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## French Military Adaptation in the Afghan War: Looking Inward or Outward?

Olivier Schmitt

Center for War Studies, University of Southern Denmark (SDU), Denmark

### ABSTRACT

For some, a specific feature of the French armed forces' adaptation process in the adaptation process would be the capacity to look inward instead of outward in order to identify relevant solutions to tactical/doctrinal problems. This article questions such a narrative, and argues that the French armed forces are as quick as any to borrow from other countries' experiences. In order to do so, this article introduces the concept of 'selective emulation', and compares the French and German military adaptation processes in Afghanistan. The article argues that there is indeed something distinctive about French military adaptation, but it is not what the fiercest defenders of the French 'exceptionalism' usually account for.

**KEYWORDS** France; Germany; Military Adaptation; Afghanistan; Selective Emulation

### Introduction

Observers have long noted the French tendency selectively to use France's own history to justify current policies. For example, Beatrice Heuser observes: 'History is drawn upon to justify France's claim to leadership today, to legitimize her political system, to give her direction in her foreign and defence policies. The past is France's guide for the future'<sup>1</sup>

Similarly, a traditional narrative about the French way of warfare is the alleged capacity of the French armed forces to borrow from a rich military tradition of colonial warfare<sup>2</sup> in order to get a better sense of local dynamics and appropriate tactics in the case of interventions 'among the people'.<sup>3</sup> For example, military historian Jean-Charles Jauffret mentions the existence of a 'French touch', based on the accumulated and distilled knowledge of French

**CONTACT** Olivier Schmitt  [schmitt@sam.sdu.dk](mailto:schmitt@sam.sdu.dk)

<sup>1</sup>Beatrice Heuser, 'Historical Lessons and Discourse on Defence in France and Germany, 1945-1990', *Rethinking History* 2/2 (1998), 214. See also Ulrich Krotz, *History and Foreign Policy in France and Germany* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan 2015).

<sup>2</sup>On the ambiguities of the French colonial experience for modern counter-insurgency, see Etienne de Durand, 'Francs-Tireurs et Centurions. Les ambiguïtés de l'héritage contre-insurrectionnel français', *Focus Stratégique* 29 (March 2011).

<sup>3</sup>Rupert Smith, *The Utility of Force. The Art of War in the Modern World* (London: Allen Lane 2005).

colonial warfare, which he compares to an allegedly less historically-informed American approach in Afghanistan.<sup>4</sup> It is likely that different military traditions and experiences have shaped different military practices over time, for example in preferred tactics or procedures for operational planning:<sup>5</sup> scholars have long documented the existence of different 'ways of war' or 'strategic cultures', and how they are shaped by the specific historical experiences of a given political community. However, this observation of the existence of different military practices can also become a rhetorical tool for practitioners, boasting alleged expertise derived from unique and extensive experience.<sup>6</sup> In the French case, this tendency is translated into an argument about the added-value for the French forces of looking back, towards their own historical experience in order to derive meaningful lessons, instead of looking elsewhere and observing what their partners are doing. In short, the French forces are supposedly better off being introspective than conducting a benchmark analysis. For example, General Guy Hubin writes:

We [the French] still have a role to play, and it is not by limiting ourselves to an unproductive mimetism that we will play it. The theories and practices of our allies, interesting as they may be, are not always in line with our interests or methods, but mostly are out of touch with reality. Following such methods like sheep, just because of our membership to the Atlantic Alliance, is without interest.<sup>7</sup>

Similar discourses can often be heard within the armed forces,<sup>8</sup> and a split seems to be emerging between those who value the inspiration from allies, and those who are much more reluctant and fear a loss of doctrinal and tactical originality.<sup>9</sup> Yet, this fear confuses the descriptive and the normative: although initially warning against the careless observation of the allies' practices and advocating for the search of endogenous solutions within French military history, critics regularly slide towards a romanticised description of the French armed forces as having always been looking inward instead of outward in their search for solutions to tactical/operational problems. In this argument, French exceptionalism is presented as being the ability to find autonomous solutions. This line of thinking is often heard within the French armed forces, with an associated lamentation about the need to improve and augment the number of classes in military history through an officer's career.

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<sup>4</sup>Jean-Charles Jauffret, *La Guerre Inachevée, Afghanistan 2011-2013* (Paris: Autrement 2013).

<sup>5</sup>The French General Michel Yakovleff often uses the American tactics and procedures as a 'shadow case' highlighting the differences between the French approach in his book *Tactique Théorique*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Economica 2009).

<sup>6</sup>In the British case, see Andrew Mumford, *The Counter-Insurgency Myth: the British Experience of Irregular Warfare* (Abingdon: Routledge 2011).

<sup>7</sup>Guy Hubin, *La Guerre. Une Vision Française* (Paris: Economica 2012), 255.

<sup>8</sup>The author heard similar arguments in multiple interviews.

