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Eyes Wide Shut?
The Impact of Embedded Journalism on
Dutch Newspaper Coverage of Afghanistan

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Executive summary

Eyes Wide Shut?
The Impact of Embedded Journalism on Dutch Newspaper Coverage of Afghanistan

The Dutch Ministry of Defence developed a policy of embedded journalism as an integral part of the communication strategy for the deployment of Dutch troops to Uruzgan. This policy allows journalists to report from inside the military on operations in Afghanistan, and built on earlier experiences of the United States and United Kingdom, and experiments by the Dutch military in Iraq.

From the point of view of the Ministry the policy has satisfied its primary objective: to put the mission in the spotlight. It has resulted in a constant stream of articles from a variety of newspapers and journals. At the same time, the embed arrangement has led to a narrowing of focus of the media coverage to predominantly Dutch military affairs. Embedded journalists focus on tactical reporting from the military base, and most articles cover military operations or daily life of soldiers at the military camp in southern Afghanistan. In addition, in the two years since the inception of the embed policy, the Ministry has helped create a core group of 'defence reporters' who are knowledgeable on military matters and regularly report on Afghanistan.

Under the embed policy, three journalists can travel from the Netherlands to Uruzgan every two weeks. They are hosted by the Dutch contingent and fall under the commander's responsibility. Articles have to be submitted for review on operational security prior to publication. Dutch embedded journalists cooperate closely with the Ministry of Defence before, during and after their embed experience. Many have developed a close relationship with the military as a consequence.

Journalists who travel to Afghanistan unembedded have criticised embedded journalism as semi-journalism. They accuse journalists who use the embed option of being opportunistic and providing a one-sided account of the situation in Afghanistan. There are few journalists who travel unembedded to Afghanistan, which makes comparison of content difficult. However text analysis shows that embedded journalists write mainly about the Dutch troops and their military operational activities while unembedded reporters focus more on the socio-political situation in Afghanistan.

Embedded journalism has created a diversity dilemma. While more journalists write of Afghanistan, the focus has narrowed. The close interaction between military and journalists may also jeopardise the independence of reporting.

Yet, journalists who travel embedded to Afghanistan are basically content with the embed policy. While individual journalists question the control on operational security prior to publication, in practice there have not been major problems with this type of compulsory review. The main concern of journalists with the embed policy remains the lack of freedom of movement and the discretion of the military commander in this regard.

In comparison to other ISAF nations, the Dutch embed policy is progressive in scope, but cautious when it comes to details. The US, UK, Canada and Australia all have their own experiences with embedded journalists and generally use more rigid guidelines.

In order to contribute to more diverse and substantive reporting, the Dutch embed policy could benefit from further clarification of operational security, relaxing its compulsory review prior to publication and allowing more freedom of movement to embedded journalists. This would emphasise the journalists' own responsibility regarding training, resources and personal safety.

Furthermore, the Dutch press in general could benefit from maintaining a professional distance from the military, and finding more ways to complement embedded with unembedded reporting.

Contents

Abbreviations

ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MoD	Ministry of Defence
OPSEC	Operational Security
OEF	Operation Enduring Freedom
PIO	Public Information Officer
US	United States
UK	United Kingdom

1   Introduction

Media coverage in times of conflict has repeatedly been subject to heated debate. Well-known examples are the two World Wars with their large-scale propaganda campaigns[1], and the experience of the United States' (US) government in dealing with the media's impact on public support for the Vietnam War in 1968.[2] Reporters have often found themselves caught between patriotism on the one hand and independent reporting on the other. Finding the balance between safeguarding independent reporting from conflict areas and identifying too closely with one's national military has proved challenging. As a consequence, the relationship between journalists and national militaries has generally been fragile.

The second Gulf War in 1991 changed this with some of the first experiments with embedded journalism by the Pentagon. This gradually evolved into a key principle of today's war reporting. Even though the basic idea is far from new – selected reporters have been travelling alongside and under supervision of military units as early as the First World War – the scale at which it is currently applied in media coverage *is* new.

With more embedded journalists working in the field, tensions have increased too. This report presents the findings of research by the Hague Centre for Strategic Studies (HCSS) into the impact of embedded journalism on the diversity of written media coverage of Afghanistan.

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[1]   Carruthers, S., *Media at War*, Macmillan Press Ltd: London, 2000, pp. 54-107.
[2]   Idem, pp. 119-120.

2   Research Design

2.1   Research Questions

This report analyses the impact of the policy of embedded journalism on Dutch written media coverage of Afghanistan. The research can be divided in three main questions:[3]

1   How did the concept of embedded journalism evolve?

2   How does the policy of embedded journalism impact on press coverage of Afghanistan?

3   How can Dutch Embed Policy contribute to more diverse and substantive reporting in conflict areas? To what extent can international experiences in embedded journalism be used as inspiration?

2.2   Framework of Analysis

Embedded Journalism comes in various shapes and sizes. The spectrum ranges from highly restrictive arrangements all the way to independent journalists working on their own initiative. This study analyses the case of Afghanistan, where the Dutch embed policy has come to full maturity in the period 2006-2007. This research focuses on the Dutch printed press, analysing the work of newspapers across the Netherlands as well as written publications in magazines and similar printed formats. Analysis of other media formats are not part of this study.

In order to analyse the impact of the policy of embedded journalism on Dutch press coverage on Afghanistan, this report distinguishes seven elements to define embedded journalism: policy; selection; timing; facilitation; freedom of movement; control over content and sanctions.

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[3]   See also: Wapens en Weblogs. De Nederlandse Pers in Conflictgebieden, HCSS Projectvoorstel, November 2007.

Defining Embedded Journalism: Seven Elements for Analysis

Policy
The way the embed policy is formulated. This can range from an informal oral agreement to formal guidelines.

Selection
The criteria that are employed by the MoD to select journalists to go to Afghanistan under embedded conditions.
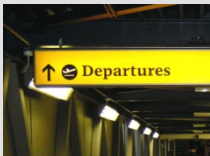
Timing
The 'when' and 'how long' of an embed visit.

Facilitation
The degree to which the MoD facilitates the travel and presence of embedded journalists, including travel arrangements, food or equipment and insurance.

Freedom of movement
Whether journalists are free to interact with the military on base and are free to leave the camp independently.
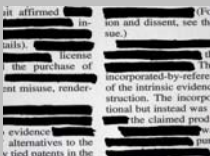
Control over content
To what extent the journalistic content resulting from the embed tour is controlled, such as review prior to publication.

Sanctions
Consequences resulting from a breach of the embed policy. This can be stated explicitly or implicitly.

2.3   Approach

Embedded journalism is not a one-way-street. The MoD determines the rules of
embedded journalism, which set the conditions for journalists to work in the field. In
turn, reporting practices and media productions are shaped by the institutions and
people that interpret, follow and oppose existing rules. It involves reporters, their
editorial superiors, the MoD and individual soldiers. In order to address these issues,
this report discusses 1) rules, 2) actors and 3) content. In chapter 3 and 4, this report
first presents the evolution of the embed policy and the current rules of embedded
reporting in Afghanistan. Chapters 5 and 6 subsequently look at the policy's impact on
the interaction between the MoD and the press and chapter 7 discusses the impact on
the content of news publications. The graph below visualises this approach.
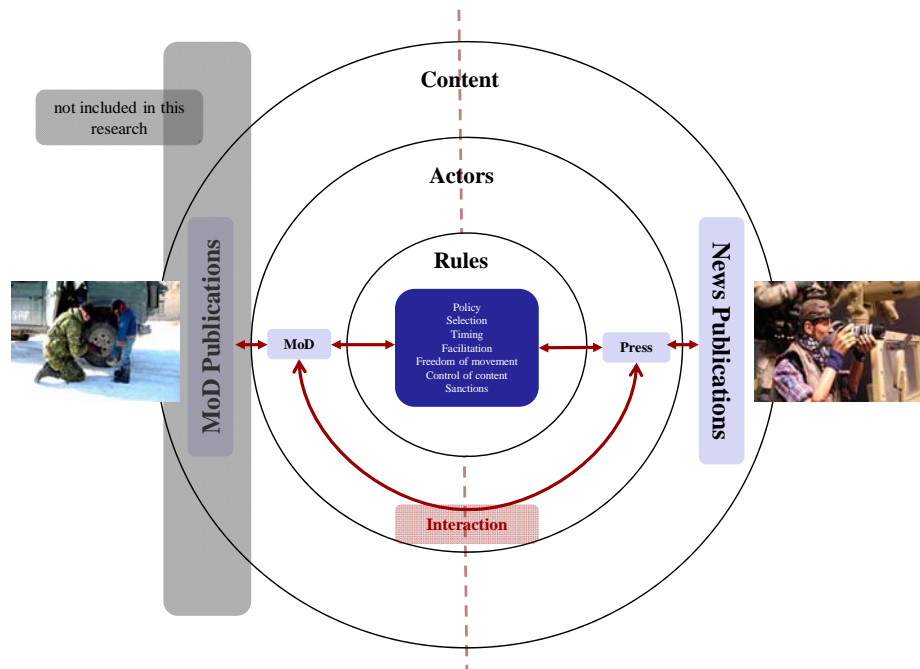
Framework of Analysis: Rules – Actors – Content

Chapter 8 then gives an overview of international experiences regarding embed policy
in Afghanistan and chapter 9 draws conclusions based on the presented findings.

2.4   Methodology

This report is based on an analysis of available literature, online sources, interviews and
data drawn from text mining. The authors conducted 26 semi-structured interviews with
national and international journalists[4], staff of the Ministry of Defence[5] and Ministry of
Foreign Affairs (MFA).[6] Interviews with selected experts in the field of military
operations, journalism and mass media complemented the findings.

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[4]   Journalists included professionals with embedded and unembedded track records in Afghanistan.
[5]   MoD staff members included (former and current) staff members of the public information
       department and individuals that served in Afghanistan.
[6]   MFA staff members included (former and current) public information officials, both based in
       The Hague and in Afghanistan.

Text analysis supported this research in various ways. HCSS conducted a manual analysis on articles from the period March 2006 – December 2007,[7] written by embedded reporters from the five major Dutch national newspapers.[8] Further text analysis was conducted using text mining software on articles published by five major Dutch newspapers in the period of 1 January 2006 – 1 January 2008.[9] For the latter sample, two separate analyses were carried out, the first on all articles written on Afghanistan[10] and the second on a sample of embedded and unembedded articles written in the field.[11] For more information on the HCSS software based text mining analysis please access the online version of this report at www.hcss.nl.

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[7] This analysis was performed using a sample of 66 embedded articles.

[8] *Algemeen Dagblad, NRC Handelsblad, De Telegraaf, Trouw, Volkskrant.*

[9] The used software calculates the scores for the relative weight of all words used in a given article and uses this data to calculate the relative weight of all relationships between words. The scores are based on 1) whether a certain word in a given text is semantically important and 2) to what extent it has a close relationships to other words.

[10] The analysis was performed using a sample of over 2000 articles. Selected was done by using the following search terms (in the title): Afghanistan OR Uruzgan OR ISAF OR Kandahar OR Kabul OR Afghaanse OR Taliban OR Helmand OR Kamp Holland OR Baluchi OR Tarin Kowt OR Deh Rawood OR Oeroezgan.

[11] The analysis was performed using a sample of 49 embedded articles and 68 unembedded articles.

