

# Transferring Responsibility for Security in Afghanistan

*Norwegian Officers' Challenges when Cooperating with the  
Afghan National Security Forces*

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The views presented in this thesis are strictly my own, and any errors and misjudgements are solely my responsibility.

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## List of Acronyms

ANA	Afghan National Army
ANSF	Afghan National Security Forces
ANP	Afghan National Police
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
OMLT	Operational Mentoring and Liaison Team
PRT	Provincial Reconstruction Team

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Background

The war in Afghanistan approaches its first decade. During the last two years, the security situation has worsened, also in the northern parts of the country where the Norwegian military contribution in Afghanistan has its centre of gravity. Norway has leadership responsibility for the Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in Faryab province, north-east Afghanistan. The PRT carries responsibility for security, development and improved governance in the province, and is largely focused on cooperation with the Afghan forces and authorities to strengthen the legitimacy of the Afghan government (Ministry of Defence 2010). In addition, a substantial part of the Norwegian force contribution in Faryab consists of teams for training and operations with the Afghan Army (Operational Mentoring and Liaison Team – OMLT) and the Afghan police.

The International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), which includes the Norwegian forces in Faryab, is scaling up the effort to boost the capacity of the Afghan forces. Since 2009, military advising and operations with the Afghan forces have received an increased focus. The current policy seems to point towards *transfer of authority* – to build Afghan capacity and transfer full responsibility of the security to the Afghan authorities (NATO 2010). When newly commissioned as the new commander of ISAF, general David Petraeus stated, “we will all continue the current strategy (...) to gradually transfer lead security responsibility to the Afghans” (2010).

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The Norwegian policy also states the importance of transferring authority to the Afghan Governments. In Norwegian policy documents, a vital part of the Government's approach is to

... build Afghan capacity and ownership, in order to gradually transfer more responsibility to the Afghan Governments, so-called 'Afghanization'.  
(Ministry of Defence 2009:2)

Norway's Minister of Defence stated that "the Norwegian contribution will shift to a greater focus on supporting the Afghan Security Forces" (Faremo 2010b), and "we must build – not substitute – Afghan capacity" (Faremo 2010a).

The Norwegian forces in Afghanistan are responsible for a vital part of the implementation of this policy.<sup>1</sup> The mission given to the Norwegian forces is to conduct operations together with the Afghan forces in order to

...maintain a safe and secure environment and facilitate good governance and development, thus extending GIRoA [Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan] authority and influence within FARYAB province. (ISAF 20102)

At a more practical level, this implies that Norwegian officers are not only meant to train Afghan forces, but work together with Afghan officers and Afghan police, participate in Afghan-led operations, and support government authorities. Norwegian soldiers and officers, who are tasked with implementing the policy on the ground, therefore work closely with people of a very different background, education and culture than themselves.

There are some universal ethical challenges and dilemmas connected to the transfer of responsibility to local authorities in a war-torn society such as Afghanistan's. State-building in war-torn societies is extremely complex. As the Norwegian Minister of

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<sup>1</sup> Other efforts are also aimed at strengthening the Afghan security sector. For instance, Norway is planning to support the financing of the Afghan Army (ANA Trust Fund) with 40 million US dollars from 2011 to 2013 (Ministry of Defence 2010).

<sup>2</sup> Norwegian Contingent Report; available from the author.

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Foreign Affairs stated, "Afghanization implies choosing [Afghan] solutions that do not necessarily comply with the solutions we would prefer" (Støre 2009). These problems are most directly felt at the implementation level, where soldiers and officers need to work alongside indigenous forces. Living and operating closely with a foreign force and in the context of a foreign culture is likely to cause challenges. And choosing Afghan solutions that do not comply with what oneself might prefer can be problematic for those who are supposed to implement the policy, and who experience such contradictions on a daily basis.

## 1.2 Research Question

The intent of this thesis is to investigate the challenges facing Norwegian officers in Afghanistan when transferring responsibility for security to Afghan forces and authorities. The research question therefore goes:

*What challenges do Norwegian officers meet in Afghanistan in their efforts to build Afghan capacity and transfer authority and responsibility of security to the Afghan National Security Forces?*

Two factors make this a particularly interesting matter to investigate. First, it is an important part of Norwegian foreign policy, and how the policy is implemented. The outcome of the war in Afghanistan will be of importance for Norway, NATO and the western world – in addition to Afghanistan itself. Therefore, it is necessary to gain more knowledge about this operation, and by doing so shed light on the roles the Norwegian Armed Forces could have in the implementation of foreign policy. Second, training and cooperating with indigenous forces is a rarely investigated topic in international research on so-called state-building operations. Previous research has primarily focused on which role military forces can fill *on their own* in such operations, not in cooperation with local forces. Thus, the analysis seeks to bridge a knowledge gap in the literature on building states in war-torn societies.

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## 1.3 Discussion of terminology

### 1.3.1 The military advisors

Military units performing advisory tasks have a wide array of names, including advisory team, military training team, embedded training team, assistance team, mentor team etc.; which of them is chosen often reflects the unit's main effort, such as whether they are embedded and closely follow the local forces on operations, for instance. The term advisor may bring associations to a less active role in combat and offensive operations. However, for field advisors – who are the focus of this analysis – these activities have been regarded as a complex military task. As one officer pointed out, “it is not coincidental that SOF [Special Operation Forces] traditionally have been earmarked to train indigenous security forces” (Haug 2009:111). The term military advising does not cover the wide array of tasks performed by the personnel, but it does emphasize the main objective of these activities: enabling others to master the challenges.

Military *assistance* is occasionally used in literature to grasp a wider spectrum of support in the form of equipment, money, armaments and other types of support (Nygard 2009:10). Advising is in this regard more specific than assistance, since it entails interaction between two human beings: the advisor and the advised. As the different Norwegian military units in Afghanistan also have many names, I shall therefore use the term military advisor throughout this analysis, in order to address all those officers who cooperate closely with one or several Afghan authorities or forces.

### 1.3.2 The counterpart

The term “indigenous forces” is often used in historical literature, and applied “to all those local people who offer the potential to serve as trained auxiliaries to the

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government forces, as government forces, or with the occupation forces” (Cassidy 2006:62).<sup>3</sup>

Training of indigenous forces can sometimes entail unconventional operations such as the training of militias or irregular forces in foreign countries, for instance coup d'état in (potentially) hostile regimes during the Cold War. In conflicts where the indigenous forces are, or are supposed to become, a state institution rather than a guerrilla movement, the host nation forces are normally addressed by their names or abbreviations, such as the Republic of Korea Army (ROKA), El Salvador Armed Forces (ESAF), the Iraqi National Guard (ING) and the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF). In this analysis, with some exceptions in connection with reviews of the historical literature, the different Afghan forces will be called by their specific names. The terms “Afghan forces” and ANSF will be used to indicate the Afghan security forces as a whole, for instance both the Afghan National Police and the Afghan National Army.

Since the personal relationship between the advisor and the advisees is a vital part of this analysis, the term “counterpart” (abbreviated CP) will be used for the actual recipient of the advice and support. It is also commonly used in a variety of literary sources, documents and doctrines, including this analysis.

## 1.4 Further structure of the thesis

The next chapter, chapter two, will give an account for the research methods and discuss methodological issues of this analysis. The research was designed as an exploratory case study with a qualitative approach, based on semi-structured interviews of practitioners of military advising. Chapter two will also give an account

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<sup>3</sup>Indigenous in this sense refers to a demographic or local connection, which is naturally not desirable in discussions of national, centrally controlled forces. “Host nation forces” is a more neutral term, and used consistently in the recent American military doctrines (US Army 2006:2-4, US Army 2008:6-82).

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of the data gathering process, criteria for the selection of respondents, credibility and reliability of the research, and some ethical considerations.

Chapter three presents a review of literature on state-building operations in general and military advising in particular. The point here is to look at potential challenges for military advisors involved in state-building operations, to form an analytical framework for further analysis, and to derive questions to put to the respondents. The analytical framework also structures the discussion throughout the thesis, which is roughly divided into ethical, technical and cultural challenges.

Chapter four presents and analyses the findings based on the empirical material. They will be exemplified by quotations from the respondents. The chapter will discuss the challenges experienced by the Norwegian officers thematically in accordance with the analytical framework set out in chapter three. In addition to the thematically structured presentation, some findings at the outer fringes of the material are presented in order to show the variance in the data.

Finally, chapter five will summarize the most pressing challenges facing Norwegian officers in working together with Afghan forces and authorities, how they relate to the reviewed literature. The chapter also discusses those challenges which, interestingly, are considered manageable. The chapter will seek to look beyond operations in Afghanistan, in order to see differences in how officers experience interaction with indigenous people in other conflicts. It will be argued that there are fundamental differences between the operation in Afghanistan and Kosovo regarding perceptions of those one is there to help.

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## 2. Methodology

This chapter gives an account of the research methods chosen and discusses methodological issues of this analysis, including the research design, how the interviews were conducted and some credibility and reliability issues. In addition, some of the motivation for this research project comes from personal experience of military advising. It is therefore important to give an account of the ethical considerations that were made in this regard, given that the author has links to the topic and organization investigated.

### 2.1 Research design

The analysis was designed as an explorative case-study of Norwegian officers' experienced challenges when cooperating closely with indigenous security forces and government officials in Afghanistan. The research design is closely linked to the research question, which is posed as an open, empirical question.

Little research has been done on cooperation between Afghan and western forces and the following transfer of responsibility for security to Afghan authorities. As it is a rather new topic, it calls for an exploratory approach and empirical research question in order to gain more knowledge. The purpose is to explore and describe the challenges officers face in this partnership. The analysis does not therefore seek to generalize, but to enhance our insight into and knowledge of the challenges this interaction causes. In a bigger perspective, further research could build on this knowledge to explore causal chains and explain *why* states, military units or Afghan and Norwegian officers act as they do. However, since the bulkheads between an explanatory and exploratory approach are rarely waterproof, elements of explanations will be discussed in the analysis.

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## 2.2 Description of the data-gathering process

The analysis builds on ten qualitative interviews of practitioners of military advising, more specifically Norwegian officers working with Afghan Security forces and authorities. The study asks how practitioners experience and perceive certain challenges at a personal level, something the in-depth interview as a method is likely to reveal. Since the research has an exploratory approach, relevant literature is reviewed in the initial part of the analysis. The literature review is used to create an analytical framework to structure the data gathering and the analysis of the empirical material. This is done by identifying potential challenges described in literature, categorizing those challenges and deducing questions to put to the respondents (see interview guide, appendix 1). The respondents' answers to these questions constitute the empirical data on which the findings are based.

### 2.2.1 Criteria for selection of respondents

Several considerations affected the selection of respondents. First and foremost, the respondents needed to have had close working and personal relations with those they advised, in order to reveal challenges of proximity of living and operating close to indigenous people in a foreign culture. Second, the analysis focuses on field advisors: combat units immersed in the local situation with face-to-face contact with government officials. Officers with field experience<sup>4</sup> of working alongside Afghan forces were therefore chosen. Third, leadership experience at a certain level was considered necessary since decision makers are most prone to face the tough choices thrown up in post-war state-building operations.

Fourth, to give a broader picture of cooperation with the Afghan Government, i.e. the Afghan police, politicians and government officials, members of the PRT were also selected as respondents. They work closely with actors such as the Afghan police and

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<sup>4</sup> Field experience in this regard refers to experience with the planning and implementation of military operations, and their conduct on the ground.



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civilian provincial and district leaders, while the OMLT personnel mainly operate with the Afghan Army. Fifth, Norwegian cooperation with Afghan forces has been in progress for many years, but received increased attention since 2009. Recent experience of working in Afghanistan over the last two years was therefore seen a necessary criterion.

All in all, the majority of respondents were officers from the teams training the Afghan Army; they met most of the criteria and constituted the largest group of respondents. In addition, some respondents from the Norwegian PRT units, who cooperate with other Afghan actors, were included.<sup>5</sup>

### **2.2.2 Pilot interviews**

Two pilot interviews were conducted to test the ability of the questions to reflect the experienced challenges. While the two respondents in these pilot interviews met the selection criteria discussed above, their answers have been left out of the data material for two reasons. First, their answers indicated a need to adjust the interview guide. Afterwards, more questions were added and some taken away. Second, the two respondents also discussed the topic and the questions at a meta-level; for instance they were involved brain-storming sessions or other exercises that made it difficult to include those interviews.

### **2.2.3 The interview process**

Although the respondents were geographically scattered, their flexibility (and transfer-flights) meant that the field work became cost-effective, methodologically acceptable and conducted in accordance with the selection criteria. The interviews took place mainly at the Norwegian Institute for Defence Studies or at the

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<sup>5</sup> The majority of the respondents were at the level of company commander or equivalent position, with the rank of captain and approximately ten to eighteen years of military experience. The rest of the group had been commanding officers at the battalion level or equivalent position, with the rank of lieutenant colonel and approximately ten more years of military experience.

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respondents' offices. Two interviews were conducted in public places, though in a private atmosphere, and this may have affected the confidentiality. One interview was conducted by e-mail and phone; the result was acceptable because the respondent was very thorough in his written answers and follow-up questions asked over the phone. All interviews were digitally recorded after the respondents have given their consent in writing, and written up within a day to avoid forgetting any particular nuances or impressions. The data have been treated confidentially in accordance with guidelines from Norwegian Social Science Services (NDS), where the project also is registered. Ethical considerations are discussed below.

## 2.3 Discussion of validity and reliability of the study

Though not all agree that validity and reliability are relevant criteria for evaluating qualitative research (Bryman 2008:376), certain aspects of validity and credibility regarding this analysis should be discussed. Most important are those relating to validity of the relevance of the study (transferability), and transparency and objectivity when collecting and interpreting the data.

### 2.3.1 Validity

The analysis is designed as an explorative case-study by qualitative interviews of practitioners. The external validity of such a method is somewhat reduced since the ability to generalize to a wider population is limited. But the intention with this research is to explore and explain rather than generalize. Also, the empirical material is based on the first-hand experiences of the respondents. The findings may therefore have value for other forces in similar contexts, and be relevant to subjects and settings beyond those involved in the study (Hovi 2009). For instance, most officers in Afghanistan interact with local forces or authorities, and most practitioners of military advising are likely to face similar challenges in other operations. Both NATO and the European Union contribute in operations supporting local police and security forces at

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the Balkans or in Africa. The research is likely to have *transferable* value to the other officers in similar contexts, which enhances external validity (Bryman 2008:377).

