

verondersteld. In dat opzicht lijkt Peper niet altijd de visionair te zijn waarvoor Van Osch hem houdt. Dit alles neemt echter niet weg dat Van Osch een prettig geschreven, gedetailleerde schets geeft van het contrastrijke leven van Bram Peper. Empathie voor Peper's persoonlijk leven heeft hem daarbij geholpen; gepaste afstand heeft een afgewogen oordeel mogelijk gemaakt. Soms leidt meer distantie ook tot meer begrip.

BRAM MELLINK, UNIVERSITEIT VAN
AMSTERDAM

Brocades Zaalberg, Thijs, Cate, Arthur ten, *Missie in Al Muthanna. De Nederlandse krijgsmacht in Irak 2003-2005* (Amsterdam: Boom, 2010, 390 blz., ISBN 978 94 6105 359 6); Klep, Christ, *Uruzgan. Nederlandse militairen op missie, 2005-2010* (Amsterdam: Boom, 2011, 246 blz., ISBN 978 94 6105 277 3).

In recent years there has been talk – and not just in the Netherlands – of a ‘Dutch approach’ or a ‘Dutch touch’ that the Netherlands armed forces have brought to international stabilization operations, and that sets them apart from the approaches taken by other armed forces, especially those of the United States and the United Kingdom. Do the ‘Dutch approach’ and ‘Dutch touch’ really exist? This is a question that has been addressed by two recent studies, one by Thijs Brocades Zaalberg and Arthur ten Cate on the Dutch involvement, just after the fall of Saddam Hussein, in the Iraqi province of Al Muthanna from 2003 to 2005, and the second by Christ Klep on the deployment that followed by Netherlands forces to the Afghanistan province of Uruzgan and lasted from 2005 to 2010. To be sure, both of these fine studies also comprehensively deal with a host of other issues arising from the two deployments. These include the decision-making processes to go into Irak and Uruzgan and then to get out, the

size and nature of the Dutch military units, and how well the overall Dutch mission, military and civilian, was able to contribute to the improvement of economic and social condition in the areas of deployment.

In going into Iraq, the Balkenende government of the day had a strong incentive to claim that there would be something distinctive or special to the Dutch operations there. The government's decision to support politically the toppling of the Iraqi regime by the Americans and British had been unpopular and the cabinet wanted to emphasize that the Netherlands forces would not be part of the Anglo-American occupation forces there, but rather, operating under a UN mandate, would be responsible for stabilization operations. The Dutch, it was expected, would take things more ‘softly’ in Iraq than the more interventionist, violent approach that the American and British occupiers would rely upon. The Dutch would show respect for the local population and its customs and stand back as much as possible. Of course this fed into gratifying national self images. Lots of smaller, democratic countries prefer to see themselves as peacekeepers rather than as warfighters and like to think of their soldiers as ‘nicer’ or ‘more culturally sensitive’ than those of other countries.

The 2002 toppling of the Taliban theocracy in Afghanistan had been far less controversial in the Netherlands. Still, the Balkenende government also underlined, when proposing the mission in Uruzgan, that the emphasis would not be on combat – which would remain the chief task of the Americans – but on military support for reconstruction of the war-torn country. This was reinforced by command and control arrangements. The Americans would be free to pursue combat operations under their ‘Operation Enduring Freedom’ arrangements while the Dutch would fall under the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). Of course, nobody was expecting Uruzgan to be easy and as Klep emphasizes, the government did not deny there would be both risks and the recourse to the use of

force in Afghanistan. However, as he summarizes the Balkenende government's arguments, the Netherlands forces 'would only fight insofar as the insurgents directly interfered with reconstruction' and Dutch use of force there would be less 'blunt' than that of the American military (Klep, 33).