<sup>9</sup>Anne-Henry de Russé, 'France's Return into NATO. French Military Culture and Strategic Identity in Question', *Focus Stratégique* no. 22 bis, October 2010.

The website of the French Army centre for strategic studies (CESAT) perfectly embodies this tendency. One can read articles written by mid-career officers explaining that military history must be developed because it improves officers' understanding of the French military traditions, thus making them better soldiers;<sup>10</sup> tactical proficiency is based on the respect of national characteristics, and studying national military history is necessary for future performance;<sup>11</sup> or the French national character has been constant for more than a millennium, and studying it is necessary to prepare future successes and avoid blunders.<sup>12</sup> This argument is intriguing, as military practices are always influenced, shaped and transformed through the interactions with other military organisations and cultures, even in the French case.<sup>13</sup> Yet, its prevalence within the French armed forces makes it worth investigating, thus giving a closer look at the mechanisms by which the interactions with allies in a multinational context influence national military practices (themselves already shaped by culture and experience). By doing so, it becomes possible to establish what is exceptional, or not, in the French way of warfare, in particular in the case of a multinational operations such as the intervention in Afghanistan, and whether the French armed forces actually look more inwards than outward. It is then worthwhile to look at the French military adaptation during the Afghanistan conflict, as a recent example of a long intervention in a multinational context, triggering change in the armed forces.

Military adaptation is important, because the way military organisations tackle operational challenges influences battlefield outcomes. In that regard, much work has been conducted in studying the bottom-up adaptation process of units on the ground. While this vertical process of adaptation must be explored in its own terms, it can also be complemented with the study of the horizontal dimension of adaptation, which is emulation. Military organisations copy each other, and borrow from partners already-proven combat solutions, especially in the context of an alliance such as NATO.

This article explores this horizontal mechanism through the comparative study of the French and German military adaptation in Afghanistan. It shows that, in both cases, external solutions were sought from the US and the UK,

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<sup>10</sup>Vincent Bureau, 'Enseignement de l'histoire militaire: une renaissance essentielle', *Pensées mili-terre*, available at [http://www.penseemiliterre.fr/enseignement-de-l-histoire-militaire-une-renaissance-essentielle\\_2016275.html](http://www.penseemiliterre.fr/enseignement-de-l-histoire-militaire-une-renaissance-essentielle_2016275.html) (last accessed 22 April 2016).

<sup>11</sup>Destia, 'Facteur culturel et tactique à l'épreuve de l'histoire', *Pensées mili-terre*, available at [http://www.penseemiliterre.fr/facteur-culturel-et-tactique-a-l-epreuve-de-l-histoire\\_2022521.html](http://www.penseemiliterre.fr/facteur-culturel-et-tactique-a-l-epreuve-de-l-histoire_2022521.html) (last accessed 22 April 2016)

<sup>12</sup>Didier Ozanne, 'Bon sang ne saurait mentir, ou quelques traits persistants du caractère français à travers les âges', *Pensées mili-terre*, available at [http://www.penseemiliterre.fr/-bon-sang-ne-saurait-mentir-ou-quelques-traits-persistants-du-caractere-francais-a-travers-les-ages-militaires-\\_2014156.html](http://www.penseemiliterre.fr/-bon-sang-ne-saurait-mentir-ou-quelques-traits-persistants-du-caractere-francais-a-travers-les-ages-militaires-_2014156.html) (last accessed 22 April 2016).

<sup>13</sup>Walter Bruyère-Ostells and François Dumasy (eds), *Pratiques Militaires et Globalisation, XIXe-XXIe Siècles* (Paris: Bernard Giovanangeli éditeur 2014).

but that their implementation suffered differentiated fates depending on idiosyncratic factors such as historical experiences or material constraints. This process of importing parts of others' solutions is labelled here as 'selective emulation', and the comparative case study permits the identification of the variation in the intervening variables. This finding is important in studying the alleged 'French exceptionalism' in military affairs, as it shows that despite a rhetoric of finding indigenous solutions to operational problems, the French armed forces are quick to borrow from other armed forces, especially the UK and the US. There is indeed something distinctive about French military adaptation, but it is not what the fiercest defenders of the French 'exceptionalism' usually account for.

In the remainder of this article, I first lay out the conceptual framework for the article, explaining the process of 'selective emulation'. I then turn to an analysis of the French and German campaigns in Afghanistan, which serves as the background for this study. Explaining the French and German performances in detail is important, because the operational approach of the two countries considerably evolved over time and is probably less known, considering that the English-speaking literature has been dominated by accounts of the American and British experiences. The final two sections look at the changes in doctrines and materials and highlight the process of selective emulation.

### Military Change in a Multinational Context

The military campaign in Afghanistan has generated an important literature studying how and when military organisations change in order to tackle the challenges they were confronting on the ground, a process called 'adaptation'. A major milestone in this research was the publication in 2013 of *Military Adaptation in Afghanistan*, edited by Theo Farrell, Frans Osinga and James A. Russell. In the introduction to the edited volume, Farrell describes a number of drivers and shapers of military adaptation, including within the latter category domestic politics, alliance politics, strategic culture and civil-military relations (Table 1).