Internal validity is often argued to be the strength of qualitative research itself, and credibility is therefore an alternative criteria for evaluating internal validity<sup>6</sup> (Bryman 2008:377). In this thesis, credibility is sought by ensuring that the research was conducted in compliance with good practice, for instance by cooperating with and responding to feedback from the Norwegian Social Science Service (NSD). Further, the findings were submitted to other researchers at the Institute of Defence Studies to confirm whether the researcher understood the social world that has been investigated. In addition, all respondents were asked to give feedback on the interview process and the questions posed.<sup>7</sup> Finally, personal experience as a practitioner of military advising may increase the validity of the findings in the collecting and interpreting of the data.

### **2.3.2 Reliability**

In some cases, the ethical guidelines on collecting data may conflict with the transparency and external reliability of the study, or the study's replicability. Since the data may contain sensitive information, the respondents are made anonymous. The link between the respondents and their answers will be destroyed at the end of the research project in accordance with NSD guidelines. The Norwegian Armed Forces is a small organization and the respondents' anonymity may be compromised if the dataset containing transcribed interviews is made publicly available. However, the study is, to some extent, still replicable through the criteria for selection, and the fact that there are many respondents available. However, in this case some transparency must be traded for preserving confidentiality and anonymity of the respondents.

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<sup>6</sup>For alternative criteria for evaluating qualitative research, see Lincoln and Guba (1985).

<sup>7</sup>This does not fully account for a respondent validation, but it was not considered useful since it is questionable whether the respondents can validate the researcher's analysis (Bryman 2008:378).

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### 2.3.3 Objectivity

The final criterion for discussion is objectivity. It cannot be excluded that the interviewer being an officer has affected the respondents during the interviews, and the analysis as a whole. For instance, combat situations or how the respondents characterize the Afghan forces might be interpreted differently by researchers other than a practitioner. However, complete objectivity in social research is rarely possible. The researcher should act in good faith and not deliberately let personal values or theoretical inclinations sway the research (Bryman 2008:379). Transparency regarding methods, field work and own background is therefore important. A more thorough discussion regarding the ethical aspects of this will be discussed below. Personal experience may also give comparative advantages: familiarity with the military system, military jargon, the Afghan forces and the cases described might increase the level of confidentiality and trust in the interviews.

## 2.4 Ethical considerations

Some important ethical considerations should be discussed regarding this research project. These are mainly to do with the author's role beyond being a researcher, and anonymity and security considerations for the respondents.

The project has been at pains to uphold the ethical research guidelines issued by the Norwegian Social Science Service (NSD). Having chosen the qualitative interview as a method, it naturally follows that the researcher gets close to the respondents. That might be a challenge when asking about personal relations to the Afghan counterparts and potential dilemmas the respondents experienced. Other research has shown that negative attitudes towards indigenous people can be a sensitive topic (Røkenes 2005:29, Mæland 2004:22). There may be issues respondents do not wish to discuss in this regard. It has therefore been important to avoid *constructing* a picture of the respondents' attitudes, but rather to clarify their answers and let quotations from the interviews exemplify their arguments.

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My service in the Norwegian Armed Forces may have affected the research, both by strengthening it and by exposing it to bias. However, I neither knew personally nor have been formally in the line of command of the respondents, though I was familiar with who they were, their military education and their position. I also had some idea about what characterized their tour in Afghanistan, but this information was mainly gleaned from the contingency reports. The respondents were informed about my background when they were asked to be interviewed. Indeed, my background helped simplify the conversations on military technicalities like operations, locations in Afghanistan, the situation on the ground and especially the characteristics of the Afghan forces. This common ground is a source of potential bias, but it is also likely that it increased the respondents' sense of confidentiality and strengthened the credibility of the research.

Written approval, both of the NSD and the Norwegian Armed Forces, was obtained before contacting the respondents and collecting the data (see appendix 2 and 3). All respondents were contacted by the author, given written information of the research project and their rights as respondents, and signed a written consent form before the interviews (see appendix 4). As the project *might* touch on sensitive, personal information all respondents were made anonymous to protect their privacy. It should be mentioned that none expressed a wish for anonymity; a few even questioned the necessity.

### **2.4.1 Security and classified material**

Security regulations on handling classified material have not posed serious problems in this research, though some of information that came up during the interviews may be considered classified. That information is naturally left out, since the author, by law, carries a personal responsibility for complying with security regulations in the handling of classified material (for instance, certain geographical names, operation names and names of Afghan counterparts are deliberately left out). The analysis focuses on normative perceptions of officers, not of their or their unit's conduct of

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operations, and there were only a few cases where these considerations had to be made. Some reports classified 'restricted' have been used as background information, but not as primary sources. The respondents were informed that the project would result in a publicly available, unclassified thesis, and asked to inform the author if any material needed to be regarded as classified for reasons of security. However, the author bears full responsibility for any breaches of security regulations.

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### 3. From literature review to analytical framework

In this chapter I review previous research on state-building operations in general and military training of and advice to indigenous forces in particular. The intent of the chapter is to develop an analytical framework, in addition to questions to the respondents, for the empirical study of challenges facing Norwegian officers serving as advisors to the ANSF. Since relatively few academic scholars have focused on the topic of training indigenous forces, a review is made of the different approaches and genres in the literature. In some instances I will also draw on my own experience as a military advisor in Afghanistan in 2009.

The examined literature can be roughly categorized into two main groups. First, the scholarly literature on state-building in war-torn societies is reviewed in order to search for relevant dilemmas that arise when using external forces to build state institutions. This is a complex topic, dealing with questions at a high level of abstraction. Against the background of this literature review, four potential ethical dilemmas military advisors may face in Afghanistan are presented. Second, section two will investigate the literature on military advising. Naturally, literature of a military origin tends to focus on lessons learned and further implications for training, selection and future operations rather than in-depth analyses of challenges. For instance, the most extensive research project examined, the 1965 RAND Vietnam study<sup>8</sup>, was initiated to “suggest ways in which the relationship could be improved so that Vietnamese military authorities would be more likely than they are at present to understand, accept and act on American advice” (Hickey 1965:1). The literature on military advising consists largely of concrete “advice for advisors”. However, this advice is deduced from a very wide array of research publications, military reports, biographies, doctrines and interviews.

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<sup>8</sup> Dr Hickey built this study on ten years work on Vietnam, including four years in the country. He spoke fluent Vietnamese and interviewed 320 American advisors and soldiers serving in advisory units (Ramsey 2006a:58).

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Three categories of challenges are derived from the literature on military advising. First, challenges connected to *the outside force's expertise*, second, *practical problems related to the area of operations*; and third, a set of *cultural challenges*, which will be identified in a separate section below.

## 3.1 Ethical dilemmas in state-building operations

### 3.1.1 Introduction to the literature

In recent years, an extensive literature on state-building in war-torn societies has emerged. This includes literature on peace operations (Berdal 2009, Bellamy et al. 2004), state-making in fractured and failed states (Ayoob 1996, Chabal and Daloz 1999, Paris and Sisk 2009b), components of state-building such as electoral systems and power-sharing arrangements (Rothchild and Roeder 2005, Blanc et al. 2006), and state-building challenges in Afghanistan (IISS 2009, Suhrke 2009, Stephenson et al. 2010). A common denominator of these operations (and the literature) is the likely blurring of the distinction between “war” and “peace”, “conflict” and “post-conflict”(Berdal 2009:24).

In *The Dilemmas of Statebuilding: Confronting the Contradictions of Postwar Peace Operations*, Paris and Sisk (2009a) summarize many of the contradictions and dilemmas of post-war state-building. According to them, there are some “unchanging and unchangeable” universal contradictions embedded in the very idea of externally assisted statebuilding (2009a:305). These contradictions are at a “rather high level of abstraction from the day-to-day realities of statebuilding operations” (Paris and Sisk 2009a:306), but manifest themselves as concrete policy dilemmas which practitioners of state-building routinely have to struggle with. Dilemmas, which Berdal describes as “trade-offs”, can be caused by tensions between requirements of physical security in the short term and policy objectives for stability in the longer term (Berdal



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2009:21). According to Berdal, “trade-offs, priority-setting and awkward compromises between these sets of objectives simply cannot be avoided” (2009:22).

In state-building operations, long-term capacity-building of weak security sectors is often a critical objective for achieving stability in the longer term (Berdal 2009:20,120). Outside support for strengthening the security sector is considered by scholars and policymakers alike to be important in efforts to stabilize societies that are ridden and fractured by conflict. It is therefore likely that Norwegian officers, as practitioners of one component of state-building, will face some of these dilemmas in their efforts to support Afghan police and military forces.

Before describing the dilemmas derived from literature, certain provisos should be made. First, the word ‘dilemma’ should be used advisedly. Paris and Sisk define dilemmas as “problems that defy easy solutions because they present choices between multiple, conflicting imperatives” (2009a:306). Further, I use the word “challenge” as a subordinate term relative to “dilemma”. A challenge in this regard is a problem with less conflicting solutions. It is still a demanding problem, but less so than a dilemma. Second, it is worth noting that Paris and Sisk describe dilemmas as problems for policy – rather than for practitioners (2009a:306). For instance, some difficult choices and contradictions are handled by politicians at a higher level – not by officers in the field. But as I discussed in the introduction, policy dilemmas have a tendency to trickle down to the practitioner level, and “loose ends” or contradictions in the policy have a tendency to “flap the hardest at the end of the line where the policy has to be implemented on the ground” (Thompson 1966:158). Practitioners, like military advisors, are the ones who have to “live the contradictions on the ground, on the daily basis, and have to live with them afterward” (Simons 2003:129).

Third, several dilemmas are described in Paris’s book and in the wider literature on state-building in war-torn societies.<sup>9</sup> I address only those dilemmas that are most

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<sup>9</sup> The other dilemmas are the ‘coherency dilemmas’, ‘footprint dilemmas’ and ‘participation dilemmas’ (Paris and Sisk 2009:306). The participation dilemmas, or challenges facing actors participating in post-war political processes, are probably familiar to Norwegian officers. But these Afghan actors are normally predetermined; they are therefore less likely

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relevant for the analysis, i.e. those which Norwegian officers are most likely to have experienced.

The fourth and final thing to note is that the dilemmas are derived from the very complex dynamics that are at play in war-torn societies, and they might overlap. They are, for all practical purposes, influenced by each other. Still, it is useful to distinguish them for analytical purposes.

### **3.1.2 The contradiction between short-term needs and long-term goals**

*The duration dilemma* (Paris and Sisk 2009a:307) derives from the fact that state building, by nature, is a long-term activity. At the same time, the local population will expect fast improvements of their living conditions as a result of the presence of foreign forces. Furthermore, heavy international presence over a lengthy period of time may represent a source of hostility itself (Paris and Sisk 2009a:307). Elections can be held quickly and operations initiated fast but it takes time to consolidate political institutions, administrative capacity and a system for upholding the rule of law (Paris and Sisk 2009a:307).

Arranging elections may also temporarily boost violence levels. In addition, countries contributing to state building abroad seem less willing to deploy soldiers to open-ended and lengthy operations, not least because of casualty sensitivity in the opinion at home. Simultaneously, harsh security-conditions and civilian suffering make both local and international actors call for quick impact and progress from the international forces.

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to be experienced as dilemmas. Aspects of this problem are discussed in this chapter, but under challenges due to the characteristics of the Afghan forces, because the *loyalty* of these actors tends to vary and might constitute a source of frustration.

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Military advisors are instructed to support the establishment of long-term functioning institutions in the area of security, law and order. Simultaneously, they must cope with day-to-day security issues with a much shorter time horizon, well aware that their contribution is limited in time and scope. Regular foreign forces may have security and short-term stability as their main concern. Military advisors are likely to share this concern, but are primarily concerned with long-term development of the host nation's forces. Short-term and long-term requirements tend to conflict.

Based on this dilemma, it becomes interesting to ask whether Norwegian officers experienced their short-term efforts as counter-productive compared to the long-term purpose of the operation.

### **3.1.3 The dependency dilemma**

The dependency dilemma is described by Paris and Sisk as the danger of fostering dependency among the host-nation population on the international presence (2009a:308). During state-building, large flows of assistance and outside 'hands-on' management by external actors may create institutions that rely heavily on continued external aid and assistance. This may work against the goal of transition to self-governance<sup>10</sup> (Paris and Sisk 2009a:308). The large inflows of money, equipment and increased military support to the Afghan Security Forces inevitably create patterns of dependency that may delay or even reverse NATO's strategy of transition of ownership to Afghan institutions.

For instance, the Afghan Army's dependency on close air support grew as the insurgency escalated from 2005 to 2007 (Giustozzi 2008). The Afghan Army has neither the personnel nor the resources to handle close air support, nor are they likely to get it in a foreseeable future. It is therefore administrated through foreign advisors.

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<sup>10</sup> In the complex dynamics of war-torn societies, the dilemmas are intertwined: Host-nation dependency on external support may increase over time, for instance by creating passivity within the local population. Also, a high level of host-nation dependency might increase the duration of an international presence (Paris and Sisk 2009:307).

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Foreign advisors aim at promoting Afghan self-sustainability in the harsh conditions of combat. However, in war, letting the host nation's security forces 'learn by consequences' has a high price. Advisors might plausibly experience a dilemma when their resources save lives in the short run, but prevent learning and independence in the longer run. Military advisors might find themselves in the unpleasant situation of having to choose between helping the host-nation forces in combat, but not so much that they become overly dependent on future support.

In light of the contradictions of dependency, one might ask whether military advisors have experienced whether supporting the ANSF through procedures and capacities actually made them less able to operate independently in the longer term.

### **3.1.4 Ethical dilemmas caused by illegal or unethical behaviour by the indigenous forces**

The legitimacy of military forces, both foreign and indigenous, is absolutely critical in operations to build stability in war-torn societies (Berdal 2009:97). At the same time, it lies in the nature of military advising that the forces you are there to support have a different military quality than your own forces and their ethical standards may, perhaps, conflict with your own values or the values you are set to protect and promote. The difference in ethical standing is not a dilemma in itself. The dilemma arises when the advisor has to make decisions that might violate his or her own ethical standards. These are tough choices, and may lead to both practical and ethical challenges. Two examples, plundering of civilians and corruption, may illustrate the problem.

