

# Temporary organizing and the challenge of achieving resilience

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# Introduction

# Introduction

## Resilience concept

- “The capacity to cope with unanticipated danger after they have become manifest and *bounce back*” (Wildavski, 1988)
- Often used for organizations that have to deal with unexpected events
  - Classic HRO work on Aircraft carriers, air traffic control
- But increasingly also relevant for mainstream organizations

## Introduction

Has organizational (design) consequences

- “Resilience then concerns the ability to recognize and adapt to handle unanticipated perturbations that call into question the model of competence, and demand a shift of processes, strategies and coordination” (Woods, 2006)
- Extreme context can provide important lessons (Hallgrän, Rouleau & De Rond, 2018)
- Military task force in Afghanistan (2006-2010)
- How does design of military task forces influence this process?

# Introduction

## Military task forces

- After fall “Berlin wall”, substantial change in military missions
- Military Operations Other than War (OOTW)
- State building, peace-keeping, peace-enforcing, reconstruction
- Bosnia, Cambodia, Iraq, Afghanistan

## Design of military task forces

- Scott Snook (2000, p. 33):

*“Task Forces are designed by **taking basic unit building blocks** and **assembling them along hierarchical lines** consistent with the demands of the mission and **time-honored military traditions of command and control**”*

# The case

## Task Force Uruzgan

- Military operations Dutch armed forces
- In Afghanistan
- 2006-2010
- about 1500 soldiers
- Joint effort: Army, Air Force, Navy, MP
- Goal: Reconstruction
  - Along the way: “peace enforcing” mission