3   From the 90's to Afghanistan

*The news writers could be pacified and at the same time be made to serve as
propagandists. By stationing the reporters at the various army
headquarters, and by making them personal friends, they became apologist
for the British cause.*

The Media at War (2000)

3.1   Background

As a concept, embedded journalism originates from past forms of war correspondence
and heavily draws on experiences during US military operations. Most discussions on
the topic refer to the Vietnam War (1965-1975), where journalists had unprecedented
access to the frontlines of the war. The graphic images that followed are said to have
been one of the key factors that made the war politically unviable. Militaries across the
world drew their lessons from this 'Vietnam Syndrome': in order to win a war abroad,
one first has to win it at home.[12] In the English Falkland War (1982), most of the media
had no access to military operations. Only a select few were embedded with the soldiers
and "were completely reliant on the military, not only for access to the battle zone, but
for food, shelter, protection, and transmission of their reports".[13]

The embed policy evolved during the American conflicts in Grenada (1983),
Panama (1989)[14] and the first Gulf War (1991). New technologies and the political
significance of the invasion of Iraq meant the press could not be kept away from the
frontline.[15] The US introduced a pool system whereby journalists were given
supervised access to the battlefront. News would then be shared with the rest of the
press.
This system appeased earlier criticism by the media, while at the same time kept the
military commanders in control over media productions. However, the number of
available places in the pools was limited and the access given to the journalists was
considered highly disappointing.[16] After experiments during American military
operations in Bosnia (1996), the Pentagon developed the embed policy in response to
these criticisms.[17] While it was difficult to offer embedded positions during the air raids
of Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan (2001), Operation Iraqi Freedom (2003)
did provide the right conditions because of the greater emphasis on land forces.[18] This
led to major Iraq coverage by embedded journalists: more than 600 reporters were
embedded in the U.S. army during this period.[19]

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[12]   Carruthers, op. cit., pp. 108-109.
[13]   Miskin et al., "Media under fire: reporting conflict in Iraq", *Current Issues Brief,* No. 21, 2002-03,
        p. 9.
[14]   Taylor, P. M., *War and the Media: Propaganda and Persuasion in the Gulf War,* University of
        Manchester Press*: Manchester,* 1992, pp. 4-5.
[15]   Idem, pp. 4-5.
[16]   Paul, C. & Kim, J.J., *Reporters on the Battlefield: The Embedded Press System in Historical
        Context*, RAND Corporation: Santa Monica, 2004, pp. 42-43.
[17]   Brandenburg, H., "Security at the Source: Embedding Journalists as a superior strategy to military
        censorship"*, Journalism Studies,* Vol. 8, No.6, 2007, p. 952.
[18]   In 2001 OEF had a clear emphasis on air and Special Forces operations, which did not allow
        journalists to embed on a large-scale: Brandenburg, H., op cit., p.p. 952-953.
[19]   Paul, C. & Kim, J.J., op. cit., p. 1.

The Dutch embed experience is of a more recent origin. With a national military that had significantly less involvement in conflict zones during the Cold War, there was no need for the Ministry of Defence to develop a proactive policy towards the national press. Similarly, the Dutch journalist profession has no significant track record in covering conflict areas in that period, as compared to its international counterparts. As a consequence, Dutch journalism did not possess a reputation for in-depth coverage in complex, fragile surroundings.[20]

The Srebrenica massacre (1995) marked the watershed for both policy-makers in The Hague and the media.[21] During the war, there had been vast media coverage. As one journalist observes: "[o]ver a hundred Dutch journalists, photographers and cameramen went to the battlefront, which made the war in former Yugoslavia the best visited war ever".[22] Yet, the relationship between the MoD and the media was problematic. The Ministry was generally seen as a "closed, impenetrable stronghold".[23] Coverage of UN's *Dutchbat* Battalion remained very limited as a consequence.[24] The relationship reached a low point when journalists were unable to visit Srebrenica in 1994.[25] None of the journalists took the risk to go to the area without military protection and therefore no Dutch journalists were present to witness one of the darkest pages in Dutch military history, the slaughter of an estimated 8,000 Bosnian Muslims on 11 July 1995.[26]

When the grim reality surfaced and the press was confronted with the MoD's attempts at playing down the failures of *Dutchbat*, the media swiftly turned against the Dutch military. A heated public debate on the failures of the *Dutchbat* followed.[27] This 'Srebrenica syndrome' led the MoD to realise that, in order to ensure broad support for operations, military engagement outside the Netherlands had to be better communicated to the home front. For many within the military this insight came too late. The reputation of the Dutch military, both amongst politicians and the public, had already suffered severely from the Bosnian publicity debacle.

3.2   Towards an Embed Policy

The restructuring of the Dutch military after Srebrenica brought slow but significant change to the institution's media approach. With General Urlings as Commander in chief of the Armed Forces, the MoD was set to play a more proactive role. When the Dutch cabinet decided to send some 1,100 troops to Iraq in 2003,[28] the military leadership undertook the first steps towards embedded journalism. Public information officers (PIOs) at the military headquarters in The Hague were tasked to actively

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[20]   HCSS interview, 26 February 2008.

[21]   HCSS interviews, 31 January – 20 February 2008.

[22]   Karskens, A., *De Geschiedenis van de Nederlandse Oorlogsverslaggeving van Heiligerlee tot Kosovo,* Meulenhoff: Amsterdam, 2001, p. 255.

[23]   Wieten, J., *Background and influence of media reporting of the conflict in the former Yugoslavia during the period 1991-1995: A study of views and methods of Dutch journalists,* Netherlands Institute for War Documentation: Amsterdam, 2002, Ch. The media and the military, no page number.

[24]   Karskens, op. cit., p. 267.

[25]   At that time, the MoD facilitated for seven Dutch journalists to travel to the town, but did little to prevent Serbian forces from holding them back: Wieten, J., op. cit., no page number.

[26]   Karskens, A., op. cit., p. 267 ff.

[27]   Wieten, J., op. cit., no page number.

[28]   *Nieuwsbericht*, 6 June 2003, obtained at: www.regering.nl.

engage with the media and to experiment with the facilitation of journalists in their area of operations.[29] A number of press trips formed the core of the new policy, which meant that a handpicked number of journalists were offered pre-arranged visits. The refurbished military apparatus had become more confident with the establishment of a professional force: "there was a feeling that we had something to show for".[30]

Over time, there was a gradual move from 'classic' field trips to more flexible arrangements. From late 2004 onwards the MoD started to offer embedded trips. Journalists could interview individual soldiers and could include quotes in their reporting. The informal consensus behind this policy was clear: there was no control as regards the content as long as there were no major problems with the individual revelations.[31]

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), while responsible for the overall policy on Iraq, was not involved in the preparation phase of the embed policy. Iraq was a purely military mission, and the two ministries kept a clear division between their respective mandates. Whereas the MoD worked on a more transparent communication strategy, the diplomatic service continued to work under the existing public information routine. The MFA's civil servants were not encouraged to communicate to the press, and if so, only off the record. The Ministry focused on official press statements and managed public accounts by the Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Development Cooperation.[32] As a consequence, the MoD did not consult with the MFA when working out the details of the new embed policy for Afghanistan.[33]

For some time, the MoD experimented with embedding journalists and gradually developed a more formal approach. Some elements of this process merit a closer look. First, there was no coordination with other nations,[34] although the MoD built on past experience from the United Kingdom (UK) and the US.[35] Second, initially the rules for journalists were not officially adopted. During Iraq operations, officials chose to keep these agreements with individual journalists outside the MoD's formal decision-making process.[36] As a result, no forms or statements had to be signed for embedding in Iraq.[37] A third aspect of the emerging embed policy was a direct result of these tacit agreements: mutual trust. MoD staff in The Hague entertained personal contact with individual journalists and conducted personal interviews to get a feeling for motivation and experience.[38] As a result, headquarters soon established a small network of journalists from the various media and facilitated their coverage of the Iraq mission. Lastly, the programme was demand driven. There were no permanent embed slots, trips would be organised upon journalists' requests.[39]

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[29]   HCSS interview, 5 February 2008.
[30]   Idem.
[31]   Idem.
[32]   HCSS interview, 13 February 2008.
[33]   HCSS interviews, 5 and 8 February 2008.
[34]   In fact, it was very difficult to discuss embedded policy within the ISAF coalition. A meeting on a joint communication strategy in London did not conclude with any tangible results. HCSS interview, 8 February 2008.
[35]   HCSS interview, 5 February 2008.
[36]   Idem.
[37]   While there were no formal arrangements, journalists were occasionally asked to submit their article for review on operational security issues by the PIO in charge. HCSS interview, 27 February 2008.
[38]   HCSS interview, 5 February 2008.
[39]   Idem.

At first, the media showed little interest in the MoD's offer to facilitate their reporting in Iraq. In fact, the public information department had difficulties finding journalists who were willing to go to visit the mission.[40] The main reasons were the international media's narrow focus on the developments in Baghdad coupled with a general reluctance to send reporters into a high-risk environment. Furthermore, as some emphasise, the province of *Al Muthanna* did not provide a very appealing setting for continuous press coverage.[41] Nevertheless, the Iraq experiment created a new momentum for cooperation between the MoD and journalists at the end of Dutch military operations in Iraq.

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[40]   Idem.

[41]   HCSS interviews, 21 January and 5 February 2008.

4   Embed Policy in Afghanistan

4.1   Formalising the Policy

The Dutch military has been engaged in Afghanistan since 2002. The Netherlands has been supporting both the US-led Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF)[42], as well as NATO's International Security Assistance Force (ISAF).[43] Neither of these operations had a concrete embed policy.[44] Prior to the Netherlands assuming operational command in Uruzgan in 2006 however, the MoD drafted a communication plan for the mission. It encompassed a complete communication strategy for the mission, ranging from the organisation of VIP visits to internet access for soldiers. Embedded journalism was a central element.[45]

The lessons from Iraq were taken as a starting point, and modified to match the Afghanistan mission. Three aspects are interesting to note in this regard.
First, embedded journalism became an official policy. The trust-based 'gentlemen's agreement'[46] that had applied in Iraq gave way to a more formal approach, which subsequently developed into a signed agreement between the individual journalist and MoD, the so-called *gedragscode* (code of conduct).[47] Second, while the communication plan stated that "there is a need to have clear agreements in place to safeguard operational security […]"[48], the plan did not mention whether this included military control over content. Third, this effort was not coordinated with the MFA.[49]

The MoD plan was very clear about its key objective: "[…] to showcase the importance and the developments of the mission and its specific assignments in a professional manner, to reach the public, visitors, politicians and others that are involved."[50]
The underlying idea stemmed from a wish for maximum transparency. In today's communication era, the assumption goes, it is impossible – and counterproductive – to hide the challenges a military mission faces in its daily operations.[51] Rather, the public needs to have a realistic picture of the situation on the ground. As a consequence, public information officers were tasked to prevent the emergence of 'two separate worlds'.[52]
A second important objective for the MoD: "the soldiers must enjoy our full support for the task at hand."[53]

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[42]   For the years 2002-2003 this included: F-16 support; in 2004: maritime support; in 2005: 165 Special Forces and a 85-strong helicopter detachment.

[43]   For the year 2003 this included: 650 troops. In 2006 the Dutch contribution was expanded with 1400 troops in Uruzgan.

[44]   A few embedded trips were made before the official policy was announced in April 2006. These were not part of a comprehensive media policy. *Trouw* reporter George Marlet was the first journalist to go embedded to Afghanistan, when he toured with the Dutch Special Forces in late 2005. Marlet, G., "Zwaar bewapend en geen schot gelost", *Trouw*, 5 October 2005.

[45]   *ISAF Stage III. Uruzgan. Communicatieplan*, Dutch Ministry of Defence, 12 July 2006.

[46]   HCSS interview, 5 February 2008.

[47]   *Gedragscode voor Media in Afghanistan*, Dutch Ministry of Defence, 29 May 2006.

[48]   *Communicatieplan*, op. cit., p.8.

[49]   HCSS interview, 8 February 2008.

[50]   *Communicatieplan*, op. cit., p.4.

[51]   HCSS interviews, 8 February 2008 and 12 February 2008.

[52]   HCSS interview, 19 December 2008.

[53]   Commander-in-Chief, Gen. D. Berlijn, speech at the opening of Nieuwspoort exhibition: *Shooting sharp – photography in conflict zones*, Nieuwspoort, 15 April 2008.

The embed policy was developed without input from the press, but was communicated to journalists at a press briefing on 28 April 2006.[54] The MoD announced that journalists were free to request seats on military planes departing from *Eindhoven* Airport. As a matter of principle, the MoD would make a slot available for three journalists every two weeks, and those journalists would be subject to the rules set out by the MoD.

4.2   **Rules of the Game**

The new embed **policy** for Afghanistan was formalised in an embed Code of Conduct (*gedragscode*). However, this official document was only made public after Members of Parliament from the Socialist and the Green-Left parties asked detailed questions about the official embed policy.[55] Since then, embedded journalists have had to sign a one-page document agreeing to the Code.[56] By that time, the MoD had already finalised a draft communication plan of which the embed policy was part. Only later this umbrella document was officially released (see chapter 6).