First, an example based on personal experience. Afghan Security Forces are known to steal food, farm animals and even plunder Afghan civilians during operations, sometimes even with the blessing of their Afghan commanders. As most Norwegian officers are well aware, the loss of a goat could be extremely critical for the average Afghan family. Misconduct like this clearly corrodes the perceived legitimacy of both ISAF and Afghan forces, especially in the eyes of the local population. This

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plundering of civilians is neither easy to expose nor to stop. Giustozzi argues that lack of army discipline mainly results from “unwillingness of its foreign officers to take the responsibility for punishing errant behaviour” (2009:40). Giustozzi’s point is valid, but in other cases, discipline in the Afghan Army can be very harsh, including ruthless and violent punishment of soldiers, which advisors also might consider unethical. However, advisors are dependent on upholding rapport and a good relationship with their counterparts. Second, corruption in the ANSF is another widespread problem that escalated because of increased deployment of Afghan forces among the population (Giustozzi 2009:39). Advisors may find corruption ethically problematic, and support an institution which needs to counter corruption to achieve legitimacy. Simultaneously, they might have to condone a certain level of corruption, for example to maintain good relations with their Afghan counterparts, or to initiate and achieve progress in local projects and operations.

Confronting the counterpart with these difficult issues, especially in front of others, may dilute the trust an advisor is so dependent on. Also, the advisors’ approach is rarely to directly interfere in the actions of soldiers, since they do not have formal command authority over their counterparts or their counterparts’ organization (Ramsey 2006a:155,161,165). They are to encourage and enable the Afghan officers to take that responsibility themselves. To directly interfere with other officers’ subordinates, and go outside the chain of command, is problematic and rarely appreciated by any officers, regardless of nationality.

The core of this dilemma is that the local forces may do things you do not appreciate, and even strongly condemn, and which may gravely erode the legitimacy of both the advisor and the advised. The advisors may feel bound uphold their ethical standards and intervene. Simultaneously, they are absolutely dependent on sustaining a working relationship with their counterparts. They are, after all, human beings that know that they have to live with the decision of interfering or not in what they consider unethical behaviour. Therefore it seemed important to ask the Norwegian officers whether they have had to support or refrain from intervening in behaviour conducted

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by afghan forces that violated their ethical principles or the overall purpose of the operation.

### **3.1.5 In accordance with western military doctrines or “the Afghan way”?**

One dilemma derives from the fact that western military doctrines may be imposed on Afghan Security Forces. Foreign procedures, imperatives and goals that are taught tend to be strange and unfamiliar for the host nation. Operations that are planned and conducted by Afghan authorities and forces may not be in accordance with the outside force’s overall purpose. An example might be how the insurgency is to be countered, because the ANA presumably lack skills in counter-insurgency operations (Giustozzi 2009:41). The philosophy of counter-insurgency, as a military strategy, lies in the integrated civil and military efforts to secure the local population and win their support.<sup>11</sup> “Clear”, “hold” and “build” are phases in counter-insurgency operations. Military forces are to clear an area for insurgents, hold the area over a period of time in order to enable the last phase of building the civil society through promoting development and governance (US Army 2006:5-18). These are complex operations with many counterintuitive paradoxes for military forces. The population is the centre of gravity rather than the enemy, and when countering an insurgency, “legitimacy is the objective” (US Army 2006:1-21).

Norwegian officers have reported that the Afghan National Army (ANA) seem, for various reasons, to favour the offensive “clear” phase, and avoid the defensive “hold” phase.<sup>12</sup> Holding an area over time is risky, demands extensive man-power and often results in a high degree of attrition. It might also be perceived as less prestigious than

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<sup>11</sup> There is a good deal of literature on counter-insurgency (COIN). It includes American doctrines and field manuals, Norwegian interpretations and a comprehensive, scholarly literature on the perspectives of COIN which this analysis cannot discuss. In short, building host-nation security forces is an activity described in current COIN doctrines (McBreen 2008, US Army 2006, Stoker 2008:5). Though several texts emphasizes the importance of cooperation with indigenous forces (US Army 2006:2-4, US Army 2008:6-8, Cassidy 2006:61), they tend to only briefly touch upon the *difficulties* of cooperation and transfer of responsibility to the host-nation.

<sup>12</sup> In personal conversation with the author.

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killing the enemy in offensive operations. Defensive operations with a high number of troops are dependent on good logistical support, and logistics may be one of the ANA's weakest qualities. If ANA conducts an offensive operation and withdraws too fast it might be very counterproductive for achieving local support and legitimacy.

The dilemma arises when the Afghans initiate and conduct operations that are perceived to be counterproductive from a western perspective, and corrode rather than increase support among the population. Military advisors are there to support operations that are decided by the host-nation force, but simultaneously work in accordance with the overall purpose of countering the insurgency through achieving local support and legitimacy. Since the Afghan advisory efforts are built on western military doctrines (Mathiesen 2009:37), it is interesting to ask whether the advisors have experienced a dilemma between supporting Afghan operations, and simultaneously operating in accordance with western military doctrines and the purpose of the operation.

## 3.2 Challenges related to professional expertise of the outside force and the situation in the area of operations

### 3.2.1 Introduction to the literature

The reviewed literature consists of military and civilian research, biographies, quantitative studies of soldiers and officers, historical analyses, military reports and tactical lessons learned. Two books from the US Army Combat Studies Institute by Robert D. Ramsey, "Advising Indigenous Forces" (2006a) and "Advice for Advisors" (2006b) are the most detailed studies on military advising. The first is a historical case-study, in which several authors analyze the American cooperation with host-nation forces in Vietnam, Korea and El-Salvador. The second is a supplementing anthology and collection of articles from past and present advisors, from Lawrence of Arabia in 1917 to the latest war in Iraq. Another book edited by Donald Stoker (2008) presents a number of historical cases of military advising, from 1815 to 2007. Stoker

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focuses especially on the underlying political intent of the contributing countries, and the role of private military actors as advisors (2008:2,6).

As mentioned, literature of a military origin tends to focus on lessons learned and further implications for training, selection and future operations instead of causal explanations and in-depth analyses of the challenges. The purpose of this review is therefore not to detail all the challenges advisors in different contexts may face, but rather to search for common denominators across the variety of texts. This literature often presents concrete points of “dos and don’ts” when advising indigenous forces, here from several authors cited in Ramsey’s book:

The beginning and ending of the secret of handling Arabs is unremitting study of them. (Lawrence 1917:140)

Advice [the] counterpart forcefully, but not command his unit’  
(Commandments for KMAG Advisors. 1953:141)

Avoid offending Vietnamese by showing dislike for their food, their customs, their way of life. (Role of the Individual 1962:144)

Speak in phrases and short sentences (...) maintain the same moral and ethical standards in Vietnam as you would at your home station (...) don’t forget for a single minute that you may have to go to war with your [indigenous] unit (...) don’t compare relative pay-scales. (Advisor “Do’s and Don’ts” 1962:147-51)

Stress mutual advantages of good military-civilian relations (...) study your counterpart to determine his personality. (Tips to Advisors 1966:155)

Expect slow progress (...) Do not expect to use your western measuring stick for honesty and morals. The same values do not apply (...) Live as close to those with whom you work as possible, but don’t go ‘native’.  
(US Army Special Forces Advisors Reference Book 2001:175) (All cited in Ramsey 2006a:135-176)

These lists are many and comprehensive in scope; they deal with everything from basic survival techniques to more complex cultural challenges. They may seem trivial and repetitive, but it should be noted that they nevertheless capture the distilled wisdom of field advisors, wisdom that might not be captured in doctrines (Ramsey 2006a:1). For instance, T.E. Lawrence, Lawrence of Arabia, wrote twenty-seven



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points or suggestions for fellow advisors, or “stalking horses for beginners in the Arab armies” (1917). One frequently quoted point, number fifteen, is “do not try to do too much with your own hands. Better the Arabs do it tolerably than you do it perfectly” (Lawrence 1917).

The literature also points to the limits of the role of the military advisors. The following quote of Major David H. Marshall (2006), who served as an advisor in the Iraqi National Guard, illustrates this point:

Corruption and fear had polluted the Commandos (...) When all was said and done, we had one officer and three soldiers who were willing to stand and fight (...) as we learned, simply training, equipping and organizing is not enough<sup>13</sup> (Marshall 2006:60).

Despite a comprehensive American effort, the Iraqi commando soldiers failed to do as the Americans wanted or advised. It indicates that there are some cultural barriers to overcome that go beyond technical, military challenges such as training, equipping and organizing.

In general the literature tends to follow a certain pattern: it points to suggestions or dos and don'ts on how to be a good advisor, and when the advised people do not act in accordance with the advisors' preferences, the literature points to cultural, and sometimes contextual, differences as explanations. When the advisors quoted above failed to motivate the Iraqi commandos, they explained it by stating that “[w]e cannot undo the influence and corruption that has existed for hundreds of years” (Marshall 2006:60, Ramsey 2006a:115). Lawrence explains advice number fifteen, also quoted above, with his subsequent sentence (which is not so frequently cited but nevertheless important):

Under the very odd conditions of Arabia, your practical work will not be as good as, perhaps, you think it is. (Lawrence 1917)

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<sup>13</sup> These Iraqi soldiers were supposed to be more than regular forces within the Iraqi National Guard (ING), they were intended to constitute a reaction force that were willing to ‘stand and fight’, because the commitment of the Iraqi Security Forces was questioned and more professional Iraqi soldiers were needed (Marshall 2006:58). They were therefore carefully recruited, equipped and trained, but nevertheless not willing to conduct the operation as the Americans wanted them to.

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In the following I present challenges related to the qualities of the advisory forces and challenges related to living and working in a culture that is very different from your own. These challenges are related to the moral dilemmas discussed above, but are nevertheless of a more practical nature.

### **3.2.2 Challenges related to the professional expertise of the outside force**

When examining the issue of professional expertise, discussions in the literature tend to focus on whether military technical skills or cultural knowledge is the most important quality of a good advisor. The authors are divided on what matters most, the ability 1) to master the officer's military "workmanship" or 2) to establish and sustain a functional relationship with humans from other cultures. In a survey of the literature on the advisory function, professional skills were emphasized as first priority. "[A]ll agree (...) that the first qualification for anyone serving in a intercultural context is professional competence" (Hickey 1965:172 cited in Ramsey 2006b:172) . However, the failing of establishing rapport because of lack of cultural awareness is where the American advisors are described to have had their greatest unrealized potential, especially in light of experiences gained in Vietnam<sup>14</sup> (Westerman 2008:144). Also, some argue that in most cases, "the success of the advisor depended as much upon his behavior as upon his professional ability" (Hermes 1965:82).

These two qualities are discussed in two Norwegian studies of military advising in Afghanistan. Based on policy documents and interviews with advisors, Haug (2009) argues that cultural skills for advisors at the Brigade level and "personal and professional credibility" of advisors at the Battalion level (in the field), are more important than technical and tactical proficiency (2009:110). Based on interviews

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<sup>14</sup> Almost none American advisors from the cases of Korea, Vietnam and El-Salvador reported to have felt "tactically, technically or militarily unprepared for his duties – even those duties above his rank" (Ramsey 2006a:109). Instead, they felt inadequately prepared in the "demanding challenges posed by language, cultural differences and host-nation institutional barriers" (Ramsey 2006a:109).

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with Norwegian advisors in Afghanistan, Nygard also points to the challenge of balancing military basic infantry skills and practical training in “being an advisor” (2009:67). The literature does not provide a clear-cut answer, and while both types of skills are emphasized, what matters most remains undecided. With the above discussion as a backdrop, it is interesting to ask which type of competence was felt by the advisors to be most important, military expertise or personal ability to establish trusting relations across cultures. And was it possible to establish trusting relations with less military professional expertise, or without operating closely with the ANSF?

### *Language and situational awareness*

Another practical challenge, however trivial it may seem, comes from language problems. The advisory units are normally heavily dependent on translators, which further complicates interaction between the advisor and his counterpart. In addition, several languages are spoken within the Afghan forces.

Sometimes, advisors are “unaware of the implications of their actions and inactions” (Hermes 1965:82-83), and therefore described as partly blind and prone to frequently misunderstand, also because of differences beyond the language. As an example, it is argued that the Dari word for operation, “amaliyaat”, has two fundamentally different meanings for the Afghans. One of them means decisive combat – find and kill the enemy. The other refers to military presence to uphold law and order (Nygard 2009:81), a very defensive mode of operating. Norwegian officers have often noted this as one of the reasons why Afghans are either reluctant or eager to initiate operations. But military interpreters argue that “amaliyaat” is the linguistic equivalent to “operation”,<sup>15</sup> and for both languages more words are required to describe “modus operandi”, i.e. what kind of operation it is. If that is the case, potential linguistic misunderstandings could be cleared up after a discussion with the Afghan officer. Based on my own experience, the language problems are seldom the main obstacle in

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<sup>15</sup> In personal correspondence with the author, available on request to the author by e-mail. “Amaliyaat” is rooted in the Arabic word for “acting”, and the interpreters also refer to misunderstandings among Norwegian officers on the Afghan use of amaliyaat.

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intercultural communication, the picture is more complex. The Afghan officers may, for instance, be reluctant to act because of lack of orders from superiors to initiate operations for fear of consequences if the operation fails.

Nevertheless, it is pertinent to ask how far language problems or different situational awareness obstructed cooperation between the advisor and his counterpart.

### **3.2.3 Practical and technical challenges related to the situation in the area of operations**

Antonio Giustozzi has pointed to many challenges in the Afghan National Army, most importantly illiteracy among soldiers, corruption, changing loyalties among military leaders, ethnically dividing lines and low morale (Giustozzi 2009). These challenges are deeply rooted in Afghan society. In this section the problems of conflicting loyalties, ethnic dividing lines, low combat morale and corruption will be discussed since they seem to attract most attention in the literature.<sup>16</sup>

First, Giustozzi elaborates on the ANA officer's conflicting loyalties to rival patronage networks inside the army. They include mujahadeen warriors, former pro-Soviet officers, supporters of local power-brokers as the Junbesh war lord Dostum, and the former army chief of staff Bismillah Khan (2009:39). As an officer in the Norwegian Provincial Reconstruction Team told me, fostering local political governance sometimes felt like "supporting the least bad bad guys".<sup>17</sup> Patronage networks and alliances along the lines of clans, families and ethnicities are very common in the Afghan society, also within political institutions, and intercept the formal political and military line of command. Since foreign advisors have reported spending much time managing rivalry among patronage networks (Giustozzi 2009:39), it is worth asking whether this applies to the Norwegian advisors as well.

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<sup>16</sup> For instance, illiteracy is not discussed in this section. Although illiteracy represents a vital social problem for Afghanistan, it may not be an insurmountable problem for a combat force with low-tech equipment (Giustozzi 2009:37).

<sup>17</sup> In personal conversation with the author, Meymaneh, Afghanistan, March 2009.