Yet standing back did not turn out to be the way the Netherlands battle group approached things once on the ground in Al Muthanna. 'In fact, the approach that was emphasized in the government's June 2003 statement was just about the opposite of what later would be called the 'Dutch approach' (Brocades Zaalberg and Ten Cate, 320). The Netherlands marines saw their primary task as the protection of the local populace, and stepped forward to provide it. This included from time to time resort to violence and the threat of violence, although given the underlying nature of Al Muthanna province that was far less necessary than in other parts of the country. Nonetheless, the authors also conclude, 'This does not undercut the fact that the Dutch, in executing the mission generally used the necessary tact and cultural sensitivity. But because this approach by itself is nothing original and because it did not arise from a consciously pursued and executed "Dutch approach" the name "Dutch touch" seems more appropriate' (Brocades Zaalberg and Ten Cate, 321).

Klep comes to similar conclusions about the Netherlands in Uruzgan. True, the Netherlands forces 'indeed sought somewhat less to engage in combat' the insurgents than did the Americans, British and Canadians and there were 'noticeable differences in approach' between them (Klep, 151-152). Nonetheless, these differences were secondary, for 'None of the countries had a truly unique method. The operation plans and tactics were comparable [...]' (Klep, 152). In other words, what Brocades Zaalberg and Ten Cate concluded about any distinctiveness in Al Muthanna can be said about Uruzgan too: there was more of a 'Dutch touch' than a 'Dutch approach'.

The approach that the Netherlands forces actually took in both places was that

of counterinsurgency (COIN) warfare. A counterinsurgency approach relies on patient attempts to decrease, and eventually eliminate the influence of insurgents. Its core military effort is the protection of the local populace, and it also involves economic development as well as political efforts. This is significant when viewed within the broader history of the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars and of the 'Long War' itself against Islamist terrorism. The u.s. armed forces, as they began the occupation of both Iraq and Afghanistan intended to concentrate not on COIN but only on 'anti-terrorist' operations – going after the major bad guys, in other words. They left what they considered to be the less important tasks to the allies; the Americans and the allies together also did not have enough forces on the ground. In military jargon, the 'footprint' was to be light. The results were catastrophic in Iraq and led to a dangerous, lengthy standoff in Afghanistan. Most of Iraq plunged into violent chaos. Only after the u.s. army, especially under the inspired leadership of General David Petraeus, learned its lesson and embraced a true counterinsurgency strategy based on the protection of the local population, and after President George W. Bush defied popular opinion in 2006 by providing a 'surge' of u.s. forces to execute his strategy, was the war in Iraq finally won. Petraeus was then sent to Afghanistan by recently-elected President Barack Obama with a similar counterinsurgency mandate and a similar increase in u.s. forces on the ground. We still do not know the ultimate outcome. Meanwhile, in response to the lack of conclusive results so far, not to mention the loss of the lives of 25 soldiers, the Dutch decided not to stick around in Uruzgan and be part of the renewed military effort Obama unleashed.

While there may not be a distinctive 'Dutch approach' to international stability operations, the Netherlands military does seem to have acquired a real knack for the approach that lends itself to counterinsurgency warfare that it showed in both Iraq and Afghanistan. This is a skill, the importance

of which has now been learned, under the most painful circumstances by the leadership of the U.S. army. In other words, COIN is now the 'Dutch approach' and the 'American approach' too. Although both books cover recent Dutch military engagements, they have a different feel to them. The one on Iraq is a semi-official history, published by Boom under the auspices of Netherlands Institute of Military History, which holds the copyright. It is rather handsomely produced. Brocades Zaalberg and Ten Cate had access to classified defence documents. So it can be taken as an effort to write what can be called, at least for now 'the last word' and a basic reference work on a Dutch military mission that is already eight years in the past. Klep appears to have been on his own and without access to classified sources. His book is now the 'first word' in what undoubtedly will be a series of longer works on the controversial Dutch involvement in Afghanistan.

JOSEPH T. JOCKEL, ST. LAWRENCE
UNIVERSITY, CANTON, NEW YORK