The Code includes four elements: respect the security; respect the individual; respect the home front; and respect the coalition. The general tone of the document is courteous. It requests journalists to: 1) submit all media products for final review prior to publication; 2) not to use surnames of military staff; and 3) to wait with publication on casualties until MoD has alerted the family concerned.[57]

There are no official restrictions in the **selection** process. Every professional journalist can request a place on a military plane to Afghanistan. However, the MoD reserves the right to refuse individuals on the basis of MoD staff members' judgement.[58]
At headquarters level in The Hague, the public information department keeps a watchful eye on maintaining a 'representative' balance across the Dutch media landscape.[59]

The **timing** is generally up to the military. There are three seats available for two weeks periods and the MoD makes the selection according to submitted requests.[60] However, journalists can negotiate timing in consultation with officials in The Hague.

When in Afghanistan, **freedom of movement** is restricted to the camp and to military patrols outside the camp. The MoD assumes full responsibility for the safety of the embedded journalists. In today's Uruzgan, this means that military commanders have full authority on journalists' whereabouts and have the final say on whether or not journalists are allowed to join military operations during their visit. If journalists decide not to take the advice given by the military, the commander in charge could consider letting them sign a waiver freeing the MoD from its responsibility.[61]

The MoD's **control over content** is limited to operational security. Before publication, the public information officer in theatre screens all media products. The underlying idea

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[54]   HCSS interview, 8 February 2008.
[55]   Motion by Members of Parliament *Karimi* and *van Bommel*, 13 June 2006.
[56]   HCSS interview, 23 January 2008.
[57]   *Gedragscode voor Journalisten.*
[58]   HCSS interview, 5 February 2008.
[59]   HCSS interview, 19 December 2007.
[60]   HCSS interview, 5 February 2008.
[61]   HCSS interview, 12 February 2008.

is straightforward. Any detail that might put the lives of soldiers at risk cannot be published. A prominent example highlights the necessity of such a policy. When the Dutch Minister of Defence was due to make an unannounced visit to the mission in 2006, journalists were requested not to report any detail that could reveal soldiers preparing for the event. It would have alerted potential attackers to the presence of a high-value target.[62]

The Code does not define **sanctions** that apply to offenders. Unlike other embed policies, the Dutch Code does not state the consequences of violating the rules such as the 'termination of the embedded status' found in the Canadian policy or the 'revocation of your credentials' found in the US policy.[63]

With the introduction of the Code, the MoD created an embed policy of a rather ambivalent character. On the one hand, the guidelines reflect the good experiences from the Iraq mission. It includes no strict selection criteria, and aims to bring a broad variety of journalists to the operational area in order to have representative coverage from across the various media formats in the Netherlands. This is, in international comparison, a rather progressive stand. At the same time, the embed policy includes a clear element of control over content, which is new compared to the Iraq period. Rather than a mutual understanding on the limits of disclosure of operational information, the MoD introduced a compulsory review regime.

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[62]   Idem.
[63]   Canada: *Op Athena – Media Embed Program (MEP) Instructions*, Canadian Expeditionary Force Command, February 2007, obtained at: http://www.forces.gc.ca. United States: *Ground Rules Agreement*, ISAF, no date.

5   Embedded Reporting – What it Means for the Press

In a conflict zone, journalists have to work under extreme conditions and face many restrictions. The embed regime therefore marks a breakthrough for Dutch press coverage, but is at odds with a fundamental principle in journalism, independent reporting. Many journalists struggle to find the appropriate balance between ideological reservations and practical considerations. [64]

5.1   Policy

In general, journalists consider the embed policy a welcome development. Most accept that Operational Security (OPSEC) reviews are part of embedded work,[65] and emphasise that embedded journalism gives the media structural access and greater insight into the military domain. Some have also suggested that the presence of journalists keeps the military 'sharp', and that the media can thus play a crucial role as a camp-based watchdog.[66] This notwithstanding, most stress that conditions under which embedded reporting takes shape are still far from ideal; it is considered "better than nothing".[67] Freelance journalists with experience in Afghanistan are especially critical about the policy. Some choose not to affiliate with the Dutch military at all, while others follow a two-track policy, combining unembedded reporting with embedded visits.[68] While some journalists publicly voiced their concerns about the embed policy, all national newspapers accepted the conditions as laid out by the MoD. Regional, local and thematic print media followed suit and started to send their journalists on embedded tours. To its critics, embedded reporting is little more than 'semi-journalism',[69] as the MoD's review scheme impedes independent reporting.[70] Further, the limited freedom of movement makes it difficult to verify information obtained under military supervision. In order to address these central issues and advice an updated policy, a group of embedded journalists met with the MoD in January 2008.[71] The MoD was adamant that the review process would remain, but agreed to put more effort into recruiting and training staff members that are in contact with journalists.[72] In turn, MoD staff members encouraged journalists to invest more time in preparing for embedded

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[64]   Photograph courtesy of *Wereldomroep*.

[65]   HCSS interviews, 23 January 2008 – 17 February 2008.

[66]   HCSS interviews, 21 and 22 January 2008.

[67]   HCSS interview, 31 January 2008.

[68]   One journalist acknowledges that, articles were only submitted for review in order not to endanger the relationship with the MoD. HCSS interview, 31 January 2008.

[69]   HCSS interview, 23 January 2008.

[70]   There are various definitions of journalistic professionalism, ethics and codes of conduct. This includes international guidelines such as from the Poynter Institute, the Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ), the Project for Excellence in Journalism (PEJ), or the Federation of International Editors of Journals. This study uses the Dutch Code of Conduct as stated by the Dutch Society of Executive Editors. See, *Gedragscode voor Journalisten*, De Raad voor de Journalistiek, obtained at: www.genootschapvanhoofdredacteuren.nl.

[71]   HCSS interview, 21 January and 8 February 2008.

[72]   This includes PIOs, commanders and other staff. Increased awareness about the media is seen as a useful investment for the future. HCSS interview, 8 February and 15 April 2008.

reporting.[73] The MoD is therefore not expected to introduce major changes to the embed policy in the medium term.

5.2   Selection

Since the start of the embed programme, a broad variety of reporters took advantage of the MoD offer. *NRC Handelsblad* and *Volkskrant* have taken the lead in using embedded journalism. Both newspapers had embedded journalists reporting from Afghanistan on nine occasions between March 2006 and December 2007.[74] The offer to embed journalists also led to a wave of reporters from smaller newspapers travelling to Afghanistan.[75] Parallel to this development, there has been an increase in reporters who focus on defence-related matters and operational aspects of the Dutch deployment.[76] Some argue that the large number of journalists brought into the field impacts on the quality of reporting. Many of the less-experienced journalists tend to focus on the best scoops available in the time slot, keen to present minor developments as major news.[77]

There is broad agreement among journalists that this type of press coverage should be complemented by other means of reporting, as it remains difficult for embedded journalists to verify information that is provided by military sources.[78] Back in the Netherlands, editors count on a team of journalists to complement each other's information.[79] By using political correspondents in The Hague, foreign affairs reporters at headquarters, correspondents in the region and Brussels-based correspondents for NATO, newspapers aim to verify 'embedded' information. Occasionally, newspapers acquire previously published articles from the international print media. Newspapers also utilise the services of freelance journalists on an ad-hoc basis, if there is enough confidence in the freelancer to fit into the team's reporting style.[80] Still, newspapers have been reluctant to outsource when offered freelance services. Adequate insurance coverage and budgetary considerations have frequently emerged as major stumbling blocks.[81] This unwillingness to hire freelancers, coupled with an increased desire for Afghanistan coverage has led to a small group of journalists with established track records of embedded reporting. Over time, those frequent visitors to the camp have built a good rapport with the military in the field and in The Hague and often enjoy preferential treatment.

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[73]   Suggestions included first-aid training, a good physical condition and a training course. Weapon training for journalists by military staff was explicitly excluded. HCSS interview, 21 January 2008.

[74]   In comparison: *Trouw* (5), *De Telegraaf* (4) and *Algemeen Dagblad* (3). Source: *Overview of embedded journalists*, obtained from the Ministry of Defence.

[75]   With the embedded policy in place, it was feasible for newspapers or weeklies such as *Medisch Contact* and the *Libelle* to send journalists to cover the Dutch contribution to the ISAF mission in Uruzgan. HCSS interview, 6 February 2008.

[76]   HCSS interviews, 23 January – 17 February 2008.

[77]   HCSS interviews, 23 January and 5 February 2008.

[78]   HCSS interview, 30 January 2008, a good example of how reporters have used alternative strategies to cover the other sides of the story is the case of the Candian newspaper, the Globe and Mail, which used a local researcher to conduct video interviews of Taliban fighters. See: http://www.theglobeandmail.com/talkingtothetaliban.

[79]   HCSS interview, 23 January 2008.

[80]   HCSS interview, 30 January 2008.

[81]   HCSS interview, 31 January 2008.

5.3   Timing

Reporters submit requests for embedded 'tours' to the MoD public information department. Depending on whether or not a free seat is available at the requested time, journalists then prepare for their Afghanistan trip. Most journalists accept that the MoD determines the schedule for a possible tour and generally plan their visits according to the available dates offered by the Ministry.[82] A related consequence of this 'fixed-seat' policy was that there were no peaks in the amount of journalists brought into the theatre of operation. This includes the period of September – October 2007, a time when the Dutch parliamentary debate on the possible extension of the military mission was in full swing. Also, due to the fixed amount of places available for embedded trips to Afghanistan, selection has sometimes been decided on a purely 'first come, first serve' basis.[83] With the emergence of a more specialised group of reporters, this equal treatment of all journalists is slowly changing.[84] Over the last two years, the MoD is increasingly willing to consult with members of this group and consider individual wishes regarding the proposed topics in terms of timing of their trip.[85] The MoD acknowledges that in the case of well-known journalists, the public information department is willing to facilitate a 'successful' stay.[86]

5.4   Facilitation

The embed scheme includes a number of tempting elements. The MoD provides a comprehensive service package, including free transport from *Eindhoven* Airport, accommodation and personal safety equipment. They also provide photographic material from their defence reporters.[87] Furthermore, there are plans by the MoD to offer journalists the ability to jointly train with a to-be-deployed unit during their preparation in the Netherlands.[88] When looking at the Dutch code for professional journalists, this is a delicate issue. It states that "a journalist disapproves of any form of material allowances that are aimed at promoting news coverage on a certain topic."[89] This notwithstanding, Dutch journalists generally view the facilitation package as a welcome development as it helps to safe money. Travel to and from Afghanistan is very costly, both in terms of time and expenses. Insurance fees for conflict areas are substantial and prevent many from undertaking trips to cover distant, unsafe environments. Other expenses, such as special equipment, local fixers and transport, can also be a heavy burden for a budget. Others too have acknowledged these concerns and realise that it has impact on press coverage. In 2007 members of the Dutch parliament suggested the establishment of a public fund to support journalists in covering these kinds of costs.[90]

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[82]   HCSS interviews, 23 January 2008 – 17 February 2008.
[83]   HCSS interview, 30 January 2008.
[84]   HCSS interviews, 8 February and 21 January 2008.
[85]   HCSS interview, 23 January 2008.
[86]   HCSS interview, 8 February 2008.
[87]   Many newspapers used this service; in the period March 2006 – December 2007 a total of 4 photographers went embedded, none of whom were permanently employed by the five above-mentioned national newspapers. Source: *Overview of embedded journalists*, op. cit.
[88]   HCSS interview, 8 February 2008.
[89]   *Gedragscode voor Journalisten*, Genootschap van Hoofdredacteuren, article 4.
[90]   *Motie*, kamerleden Karimi en van Bommel, 13 June 2006.

Another reason for accepting MoD facilitation lies in the lack of personal safety for the individual journalist. Interviews confirm that there are few journalists who are willing to report from Afghanistan, even if insurance coverage is not an issue. Partly because of these constraints, all national newspapers had decided to maintain existing staff levels and not to substantially increase their budgets for Afghanistan coverage.[91] Consequently, between March 2006 and January 2008, there was no permanent Dutch media representation in Afghanistan. Two years after deployment, the *Volkskrant* is the only newspaper to have recently stationed a correspondent in Kabul.