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Second, ethnic dividing lines are also a major challenge to the building of national institutions in Afghanistan. One may question the strength of the national character of the Afghan Security Forces is. Ethnic dividing lines may create challenges both inside and outside the security forces. Excluding vital groups from national institutions (like the army) is problematic in a state-building perspective (Paris and Sisk 2009a:308). In addition, ethnic dividing lines *within* the army may create conflicting loyalties, rivalries and even language problems. On the other hand, a former advisor argues that different ethnic groups in ANA provided a more competent force and integrated soldiers across ethnic and tribal lines (Byrom 2008:208).

In both Faryab province and throughout Afghanistan, the Taliban insurgency seems to be growing demographically in the Pashtun segments of the population. The Pashtuns are, to a large extent, excluded from the state-building process. This does not imply that all Pashtuns, who constitute almost 39 per cent of the Afghan population, are potential spoilers;<sup>18</sup> the picture is far more complex. But with Faryab Province as one example, both scholars and officers perceive the lack of Pashtun representation or inclusion in state-building efforts and the security forces as a problematic and even de-stabilizing factor (Lurås 2010:4, Solberg 2010, Caldwell 2010:11, Giustozzi 2009:38).

Third, combat morale in the Afghan forces is often measured by attrition rates and numbers of deserters, both of which have been high in the ANA, and resulted in a high turnover rate and many unmanned positions (Giustozzi 2009:40). Desertion may result from conflicting loyalties, the need to provide for one's families, or attrition through combat operations. The Norwegian forces have been in many combat operations with the Afghan forces, and are likely to be aware of such problems.

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<sup>18</sup> The NATO training mission seems aware of the challenges regarding recruitment and ethnicity in the Afghan National Security Forces: The Pashtuns are underrepresented in the ANSF, especially in the south (Caldwell 2010:11).

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Last, but not least, corruption in the ANSF not only creates moral dilemmas, but also logistical problems and “bureaucratic chokepoints” in the Afghan Army (Giustozzi 2009:39). The logistical problems of fuel, ammunition and other supplies are tremendous, partly due to corruption. On the other hand, they are always scarce resources in war (an old saying is that generals discuss strategy during peace, but logistics during war). Since logistical problems and corruption scandals tend to define the debate on Afghanistan, it is worth asking Norwegian officers whether they perceived them as a challenge.

In light of these four problems, it is worth asking if Norwegian officers found changing loyalties, ethnic dividing lines, low morale and corruption in the Afghan forces to constitute a source of frustration and/or practical obstacle for their work.

### 3.3 Cultural Challenges

#### 3.3.1 Challenges of living close to indigenous people

A preliminary analysis of soldiers living close to indigenous forces and native people, suggests that cultural differences between the advisor and his counterpart may be a source of psychological strain for the advisor. To live, eat, sleep and engage in combat in close proximity to the local forces may cause severe “cultural stress” to the soldiers because of the interaction with indigenous people (Azari et al. 2010:592). The tensions that arise from exposure to a different culture and loss of one’s own familiar environment, could represent a “stressor that generates visible stress responses” (Azari et al. 2010:590). The authors do not directly point to advisors as an exposed group, but most of their cases and examples are based on research on advisory units, like the RAND study from Vietnam (Hickey 1965). In addition, some studies have shown that officers run the risk of developing negative attitudes and a condescending jargon towards the indigenous people and the security forces in similar operations (Mæland 2003:24, Røkenes 2005:30).

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Military advisors often live, eat and fight together with indigenous people, and are dependent on them. They might therefore be exposed to the stresses described above. It is therefore interesting to ask whether the Norwegian advisors experienced special challenges related to living and operating with Afghans over time.

### **3.3.2 Professional identity – accelerator or obstacle for cooperation?**

Differences in professional identity, or military culture, may represent a challenge when officers from different nations and cultures cooperate closely. Some of the authors quoted above suggest that severe cultural challenges are likely to be due to the peculiarity of American military culture rather than the advisor's personal skills, and that the US Army tends to "train other nations' armies as our clones" (Baritz 1985:143). This 'gap between cultures' is particularly visible in the case of Vietnam, where it is described as a "linguistic and cultural barrier ... that was almost impossible for the advisor to breach" (Ramsey 2006a:44). As an adviser observed, this cultural scepticism worked both ways. "[W]hat ultimately emerged was a situation in which the Americans look down on the Vietnamese, who were at the same time looking down on the Americans" (Ramsey 2006a:44). This came from a lack of cultural awareness which "constituted a major weakness for effective training and advising (...) and was symbolic of a larger failure in the entire US effort during the war in South-East Asia" (Westerman 2008:144). Ramsey argues that the "American way", through "our way", "can do", "make it happen", "get over it" and "just do it" seemed quicker and better, but these slogans became substitutes for thought and analysis, and the final result was no better than what the host-nation forces performed (2006a:113).

These issues could plausibly have been caused by some officer's indoctrinated willingness to act and grasp the initiative, which is enhanced in confrontation with lack of host-nation progress. This may have root in the national military culture and the officer's professional identity. According to this logic, military culture and professional identity may *hinder* the advisor and their counterpart to develop a

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trusting relationship. On the other hand, both the advisors and their counterparts belong to the military profession; to some extent they share a common identity of being soldiers. This common ground could *improve* their ability to establish a functional relationship.

A statement of a young American lieutenant who served as senior district advisor in Vietnam may illustrate the problem.

I was determined and eager to do my best (...) In many ways I controlled life and death of thousands of people (...) Most of the responsibilities were not truly mine, but I knew that the district chief would approve anything I did, and if I didn't do it, I had the definite impression that very little would be done. Perhaps it was just youthful, American arrogance that made me take those powers that were outside my rightful reach (...) but when I had the chance to get something done I by-God took it! (Donovan 1958:134, cited in Ramsey 2006a:53)

Ramsey comments on the quote and concludes, “MACV field advisors [in Vietnam] remained what they were: American military personnel with all of their capabilities and all of their limitations” (2006a:53). An eagerness to act, overwhelming power, or just sympathy for the natives may represent a challenge for the advisor when the point of your task is to let someone else do the job.

However, strong human mechanisms seem to be at play at the intersection of two fundamentally different military cultures. What we can investigate is the ability of military culture, either Norwegian or Afghan, to accelerate or hinder advisory efforts.

### **3.3.3 Can the advisory role be incompatible with being an officer?**

A final challenge is derived from the potential conflict of having an identity as an officer and being set to perform tasks that might be incompatible with their perceived identity. This challenge is closely linked to the challenges of military cultures discussed above. The anthropologist Simmons has also noticed Lieutenant Donovan's



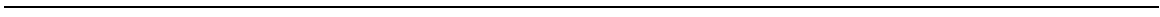
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statement quoted above, and argues that it exemplifies how advisors (and anthropologists) in the field risk “going native”<sup>19</sup> and lose objectivity, distance and the original mission from sight (2003:124). Based on an in-depth analysis of a handful of military advisors, she argues that the ultimate source of friction and frustration for advisors in the field comes from different *war aims* of the advisor and the nation sending those advisors (Simons 2003:129). The advisors feel responsible *for* and not just *to*, which may cause long-term emotional damage if they feel they are betraying their counterparts by ending the mission too early: it might be painful to leave behind those you were there to help. Veteran special forces in Iraq (1991) still talk bitterly about a betrayal when they left the Kurds (Simons 2003:130). In these situations advisors are put in a position where performing as a good advisor to those you are there to support may contradict being a good officer and following orders such as ending support effort and leaving. To investigate whether this remains true today, one may ask to what extent the Norwegian officers perceived their advisory role as compatible or consistent with their role as an officer.

All in all, a variety of challenges, ranging from complex ethical dilemmas to practical and cultural problems of culture and for instance corruption, has been presented. This review and potential challenges gave rise to a series of questions to ask the respondents. The following chapter will present and analyse the findings following the same thematic structure as the literature review.

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<sup>19</sup> “Going native” is described by Simons through two main mechanisms: either when empathy for natives leads to sympathy which again leads to loss of objectivity, or when advisors are seduced to act like a “warrior-king” and warps their sense of the original mission (Simons 2003:113).



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## 4. Findings and analysis

This chapter presents and analyses the findings from the interviews. The findings will be structured thematically like the literature review in chapter three, presenting perceptions of ethical challenges first, perceptions of practical and technical challenges second, and third, perceptions of cultural challenges. A brief discussion will conclude each sub-section. The respondents were also asked several control questions, and the answers to them will be presented after the discussion of the cultural challenges. Lastly, in order to show how different the answers of some of the respondents were, some findings at the fringes of the general material will be presented at the end of the chapter.

### 4.1 Ethical dilemmas in statebuilding operations

#### 4.1.1 General impressions and main challenges

Keeping in mind that the respondents may have experienced other challenges than those described in literature, each interview began with a few open questions. The officers were asked to describe working with the Afghans in general terms, and what they felt was the most challenging part of the work. First and foremost, all respondents characterized cooperation as *good*. They felt appreciated and respected by their Afghan partners, and reciprocated in like manner. Sometimes they just described the relationship as unproblematic. One respondent compared serving as a mentor with his previous contingent in Afghanistan, and said “it felt better in the OMLT [mentor unit] because we were closer to them [the Afghan forces]”.

A majority of the respondents, eight out of ten, mentioned as the biggest challenge that the ANSF’s had other intentions or wanted to operate in other ways than they themselves. However, they also gave very different reasons for this, ranging from ethnic dividing lines in the Afghan leadership, to Afghan forces wanting to do

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counter-insurgency differently or not conduct operations at all, and that Norwegian regulations and guidelines made working with the ANSF difficult. About half of the respondents experienced cases where the Afghans had apparently other agendas than improving the security situation. The following quotations may illustrate the point.

The provincial leadership had their own agendas and no interest in establishing security in the Pashtun areas [as many consider vital to reduce the conflict level].

We [Norwegians] do not have an agenda of our own, we want progress.

We were more idealistic, we saw windows of opportunity for improving the security situation... it was frustrating when the Afghans did not want to operate for fear of taking the blame. It collided with our understanding of the intent.

Finally, it is worth noting that only one respondent cited his Afghan counterpart as his main challenge, and referred to him as “completely incompetent – he totally lacked both will and ability”. The other respondents mainly relate the challenges to *systems* and *society*, for instance circumstances within the ANSF or ISAF organizations, cultural factors in Afghanistan or to divergent Norwegian and Afghan objectives. The tendency to explain difficulties and deficiencies by reference to cultures and organizations, rather than to individuals behaving badly, is also indicative of all the findings of this analysis.

#### **4.1.2 The contradiction between short-term needs and long-term goals**

In state-building operations, short-term needs and long-term goals tend to conflict, as they did for the officers engaged in the long-term development of the host-nation forces and in promoting security and short-term stability. Half of the respondents had experienced this dilemma between their short-term efforts which either were, or could be, counterproductive for the long-term purpose of the operation.

The intuitive answers of the respondents were consistently either yes or no, but their interpretation of the long-term objective was more nuanced. Those who *denied* experiencing a dilemma considered the improvement of the Afghan forces as the

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overall long-term objective – and felt their efforts had contributed to great progress. Those who *confirmed* experiencing a dilemma regarded progress in security and development for the local population and improved legitimacy for the Afghan government as the main long-term objectives.

To illustrate the latter, two respondents felt it constituted the most difficult dilemma in their work, especially when large and risky operations were initiated by the Afghans. One of those respondents described these operations as “short-term treatment of the *symptoms* rather than the *causes* of the conflict”. Another experienced that “state-building in Afghanistan” failed because of “distrust of the local political leadership” – the very leadership he was set to work with. For him, the dilemma materialized when the Afghan agendas conflicted with what he saw as the supreme objective of the longer term, often with an ethnic dimension. For instance, some respondents saw pushing security and development into the Pashtun areas (where the insurgency seems to grow) as their core task, but often the Afghan forces did not agree. As an example, an officer had to join an ad-hoc operation to help a pro-government village, a village of the same ethnicity as the Afghan provincial leadership. The respondent described this as “short-term fire-extinguishing”. The original operation (to push security into the Pashtun areas) collapsed because the Afghan forces refused to operate there, and Norwegian guidelines prevented him from operating alone:

The Afghans wanted me to go and open the road to village X [name of village] ... should I really support this operation when the Afghans want to treat the symptoms rather than causes of the conflict? I was under pressure, I could not initiate operations alone because of Norwegian guidelines, and I could not get the ANSF into the Pashtun areas.

At a more practical level, those who experience a dilemma often illustrated it with cases where the ANSF’s use of force, bad behaviour and way of operating felt counter-productive because it undermined the forces’ legitimacy. In one case, an ANA truck had accidentally run over and destroyed a sales booth at the bazaar (city centre). The officer tried to convince the ANA that they had to sort out the problem themselves and help the local salesmen,

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but they refused and said 'it 'll only be trouble' ... we had to evacuate two Afghan civilians ourselves... they did not see that as their responsibility. The ANA's focus on operations like cordon and search, ambush, assaults and confiscations instead of seriousness, show of force and presence [to maintain law and order] alienated the population and created 'accidental guerrillas'.<sup>20</sup>

If the force had to withdraw from an area too early after combat, or because there was a high risk of civilian or own casualties, it exacerbated the dilemma and feeling of having to participate with a heavy heart. One officer even argued, "every time we break contact [participate in a fire-fight], we lose.... We strengthen their unity against us."

A small number of respondents gave an account of their time perspective or elaborated "long-term" and "short-term" in concrete terms. However, members of the PRT (Provincial Reconstruction Team) spoke of a frustratingly short horizon of six months, or a single rotation (change of command), and members of the OMLT (army mentoring units) spoke of the challenges in a perspective of five to seven years. In addition, the PRT commanders saw the long-term – short-term dilemma as the most fundamental challenge of those presented above. In contrast, the OMLT commanders almost dismissed it.

All in all, the dilemma is felt, though not by everyone, and beside the fact that the Afghans may act or operate in a way perceived to be counterproductive, the problem seems to be perceived as manageable. None argues for not operating with the ANSF; on the contrary, it is seen an argument for working closer together to prevent these situations. The extent to which the respondents experienced a dilemma depends on what they considered to be the long-term objective. That is not to say that some Norwegian officers do not consider peace in Afghanistan as the main and greater good, but rather that some are very concerned about the long-term development of the Afghan forces, which they see as their main objective. They are thus able to distance themselves from a temporary deterioration of the security situation. However, those

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<sup>20</sup> The respondent here explicitly referred to David Kilcullen's expression and book title "The Accidental Guerrilla: Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One" (Kilcullen 2009).

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PRT officers who liaise with several, more complex Afghan institutions than the army mentor teams are more affected by this state-building dilemma than the other groups. The focus on development of the Afghan forces as the long-term objective makes the dilemma avoidable to some extent, but not completely.

