

Are there any standards to measure effectiveness and efficiency of missions?

An interview with Col PJ Schaberg and Col JHM Stumpers (RNLA)

Pascal Brinkman, Robbin Koelewijn, Frank Pieterse, Arjen Schlepers and François Heek

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Introduction

The Dutch Government wishes to participate in peace enforcing missions and stabilizing missions. From the early 1990s onwards, the armed forces have taken part in several of such missions, examples of which are the execution of peace enforcing operations in the Gulf area and peacekeeping missions in former Yugoslavia, Cambodia, Iraq, Ethiopia and Eritrea. Generally, more than a thousand soldiers a year are being deployed. Currently, the armed forces participate in the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan. Amongst others, this protracted deployment raises questions as to these troops' performance, and whether there are any standards to measure effectiveness and efficiency during missions. We discussed these questions with Colonel Schaberg and Colonel Stumpers who are both working at Central Staff of the Dutch Ministry of Defense.

Colonel Schaberg, why do you think you and Colonel Stumpers are the best suited candidates for the interview?

“I am the Chief of staff of the Director of Operations. On behalf of the Chief of Defense, This Directorate is in charge of the execution of all missions and we control the performance of the various services' expeditionary units, such as Army-troops, Air Force squadrons and Navy ships. So, naturally, we are very interested in the effectiveness and efficiency of the military operation.”

Colonel Stumpers, you are also a specialist in this domain?

“I am Head of the Evaluations and Lessons Identified Division. As the name of this division suggests, we are trying to establish how well our troops are doing.”

Is there any policy to measure effectiveness and efficiency of peacekeeping operations?

“To measure efficiency or effectiveness, first, you’ll have to know what you want to achieve. Bearing in mind the lessons of the major peacekeeping operation in former Yugoslavia, in 2001, a framework to decide whether to participate in future missions was developed and agreed upon by the Dutch Parliament. By debating the criteria the framework puts forward, the Dutch Parliament now has a tool to help her to decide whether the armed forces should participate in a specific mission and what sort of military action would be required. However, the framework does not elaborate on the objectives the mission has to achieve. Therefore, when the Dutch Parliament decides to participate, military commanders have yet to be informed on the objectives they are expected to reach. In close cooperation between the military commander and representatives of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Development Cooperation, these objectives will be defined in the mission area. By conducting a sort of base-line measurement, the so-called “Check Zero”, the gap between actual reality in the mission area and the objectives is established. From this moment, the commander can figure out what lines of action to take. By comparing Check Zero to the stated objectives, the Division gets an idea about how and when to measure the operation’s effectiveness and efficiency. We are aware of the fact that you cannot measure everything, but we feel you do not actually have to do that. Theoretically, it does not sound difficult, but in reality it proves to be complicated to implement the lessons learned by measuring effectiveness and efficiency. The Americans, who have been testing the measurement of effectiveness and efficiency for more than twenty years now, found out that it could take a year before lessons learned were implemented.”

What factors are important when measuring the effectiveness and efficiency of missions?

“Efficiency is limited by the resources and the rules of engagement that are extended to the units on the ground. These factors are different for each mission. First, we have to define what we want to know and how we can express this the best way. This is a two-way lane: we have to consider the results the Government strives at, and also, we have to consider the kind of results the Chief of Defense would approve of. Furthermore, the objectives formulated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Defense are of a generic nature instead of being specific. This makes it hard to assess how much progress is being made. For example, training police officers in Uruzgan constitutes a high priority. It is unknown, however, how many policemen can be trained during the

mission. Should we aim for 500 or 1,000 police officers and, compared to other developments in the mission area, can these numbers be considered good results? Could we perhaps have trained more policemen if the Taliban were paying less money for joining them in fight? Not only will aspects such as these, influence results, but, at the same time, their influence is hard to predict, circumstances are fluctuating and this makes it very difficult to work with pre-set standards.”

Are there new developments in measuring effectiveness and efficiency, e.g. regarding Task Force Uruzgan?

“Yes, there are. Supported by a Dutch institute for applied Defense research, we have constructed an information system for missions, which is used in Afghanistan right now. The system collects information on the status and movement of combat units, persons, communities and all sorts of events. This information enables us to analyze threats, notice certain trends and to see whether our objectives are reached. Diagrams show us whether the situation is improved, has not changed or has deteriorated. To set up more standards is very difficult. At this moment, the Ministry of Defense is not able to evaluate itself. But there are positive developments.”

Are there new developments in the domain of effectiveness and efficiency?

“American military officers started a forum on the internet to share their experiences. In this way, lessons learned are implemented quickly, bypassing bureaucracy as much as possible. This forum looks a big success. The officers who started the forum have been sent to West Point to professionalize and expand their project to all branches of the Armed forces. The internet provides a very effective way to share this sort of information. Therefore, we are following this project closely and we are considering making use of it for our own operations.”