Many journalists acknowledge that without the MoD offer, there would have been less coverage on Afghanistan.[92] As a result of the free transport and free accommodation, a wave of interest from a broad spectrum of newspapers emerged. Especially from the perspective of defence reporters, the embedded option creates new possibilities to gather information in the field, and allows for a better understanding of operational and tactical issues.[93] They generally feel that the MoD facilitation allows for sufficient freedom to collect information on the situation on the ground.[94] On the other hand, some argue that Dutch journalists have become so used to this level of facilitation that they have developed a 'bunker mentality' and are unwilling to, for example, make use of non-military transport inside Afghanistan.[95] In addition, mission coverage on various occasions depended on whether or not the MoD could offer embedded reporters the possibility to join a patrol during their visit.[96] As a result, locations such as Kandahar's Continental Hotel, which offers a range of services such as wireless Internet facilities, mainly caters to non-Dutch journalists.[97]

5.5   Freedom of movement

The MoD requires every journalist to sign a declaration on insurance and responsibility.[98] It states that journalists must: 1) acknowledge the potential risks; 2) accept full liability; 3) provide adequate insurance and 4) adhere to all security instructions imposed by military staff.[99] While this places individual responsibility firmly in the hands of the embedded journalists themselves, the military commander still has the final responsibility for everyone on the base.

Within the military camp. journalists were allowed to report from the operational staff quarters until October 2007. In response to an incident where two reporters published sensitive information on a planned offensive in the *Balluchi Valley* (see also section 'Sanctions'), access to this area of the camp was collectively restricted to all

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[91]   HCSS interviews, 23 January – 17 February 2008.
[92]   Idem.
[93]   HCSS interview, 23 January 2008.
[94]   For example, journalists are allowed to follow all conversations through the Intercom, which includes all communication across the line of command. At the same time, independent verification through the use of private translators is mostly not possible, due to limited space. HCSS interview, 23 January 2008.
[95]   *Embedded Journalism*, Debate organised by Stichting Machiavelli, Nieuwspoort, 21 November 2007. HCSS interview, 31 January 2008.
[96]   HCSS interview, 4 March 2008.
[97]   HCSS interview, 31 January 2008.
[98]   This applies to both embedded journalists and journalists that visit the military camp on their own account.
[99]   *Verklaring journalisten i.v.m. persreizen naar operatiegebied*, 15 January 2007, signed by Jeroen de Jager, obtained at: www.nos.nl.

journalists.[100] Reporting on military action outside the camp is also dependent on the acquiescence of the military. Journalists were at first not allowed to accompany patrols. Only after some complained about the lack of access to military operations, the MoD started to facilitate journalists to join patrols on a regular basis. Whether or not a patrol can be joined depends on the Task Force commander and on the MoD staff member in charge of the particular patrol.

Responsibilities are less clear-cut when a journalist decides to leave the compound without military supervision. Disagreements on personal risk have occasionally led to tensions between journalists and military staff, but few journalists have actually attempted to leave for on-the-side unembedded reporting during their embedded trips. As a consequence, there have been no major problems regarding freedom of movement during the first two years.[101] Journalists with a track record of unembedded reporting state that poor security conditions should not be a reason for less vigilant press coverage: "it is as if you were to ask a fire-fighter only to take care of the small fires and leave the big ones burning".[102] Instead, they argue in favour of greater responsibility for the individual journalist: a well-prepared professional journalist can work under the most difficult circumstances but in Afghanistan many refrain from doing so and rely exclusively on the military.[103]

5.6   Control over content

Journalists are required to submit all articles for review to the public information officer.[104] Most have an ideological, but not a practical problem with this compulsory review. On the one hand the review itself runs counter to independent reporting, a key principle in journalism.[105] At the same time, they generally accept that there is a need to ensure the safety of military operations and adhere to the MoD rules. Various journalists also acknowledge that they apply a certain degree of self-censorship and adapt their writing before submission to the PIO.[106] For example, there was very limited media attention to the amount of civilian casualties prior to when the MoD published its first statement on the topic.[107] In fact, MoD staff members have occasionally remarked that journalists were very 'obedient' to the wishes of the military.[108] At times, the issue of OPSEC review goes beyond the relationship between the PIO and embedded journalists. In at least one instance, MFA staff members asked a journalist to submit all articles on provincial reconstruction activities for a review on 'political sensitivities'.[109] Some highlight that there are practical problems that arise from this type of content review. Articles that are written in-theatre are subject to a compulsory review, while articles produced on the way home, which can also entail sensitive information, are

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[100]   HCSS interview, 23 January 2008.
[101]   In one case, a journalist did not consult with the commander and was removed from the camp. HCSS interview, 12 February 2008.
[102]   HCSS interview, 31 January 2008.
[103]   Idem.
[104]   *Gedragscode,* op. cit., article 1.
[105]   Idem.
[106]   HCSS interviews, 23 January 2008 – 17 February 2008.
[107]   *Weekoverzicht Afghanistan*, Dutch Ministry of Defence, 19 October 2006, obtained at: www.mindef.nl. HCSS interview, 12 February 2008.
[108]   HCSS interview, 6 February 2008.
[109]   HCSS interview, 31 January 2008.

not.[110] In contrast to the time at the base, the MoD trusts the editorial choices of reporters when it comes to airborne and post-deployment productions. Similarly, there is a difference in the review process applied to NATO's international press tours and journalists from international media when joining the Dutch embed programme. The MoD refrains from screening the work of NATO press tours and does not consistently apply content review to the international media.[111]

5.7   Sanctions

The Dutch embed experiment has thus far survived without having led to major tensions between the MoD and the press. This is not to suggest that problems have not occurred. The most prominent case occurred in October 2007, where a combination of articles and radio interviews – which had been screened by the MoD – revealed a future operation in the *Balluchi Valley*.[112] Thereafter, journalists at Camp Holland were no longer allowed into the operational staff quarters and were sequestered to a section of the camp.[113] Various journalists protested against the 'collective punishment' and have since argued for a strict policy to enforcing sanctions on the individual level.[114] In an unrelated case, the New York Times refused to submit its own material for the MoD review and published a photograph of a wounded Dutch soldier.[115] The *Volkskrant*, present in Afghanistan at the time, in turn decided to publish the New York Times material the next morning.[116] Despite this breach, no sanctions were applied against the New York Times or any of its staff members.[117] The MoD acknowledges that several journalists are concerned about this ambiguous policy: that the actions of a single journalist can result in major repercussions for other embedded colleagues.[118] Based on in-house debates among MoD staff, the public information department considers to advocate a less punitive attitude towards the media, whereby MoD staff members accept that the relationship between media and the military includes making mistakes – on both sides.[119]

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[110] In theory, all articles are to be reviewed by the MoD, including those that are produced when a journalist is no longer embedded. In practice, this has not been consistently done. HCSS interview, 5 February 2008.

[111] HCSS staff participated in NATO's press tour in October 2007. HCSS interviews, 23 January – 17 February 2008.

[112] Interpretations differ substantially of the responsibilities for mistakes made in this incident. HCSS interviews, 23 January– 17 February 2008.

[113] HCSS interviews, 23 January – 17 February 2008.

[114] Idem.

[115] HCSS interview, 31 January 2008. See also: Chivers, C.J. "An Ambush in the Taliban Heartland", *New York Times,* 10 April 2007.

[116] *Overview of embedded journalists*, op. cit., HCSS interview, 23 January 2008.

[117] HCSS interview, 5 February 2008.

[118] Idem.

[119] HCSS interview, 14 April 2008.

6   Embedded Reporting – What it Means for the MoD

The MoD developed its embed programme based on first experiments in Iraq and formalised the policy with the start of the Afghanistan deployment. The official 'gedragscode' is of a general nature and does not always provide clear guidelines. When applied in practice, the policy largely depends on the personal interpretations by individual MoD staff members.[120]

6.1   Policy

The MoD and MFA are using separate communication plans for Afghanistan. The MoD communication plan for Uruzgan, the umbrella document for the new 'open door' embed policy, originally existed only as a draft.[121] The MoD leadership fully supported a proactive policy towards the media[122] and offered embedded status to journalists even before the policy was formalised.[123] The plan was officially published on 12 July 2006, following inquiries from *NRC Handelsblad*.[124] However, there are intra- and interdepartmental differences in its application. On the one hand, the MoD's public information department has to strike a delicate balance between transparency towards the media and confidentiality of operationally sensitive issues. This has frequently led to substantial discussions between MoD staff in the field and their colleagues in The Hague.[125] On the other hand, the MFA applies a more centralised approach to public information. Foreign affairs officials are not supposed to give regular interviews to the press, and if so, only off the record.[126] As a result, the bulk of the public information work in the field is left to be provided by MoD staff. This includes topics such as reconstruction, where many within the MoD feel they have limited knowledge or expertise.[127]

For the individual soldier, the policy therefore had a significant impact as many have become more acquainted to working with journalists. While this increased routine leads to more professionalism, it can go hand in hand with less enthusiasm.[128] The more journalists, the more each soldier has to answer the same type of questions. In spite of this, increased reporting also improves morale by demonstrating to the Dutch public the importance of an individual soldier's work: "a story in the newspaper is good for the ego".[129] As a result, individual officers are increasingly taking the initiative to invite journalists to accompany them on operations: "are there any journalists around? We are going to do something interesting".[130] In order to ensure that MoD staff members are able to work professionally with media representatives in the field, the MoD is looking

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[120]   Photograph courtesy of NOVA.

[121]   *Communicatieplan*, op. cit., p.7.

[122]   HCSS interviews, 5 and 8 February 2008.

[123]   HCSS interview, 8 February 2008.

[124]   Idem.

[125]   HCSS interviews, 27 September 2007 and 5 February 2008.

[126]   HCSS interview, 13 February 2008.

[127]   HCSS interview, 12 February 2008.

[128]   Idem.

[129]   HCSS interviews, 8 February 2008.

[130]   HCSS interviews, 5 and 8 February 2008.

into possibilities to include media awareness as part of the basic military training package.[131]

6.2   Selection

As Dutch embed policy strives for a permanent and balanced media presence in Uruzgan, the MoD does not actively select journalists for visits to Afghanistan.[132] At the same time, the MoD acknowledges that selection is linked to the communication plan's key objective: whether a certain reporter's presence will lead to more publicity for the mission.[133] This has gradually resulted in a 'two-speed' selection policy. Journalists that have frequently been embedded have better connections with MoD staff members and tend to receive more detailed information about, for example, ongoing operations.[134] This particularly counts for the interaction between MoD staff members based in The Hague – who keep their posts for several years – and individual journalists. Some argue that this has led to a trust-based working relationship, and de-facto created a give-and-take atmosphere.[135] This is different to the situation in the field: deployed MoD staff members serve for six months at a time and generally do not build a permanent relationship with journalists.

6.3   Timing

The MoD policy of 'three seats every two weeks' does not preclude an individual assessment of the 'when' and 'how long' of embedded reporting. The PIOs in the field are responsible for the overall coordination and consultation with their colleagues in The Hague, based on developments on the ground and planned operations by military command.[136] The commander in charge decides whether or not it is possible for certain journalists to join operations at a certain time, and can deny accesses to specific journalists on embedded tours.[137] For the individual soldier however, timing of embedded journalists is generally not an issue. The MoD selection scheme ensures a constant presence of media and soldiers are increasingly used to the permanent media presence at camp as a consequence.[138]

6.4   Facilitation

The public information officer is the key figure in the Dutch embed scheme. PIOs act as the point of contact for the journalists, coordinate their stay and review all articles before they are sent to the editors. Many emphasise that the current level of facilitation is substantial and time-consuming for MoD and its staff.[139] In the beginning of 2007, for example, there were a total of 370 external visitors, including journalists, within a

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[131] On 9 April 2008, the MoD held a one-day session on how to deal with the media. One of the main conclusions of this event: there is a need to structurally include media awareness in military training programmes. HCSS interview, 14 April 2008.
[132] HCSS interview, 19 December 2007.
[133] HCSS interview, 8 February 2008.
[134] HCSS interviews, 23 January and 12 February 2008.
[135] HCSS interview, 8 February 2008.
[136] HCSS interview, 8 February 2008.
[137] HCSS interview, 12 February 2008.
[138] Idem.
[139] HCSS interviews, 8 and 12 February 2008.

period of ten weeks.[140] The PIO position is not without controversy. They are expected to portray the mission not purely as a military effort, but also include its reconstruction activities.[141] In the beginning, the MoD therefore made an effort to highlight reconstruction activities at the cost of other important developments. Only when individual journalists confronted the PIOs with information obtained from locals were journalists given more access to operational information.[142] It is a delicate balance to portray a realistic picture of the mission while at the same time taking into account of operational and political sensitivities.[143] This ambiguous mandate comes with the added difficulty of six-month tours for officers. It takes time before one becomes acquainted with the right balance between the field and headquarters.[144] PIOs also have to be excellent communicators. They have to build a rapport with their military colleagues as well as with individual journalist in order to keep everyone content. The general PIO philosophy, however, is straightforward: journalists are considered as clients, who the MoD can offer interesting products.[145] PIOs should therefore give direction to their stories and anticipate what journalists are looking for, as "they do not want to write the same every time".[146] Since the start of the embed policy, the practice of facilitation has changed over time. The MoD first did not allow journalists to join operations but later invited journalists to go on patrol.[147] The latter is only possible for certain individuals. MoD staff admits that the exact level of facilitation has, to a certain degree, become a personal issue.