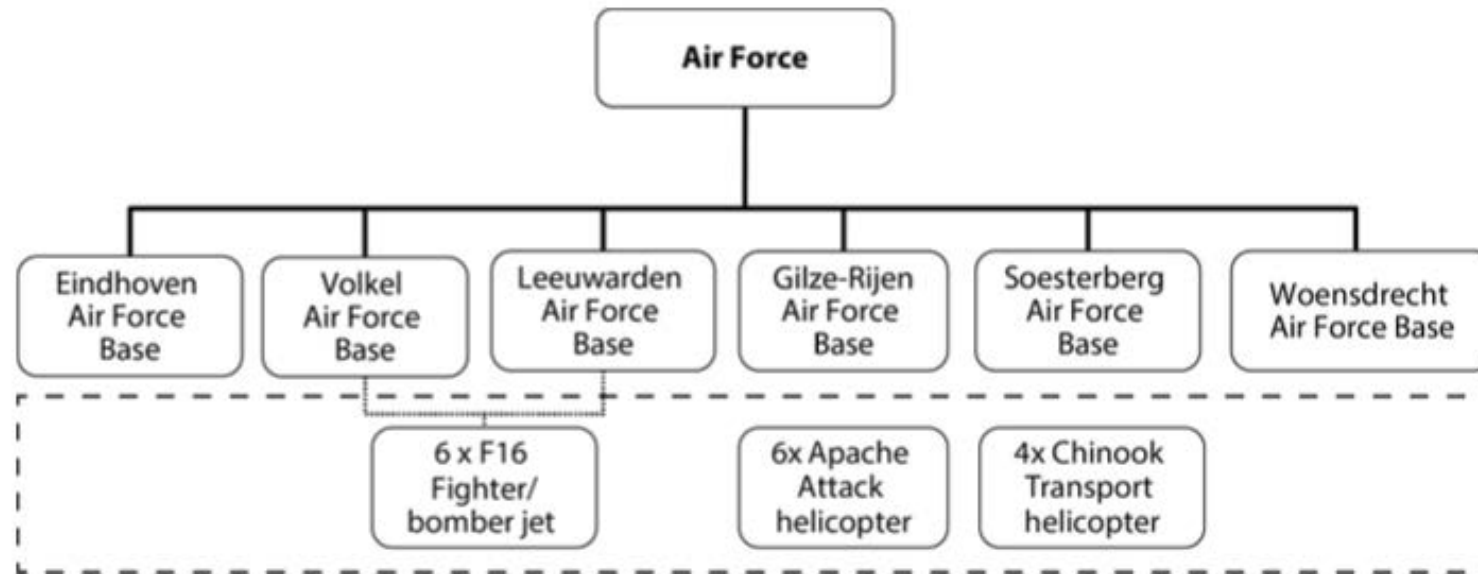




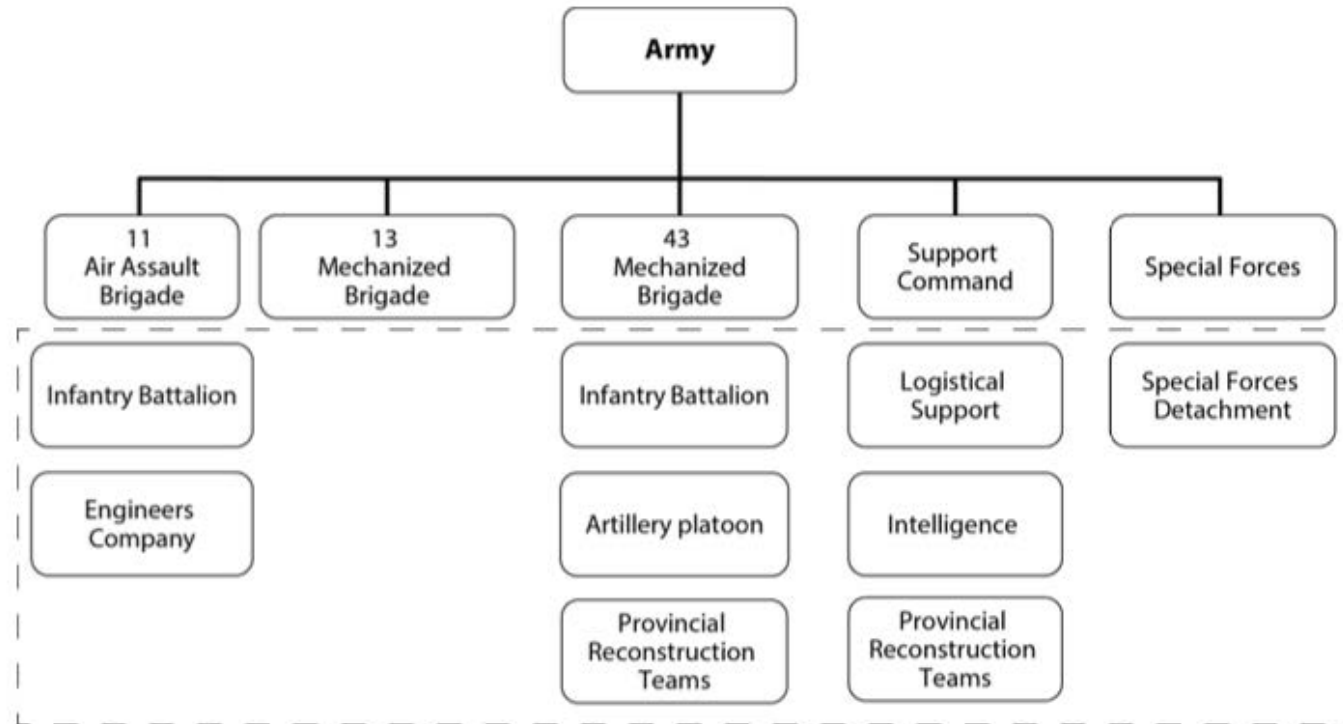
## Task Force Uruzgan

- Organizational challenge
  - Military in NL: four parent organizations
  - They do not fit 1-on-1 to mission demands
  - Brigade is too large, battalion too small and misses essential functions for expeditionary mission
- Design strategy
- “mix and match”
  - What does that look like?