### 4.1.3 The dependency dilemma

The danger of fostering dependency among those you are there to support may bring about tough choices for military advisors. Their resources and capacities may save lives in the short run, but prevent learning and development in the longer. The use of close air support has been much discussed in this context not least by participants in the wider debate over Afghanistan.

This is the dilemma most respondents agreed was a potential challenge; seven in ten respondents experienced it as a dilemma. The other three saw it as challenge, but not a difficult choice as such, mostly because of they gave priority to their own safety during combat. As one respondent commented, “in those situations you want to come home as well; you have to use what you have got.”

While the respondents largely agreed on that the danger of dependency is an important challenge, there is a marked division in *what* they believed created dependency and whether the use of foreign capacities actually exacerbated Afghan dependency or not. One illustrating example is the use of close air support (CAS) or similar offensive non-Afghan capacities. Those who *denied* seeing any problem with the use of these capacities argued that they either held back those capacities and limited their use, or made the ANSF sufficiently aware about planning and the weapons’ limitations, or thought it was easy to choose for instance close air support because they considered their own security threatened. As an officer explained,

We were very conscious about this, we saw the danger, but saved our capacities as long as possible... air bombs were used when we saw no other options. We gave target designations to the ANA rather than firing ourselves.

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On the other side, those who *question* the use of close air support nevertheless agree that it is a difficult problem; several emphasize the unwillingness of Afghans to operate alone because, as one respondent explained it,

[i]f they brought coalition forces [ISAF], no matter who, they knew they would get air support, they told me themselves.

Another argued that lack of confidence in own skills and dependency among the Afghans had already appeared:

They didn't trust their own skills.... Once when we spotted Taliban fighters on a hillside, I rejected his [Afghan CP] request for close air support.... Then he said 'then we cannot do this', I said 'yes we can'... the use of air support is very short-term in many respects, they feel very dependent on air support... you go down there as a force multiplier, but you are the one who does the fighting at long distances...

However, many respondents also spoke of great progress and how much the Afghan Forces learned from the use of foreign capabilities, and indeed how to utilize their own capacities at the battlefield.

Two more cases are worth mentioning since they flesh out the picture of dependency. First, an Afghan company commander was to hold and secure a village together with local police and arbakee (local militia/police). All were expecting additional fighting. The Norwegian officer had to choose between

staying with our firepower that probably would have helped them a lot, or, as we chose, to go home and let them handle it themselves. Sometimes you have to let go of the bike if they're ever going to learn to ride it. They [the ANA] stayed there for eighteen days, with troops in contact... they were praised for that, and I felt they grew from it...

In this situation, the ANA was seen to have made great strides and the problem of leaving them was manageable. Second, difficult situations of dependency are not just tied to foreign firepower and combat. One respondent saw the Afghan's logistical issues as just as challenging:



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They lacked the ammunition to test-fire their weapons, and we were going on an operation. I had to choose between getting ammunition for them, or leaving without it... or without water or fuel.... Their logistical system needs you to say no. But it is tough to try and make their logistics good when you know it is poor.... They had to operate without winter clothes... and you know you could have rectified the situation with a stroke of the pen... that is, in many ways, the daily stress you're under.

All in all – even though dependency is perceived as a dilemma, it is not considered an insurmountable problem because the respondents saw progress among those they trained. Dependency is perceived as something they had a stake in and responsibility for, naturally, since it touches the core of the mission they were given by the Norwegian government (to make the Afghan forces independent). Nevertheless, when operations and contingents go fairly well, it is plausible to think that they should have let the Afghans shoulder more responsibility. As one respondent commented after he unconsciously took the lead of an Afghan operation:

We ended up leading the operation... you do a lot of things you think are right there and then, but at the end of the day you find out that they should have coordinated themselves.

#### **4.1.4 Ethical dilemmas caused by illegal or unethical behaviour by the indigenous forces**

The core of this dilemma is that Norwegian officers might have to support indigenous forces who are acting illegally or unethically. Military advisors may feel morally compelled to intervene, but may be unable to do so due to many factors, for instance the need to maintain good relations, or because interfering might worsen an ethical problem.

This is the dilemma over which the group is most obviously divided. Half of the respondents *denied* that it was a dilemma at all, and substantiated their contention with cases illustrating how honourable the Afghans were. The following quotations provide some examples.

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The only thing I saw was when X [Afghan Commander] caught a soldier in smoking hashish, the Commander was sad, disappointed and confound.

Their interpretation of the rules of engagement and use of force was very close to ours.

The village elder came to us afterwards... he told that the [Afghan] soldiers had searched all the houses but not stolen anything, even though there were money lying around in the open... then I felt very proud of the [Afghan] company’.

You read about women who get exposed to horrible things. Luckily I never experienced that or such extreme dilemmas.

Second, the half that *experienced* it as a dilemma told stories which, in contrast to those of the former group, showed the opposite: Brutal or unethical behaviour, uncritical judgement of potential civilian casualties, looting and lack of understanding for proportional use of force. Several described instances in which the life of civilians could be at stake. One respondent experienced this repeatedly when he and his Afghan unit several times came under sudden enemy fire:

The ANA fired back towards some houses... they started firing quickly and uncritically. There might have been enemies there, but we tried to stop them – you cannot fire at civilians....

In another case, we took fire from a village.... The Commander ordered mortars and machine guns to ‘fire at the village with all you’ve got’.... They could have shot at their own forces... the value of a life and collateral damage is not like we see it... if they take fire from a built-up area, they fire back... they are pretty trigger-happy.<sup>21</sup>

The respondent argued in terms of duty ethics in saying it was wrong *per se* to use violence against possible innocent victims of a fire fight. Another respondent faced a similar ethical challenge, with maybe even higher stakes:

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<sup>21</sup>In this context, the respondent referred to “trigger happy” as the tendency to open fire because of nervousness and fear in combat situations, and not extended particular wish or will to shoot as such.

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In some cases, we saw through our optics that they shot towards an area where there were children. We told them so, but they said everyone in that area was Taliban.... Compared to our background, children are not guilty of anything, but their attitude was totally different: It could have been kids, but than they were resupplying Taliban with water and ammunition. Children are not innocent in their eyes.

Some respondents saw corruption, harsh discipline and other actions as ethically problematic, though how far they felt it was right or possible to intervene varies.

Some quotations regarding unethical behaviour run as follows:

The ANA had stolen melons, animals, food... I did not intervene, but I told them it is not productive in the longer term.

The ANA's are afraid of the dark. When it is dark and they see something, or they *think* they see something, they shoot at it. That was something I tried to stop, but I almost had to run in front of their guns and say "there is nothing there, don't shoot... and if it is something there, it is definitely not the enemy!".

The ANA shot a horse (collateral damage), and that caused a tense atmosphere. ISAF did not pay reparation because ANA shot it. And ANA was not interested because they meant the locals sympathized with the enemy.

You cannot change the mindset of grown-up people.... He had been in Norway and learned about human rights and that beating prisoners is not allowed. So he made other captives beat the prisoner.

Violations of the rules of engagement in the use of force, weapons and firepower seemed to be the tipping point for intervening immediately. Less serious problems like corruption, discipline and looting seem to be handled by advice rather than intervention. The quotations above essentially represent a consequentialist ethic: that violence towards civilians will increase hatred and risk the overall mission (Syse 2005:51).

Harsh physical discipline or "mild" violence towards Afghan soldiers happens, but is rarely considered sufficiently brutal to be problematic. Half of the respondents had seen physical discipline and described it as "relatively harmless", just a "bitch slap", a "smack on the back of the head" or simply "some push-ups if they were AWOL [absent without leave]". A few respondents felt they had to intervene, when the violence was perceived to be overly brutal. The respondents seem to consider this

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discipline and violence as necessary, culturally unchangeable behaviour or harmless compared to what they had expected. As one of them commented,

I did not *agree* when the CO [commanding officer] smacked a soldier in his face because he pointed his weapon in the wrong direction. But that is how they work; you have to accept some episodes like that.

Corruption, which is repeatedly discussed in the literature and in the debate on Afghan security forces, is surprisingly absent from discussions among respondents. Those who managed to expose corruption described it as a culturally unchangeable phenomenon and it was difficult to act on suspicions because, as one said, “We had to be a 100 per cent sure before we did anything about it”. Finally, it should be noted that younger or non-mentoring officers whose relations with their Afghan counterpart were less personal, were more likely to be frustrated by unethical ANSF behaviour.

Most problematic was unnecessary or uncritical use of force, because it could lead to civilians getting killed. Those with experience of serious abuse of power and force, putting civilians at risk or looting are clear on that it represented “a logical problem when coming to help”, as one respondent noted. The philosopher Henrik Syse points to several ethical arguments to explain why it is problematic when non-combatants become victims (2005:50). And those ethical arguments are reflected in what the respondents say as well, for instance that it is wrong *per se* (deontological argument) to hurt or not shield non-combatants, or creates a kind of soldier which we do not want to identify ourselves (virtue-ethical argument) (2005:51).

In contrast, those who had not experienced such ethical dilemmas had good opinions, and were even very proud of the good behaviour in the Afghan units they followed. It underlines how in this dilemma personal experience makes the most difference. In the two previous dilemmas the respondents had to consider whether operations were counterproductive or if ANSF dependency grew in the longer term, which are more abstract problems. That might explain why the answers are more consistent here. Problems with corruption, discipline and plundering seem manageable. This may be

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because they expected the problems to be more serious, or because it just did not cause dilemmas compared with the other examples discussed.

#### **4.1.5 In accordance with western military doctrines or “the Afghan way”**

This dilemma arises when Afghan forces initiate and conduct operations that are perceived to be counterproductive, too risky or in breach of the overall objectives according to western military standards, and military advisors still have to support the Afghan way of operating.

It was a dilemma for about half of the respondents that Afghan forces operated in ways that conflicted with western military doctrines or ISAF’s way of operating. The answers differed a great deal, but common to all was the sentiment, “we were always joining them”, as one put it. Many experienced episodes, as previously discussed, in which the Afghan forces operated in ways that felt counterproductive, unethical or made them more dependent. But almost none of the respondents felt this was sufficient reason for *not* operating together with them, or that it violated ISAF’s general purpose. The respondents almost always joined their Afghan fellows on their missions, either by bending their own guidelines, accepting a higher risk, successfully influencing the Afghan plan, or agreeing on mutually acceptable solutions during the planning process. Some respondents found the question irrelevant, because the challenge was mostly to convince the ANSF to operate *at all*, not whether they managed complex operations or not. The following quotations may illustrate these findings:

He meant we should dress in Afghan clothes and sneak in by night.... His plan was madness, but luckily it was easy to get him to change his mind....

There were some meaningless operations, or foolish from a military perspective, but we were always with them.... We had to show some willingness to cooperate, but if something had gone wrong it would have been hard for me afterwards.... We tried to turn the focus so they at least learned something.

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We did not feel safe in the way they cleared vulnerable points [potential road-bomb sites], but still we had to follow them... so we educated them in that [route clearance] and felt much safer.

We always agreed in the end... though it is difficult to say who affected the other most.

The necessity of “being out there” may be explained by the perception of acting in accordance with the overall objective, even when the Afghan plan was not in accordance with the same objectives.

### *Norwegian guidelines and regulations are problematic*

Some cases illustrate another dilemma not described in the literature; having to choose between national guidelines or joining the Afghan operations. As two respondents explained

You cannot follow them because of lack of medical evacuation, helicopters or other [Norwegian/ISAF] regulations prohibits you... your conscience and ethics makes you want to, but you can't... as commander in charge you have a high responsibility for that regulations are followed... we bend the rules for following them, but we also have to say no... that is maybe the biggest dilemma.,

The doctrinal approach [on COIN] and [Norwegian] guidelines are impossible to uphold. Should I participate in the operation, well aware of that the ANSF could never hold the area, or should I refuse to participate? I always participated and more or less gave a damn in those regulations.

In the cases quoted above, the dilemma is turned upside down: the respondents felt it hard to choose between *national guidelines* and the overall purpose of the operation, in contrast to the predicted dilemma between the *Afghan* way of operating and the overall purpose. Several respondents (mostly but not always from the PRT) also emphasized the difficulty of complying with Norwegian regulations. It is sometimes impossible to act in accordance with them. At the same time, they were frustrated with the lack of overall national objectives.

All in all, two conclusions can be drawn. First, even though the extent to which this was experienced as a dilemma varied, respondents agreed that they almost always chose to participate in the operations. It indicates that the Norwegian officers saw

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operating together with the Afghan forces as extremely important and mostly in line with the general purpose of their mission. Second, others see this dilemma as less important. Plausible explanations are that sometimes the Afghans did not want to operate at all, Norwegian regulations were more of a problem than Afghan plans, and often it was possible to reach agreement on how to operate. Another explanation is that without joining field operations and following the Afghan forces, no matter how poor their plan or performance was, you made yourself irrelevant as an advisor, unable to change either the outcome of the operation or ANSF's behaviour in the field.

#### **4.1.6 Unethical behaviour causes challenges when civilians are at risk**

The dilemmas addressed in the literature on state-building in war-torn societies were also experienced by some of the respondents, but not unambiguously and with many nuances. Most dilemmas were perceived to be manageable; the overall impression from the material is that the operation still felt meaningful for the respondents. Nevertheless, this seems valid only to a certain point, i.e. when civilian lives are at stake because of the Afghans' behaviour. The respondents clearly perceived such behaviour as problematic in many respects, in terms of consequentialism (that violence towards civilians risks the overall mission) and virtue ethics (that this behaviour is something we do not wish to identify with).

## **4.2 Challenges related to professional expertise of the outside force and the situation in the area of operations**

The literature reviewed on military advising presents a variety of “dos and don'ts”, what constitutes necessary competence and potential cultural challenges advisors may face. These challenges are related to the ethical dilemmas discussed above, but are nevertheless of a more practical nature. The findings and discussions after each sub-paragraph follow sequentially.

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### 4.2.1 Challenges related to the professional expertise of the outside force

The literature discusses whether military skills or cultural competence is most vital to succeed in the advisory role, and the vital importance of the ability to establish trust in that respect. The respondent were therefore asked which competence they saw as most important, how trust was gained across cultures, and to what extent it was possible to gain trust without operating together with the ANSF or without extended military competence.