6.5   Freedom of movement

A journalist's freedom of movement depends on local conditions as determined by the (task force) commander, in consultation with the PIO.[148] The application of this policy however has occasionally led to frictions between military staff and the press. In one case, a journalist, after allegedly asking too many questions about Taliban was no longer allowed to join the patrol.[149] In another case, a journalist left the camp without the commander's knowledge and was, upon return, asked to leave the camp.[150] Also, it at times led to confusion within the military hierarchy. It is not clear to what extent a more senior officer in the field can overrule a decision made by the public information department.[151] While these are isolated incidents, MoD staff members acknowledge that

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[140] This number also includes members of various delegations, which did not have to be coordinated by the MoD public information department. However, it indicates the level of facilitation provided by support staff, i.e. for accommodation and the like. HCSS interview, 4 March 2008.

[141] "[…] het bevorderen van wederopbouw door Afghaanse of internationale actoren is een van de belangrijkste doelstellingen van het PRT." (Facilitating the reconstruction by Afghan or international actors is one of the most important objectives of the PRT). Source: *Article 100 Letter*, 22 December 2005, p. 20, obtained at: www.mindef.nl. See also: *Periodic ISAF Evaluation,* Dutch Ministry of Defence, 1 January 2005 – 31 December 2005, p. 4, obtained at: www.mindef.nl.

[142] For example, weekly reports in the beginning did not include major developments in the security sectors, but instead focused on minor reconstruction activities. HCSS interview, 31 January 2008.

[143] HCSS interviews, 8 and 12 February 2008.

[144] HCSS interview, 8 February 2008.

[145] HCSS interview, 12 February 2008.

[146] HCSS interview, 8 February 2008.

[147] HCSS interviews, 23 January and 6 February 2008.

[148] HCSS interview, 12 February 2008.

[149] HCSS interview, 22 January 2008.

[150] HCSS interview, 12 February 2008.

[151] HCSS interviews, 17 January – 12 February 2008.

the current practice raises questions about whether the MoD or the individual reporters are ultimately responsible for the personal safety outside the camp.[152]

6.6   Control over content

Despite good experiences with earlier efforts, the MoD introduced a compulsory review as part of the embed policy. Facing a major operation in a hostile environment, the MoD was keen to keep maximum control over what would be reported about the Dutch engagement in Uruzgan. Not jeopardising OPSEC was therefore the rationale for the review process.[153] This arrangement has often come at a price for PIOs. They are the primary defenders of OPSEC information, and the first to be criticised when things go wrong.[154] This often leads to uncomfortable tensions between PIOs and journalists. In addition, there is an uneasy balance between the needs of the political leadership on the one hand, and the PIO's public mandate on the other.[155] Further complicating their responsibilities is the fact that it is difficult to define OPSEC. Reporting on new military equipment, for example, is not only a question of OPSEC. Whether not certain equipment is being used in a given operation may also raise political questions on procurement.[156] Other problems include cases where PIOs edited information that was already published by the *Reuters* press agency[157], or when a Dutch civilian in Afghanistan was requested not to talk to journalists about the Dutch deployment.[158] Various journalists voiced their concerns to the MoD during several closed-door meetings between frequent 'embeds' and the MoD.[159] However, the military point of view is clear: journalists do not have sufficient information to judge on whether certain information should be considered OPSEC. Consequently, PIOs are needed to check final publications. In the end, the press accepted the MoD's decision not to modify the review policy in this regard.

6.7   Sanctions

There have been very few sanctions applied during the period of study. In a few cases, MoD staff members contacted executive editors to discuss a particular problem. However, the ones involved generally downplay the importance of these incidents.[160] The MoD generally regards sanctions as a last resort and is reluctant to acknowledge the importance of having a clear policy in this regard. The MoD relies on ad-hoc responses in case problems arise. Following the October 2007 incident, the commander in charge imposed a stricter working regime. This was based on personal judgement rather than existing guidelines. As of yet this situation has not changed despite MoD assurances to settle the issue in favour of the embedded press.

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[152]   HCSS interview, 8 February 2008.
[153]   *Gedragscode,* op. cit., article 1.
[154]   HCSS interviews, 23 January – 17 February 2008.
[155]   HCSS interview, 8 February 2008.
[156]   HCSS interview, 23 January 2008.
[157]   HCSS interview, 31 January 2008.
[158]   HCSS interview, 23 January 2008.
[159]   HCSS interview, 21 January 2008.
[160]   HCSS interviews, 30 January and 8 February 2008.

7   Content of Press Coverage

Since the start of the Dutch ISAF deployment in Uruzgan, the role of the media and its Afghanistan coverage has been subject to repeated public debate in the Netherlands.[161] A recent study on Dutch embedded journalism addresses the difference in embedded and unembedded coverage of Afghanistan,[162] and various academic publications have discussed international experiences on the impact of embedded journalism.
The research at hand is conducted comparing the writings of a small sample of unembedded articles to a much larger pool of embedded work.[163] This is unavoidable as there are only a limited number of Dutch journalists who report unembedded from Afghanistan. Various types of content analyses complement the findings.[164]
The following pages present the content of press coverage by: topic; location; source and type of analysis.

7.1   Topic

HCSS research shows that around 93% of embedded reporting covers the military and activities directly related to the military mission.[165] Recent academic research also finds that unembedded journalists spend only 2.5% of their articles on military topics and instead focus on issues such as politics, violence and reconstruction.[166] When looking at the overall coverage, the military remains the most important topic, followed by articles on the Dutch political decision-making process. Less attention is given to the reconstruction efforts that have taken place in Afghanistan.[167] This is different to Dutch press coverage of earlier conflicts. For example, press coverage on the Kosovo conflict mainly (52%) focussed on the political side of the story,[168] and while attention was paid to the military side of the story (38%), only 0,9% of press coverage concentrated on Dutch soldiers.[169] Many journalists acknowledge that a large number of stories on Afghanistan are in fact similar in nature.[170] Partly, this is a consequence of the MoD's 'permanent presence' policy, which created a steady flow of individual journalists, each of them spending up to two weeks as embedded reporters. In addition, the MoD generally expects journalists to, at least partly, cover the military mission. It is not appreciated if a journalist leaves Afghanistan without publishing anything about the Dutch deployment, as "the Ministry does not view itself as a travel agency".[171] The new

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[161]   Examples include: *Embedded Journalism*, Stichting Machiavelli, Nieuwspoort, 21 November 2007; *Media onder Vuur*, Rode Hoed Debate, 20 October 2007; *De Leugen Regeert*, VARA, 23 February 2007; Klink, J. van, "Media in Bed With our 'Tough Guys' The Impact of Embedded Journalism in Afghanistan on Dutch Newspaper Stories of ISAF", *Leiden University*, Master Thesis, 2007.

[162]   Klink, J. van, op. cit.

[163]   The unembedded (unilateral) journalists discussed are Deedee Derksen for the Volkskrant, Philip de Wit and Antoinette de Jong (freelance) for NRC Handelsblad, Minka Nijhuis (freelance) for Trouw. The Algemeen Dagblad and de Telegraaf did not make use of unembedded journalists.

[164]   HCSS conducted a manual content analysis and a text analysis using text mining software.

[165]   HCSS manual content analysis.

[166]   Van Klink, J., op. cit., p. 42.

[167]   HCSS software-based text mining analysis.

[168]   Topics covered in Dutch press coverage on the Kosovo conflict: Politics 52%, Military 38%, Other 10%. Source: Landtsheer, C. de; Palmer, J.;Middleton, D., "Een 'Framing' analyse over de Kosovo-oorlog in de Nederlandse pers (vergeleken met de Britse en Italiaanse pers)", *Tijdschrift voor Sociologie*, Vol. 23, No. 3-4, 2002, p. 415.

[169]   Landtsheer, C. de; Palmer, J.;Middleton, D., op. cit., p. 415-416.

[170]   HCSS interviews, 23 January – 17 February 2008

[171]   HCSS interview, 21 January 2008.

MoD embed policy has, in fact, provided a continuous supply of potential stories with a military focus, and led to a shift in the coverage to the performance of the military in the field.[172]

Figure 1   Visualising the findings: Comparing embedded and unembedded articles[173]

The graph above is a network diagram[174] based on a sample of embedded and unembedded articles, representing the importance of the relationship between the term 'Afghanistan' (represented by the blue circle in the centre) and other frequently used words (smaller circles, with varying degrees of vicinity to the central term). The upper figure represents embedded articles, while the lower figure represents unembedded articles.

The graph illustrates two aspects of the difference between embedded (upper) and unembedded (lower) journalism. First, while there is some overlap, both types of reporting result in significantly different types of content, visible through the limited amount of concepts with links to both central circles. Second, the unembedded sample

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172   The MoD has in the past criticised the political focus in defence reporting: J. Veen, Head of MoD
         Public Information Department, *Embedded Journalism*, Stichting Machiavelli, Nieuwspoort, 21
         November 2007.

173   This Network Diagram was made using the IBM Many Eyes (Beta) service:
         http://services.alphaworks.ibm.com/manyeyes/home.

174   Idem.

has resulted in a far greater diversity of content, as illustrated by the larger amount of words surrounding the lower central circle.[175]

Figure 2: Word Clouds of unembedded (left) and embedded (right) articles[176]

Another way to illustrate the difference between embedded and unembedded work is to use word clouds. The text boxes above represent the relative weights of selected terms in both embedded and unembedded articles. It explains the differences in content between the two forms of journalism, as represented by the network diagram displayed in the previous section. In this graphic, the higher the score of a term, the larger the word is represented in the word cloud. A few differences become clear from this figure. Words such as Pakistan, Pashtun, Kabul, *hulporganisaties* (aid agencies), *regio* (region) and Karzai figure much more prominently in the unembedded sample, while words such as PRT, Minister, *Defensie* (MoD), *Kamp Holland* and *patrouille* (patrol) are more important in the embedded sample. This difference in use of terminology supports earlier findings. The words of greater relative weight in the unembedded sample do not have a direct connection to military activities, while the words of greater relative weight in the embedded sample do have a relation to the military.

7.2   Sources

Military officials are a common source of information for the newspaper articles under review. The sample of embedded reporting shows that 80% of the sources used in the articles are military officials, while only 16% are politicians or political spokespersons. Recent academic research supports these findings, indicating that 90.5% of all sources used by embedded journalists are military.[177] The reporting on civilian casualties by the Dutch military after the events in *Chora*[178] is a case in point. Most articles were largely based on facts provided by military staff members. In a sample of 30 articles, only two articles included non-military sources.[179] The other articles used the military as their primary source. Many journalists cite limited freedom of movement, both due to the problematic security situation and MoD supervision over embedded journalists, as the main reason for this limited use of sources. Since embedded journalists can only interview civilians in the presence of the military, people are unlikely to freely speak

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[175]   More details of this diagram can be accessed through the online version of this report at
        www.hcss.nl.
[176]   Idem.
[177]   Van Klink, J., op. cit.,pp. 38-29.
[178]   Chora is an Afghan town that was shelled by ISAF and Dutch troops resulting in 50-80 civilian
        casualties.
[179]   Boom, J., "Onze Burgerslachtoffers", De Groene Amsterdammer, 6 June 2007. See also: Karskens, A.,
        "Nederland Verliest op alle Fronten", Nieuwe Revu, 5 Decmber 2007.

their minds.[180] Moreover, timing also plays a role in the type of sources used.
The Dutch embed policy allows journalists to stay in Afghanistan for two weeks, which
makes it difficult to establish connections with local sources. Academic research
indicates that Dutch unembedded journalists consult a variety of different sources.
Only 25% of their sources include military staff.[181]