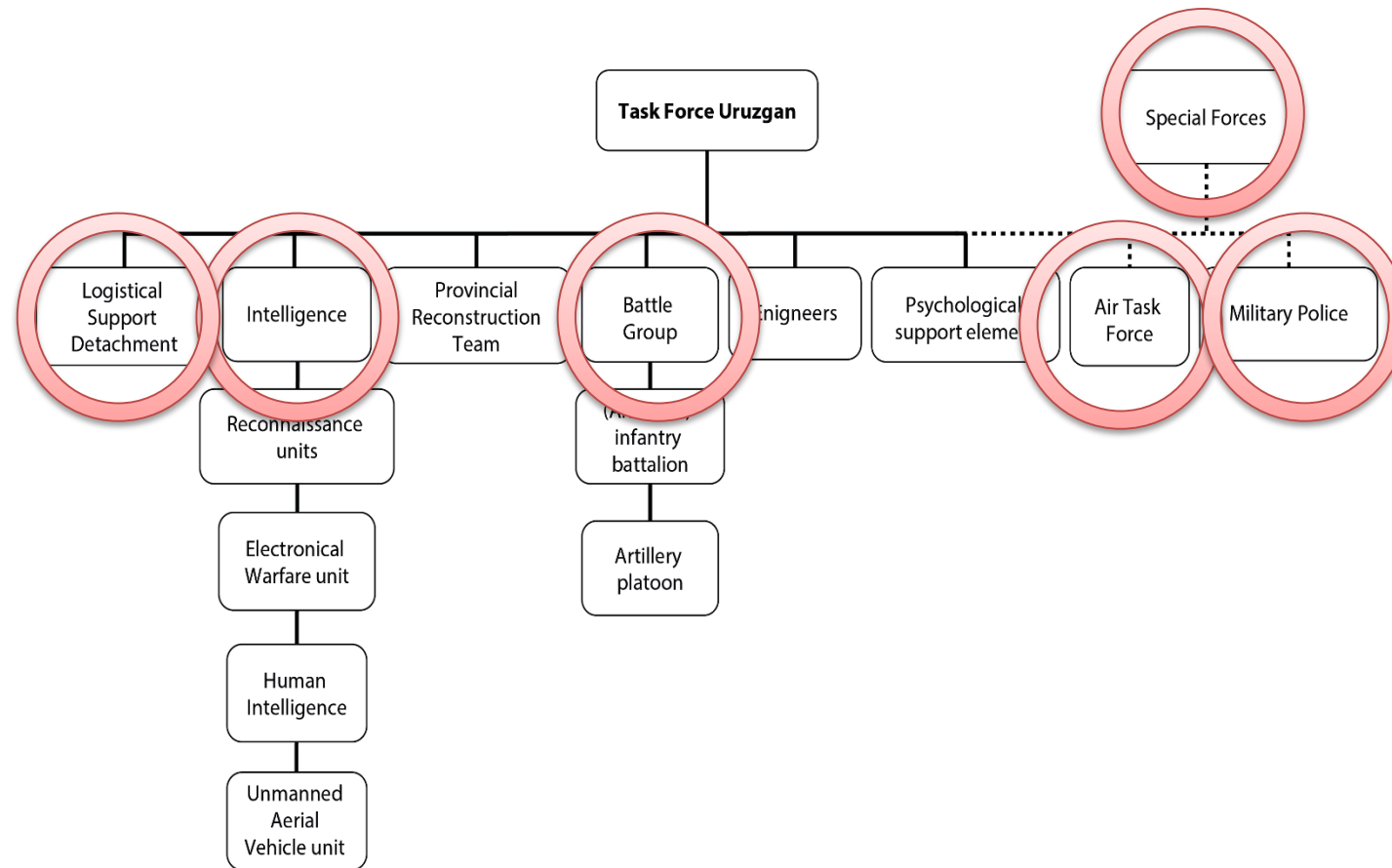
# Task Force Uruzgan



# Task Force Uruzgan



# Task Force Uruzgan



# Findings

## Results (some examples)

- Task Force Uruzgan

Problematic integration between units from the onset of operations

*We were not used to operate with other airspace users (...) and in Uruzgan we encountered things that we had not anticipated. To be honest, it was one big surprise over there... (...) We had to invent everything on the spot...*

Operator UAV unit

## Results (some examples)

*There were times that I was firing with artillery and that I suddenly heard the sound of a helicopter in the area. (...) I got used to it, in the beginning you are stupefied: did that really happen? After two months, you just start to accept that it happens...because I could not do anything about it.*

Forward Air Controller

## Results (some examples)

- And after that?

Bottom-up development of integration (**self-design**).

*One of the myths about UAVs was that we can track IEDs (...) But we can't, so we had to organize sales pitches on what can be done, and what cannot be done.*

Operator UAV unit

*Look, I don't need to tell my commander here [in the Netherlands] how to work with reconnaissance units. Within TFU, however, commanders were often not used to work with us. So, then I need to tell them what the possibilities and limitations of our unit were.*

Cavalry, reconnaissance



## Results (some examples)

But...this process was hindered by

- Incompatible rules and procedures brought along from parent organization

*My 81 millimeters were deconflicted within the company and the Sperwer was launched on TFU-staff orders. So, it was possible that I ordered 81-millimeter fire support and that nobody of TFU staff knew that. (...) So, when they launch that UAV, they do not know what my 81-millimeters are doing...*

Forward Air Controller

# Implications and possible solutions

## Implications

“Mixing and matching” units from four military parent organizations into expeditionary task force is associated with

- Integration issues between units, which was also associated with unexpected events from *inside* the organization
- **Self-designing** operators, aimed at developing integration and accompanying coordination mechanisms, which improved their ability to deal with “the unexpected”
- But: this process is hindered, achieving resilience problematic

## Possible design solutions

Flexibility dilemma:

- Many functional units in parent organizations seems flexible
- But results in operational difficulties
- Abandon current functional structure?

How to build “structure” for fluidity and self-design?

- Modular structure (Baldwin & Clark, 2000)
- Network organizations (Kuipers et al, 2010)

# Questions?

Coming soon...

Book: “Dealing with high-risk conditions in temporary organizations”, Routledge, Advances in Management and Business studies.