#### *Type of competence*

The majority of the respondents emphasize the ability to gain trust as the most important skill, though a few departed from that conclusion and underlined military skills and technical competence as overriding in order to survive at the battlefield. As one commented, “basic soldier skills, to handle your weapon, orientation, the radio and first aid, are what matter to survive”. A more thorough analysis of the respondent’s answers reveals greater variance, especially in how they experienced establishing trust between the advisor and the advised. About half of the respondents argued that “being a good military” fostered *trust in the form of respect*. Being a good military was explained as *respect they enjoyed* as a result of their rank, position, time of service, age, looks and other exterior factors that intuitively evoke a sense of esteem and reputation rather than respect gained by relations between persons. The following quotations illustrate how this kind of trust was gained:

Position and merits were things I consciously played on.

I was his age, I had been a battalion commander myself, I had been in Afghanistan before.... Those things together with personal qualities...

We enjoyed great respect. Respect because of the skills we had.

If you show incompetence, you come out wrong.



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I am big (physically) and gained respect because that, because of my age, I've lived for a while, I have kids and that provided an important common platform, and I've experienced things.... But the respect *we showed them* [my emphasis] was more important than all that.

Interestingly, many reasoned like the last respondent quoted above; they corrected or adjusted their answers during the conversation and focused more on how to gain trust by means of other qualities than military proficiency. In following their reasoning many ended up emphasizing people skills such as humility, “genuinely lik[ing] other people” and being “jovial, social and fairly all right” as two respondents put it. This may reflect how they experienced working together chronologically. First they had to master the environment, confirm that their military skills were sufficient to be accepted among the Afghans, and handle the military challenges of combat. Thereafter, people skills were considered most important when it came to handling the entire mission and all aspects of their advising job.

Cultural *knowledge* was not highlighted by many, but being polite, using ‘horse sense’ (common sense), being a good guest and spending time off with one’s counterpart. “Horse sense” and “humility” were exemplified by two respondents as respecting religious customs even though it could damage their ability to operate:

The first thing the new American officer wanted to do was to stop their religious education.... I asked him ‘what kind of nonsense is that?’ He said they had a contact in the Ministry of Defence and ‘we’re going to put an end to this’.... We knew it wouldn’t work, and he returned quickly and empty handed.

For instance Ramadan, we had to respect it but not close shop completely.... I had to read his mood, and tell him that he could not cancel a mission he was responsible for.

It is interesting that most respondents did not emphasize wider cultural competence or expertise, but rather the qualities of being attentive, observant and considerate about how the Afghan counterparts reacted to their behaviour.

When asked whether it was possible to gain trust without operating closely with the ANSF, the respondents (with one exception) said no, it was not possible. This complies with the answers given in paragraph 4.1.5 and indicates that advisors tended

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to join Afghan forces on operations, even if some of them were experienced as less productive or posing a higher risk. Taking part was perceived as being in accordance with the higher objectives, and vital to gain trust. For instance, as one respondent explained, “fortunately, we got a contact [fire-fight] together with the ANA early in our contingent”, so relations between him and the ANA went from *bad to normal* after experiencing combat together.

### *Language and situational awareness*

Language skills are often described in the literature as a fundamental challenge for forces from different nations. But neither language problems nor the use of interpreters was perceived as a crucial problem by my respondents. Some experienced language problems as a substantial obstacle to cooperation, though they were in the minority. Indeed, the Afghan interpreter was seen as aiding their cultural understanding and improved the communication between the advisor and the Afghan officer. In one case, it was the interpreter who managed to notify the Norwegian officers that ANSF was about to open fire in the direction of civilians. In suchlike cases, misunderstandings did occur, when inexperienced Afghan interpreters or interpreters one did not know or had not cooperated with before, were involved.

When it comes to different situational awareness as an obstacle of cooperation, there was little coherence in the group and the answers differed a great deal. Some argued that Norwegian intelligence enhanced cooperation, others that it made planning difficult because it diverged from the Afghans’ intelligence. When ANA produced their own intelligence and situational understanding it made both the ANA and some respondents feel more confident; they “read the situation in villages better than us”, as one said. While some experienced vital misunderstandings on the battlefield due to their counterpart’s different interpretation of the situation, others said that during combat communication became simplified and potential misunderstandings cleared up. The Afghan forces were described as both too bold and too cautious compared to how the Norwegians assessed the situation and potential threats.

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## 4.2.2 Practical and technical challenges related to the situation in the area of operations

Certain characteristics of the Afghan forces are problematized in much of the literature, especially when it comes to corruption, the changing loyalties of military leaders, ethnic dividing lines both within and outside the institutions, and low combat morale (fighting spirit) among Afghan soldiers. In contrast to the literature, the overall impression of the respondents to this study did not see these problems as a major obstacle to their work, although they were anticipated before deployment and respondents saw indications of these problems. Many respondents seem rather to reject rather than confirm the problems in the cases they describe, where loyalty in the ANA, good morale in combat and a multi-ethnic composition of the force are seen as an advantage. For instance, one reported that his Pashtun counterpart got access to a meeting with a Pashtun Taliban representative:

That officer had no problems with revealing the Taliban after the meeting....  
He gave up name, telephone number and his location.

Nevertheless, ethnicity and low morale did pose challenges for some of the respondents. Many referred to Afghans as racists and knew of ethnic clashes occurring in the military units. One respondent reported how

They spoke of the locals as ‘kandaharis or Talibans all together’ ... which strengthened the stereotypes... the Afghans are very racist.

Another experienced ethnic clashes in his Afghan unit, even within the leadership:

The company commander came and joined the volleyball match. He said ‘all the Pashtuns go to that side, I’ll only play with the Pashtuns’.

In addition, successful Afghan officers failed to advance in the system or received unpopular missions and tasks because of their ethnicity.

In cases where combat morale was described as poor, it was explained by two factors. First, it was their combat *endurance* rather than morale that was the main challenge; their ability to operate was largely hampered by lack of logistics, supplies and equipment like clothes, food and water. Naturally that also affected motivation, but

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fighting spirit among soldiers was described as high. Second, low morale was explained by poor leadership by superior Afghan officers. They lacked a sense of responsibility, were afraid of having to take the blame, and lacked the will to intervene in the situation. According to one respondent, an Afghan officer told him,

If we do something good, the Kandak [Battalion] commander takes the credit. If it goes to hell, we take the blame.  
The [ANA] company commander called the Kandak commander and requested to patrol that area. [The Kandak Commander then said] ‘you can try, but at your own risk’. So you don’t have an impression that the battalion commander backs his subordinates.

Nevertheless, the respondents spoke of the Afghan soldiers as “real warriors in combat” and explained the exceptions to this general rule by lack of equipment and poor leadership. As one respondent said about combat morale in the Afghan unit,

When the winter arrives and the Kandak does not manage to provide firewood, fuel and uniforms – they wore t-shirts when it snowed – I understood their loss of motivation.... If they had food, ammunition, fuel, sun – but not hot – they were ok, they are just like any other soldiers.

The problem was understandable; an effect of insufficient supplies and poor leadership rather than a characteristic of the Afghan forces as a whole.

Even though the respondents mentioned many challenges of a more practical and technical nature, few are emphasized as particularly important. This may have a variety of explanations. Some problems, for instance ethnicity, were sensed, but not to the extent that loyalty seemed threatened or requiring intervention by advisors to manage the conflicts. Some problems, for instance corruption, were mentioned, but rather as a cause of other challenges like logistics, lack of supplies and equipment. *Since the advisors have to solve a variety of challenges every day, focusing on solutions and progress may be a mechanism to handle day to day realities, or else potential challenges in Afghanistan may seem overwhelming.* When it comes to changing loyalties among security forces, there may be a challenge here, but it is

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probably at a higher level than the respondent operated at. It also more likely to affect the Afghan police. The Afghan Army seems more loyal than their police colleagues. In addition, many daily problems seem less important in the greater picture. For instance, the issues of ethnicity and racism may seem trivial when they, after all, lived and fought closely together.

## 4.3 Cultural challenges

This section investigates two aspects to do with culture. First, to what extent do living and operating close to people from a different culture presents a challenge for military advisors? Second, which challenges arise from the possible differences in professional identity and military culture between the forces and to what extent is the role of a military advisor compatible with the perceived role of being an officer?

### 4.3.1 Challenges of living close to indigenous people

As discussed in the literature review, certain authors suggests that living close to indigenous soldiers (Azari et al. 2010, Ramsey 2006a) and native people (Mæland 2004) may be strenuous or cause unintended hostility towards indigenous people and their culture. When asked to what extent they experienced any special challenges by operating and living alongside Afghan forces, nearly all the respondents answered spontaneously none. Many said the opposite, that living close by was an advantage *for their mission*, that the Afghans were more similar to themselves than expected, and it was sad to leave. All expressed a sense of being well integrated and having enjoyed great hospitality among the Afghans. Some quotations may illustrate this impression.

It was strange in the beginning, but on balance sad to leave.

This [problem] is exaggerated. The ANA has worked with westerns for years.

The least problem was cultural differences.... We were with them all the time, we had a closer relationship to them than to the other Norwegian forces.

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When you live so closely together you get a unique relationship.... I find it strange that NATO doesn't do it more often. Instead they cage you up in camps and body-search ANSF before meetings. They should be more co-localized. Imagine the PRT co-localized with the ANA. That would have been something!'

This impression was somewhat qualified by mention of two challenges which can be ascribed to inter-cultural differences. First, for some the sanitary and hygienic conditions of the Afghan forces were uncomfortable, laborious or frustrating. The Afghans did not want to use the toilets, clean up garbage or maintain personal hygiene in the same manner as themselves. Second, several found expressions of religious fatalism and certain religious customs, for instance fasting at Ramadan, to be problematic. Religious fatalism was described by one respondent:

When we make tactical dispositions, they put a bit too much into the hands of Allah.... They say they see the point of shooting practice, but at the end of the day it is up to Allah whether they hit the target or not.

The frustration expressed by the respondents was not of a religious complexion, but directed at the Afghan's shaky commitment. Another respondent described why this felt frustrating:

They stand upright when they shoot instead of lying down because if it's what Allah wants, they'll survive. If we had taken casualties or had to expose ourselves or others to danger because of that, it would have been frustrating.

Despite these examples, the majority found living, eating and operating with the indigenous forces unproblematic.

All in all, it is interesting that so few experienced any special challenges with regard to living close to the Afghans. Four possible explanations are worth reflecting over:

*Bonding in harsh situations affects the overall impression:* Group dynamics in combat are strong. The respondents also pointed to the importance of this. All the units represented in this analysis, and almost all respondents, were personally engaged in combat situations during their deployment in Afghanistan. It is plausible that the respondents' general impression of success, and that everyone made it back home

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despite many dangerous situations, may have erased memories of those challenges one considered less important in the bigger picture.

*The need to establish in-groups and out-groups:* Some reported having to defend the ANA to other Norwegian units in Afghanistan. One respondent argued, “there was a lot of shitty talk about the ANA” in these units. Some mentoring units expressed dissatisfaction with the better living standards, equal pay and more isolated and safer living quarters of these other Norwegian units referred to above.<sup>22</sup> Some of the respondents lived with the ANSF in bases isolated from other foreign units. It is possible to understand the need for identifying the Afghan forces and oneself as an in-group and the other Norwegians as an out-group.

*Expectations were worse:* Many expressed throughout the interview but particularly in connection with questions about culture, that the differences between “them” and “us” were smaller than expected. To a follow-up question on where these expectations came from, a respondent said,

Training in cultural understanding taught us that you have to be very careful with religion, women, don’t mention this and at least not that, don’t sit in this way or that way. But when you get to know people you can talk about most things.... I even discussed polygamy with my counterpart.

Finally, negative attitudes towards Afghans *may* be a sensitive topic and there could be issues in this regard which the respondents did not wish to elaborate. However, the general impression from the interviews does not support this assumption.

### **4.3.2 Professional identity and the compatibility of the role of advisor**

Some elements of military culture, such as eagerness to act when confronted with lack of host-nation progress, may have caused challenges for military advisors. And much sympathy for the indigenous people and their cause may have challenged officers’

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<sup>22</sup> In contingent reports classified “restricted”, available from author.

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military identity. The respondents were therefore asked about differences between Afghan and Norwegian professional identity, and whether the differences eased or hampered cooperation, and to what extent they perceived their advisory role as compatible and consistent with being an officer. The findings will be presented under these three questions, and discussed together at the end of this section.

### *Similar profession but different identity*

Nearly all respondents intuitively pointed to similarities of both Norwegian and Afghan military cultures. They were all soldiers in a hierarchic structure, everybody wanted to survive and come home, and both nations have a soldier creed and pride in their profession. However, half of the respondents also mentioned differences with regard to professionalism. Most wanted to emphasize how similar they all were as soldiers at an abstract level, but when it came to concrete situations several also pointed out differences and challenges linked to their particular professional field. The leaders pointed to differences in leadership philosophy and company mentors pointed to ANSF's lack of preparation and training. One case illustrates both the intuitive similarities and how the deeper challenges came to the surface during the interview:

We were surprisingly similar, I think, hierarchic structure is an example.... I told him we are both commanders, equals... [but during one operation] I asked him 'What do you want to do?' Then the answer of course is 'I will do whatever you tell me to do'.... Afterwards he yelled at his mentor like hell, and said it was scandalous that we did not go further.... He said: 'I could not disagree in front of the PRT commander'.... That would never happen in Norway. Even the youngest officer can suggest doing this or that. We have better leaders at the lower level, and the Norwegian principles of equality are strong.

The advisor wanted to work with his Afghan counterpart as a fellow commanding officer, but was met with submissiveness. For one respondent the biggest problem was to get the Afghans to plan for unforeseen situations:



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The ANA Brigade made only *one* plan, it did not give the commander any leeway.... They seemed incapable of grasping abstract thinking, they were unable to handle planning for several possible outcomes, if they had only one plan, and the chief signed it they were all bound to that plan. In one case [when the situation changed], I had to write a letter where I personally took full responsibility for blowing up that [ANA item].... If I had not, he would have ended up in prison and been shot.

### *Norwegian professional identity perceived as an accelerator for cooperation*

Nearly all respondents felt their cooperation with the Afghans enhanced by their Norwegian professionalism. For instance, many argued that tolerance and sensitivity towards other cultures are traits of Norwegian military culture. As one respondent put it,

The prayer-speaker went on five to six times a day. The men did not screw around; they did not imitate shouting even stuff like that, which is tempting to do. That is the advantage with bringing grown-up people.

*Flexibility* regarding rank and military position was emphasized by many respondents. For instance, one pointed out that Norwegians without advising tasks would help to advise Afghans by teaching and training them. Officers would (and should) help with practical soldier's tasks like driving, digging and carpeting. Several, many unsolicited, contrasted this understanding of professionalism with the typical American officer who, in some cases, they perceived as rigid, too controlled by regulations, too hierarchy oriented and arrogant towards foreign cultures. The literature reviewed indicates that American military culture could hamper cooperation with foreigners. The respondents agreed, by and large. The quotations run as follows:

Norwegians are flexible and US Army are too loyal to TTP [tactical procedures], regulations and hierarchy.