7.3   Location

The Uruzgan province dominates the overall coverage of Afghanistan in the Dutch
press. When looking at the general terminology, the word 'Uruzgan' surfaces as one the
most prominent terms.[182] This is even more prevalent as regards the sample of
embedded-only reporting. 62% of the articles reviewed focus on the situation in the
Uruzgan province, of which 21% on the situation in the military camp, compared to
15% that discuss the situation in Afghanistan and 2% that provide a regional
perspective.[183] According to recent academic research, 20.3% of the total ISAF
coverage featured 'daily life at the military base' as the main issue. However, this figure
could be misleading as it represents an average and there is a noticeable difference
between embedded and unembedded journalists: 44% of embedded journalists use
'daily life at the military base' as the key theme compared to 0% of unembedded
journalists that make this choice, resulting in the abovementioned 20,3% average for the
total ISAF coverage.[184] This is easy to explain. Unembedded journalists seldom make
an effort to access the camp. However, given the large amount of embedded reporting
and its focus on the military, the amount of embedded articles has a clear impact on the
substance of overall coverage. Journalists differ on how to deal with this dilemma.
Some journalists emphasise that a clear focus on the mission in Uruzgan is part of the
press' public mandate in order to keep a watchful eye on the Dutch government's
military spending and its effects in the field.[185] Others argue that it is impossible to
assess the performance of the mission without taking account of the general situation in
Afghanistan and the region.[186]

7.4   Type of Analysis

The surge in mission coverage, coupled with the restrictions inherent in embedded
journalism, had a significant impact on the way articles portrayed the broader
developments in Afghanistan. Embedded journalists mostly focussed on tactical issues,
such as the immediate area of operation and the daily activities of the military.
Data from the manual text analysis shows that the Dutch press in fact spent a significant
part of the overall coverage on tactical developments in the Uruzgan province. In 76%
of the reviewed articles, the authors refrain from taking account of issues beyond the
immediate setting.[187] Some have criticised this type of reporting as 'naive empirism',[188]
pointing out that reporters should resist the temptation to portray accounts by individual
MoD staff members as representative for the entire operation.[189]

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[180]   HCSS interview, 25 February 2007.
[181]   Van Klink, J., op. cit., p. 38.
[182]   HCSS software-based text mining analysis.
[183]   HCSS manual content analysis.
[184]   Van Klink, J., op. cit., p. 41.
[185]   HCSS interview, 27 February 2008.
[186]   HCSS interview, 31 January 2007.
[187]   HCSS manual content analysis.
[188]   HCSS interview, 20 February 2008.
[189]   HCSS interviews, 23 January and 8 February 2008.

For instance, van Klink argues that this 'episodic framing' is a direct result of embedded status,[190] and that embeddedness largely determines whether or not the wider picture is taken into account. When situations are described, "they are often placed in the context of the NATO operation itself and described from ISAF's or the Karzai government's point of view".[191] In a research report on the US coverage of the Operation Iraqi Freedom, Pfau likewise notes the tactical nature of embedded reporting.[192] Dutch journalists with a mandate to cover defence matters emphasise that for a better understanding of the military, the tactical focus is the correct mode of reporting. Foreign affairs correspondents would then complement them on the background issues be they political, economic or historical.[193] The phenomenon of tactical journalism can also be seen as a response to criticism of media coverage of the Gulf War (1991), which was perceived too clinical by many critics. At that time, bombing campaigns would be covered as statements, and many argued that this type of reporting disguised the realities of war.[194] Following this argument, today's Afghanistan coverage does paint a more realistic picture of the individual experiences of Dutch soldiers in the field, especially since the MoD is trying to provide journalists with more access to daily patrols and special operations. The question is to what extent this type of analysis is matched by journalists reporting the other side of the story.[195]

The Dutch embed policy and the resulting interaction between journalists and MoD staff members has had a clear impact on the content of press coverage. First, it enhanced the amount of articles written on the military aspect of the mission. Second, it led to a greater focus on Uruzgan and the military camp itself. Third, it promoted the use of a large number of military sources. Finally fourth, it had an impact on the type of analysis. Choices on topic, location, sources and type of analysis centred on the immediate environs of the military mission and clearly dominated the overall coverage.

As a consequence, the last two years have seen a disproportionally high amount of tactical journalism as part of the Afghanistan coverage. The fact that the embed package was offered, created a surge in articles that explicitly covered the Dutch military such as the life at the camp, personal equipment and personal frustrations. While this can be seen as a move away from the often criticised more 'clinical' character of earlier war coverage, there are fundamental questions regarding the necessary verification of military information as well as the coverage of the broader picture.

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[190]   According to van Klink, the definition for episodic framing includes four aspects: Does an article 1) portray discrete events; 2) place events in larger context; 3) presents a historical sequence or causes; and 4) consider larger, more general consequences of the events? Van Klink, op. cit., p.76.

[191]   Van Klink, op.cit., p. 44.

[192]   Pfau, M., "Embedding journalists in military combat units: impact on newspapers story frames and tone", *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, Spring 2004, pp. 81 ff.

[193]   HCSS interview, 21 January 2008.

[194]   Shohat, E., 'The Media's War', Social Text, No. 28, 1991, p. 141
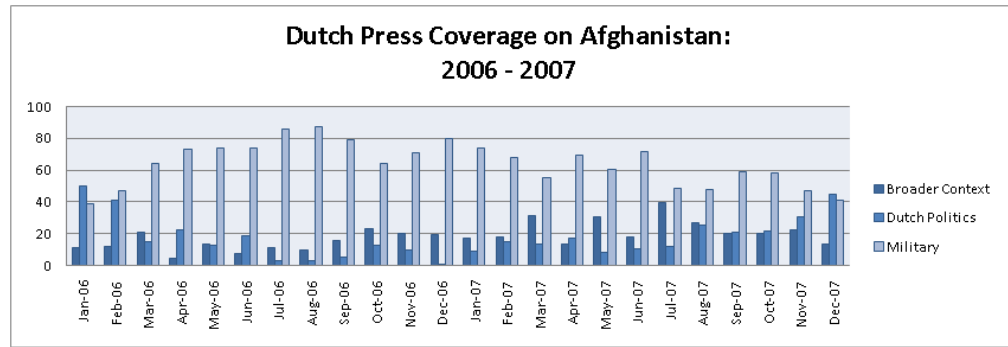
[195]   HCSS interview, 30 January 2008.

Figure 3: Visualising the findings: Dutch Press Coverage on Afghanistan

The above graph visualise the results of the second part of the text analysis, focusing on the overall press coverage on Afghanistan between January 2006 and December 2007. The figures are based on a monthly analysis of term 'Afghanistan' and how strongly it relates to other terms. For the purpose of this analysis, four categories have been used to cluster various terms: 'Dutch politics'; 'military'; 'broader context'; and 'other issues'. The category 'Dutch politics' refers to all words that have a clear connection to the Dutch political processes.[196] The category 'military' includes all terms related to activities of the Dutch and allied militaries.[197] The category 'broader context' contains terminology that describes the situation in Afghanistan in terms other than the Dutch political debate or military activities.[198] 'Other issues' refers to any other wording that has no explanatory value for this analysis. Also, the latter category includes words that fall into more than one category.[199] In order to present the findings in relation to each other, the category 'other' has not been included in the graph. The sum of the percentages for each shown category therefore amounts to 100%.

The graph illustrates several aspects. First, confirming the findings of the smaller samples, military topics are predominant in the press coverage on Afghanistan. Second, the coverage on Dutch politics depends on the political decision-making in The Hague, such as the decision to go to Uruzgan (beginning 2006) and the debate on the extension of the mission (end 2007). Third, the broader context is, with the exception of July 2007, consistently of marginal importance in press coverage on Afghanistan. The high score of 'broader context' in July can be explained by the fact that a large number of reporters covered the issue of civilian casualties as a result of the battle of *Chora*, (late June). Overall, these findings support the conclusion that the focus on military matters led to an imbalance in overall press coverage on Afghanistan, in which socio-economic issues receive relatively little attention compared to military matters. The following pages include a more detailed visualisation of these findings. These graphics can also be accessed through the online component of this report at www.hcss.nl.

Overleaf:
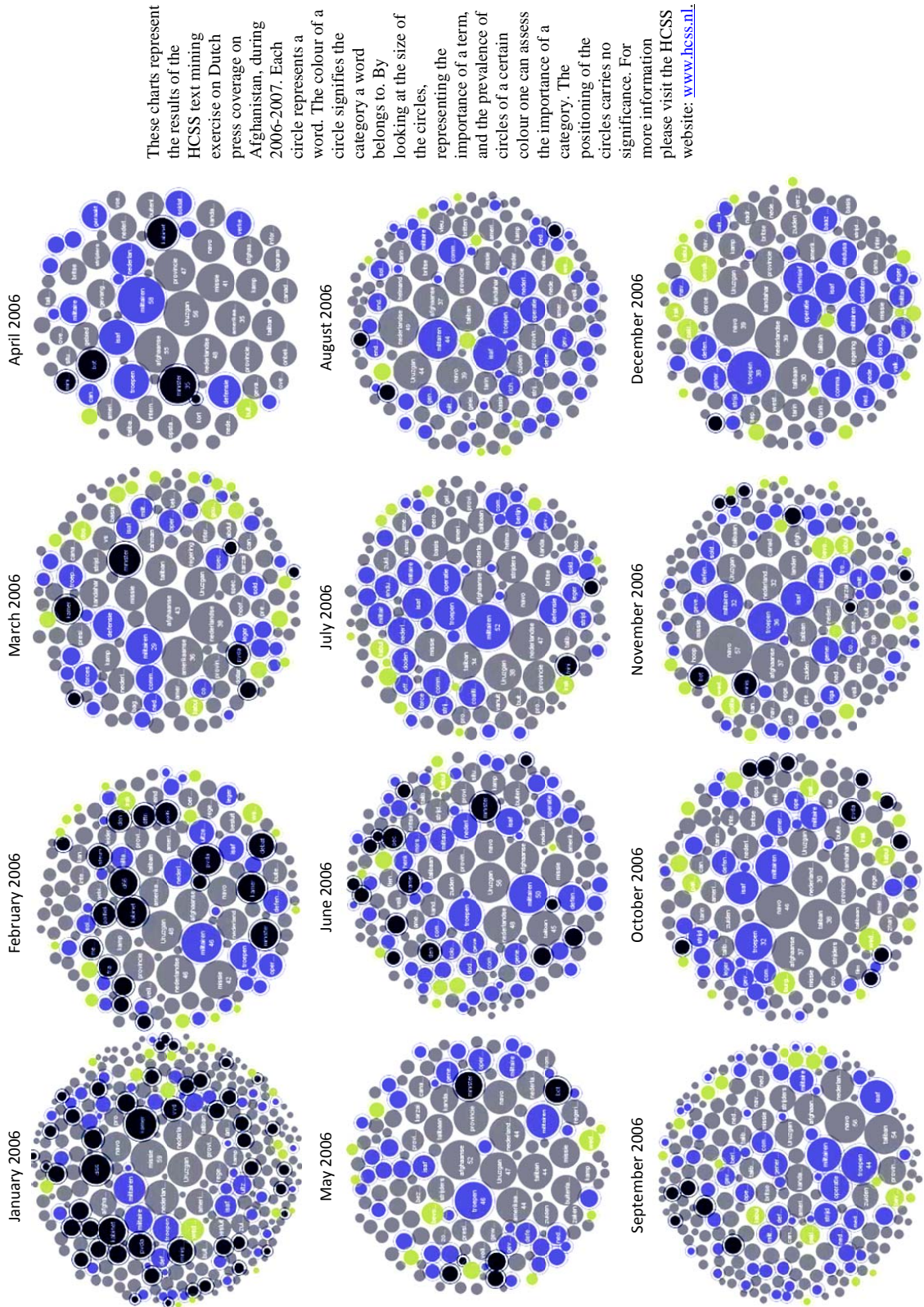*Figure 4: Visualising the findings: Dutch Press Coverage on Afghanistan per month.*

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[196]   Examples are: 'Prime Minister Balkenende' and 'PvdA' (the Dutch labour party).