Some units come and want to achieve as much as possible through their months down there. The Americans were even worse; they wanted everything done straight away.

They [US Forces] had a lot of dos and don'ts, they could do this but not that, if they did something else no one should know about it.... Norway is different... everyone contributes and is flexible.

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Nevertheless, some respondents felt that their Norwegian cultural traits, like good intentions when acting on possibilities to improve the situation in Afghanistan, could be a source of frustration for a differently motivated Afghan leadership. As one noted,

We were more idealistic.... The ANA collect their wages so that their families shall survive. Only a few of them are idealists and unfortunately they often get trampled on by someone at the level above [them].

### *The advisory role is experienced compatible with being an officer*

Nearly all reported found the advisory role compatible with being an officer because the mission felt meaningful, it was easy to see progress and one was allowed to practise and master “the officer profession”, i.e. practise leadership in combat, pass on knowledge through training, supervision and education (most Norwegian officers are used to training soldiers and officers in Norway), and mastering demanding situations. Interestingly, only one respondent mentioned “making Norway safer” as a unifying aspect of these roles. For the majority, compatibility meant meaningful operations in accordance with what they saw as duties of a professional military leader. As one chief of the mentoring units commented:

You get to test yourself as a leader in rough situations. You have often thought about it.... The feeling of doing something everyone at home thinks well of, and simultaneously seeing results down there: It cannot be any better than that.

### *Comments and reflections to professional identity*

Though the role of military advisor is complex, it does not in itself seem to have caused any severe challenges. Their role perceptions of being a teacher, soldier and officer – sometimes simultaneously – all seem very much in line with expectations and identity. Differences between Afghan and Norwegian military cultures are clearly pointed out, but not as insurmountable problems. The explanation is twofold. First, the feeling of success and meaningful input is vital, especially among those who see progress in the ANSF as the overriding objective. Second, the opportunity to test and master military responsibilities, in accordance with the role of officer and professional

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combatant, is also emphasized. The latter depends on the situation during the operation, and as mentioned, combat situations and high threat levels have probably contributed to a more coherent understanding of one's role. In Mæland's study, the different role perceptions of the respondents caused some moral inconsistency among the Norwegian officers (2004:43). His study also showed that negative attitudes towards the indigenous people can develop among foreign forces. The findings of this analysis show no support for such attitudes or conflicting roles. However, negative attitudes are a sensitive issue, and one cannot exclude the possibility that the respondents "trimmed" their answers because they were difficult to talk about. But this hypothesis finds no support in the rest of the material.

It is more plausible that the lack of challenges and negative attitudes was because the mission was largely considered meaningful, and because Norwegian and indigenous forces actually operate *together as soldiers*. That is a recognizable activity and role for Norwegian officers. It creates an impression of progress compared to missions where military forces are there to help the civilian population, as in the peace-building operations in the Balkan on which Mæland's findings are based (2004). In Afghanistan, Norwegians may not experience the same proximity to suffering civilians, and therefore be spared for de-humanizing mechanisms that may be at play in war-torn societies.

### **4.3.3 Combat situations and positive aspects**

Two questions were asked at the end of the interviews. First, the extent to which they experienced combat situations as a vital challenge in their job. Second, what they saw as the consistently most positive aspect of their mission in Afghanistan, and the most positive aspect of their work with the Afghan forces. The first questions were intended to identify respondents who saw combat and threat situations as the overriding challenges in the mission, but too obvious to mention. The latter was formulated to give the respondents a chance to reflect on the positive aspects of their work with Afghans, since the analysis and questions largely focus on problems.

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Although the respondents had all experienced combat and high threat situations in some form or another, very few *emphasized* this in the interviews. They rather spoke of the threat, combat situations and fire-fights in a very level-headed way. They were described in neither positive nor negative terms, but as something they felt trained and prepared for but of secondary importance to the main mission of improving the Afghan forces. However, three respondents pointed to expectations and eagerness of younger personnel as challenging. Especially in combat situations or situations where younger, subordinate personnel found the behaviour of the Afghan Forces unethical. As one company mentor commented:

[Combat], that's always a challenge... as a told my subordinates. 'I hope we can get back and say we were never in combat.' I have been shot at before, it was not nice. Young soldiers and [non-commissioned] officers do not have that understanding.... the biggest challenge was to moderate the younger's expectations.

As many respondents had already mentioned the importance of practising leadership in volatile situations as part of their role as officers, none emphasized being in combat as a motivational or particularly positive factor *in itself*. That is a small but important nuance, substantiated by what they saw as positive below.

Regarding positive aspects, the respondents emphasized succeeding together with the Afghans, and getting to know them on a more personal and deeper level than they expected. For many, realizing "they are not so different from us" and feeling they understood a foreign and very different culture as one of the most positive experiences. As a company mentor remarked,

To realize that we are not so different; that conclusion gave added value in life and discussions afterwards. There is much discussion on immigration and how bad and awful they [foreigners] are with their women and children and stuff like that because they have another culture than us. I feel I understand that better, maybe [I've] become more open... gained more acceptance for what is foreign... like other cultures in the world, like in Africa: maybe you understand more of the world after being so close someone so fundamentally different socially and so much poorer than we are. That is maybe the most valuable for the future.

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The respondent described a spill-over effect; the unfamiliar became less alien also in everyday-life back home.

All in all, there appears to be a feeling of mastery in having understood something foreign, finding common ground in an organization and with people one expected to be very different. Maybe most human beings appreciate being able to say “no, they are not like that, I know one of them myself” (and disprove or confirm stereotypes and nuance simple beliefs).

## 4.4 Other findings in the data – the stories on the fringes of the general material

This section intends to show that the variety of the respondents’ experiences depended on their position, mandate and location in Afghanistan.

This analysis has so far presented the findings thematically, allowing for comparison across the interviews. However, two respondents had a radically different story to tell compared to each other, and their stories also diverged from the overall impression of the data. Their answers represent the “outliers” of the material. Since their stories are less visible in the previous analysis, they will be briefly presented in this section. But first some important remarks must be made. First, these stories do not in any way represent right or wrong perceptions, or correct or incorrect stories. They are experiences made with different units in Afghanistan and are equally true for the situation in Afghanistan. The intent is to show the stark contrast between them and how they contrast with the general material. Second, quotations will be kept to a minimum partly to preserve the anonymity of the respondents and partly due to structural limitations of this analysis.

### 4.4.1 The story of success

The general picture provided by this interviewee was of the overall success of operation, both because the Afghan forces became more independent and because

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they had improved the local security situation. The respondent did not want to problematize these challenges, features of the Afghan forces, or his own decisions. The frequent combat situations and high IED threat levels were described as the main challenges, but also as the factor that tied the Afghan and the foreign forces together.

Few if any dilemmas were confirmed or denied. Ones which were mentioned were described as ethical choices – so important that it was easy to choose. Problems were manageable, the operations meaningful and the Afghans described as easily persuadable to do the ‘right thing’. Unethical and illegal behaviour among the Afghans rarely or never took place, the cases described show rather the opposite, and how honourable they were. Military workmanship was described as fundamentally important, and trust and respect were built by being competent, brave, and always operating together with the Afghans (this does not diverge from the general picture, but it contrasts with the statements in the next paragraph). Problems regarding aspects of the Afghan forces, for instance corruption and ethnicity, were almost brushed aside.

Few or no cultural challenges were described, partly because the Norwegian unit was said to consist of grown up and mature people, partly because the respondent wanted to focus on similarities and what bound the Afghan and Norwegian units together. When it came to professional identity, the Norwegian unit was described as so robust, so mature and so educated that it easily handled those challenges.

#### **4.4.2 The story of frustration**

In contrast, the story of the next respondent is one of frustration with many actors, Norwegian as well as Afghan. He was mainly frustrated by the actors’ way of handling the conflict and taking high risks to execute a strategy no one believed in. While other respondents were eager to talk about Afghan soldiers in general, this interviewee frequently returned to the factors mentioned above. The biggest challenges were “to get one’s own organization, with all the actors, to deal with it [the

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ethnic sides of the conflict]”, and “risk one’s own and others’ lives for something you know is wrong”.

Nearly all dilemmas were recognized, and the respondent experienced the most pressing dilemma when he had to take serious temporary risks for something which was counterproductive in the longer term. The respondent felt forced to take part in the conflict and support authorities without legitimacy in the population. That the way of operating was largely counterproductive, but just as much because of Norwegian guidelines as the Afghan leadership. The Afghan counterparts were sometimes unethical and corrupt because government behaviour towards the civilian population was unethical. In sharp contrast, the insurgents’ *cause* (not methods) against the Afghan authorities’ corruption and bad governance is regarded with sympathy. As the respondent noted,

I really liked that Pashtun culture; honour, it is very gentlemanly. ... They [other ISAF forces] were ambushed in our area.... I telephone him [the insurgent and asked] who is responsible for the attack and ‘why are you shooting at us?’ And he says: ‘Oh, I’m sorry, I did not know it was you’.... It kind of shows that there is hope.

Cultural knowledge and the ability to understand the local context, the conflict and how the insurgency spread out were considered vital attributes. In contrast to the other respondents, this respondent believed that trust was mainly gained *without* operating together with the Afghans; the Afghan officials would be under less pressure and not afraid of sanctions.

Interestingly, problems with the Norwegian culture and professional identity were mentioned rather than the Afghan. The following factors were given by the respondent as obstacles for positive progress in the conflict:<sup>23</sup> Norwegian officers tend to communicate to positively upwards on the development on the ground. The respondent felt the Norwegian forces took too much part in the conflict, which he said

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<sup>23</sup> The question posed was about cultural obstacles to *cooperation* between Afghan and Norwegian forces, and not obstacles to progress in the conflict in Afghanistan. But as mentioned, the respondent often retraced into this topic. However, the answers were of interest since they contrasted the general material.

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was “very ethically challenging”. Further, military educated officers are trained in decision making processes for quickly analysing the situation, making a plan and subsequently acting on it. According to him, it makes them too impatient, too loyal to regulations and too eager to quickly solve the conflict. In contrast with the rest of the respondents, he did not see his role as compatible with that of an officer; he had too much sympathy with the insurgents’ cause, and the Norwegian effort was too partial in the conflict.

#### **4.4.3 Comments and reflections**

How can two stories that are so different be explained? The two respondents were from different units, with different tasks, operating with different counterparts. Since they operated in different areas, their answers could reflect good or bad progress in those areas; one should not underestimate the local dynamics in a conflict. Also, the respondents could, maybe unconsciously, have had an agenda or “story to tell” another officer colleague. But then it should have been more apparent in other interviews as well. In addition, the frustration described by the last respondent did not take the form of a coherently directed message, as an agenda would, but was directed at many actors. The most plausible explanation seems to be the simplest; their experiences were radically different due to the local context, differences in the mission they performed and the fact that experiences are formed by personalities and that people express themselves differently. Still, it provides an interesting insight; the experiences of Norwegian officers are far from coherent. It underlines the importance of not considering all Norwegian soldiers in Afghanistan as a homogeneous group.

A series of challenges regarding military advising has been analysed in this chapter. Some were confirmed, some nuanced, and many experienced as manageable. The following chapter looks beyond the operation in Afghanistan at consequences for other operations Norwegian officers participate in.



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## 5. Conclusions

This thesis has investigated the challenges Norwegian officers face when cooperating closely with the Afghan forces in order to transfer the responsibility of security to Afghan authorities. The concluding chapter has three parts. First, the research question will be answered by pointing at the most important findings regarding ethical and practical challenges, and how this relates to the literature. Second, the conclusions regarding the cultural challenges will be compared with other research conducted on a similar group but with a very different outcome, in order to indicate some implications of employing armed forces to very different operations. Finally, some implications for Norwegian foreign policy will be highlighted.

However, it should be noted that the source of data naturally does not allow for generalizations and limits the scope of the claims that can be made. For instance, the findings at the fringes of the general material have shown that even though the interviewees have many similarities, two respondents had radically different conceptions of the challenges in Afghanistan. In addition, the findings represent the normative perceptions among Norwegian officers, and not those of the Afghans. For further research, an approach taking Afghan officers or civilians into consideration could say more about the effect and consequences of military advising.

### **The dilemmas of state-building and the protection of civilians**

Most importantly, the challenges in the literature on state-building in war-torn societies were mostly perceived as manageable by the Norwegian officers. Some of the respondents experienced some of the dilemmas, but their experiences were not unambiguous and had many nuances. For instance, by focusing on training and improving the ANSF, one partly if not completely avoids contradictions between short and long-term goals. And the dilemma of dependency among Afghan forces to western capacities was commonly experienced, but there was disagreement about whether dependency obtained and if so, how. Nevertheless, *the dilemma of local forces treating civilians unethically seems to cause the biggest challenges in these*

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*operations*. Unethical behaviour is manageable to a certain extent; but not when civilians get hurt. That seems to be the fundamental conception of the Norwegian officers; that one can (and must) accept ethical differences between oneself and the indigenous people to a certain point, but not when innocent civilians are at risk of getting killed.

The challenges of military advising are also clearly perceived to be less problematic than the literature gives the impression of. This is true whether the challenges of advising indigenous forces are cultural or practical.

Since so few challenges are emphasized, it seems appropriate to discuss why they are perceived manageable. All in all, the respondents felt they could handle most challenges, and the mission still seemed meaningful. As one respondent noted, there were often choices to be made between leading and advising:

I had to take lead... up to the hill and point and explain and say 'you shoot in that way and you shoot this way'.... These choices were every-day life, it was challenging.... You get into these situations all the time where you have to choose, and then you just hope you made the right decision.

A contributing factor to why so few challenges are highlighted might be that officers tend to focus on solutions. They are not as problem-oriented as the literature on post-war state-building is, naturally, since this research seeks to ask questions and nuance the picture. For officers in a small and remote base with Afghan forces under high levels of threat, a solution-oriented focus becomes a necessity; without it, the challenges in Afghanistan could seem overwhelming.

These conclusions complement those of the state-building literature in two respects. First, since the literature has focused on the independent role of the outside forces, not in collaboration with local forces, it underestimates the ethical challenges of having to support and legitimate the actions of indigenous forces, especially when it comes to protecting civilians. Second, there is a gap between the literature and the field of practice investigated here, since the ethical dilemmas from literature are mostly perceived as manageable by the Norwegian officers. Even though previous research has shown that state-building poses difficult choices for practitioners, this study does

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not find sufficient support to claim that such dilemmas are decisive for the challenges Norwegian officers experience in Afghanistan.

### **A similar group but a different outcome**

Compared to previous Norwegian research on a similar group on a similar mission in Kosovo, the striking thing is that being so close to people of a foreign culture is so less problematic here, compared to Mæland's (2004) and Røkenes' (2005) studies. There, officers developed negative attitudes towards indigenous people. In this aspect, the findings of study contrasts with the literature since no such attitudes were found; some felt greater acceptance and tolerance for what is foreign. There might be too many factors not accounted for in this analysis to compare operations in Kosovo and Afghanistan. But the difference in context of the conflicts is important, and the perception of being an actor in a recognizable role has proven decisive. The Norwegian literature mentioned above complements this assertion, since these factors were more pressing on soldiers in Afghanistan than on soldiers in for instance Kosovo or other peace-building missions. There, proximity to suffering civilians and difficulties in helping them are likely to foster a totally different perception of those one is there to help and their culture.

So, what is decisive for the officers' perception and experience of such operations? Apparently, it is neither the ethical dilemmas, nor the practical problems, but rather the very task they are set to perform. The mission is largely perceived as *meaningful* for two reasons. First, the officers feel their contribution actually makes a difference – the Afghan forces improve and they experience progress. Second, their task is *recognizable*; in an environment of high threats and frequent combat situations they feel they are performing a military assignment in accordance with their identity as officers. That conclusion may call attention to another, more universal debate, that soldiers, at least for their own sake, might handle frustrations in these operations better than in low-intensity, humanitarian peace-building missions. That is not to say that soldiers should not take part in such operations. But they seem somewhat more

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mentally prepared for the dilemmas that arise in operations such as those in Afghanistan. In this aspect, officers may be reluctant to participate in missions which are not in accordance with what they see as their primary role. When policymakers are to decide upon how the armed forces can be used abroad, they might have to considerate how the forces themselves argue they contribute the most. Politicians are, naturally, in control of the deployment of armed forces. But factors such as soldiers' mental health and their perception of the task may affect such decisions.

All in all, this study has sought to contribute to bridge a knowledge gap in the literature on state-building in war-torn societies, and point to implications of Norwegian foreign policy. As the study indicates, Norwegian officers, despite the high risks of the ongoing operations in Afghanistan, seem to prefer such missions to peace operations in conflicts with lower intensity and less recognizable roles. If a meaningful mission with meaningful tasks is a requirement for Norwegian officers, it might have consequences for decision makers deciding how the armed forces can be of use in implementing Norwegian foreign policy.

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## Appendix 1 – Interview guide (Norwegian)

### 1. Introduksjonsspørsmål

*Hvordan var/kan du beskrive ditt samarbeid med afghanske myndighetspersoner?*

*Hva opplevde du som mest utfordrende i Afghanistan?*

### 2. Ethiske dilemma

*Opplevde du noen etiske dilemma i samarbeidet med afghanske sikkerhetsstyrker?*

Motsetninger mellom behov/innsats på kort sikt og målsetninger på lang sikt

*Opplevde du at innsatsen du bidro til på kort sikt, av og til eller ofte, kunne være kontraproduktiv i forhold til operasjonens langsiktige målsetninger? Har du noen eksempler?*

### 3. Dilemma med tanke på avhengighet til internasjonal støtte

*Opplevde du å måtte velge mellom på den ene siden støtte ANSF, men gjennom metoder og kapasiteter som gjorde ANSF mindre i stand til selv å overta sikkerhetsansvaret/operere på lengre sikt?*

### 4. Dilemma med tanke på ulovlig eller uetisk oppførsel av styrkene man støtter

*Har du opplevd at du enten måtte støtte eller la være å gripe inn overfor handlinger utført av afghanske offiserer, som var i strid med enten egne moralske prinsipper eller formålet med operasjonen?*

### 5. I samsvar med vestlige intensjoner eller 'the Afghan way'?

*Opplevde du å måtte velge mellom, på den ene siden å støtte de afghanske styrkenes måte å operere på / operasjoner de initierte, og på den andre siden støtte den (ISAFs) høyere intensjonen med oppdraget / måte å operere på?*

## Utfordringer knyttet til faglige ekspertise og situasjonen i operasjonsområdet

### 6. Militær fagkompetanse og evne til å etablere et samarbeidsforhold på tvers av kulturer

*Hvilken kompetanse var viktigst for deg; militær fagkompetanse eller personlige evner til å etablere et tillitsforhold på tvers av kulturer?*

*Er det mulig å etablere et tillitsforhold uten høy militær fagkompetanse, evt. uten å operere sammen med ANSF?*

### Språk og situasjonsforståelse

*I hvilken grad opplevde du at språkproblemer og/eller ulik situasjonsforståelse hindret samarbeidet mellom deg og din afghanske motpart?*

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## **7. Praktiske og tekniske utfordringer knyttet til situasjonen i operasjonsområdet**

*I hvilken grad opplevde du at egenskaper ved de afghanske styrkene som skiftende lojalitet, lav stridsmoral, etniske motsetninger, korrupsjon etc., utgjorde et praktisk hinder i jobben din?*

## **Kulturelle utfordringer**

Utfordringer knyttet til å bo tett på mennesker fra andre kulturer

*Opplevde du spesielle utfordringer med å leve og operere tett med afghanere over tid?*

## **8. Profesjonsidentitet – hinder eller akselerator for å etablere tillit?**

*Hvorvidt opplevde du forskjeller og likheter i profesjonsidentitet mellom norske og afghanske avdelinger?*

*Synes du den norske profesjonsidentiteten/militære kulturen hindret eller bedret samarbeidet, for eksempel i sammenligning til den amerikanske militære kulturen?*

## **Er rollen som militær rådgiver forenelig med rollen som offiser?**

*Hvorvidt følte du at rollen som samarbeidspartner med afghanerne var forenelig med din rolle som offiser?*

## **9. Kontrollspørsmål**

### **Strid og kamp**

*Hvor vidt opplevde du stridshandlinger og kamp som en vesentlig utfordring ved tjenesten?*

### **Givende tjeneste – positive aspekter ved tjenesten**

*Hva opplevde du som det mest positive ved tjenesten i Afghanistan*

*Hva opplevde du som det mest positive ved å jobbe med Afghanerne?*

## Appendix 2 – Approval NSD (Norwegian)

Norsk samfunnsvitenskapelig datatjeneste AS  
NORWEGIAN SOCIAL SCIENCE DATA SERVICES



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Anne Julie Semb  
Institutt for statsvitenskap  
Universitetet i Oslo  
Postboks 1097 Blindern  
0317 OSLO

Vår dato: 21.02.2011

Vår ref: 26169 / 3 / TNS

Deres dato:

Deres ref:

### KVITTERING PÅ MELDING OM BEHANDLING AV PERSONOPPLYSNINGER

Vi viser til melding om behandling av personopplysninger, mottatt 27.01.2011. Meldingen gjelder prosjektet:

26169	<i>Afghanistan – Challenges for the Norwegian Forces in the transfer of authority to the Afghan Government</i>
Behandlingsansvarlig	<i>Universitetet i Oslo, ved institusjonens overste leder</i>
Daglig ansvarlig	<i>Anne Julie Semb</i>
Student	<i>Ola Krekvik</i>

Personvernombudet har vurdert prosjektet og finner at behandlingen av personopplysninger er meldepliktig i henhold til personopplysningsloven § 31. Behandlingen tilfredsstiller kravene i personopplysningsloven.

Personvernombudets vurdering forutsetter at prosjektet gjennomføres i tråd med opplysningene gitt i meldeskjemaet, korrespondanse med ombudet, eventuelle kommentarer samt personopplysningsloven/-helseregisterloven med forskrifter. Behandlingen av personopplysninger kan settes i gang.

Det gjøres oppmerksom på at det skal gis ny melding dersom behandlingen endres i forhold til de opplysninger som ligger til grunn for personvernombudets vurdering. Endringsmeldinger gis via et eget skjema, [http://www.nsd.uib.no/personvern/forsk\\_stud/skjema.html](http://www.nsd.uib.no/personvern/forsk_stud/skjema.html). Det skal også gis melding etter tre år dersom prosjektet fortsatt pågår. Meldinger skal skje skriftlig til ombudet.

Personvernombudet har lagt ut opplysninger om prosjektet i en offentlig database, <http://www.nsd.uib.no/personvern/prosjektoversikt.jsp>.

Personvernombudet vil ved prosjektets avslutning, 20.05.2011, rette en henvendelse angående status for behandlingen av personopplysninger.

Vennlig hilsen  
  
Vigdis Namtvedt Kvalheim

  
Tone Njølstad Slotsvik

Kontaktperson: Tone Njølstad Slotsvik tlf: 55 58 24 10  
Vedlegg: Prosjektvurdering  
Kopi: Ola Krekvik, Oskar Braatens Gate 24, 0474 OSLO

Avdelingskontorer / District Offices:

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TROMSØ: NSD, HSL, Universitetet i Tromsø, 9037 Tromsø. Tel: +47-77 64 43 36. [martin-arne.andersen@uit.no](mailto:martin-arne.andersen@uit.no)

# Appendix 3 – Approval Norwegian Armed Forces (Norwegian)



**Vår saksbehandler**  
Oblt Roger Helmers, rohelmers@mil.no  
+477762 8686, 0580 8686  
HST/P-AVD

**Vår dato** 2011-03-28  
**Vår referanse** 2011/012468-001/FORSVARET/910

1 av 1

**Tidligere dato** **Tidligere referanse**

**Til**  
FHS/IFS

**Kopi til**  
Forsvarets operative hovedkvarter  
BRIG N/BRIG LED/G-1/Einar Ulleberg

## Bruk av intervjuobjekter knyttet til Hæren som styrkeprodusent til ISAF i forbindelse med prosjekt ved IFS

### 1 Bakgrunn

Hæren viser til tidligere e-postrekke som har gått til Hæren og FOH, fra løytnant Ola Krekvik som arbeider på et forskningsprosjekt om Afghanistan ved Institutt for Forsvarsstudier (IFS).

### 2 Drøfting

Prosjektbeskrivelse (sitat Krekvik):

"Prosjektet søker å beskrive "utfordringer norske offiserer møter i arbeidet med å overlate sikkerhetsansvaret til ANSF". I den forbindelse ønsker jeg å intervju norske offiserer i lederroller og med helhetsoversiktoversikt, i spennet fra og med kompanisjef/kompanimentor til og med avdelingsjefer som PRT - og OMLT-sjefer. Prosjektet tar sikte på om lag 10 intervjuer av kvalitativ art." HST har tidligere gitt oppdraget til Brig N i å identifisere aktuelle personer til intervju. Krekvik har tatt kontakt med disse og gjort avtale med den enkelte. Det som gjenstår er den generelle godkjenningen av denne type intervjuer. Forutsetninger for å gi dette er at prosjektet er godt nok beskrevet samt at intervjupersonenes rettigheter er bekjentgjort for den enkelte, herunder mulighetene til å takke nei eller være anonyme.

### 3 Konklusjon

HST gir med dette IFS generell adgang til denne type intervjuer, da hvis dette er etter enighet med intervjupersonene og at det ovennevnte er etterlevd og fulgt opp.

Dag Hugo Stølan  
Brigader  
Stabssjef Hærstaben

**Postadresse**  
Postmottak  
2617 Lillehammer

**Besøksadresse**  
General Fleichersvei 6  
9325 BARDUFOS

**Sivil telefon/telefaks**  
/

**Militær telefon/telefaks**  
99/0500 3699

**Epost/ Internett**  
forsvaret@mil.no  
www.forsvaret.no

**Vedlegg**

**Organisasjonsnummer**  
NO 986 105 174 MVA

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## Appendix 4 – Information to respondents (Norwegian)

### Forespørsel om å delta i intervju i forbindelse med masteroppgave

Jeg er student ved Universitetet i Oslo og jobber med den avsluttende masteroppgaven. Temaet for oppgaven er overlatelse av ansvar og myndighet til afghanere og jeg skal undersøke hvilke utfordringer man møter ved å overføre sikkerhetsansvar og politisk myndighet til de lokale aktørene i et konfliktfylt land. Jeg er interessert i å finne ut hvilke utfordringer norske offiserer opplever ved å jobbe tett på afghanske sikkerhetsstyrker og myndighetspersoner.

For å finne ut av dette, ønsker jeg å intervju om lag ti personer på nivået kompanisjef, avdelingssjef og liasonoffiser med erfaring fra området. Spørsmålene vil dreie seg om hvilke utfordringer man opplevde i samarbeidet med afghanske aktører, eksempelvis korrupsjon, språkutfordringer, ulike kulturer, standarden på de afghanske styrkene etc.

Jeg vil bruke båndopptaker og ta notater mens vi snakker sammen. Intervjuet vil ta omtrent en time, og vi blir sammen enige om tid og sted.

Det er frivillig å være med og du har mulighet til å trekke deg når som helst underveis, uten å måtte begrunne dette nærmere. Dersom du trekker deg vil alle innsamlede data om deg bli anonymisert. Opplysningene vil bli behandlet konfidensielt, og ingen enkeltpersoner vil kunne gjenkjennes i den ferdige oppgaven. Opplysningene anonymiseres og opptakene slettes når oppgaven er ferdig, innen mai 2011. Som forsker er jeg underlagt taushetsplikt og at data behandles konfidensielt. Prosjektet er meldt til Personvernombudet for forskning, Norsk samfunnsvitenskapelig datatjeneste AS.

Hvis det er noe du lurer på, kan du ringe meg på telefon 992 46 302, sende en e-post på [okrekvik@ifs.mil.no](mailto:okrekvik@ifs.mil.no), eller til 'Ola Krekvik' via FisBasis Begrenset. Du kan også kontakte min veileder Torunn Haaland ved Institutt for Forsvarsstudier på telefon 23 09 59 23 eller e-post [torunn.haaland@ifs.mil.no](mailto:torunn.haaland@ifs.mil.no).

Prosjektet gjennomføres i nært samarbeid med Institutt for Forsvarsstudier/Forsvarets Høyskole. Utvalget er hentet fra Brigade Nord gjennom AFA, og forespørselen godkjent av Hærstaben.

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**Samtykkeerklæring:**

Jeg har mottatt informasjon om prosjektet og ønsker å stille på intervju.

Signatur ..... Telefonnummer .....

Med vennlig hilsen

Ola Krekvik

Løytnant/Mastergradsstipendiat

Institutt for Forsvarsstudier