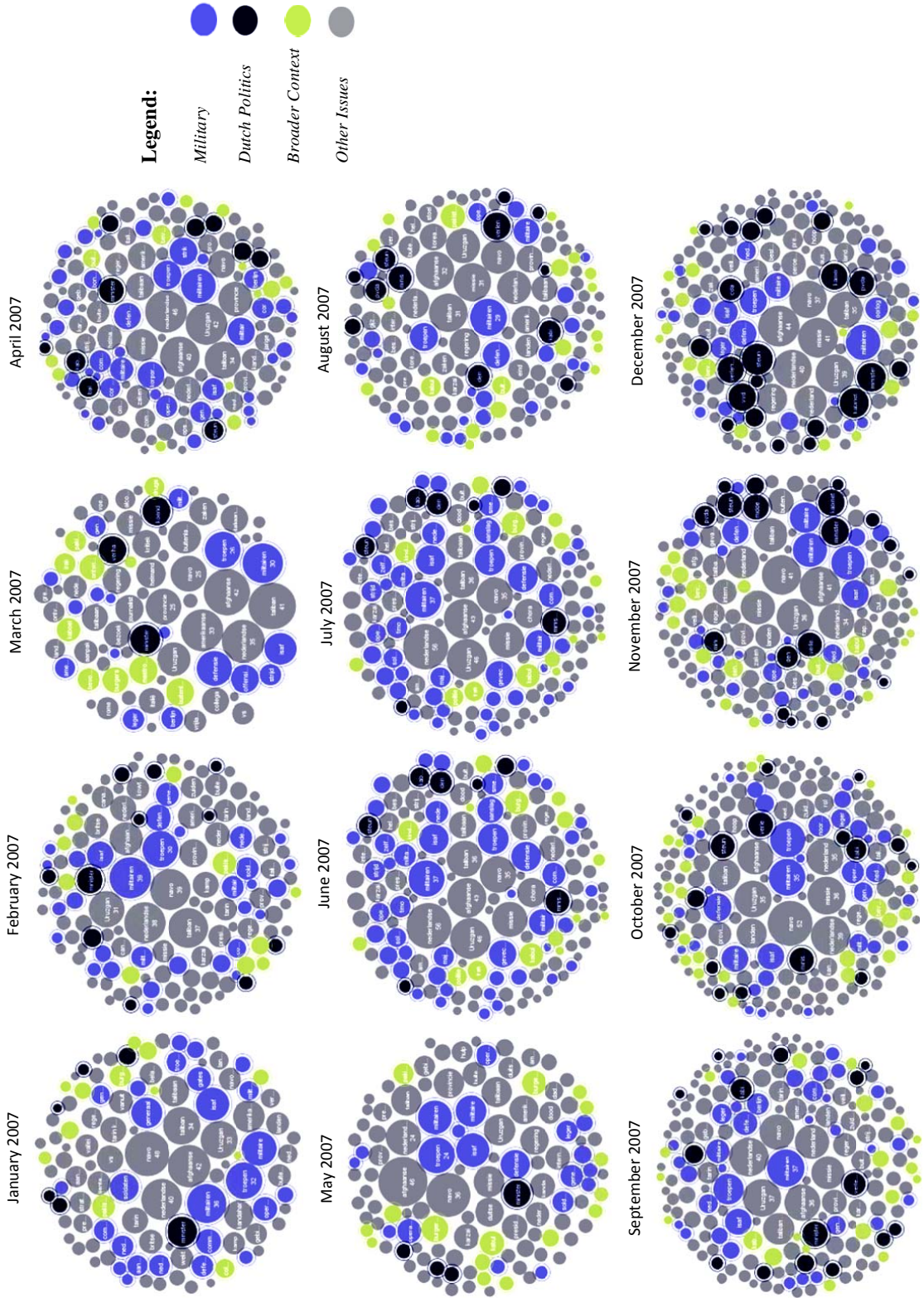[197]   Examples are: 'ISAF' and 'military operation'.

[198]   Examples are: 'reconstruction' and 'education'.

[199]   Examples are: 'important' and 'government' (which could relate to either Dutch or Afghan government).

Dutch Press Coverage: 2006

These charts represent the results of the HCSS text mining exercise on Dutch press coverage on Afghanistan, during 2006-2007. Each circle represents a word. The colour of a circle signifies the category a word belongs to. By looking at the size of the circles, representing the importance of a term, and the prevalence of circles of a certain colour one can assess the importance of a category. The positioning of the circles carries no significance. For more information please visit the HCSS website: www.hcss.nl.

January 2006

February 2006

March 2006

April 2006

May 2006

June 2006

July 2006

August 2006

September 2006

October 2006

November 2006

December 2006

Dutch Press Coverage: 2007

Legend:

Military

Dutch Politics

Broader Context

Other Issues

8   International Comparison

In Afghanistan, the individual ISAF nations have developed their own embed policies. The Dutch embed programme is relatively new, but has evolved rapidly over the last couple of years. In order to determine how the Dutch embed policy can contribute to more diverse and substantive reporting, it is useful to compare the embed programmes put in place by other militaries. The following pages address four coalition partners and their experiences with the press.

8.1   Canada – Minimal Supervision

The Canadian embed policy is a relatively open policy. What distinguishes the Canadadian from all other programmes is the fact that journalists, while embedded on the Canadian base in Kandahar, are allowed to leave the camp unembedded. This openness has, in some cases, resulted in problems with ISAF allies. In one instance "Canadian military officials removed four journalists [...] after complaints from allies".[200]

The Canadian policy also differs from the Dutch practice in other aspects. Canada offers long embedded trips, which can last up to eight weeks. In the beginning, there was no time limit on the length of an embedded stay, yet due to the great popularity of the programme and the limited resources available this was no longer sustainable.[201] On average, 13 journalists are embedded each week and stay in *Kandahar* for 25 days. Selection is based on three categories: 1st priority is given to the national media organisations; 2nd priority is given to regional and international media; 3rd priority is given to non-Canadian national media and freelance journalists.[202] In terms of facilitation, the Canadian embed programme provides only limited logistic support. Travel to *Kandahar*, clothing and equipment are considered the journalist's own responsibility.[203] The Canadian military has, in the past, offered a training course for journalists. This course was not obligatory and "some news outlets prefer to send their reporters on pricier private courses, bypassing the army-sponsored training".[204] Further, the Canadian embed programme expects journalists to visit a doctor to ensure physical fitness.[205]

Journalists in the Canadian embed programme have to sign an agreement not to publish operational information. This agreement includes an extensive pre-defined list of topics that are considered OPSEC, such as "specific information on troop strength equipment or critical supplies and the Rules of Engagement".[206] Canada does not impose an obligatory content review, but instead emphasises the responsibility of the individual soldier in their interactions with the media, a concept called 'security at the source'.[207]

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[200]   Esau, J., "Canadian military yanks embedded journalists", *C News*, 30 December 2006.
[201]   HCSS interview, 28 March 2008.
[202]   *Op Athena – Media Embed Program (MEP) Instructions*, op. cit.
[203]   Journalists are responsible for: Providing their own level IV body armour and Kevlar helmet. Being declared medically and physically fit to embed with CF operations in Afghanistan by a medical doctor. Source: *Op Athena – Media Embed Program (MEP) Instructions*, op. cit.
[204]   Chellas, S., "Good To Go", *The walrus*, February 2007.
[205]   *Canadian Forces Media Embedding Program*, obtained at http://www.forces.gc.ca/site/newsroom/mep_e.asp.
[206]   *Op Athena – Media Embed Program (MEP) Instructions*, op. cit.
[207]   Idem.

However, in practice the military has been known to review more than just OPSEC. One journalist, for example, reported that "there were heavy-handed attempts to control the story, to suppress photos, to spin messages, and to deny reality".[208] Violating the code can lead to "termination of embedded status and removal from the Canadian Forces Joint Task Force".[209] Such 'disembedding' has occurred on several occasions, but remains an exception.[210]

In other aspects the Canadian policy is comparable to Dutch policy. Canada also applies restrictions to representatives of other government agencies, such as the Canadian International Development Agency and the Foreign Affairs Department, not to speak with journalists on the ground.[211] The Canadian Forces also share the concern of being used as a 'hotel'. Consequently, they have made it clear that it is unacceptable to spend "an inordinate amount of time covering non-military activities"[212] and encourage journalists to go on patrols.[213]

The Canadian military's relationship with the press has improved significantly over the last few years. Canadian press and military, historically, had little respect for each other, but the military now recognises that the media is, "critical for maintaining popular support."[214] The military's official view of the media has evolved in the past few years to seeing it as, "one of the players in the operational sphere".[215] How to deal with the media has become part of the basic training for soldiers; they now carry a pocket card with tips for handling interviews.[216] Today, both professions work, almost comfortably, side by side.

8.2   United States – General Guidelines

The US, in Iraq (2003) and later in Afghanistan, was the first country to implement an embed policy on a large scale. With over 600 embed positions during the Iraq invasion alone, the US has, by far, the largest embed programme.[217] The size of the US embed programme makes it difficult to generalise on its details. The implementation of the policy depends on the interpretation of the different branches of the US military in the different theatres of operation. The basic philosophy is that embedded journalists are necessary to counter "disinformation and distortion".[218] This policy extends beyond the national press. In Iraq, for example, the US military catered for 20% non-US reporters in order to include networks such as Al-Jazeera.[219]

Like Canada, the US policy safeguards OPSEC through 'security at the source'. The US military has a set of ground rules which have to be signed, including an

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[208]   York, G., "Dispatches from an Embedded Life", The Globe and Mail, 3 June 2006.

[209]   *Op Athena – Media Embed Program (MEP) Instructions*, op. cit.

[210]   HCSS interview, 28 March 2008.

[211]   "Canadians 'ill-informed about Afghanistan", *Toronto Star*, 5 December 2006.

[212]   York, G., op. cit.

[213]   Chellas, S., op. cit.

[214]   Idem.

[215]   Idem.

[216]   Idem.

[217]   Paul, C. & Kim, J.J., op. cit., p. 1.

[218]   *Public Affairs Guidance on Embedded Media*, US Central Command, February 2003, obtained at:
        http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Feb2003/d20030228pag.pdf.

[219]   Rodriguez, J., "Embedding Success into the Military-Media Relationship", *USAWC Strategy Research Project*, 19 March 2004.

extensive list, similar to that of Canada, of what cannot be reported on.[220] Nevertheless, military guidelines specify that officers should assist with any questions and information needs that media might have.[221] Consequently, the US does not apply a compulsory content review. Control occurs in a more subtle way: reporters generally become so attached and dependent on their units that they avoid negative reporting.[222] However, there are also examples to the contrary. The Australian Broadcasting Corporation was allowed to report on a fire fight where American soldiers killed civilians through negligence. The reporter was able to interview the commanding officer, write and send the story from within the embedded unit.[223]

If journalists are unintentionally exposed to sensitive operational information, they will be informed by the commanders on what they should "avoid covering".[224] Similar to Dutch policy such review in principle only relates to operational information.[225] The US also allows journalists access to classified information, if, in return, they are willing to submit their material to a content review on OPSEC.[226]

The US operations in Afghanistan are sufficiently large-scale to cater to substantial numbers of journalists. The US imposes no clear time limits on the period during which a reporter can stay embedded.[227] However, embedded reporters must agree not to travel in their own vehicles[228] and are obliged to stay with one unit throughout the duration of the war.[229] This *de-facto* also means that once a journalist is embedded with the US it is not possible to temporarily leave the US military for unembedded reporting.[230] In turn, unembedded reporters can visit the US military. They are not aided in any way and their personal safety is not guaranteed by the US military. They are also discouraged from approaching battlefield as they could be mistaken for combatants.

Like Canada, the US military provides limited logistical support. Air travel, equipment and clothing are the journalist's own responsibility.[231] In the past the US offered journalists to participate in a training course on operating in conflict zones.[232] This served as a weeding mechanism as those who took the course would have a better chance of getting "choice placements".[233] Selected embeds also had the option of embedding with their unit prior to deployment to test their equipment and get to know the people they would be dependent on.[234]

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[220] *US Ground Rules*, op. cit.
[221] Department of Defense (US), Directive 5122.5, 2000, obtained at: http://www.dtic.mil/whs/directives/corres/rtf/512205x.rtf.
[222] Pfau, M. et al., "Embedded reporting during the invasion and occupation of Iraq: How the embedding of journalists affects television news reports", *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*, Vol. 49, Issue 4, February 2005, pp. 468 – 487.
[223] Eric Campbell, "Reporting War", *Cultures of Journalism (Radio National)*, 30 October 2004, obtained at: http://www.abc.net.au/rn/learning/lifelong/stories/s1174650.htm.
[224] Zeide, E.J., "In bed with the military: First Amendment Implications of embedded journalism", *New York University Law Review*, Vol. 80:1309, 2005.
[225] Idem.
[226] Idem.
[227] HCSS, 4 April 2008.
[228] Strupp, J.,Berman, A., "Journalists set to bunk down with armed forces", *Editor & Publisher*, Vol. 136, Issue 7, 2003.
[229] Baker, P., "Inside View (on the embedding system)", *American Journalism Review*, May 2003.
[230] HCSS interview, 4 April 2008.
[231] Idem.
[232] Chellas, S., op. cit.
[233] Rodriguez, J., op. cit.
[234] Idem.

When compromising operational security, reporters credentials, necessary for an embed position with the US programme, can be revoked and the reporter can subsequently be removed at the commander's discretion.[235] Several cases of 'disembeddings' due to violations of security arrangements have been reported.[236]

8.3   Australia – No Outsiders allowed

Australia has no embed policy. One journalist even suggested that the Australian MoD applies an anti-embed policy.[237] This reluctance towards the media partly stems from the fact that most of Australia's engagement in Afghanistan is through Special Forces. However, the Australian military in general is cautious in its relationship with the media. For example, in East Timor where Australia has some 750 soldiers deployed under a UN Security Council mandate,[238] there is no official embed programme either, even though the more favourable security situation and the presence of the regular Australian army makes it is much easier for journalists to get access to the military. This stance might change in the medium term. While the Australian military is not keen to open up to the media, 2007 brought a new government, which, some suggest, could decide to follow a more proactive media policy when it comes to defence matters.[239]

In Uruzgan the Australian department of defence does not facilitate embedded reporting in any way and instead organises occasional press trips to the theatre of operations. These are accessible to a handful of journalists at a time. The selection criteria are not clear; journalists without experience in war reporting are frequently allowed in.[240] Journalists get the opportunity to spend between one and two weeks with the Australian military and are allowed to accompany patrols during their stay. These trips are strictly supervised and leave little room for journalists to gather independent information. In light of the otherwise restrictive policy it is interesting to note that reporters are not subject to an obligatory content review prior to publication.

Unembedded reporters face even more difficulties. It is impossible for journalists to turn up in Afghanistan and demand to see the Australian soldiers at *Tarin Kowt*.[241] Any independent journalists turning up unannounced have received nil help from our military".[242] As a consequence, some Australian journalists have gone embedded with other countries in order to report from Afghanistan and to "shame the Australian military into developing their own policy".[243]

8.4   United Kingdom – Tightly Managed

The United Kingdom (UK) was one of the first countries to experiment with embedded journalism when it facilitated reporters to visit the military during the Falkland War. Later, in line with US policy in Iraq (2003), the UK started to apply the embed concept on a bigger scale, and subsequently consolidated it as part of its military engagement in

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[235]   Zeide, E.J., op. cit.

[236]   Paul, C. & Kim, J.J., op. cit.

[237]   HCSS interview, 3 April 2008.

[238]   For more details see: *UN Security Council Resolution 1704*.

[239]   HCSS interview, 28 March 2008.

[240]   Idem.

[241]   Uzunov, S., "News from the Front", *Newmatilda.com,* 6 June 2007, obtained at: http://www.newmatilda.com/2007/06/06/news-front.

[242]   HCSS correspondence, 15 October 2007.

[243]   HCSS interview, 28 March 2008.

Afghanistan. The UK embed policy differs from other embed policies in several aspects. First, embedded trips to Afghanistan only last around ten days.[244]
Second, while the US and Canada do not control movement and action of journalists in-theatre, the UK programme is closely supervised by the military. The UK provides journalists with an escort, which is responsible for providing a comprehensive picture of the UK's activities in Afghanistan, including the work on reconstruction and development assistance.[245]

Similar to the Dutch programme the implementation of the policy depends considerably on individual interpretations of the rules. An example from the audiovisual media is illustrative in this regard: the BBC's *Panorama* team was prevented by a MoD 'minder' from showing civilians caught up in earlier fighting in Helmand province.[246]
The strictly managed UK programme does not impose a compulsory content review. However the policy does not discount the possibility that "on certain occasions they may be required to submit all written material [...] for security clearance before transmission".[247] This review process prevents journalists from reporting on information "that might be of military use to an enemy, from reporting on prisoners of war, and more controversially, from reporting on casualties".[248] Similar to the Netherlands, the UK military offers flights from the UK to the theatre of operations; equipment however is the responsibility of the individual journalists.[249] Access to daily operations in the field used to be on offer, but has been limited after an incident where *Sunday Times* journalist Christina Lamb ended up in a serious fire fight and wrote a controversial report on the grave problems the unit encountered during the operation.[250] As a consequence of the subsequent restrictions to journalists, the recapture of *Musa Quala* went largely unreported.[251] As far as unembedded journalists are concerned the UK military allows them to move freely outside the military compound. However, the MoD emphasises that they do not enjoy military protection beyond the Geneva Conventions when doing so.[252]

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[244] HCSS interview, 4 April 2008.
[245] Axe, D., "Military Embeds: The World Tour", *Columbia Journalism Review*, January – February 2008.
[246] Bell, M., "Return of the Censor", *The Guardian Unlimited*, 17 December 2007, obtained at: http://commentisfree.guardian.co.uk/martin_bell/2007/12/return_of_the_censor.html.
[247] *The Green Book*, UK Ministry of Defence, obtained at: http://www.mod.uk/DefenceInternet/AboutDefence/CorporatePublications/DoctrineOperationsandDiplomacyPublications/TheGreenBook/.
[248] Smith, V., "Across the Wire", *NATO Review*, February 2007.
[249] *The Green Book*, op. cit.
[250] Whitaker, R., op. cit.
[251] Bell, M., op. cit.
[252] Day, J., "MoD acts on journalists' safety", *MediaGuardian*, 1 March 2006, obtained at: http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2006/mar/01/pressandpublishing.Iraqandthemedia.

	Netherlands	Australia	Canada	United Kingdom	United States
Policy	General Code of Conduct (1A4) Declaration (to be signed by journalist, 1 A4)	No official embed policy on paper	List of what cannot be reported on; Indemnification Agreement and Liability Waiver; Engagement with the Minister of National Defence; KAF Policy Statement (to be signed by journalist)	Media Guidelines in the 'Green Book' (to be signed by journalist)	List of what cannot be reported on; Release, Indemnification, and Hold Harmless Agreement; Agreement no to Sue (to be signed by journalist)
Selection	Aim is to ensure fair and balanced media representation	No explicit selection criteria Only a selected few are allowed in on organised 'press trips'	Set priorities for certain media 15 permanent embed openings	Aims at ensuring fair and balanced media 100 to 120 journalists in total (Iraq)	Aims to counter disinformation and distortion
Timing	Two weeks (shorter for press trips)	One to two weeks no permanent media presence	Average 25 days (max. 6/8 weeks)	Around 10 days	No specified time period
Facilitation	Frequent press trips Travel from home country and equipment can be facilitated	Based on personal relationship with MoD	Optional training course Travel and equipment is journalists' responsibility	Travel from home country is facilitated Equipment is journalists' responsibility	Optional training course Travel and equipment is journalists' responsibility MoD helps in transporting equipment
Freedom of movement	Possible to get close to combat operations Cannot leave camp unembedded	Possible to get close to combat operations Cannot leave camp unembedded	Possible to get close to combat operations Possibility to leave the compound unilaterally	Fewer possibilities to get close to combat operations Cannot leave camp unembedded	Possible to get close to combat operations Personal safety is not a reason to be precluded from combat areas Cannot leave camp unembedded
Control over content	Obligatory content review on OPSEC Journalists should write on military MFA only off-record	No obligatory content review	No permanent review, OPSEC review can be demanded All Interviews are on record Journalists should write on military MFA only off-record	No obligatory content review OPSEC review can be demanded	No permanent review, OPSEC review can be demanded All interviews are on record A security review arrangement can be made for more access
Sanctions	Violation may result in removal from base (implicit) Reported disembeddings: 1	not defined	Violation may result in termination of embedded status (explicit) Reported disembeddings: several	Violation may result in termination of embedded status (explicit) Reported disembeddings: unconfirmed	Violation may result in termination of embedded status (explicit) Reported disembeddings (Iraq): less than 6

9   Conclusions

The current embed policy has created a diversity dilemma. On the one hand, embedded journalism has resulted in more diversity in the type of journalists covering Afghanistan as a news topic, reflected by the amount of individual newspapers that make use of the MoD embed service. On the other hand, the embed policy has led to less diversity in terms of published content, illustrated by the predominantly military operational focus of Dutch newspaper coverage. Reporting on socio-political developments has remained at a low level as a consequence.

From the point of view of the Ministry of Defence, the embed policy is a success. Coverage by embedded journalists has put the mission in the spotlight, which was its primary aim. Journalists who have used the embed option are also generally satisfied with the opportunity offered to them. Neither journalists nor the MoD consider the compulsory review prior to publication as problematic in practice though most admit that the review is problematic given the fundamental principle of independent reporting. The main concern of embedded journalists has been the lack of freedom of movement which hampers an independent verification of the facts provided by military sources.

Based upon the findings of this report and taking account of international experiences, the following pages conclude with some considerations as to how Dutch embed policy could contribute to more diverse and substantive reporting.

The Dutch embed policy can contribute to more diverse and substantive reporting if ...:

1   The rules are clear
As Dutch embed policy remains implicit on several issues, in particular the definition of OPSEC, it leaves room for interpretation by individuals in the field. In practice, this has led to a disproportionate reliance on personal relationships and understanding between individual MoD staff members and a small group of journalists. The embed practice of the UK, US and Canada show that clear guidelines create a more transparent atmosphere and contributes to less dependence on personal networks to a more level playing field among journalists.

2   There is enough distance between MoD and the press
Most journalists feel comfortable working under embedded conditions. They rarely leave the camp unembedded and – for various reasons – keep the use of additional unembedded reporting to a minimum. Journalists rely on the military for practical convenience and use the MoD as their main source of information. International experience makes clear that journalists do not always resist the temptation of identifying with the military. Substantive reporting, however, benefits from journalists and the military keeping a professional distance.

3   Selection criteria are strict but open to all
The fact that any reporter can go embedded carries the risk of one-sidedness. Sizeable numbers of first-time embeds choose to 'visit the camp' rather than 'report the news'. This focus on episodic reporting results in an imbalance that does not do justice to the socio-political developments in Afghanistan. Other ISAF nations apply stricter criteria for embedded reporting, including minimum experience in conflict areas and adequate

training. Embed policy can contribute to substantive reporting if journalists have a minimum understanding of the larger context of conflict that they report on.

4 Journalists do not solely rely on MoD services

The embed package de-facto mitigates the financial constraints journalists face. However, even when journalists would be fully covered in terms of insurance, transport and equipment, the embed package remains attractive given the lack of personal safety in Afghanistan. The creation of a special fund, as suggested by Dutch Members of Parliament in late 2007, could cover the financial aspects for journalists to travel to conflict areas, but is unlikely to take away the general reluctance among journalists to take substantial personal risk. Rather, the press and its umbrella bodies can encourage greater commitment to train and equip reporters in order to cover conflict areas and can take the initiative for additional, collectively organised, funding.

5 Journalists have final responsibility for their personal safety

The Dutch embed policy does not offer sufficient clarity on whether journalists may leave the camp umembedded and who is responsible in such cases. The current embed regime leaves room for consultation, but the final decision rests with the individual commander. The inability to leave the camp may hamper the possibility of independent reporting and independent verification of events. It makes it difficult for journalists to combine embedded 'visits' with unembedded reporting. International comparison shows that other embed regimes allow the individual reporter more freedom to decide to leave the camp and put the responsibility for personal safety on the reporter.

6 The press combines embedded with unembedded reporting

The broader picture matters. Embedded reporting provides interesting insights in how the military can work under difficult circumstances but needs to be complemented by independent coverage of developments outside the military compound. A permanent correspondent is crucial in this regard, however might not always be possible. This is a common concern to journalists from all over the world. Newspapers can benefit from enlarging their core teams with local and other non-permanent staff members and from establishing local networks.

7 Journalists can decide when and what to write

Neither journalists nor the MoD consider the current review policy as problematic for their daily work. At the same time, most journalists acknowledge that compulsory review is against one of the most fundamental principles of journalism: independent reporting. Safeguarding operational security is crucial, but this can be done without a compulsory review scheme, for instance, through providing a list of topics that cannot be reported on. International experiences demonstrate that the type of incidents that the UK, the US and Canada faced without compulsory review are similar in severity to the ones that led to tensions between the Dutch MoD and embedded journalists.