However, the understanding of the shaping influence of alliance politics is limited to strategic adaptation and leaves aside the study of operational adaptation. Instead, I argue that alliance politics also shapes military adaptation

**Table 1.** Drivers and shapers of Military adaptation (Farrell et al., 2013, 8).

| Drivers                | Shapers                  | Adaptations                              |
|------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| Operational Challenges | Domestic Politics        | <i>Strategic</i>                         |
|                        | Alliance Politics        | Strategy, force levels and resources     |
| New Technologies       | Strategic Culture        | <i>Operational</i>                       |
|                        | Civil-Military Relations | Doctrine, training, plans and operations |

through a mechanism of mimetic isomorphism, which predicts that ‘when organizations are faced with uncertainty, they may model themselves after other organizations, which provide to the borrowing organization practices that furnish a solution to the problem confronted’.<sup>14</sup> I suggest the following mechanism: taken aback by the evolution of the fighting in Afghanistan, France and Germany sought answers to the operational challenges they were facing within NATO (within the institutional structure of other member-states). This mimetic isomorphism occurs at different tempos, from 2008 for the French and from 2010 for the Germans. In both cases, a ‘transformative moment’ triggers such changes. Moreover, the mimetic isomorphism does not lead to a standardisation of the armed forces of both countries. Several intermediary variables must be taken into account, such as national strategic cultures, the internal political context or the existence of a strong national defence industry. In the end, we observe a mechanism of selective mimetic isomorphism (or selective emulation): the importation of external doctrinal and material solutions is filtered through a number of idiosyncratic national experiences.<sup>15</sup>

The comparison between France and Germany is interesting, because the two countries were facing similar conditions in Afghanistan (including similar combat conditions in 2010–2012), and deployed a comparable number of troops (4000 for France, 5000 for Germany). The similarity of the combat experiences permits explanation of variations in military adaptation by national-level variables and not by exogenous variables, thus showing how the mechanism of selective emulation operates in national contexts.

The indicators chosen for the comparison are the changes in doctrine and the changes in materials deployed on the ground. Doctrine is both a codification of tacit knowledge about the best way to wage war, and a guide for the practitioner. It is a tool of education, a tool of command, and a tool of change within the armed forces.<sup>16</sup> Changes in materials are also an important indicator, because they show what an army will deploy in combat. Combined, changes in doctrine and materials are a good indication of operational adaptation.

## French and German Performances in Afghanistan

### France

During the 2001–07 period, the French conventional contribution was limited to patrolling in Kabul and training the Afghan National Forces, while also providing occasional air support to Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). France was only the

<sup>14</sup>Terry Terriff, ‘U.S. Ideas and Military Change in NATO, 1989–1994’, in Theo Farrell and Terry Terriff (eds.), *The Sources of Military Change* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers 2002), 95.

<sup>15</sup>See also Olivier Schmitt, ‘Européanisation ou Oتانisation ? Le Royaume-Uni, la France et l’Allemagne en Afghanistan’, *Politique Européenne* 48 (2015), 150–77.

<sup>16</sup>Harald Høiback, ‘What is Doctrine ?’, *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 34/6 (2011) 879–900.

seventh contributor to the ISAF because Afghanistan was not seen as a high strategic priority. The main French asset was the group of Special Forces engaged in Operation Ares conducting high-value missions, but their limited number and the secrecy surrounding SF operations limited the overall value of the French contribution.

The French campaign plans fundamentally evolved with the election of Nicolas Sarkozy, who decided to increase the French contribution. France agreed to take responsibility of the Kapisa and Surobi regions north of Kabul, two small mountainous areas of critical strategic importance because of their proximity to both Kabul and the Salang highway. The provinces geographically command access to the Northern part of Afghanistan from Kabul, but also to Pakistan through Laghman province. Because of its strategic importance, the area had already been viciously fought over by the Mujahedeen during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979.<sup>17</sup> France deployed a brigade in the region, and thus came under the command of the Regional Command East (RCE). However, because France had earlier refused to participate in the Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) system, the division of labour between Europeans and Americans was turned on its head in Kapisa. Whereas most European countries ran their own PRT with American troops providing the main battlefield force, the opposite happened: an American PRT conducted civilian actions with French military forces conducting combat operations.<sup>18</sup>

The first French Task Force (codename 'Chimère') to operate in Kapisa was formed around the Paratroopers of the 8th *Régiment Parachutiste d'Infanterie de Marine*, led by Colonel Jacques Aragones, and started arriving in Kapisa in June 2008. The progressive build-up was terminated in July 2008. In total, the Task Force Chimère was a battalion-size unit (around 750 personnel), organised around three rifle companies. Colonel Aragones' campaign plans were organised around three main axes:

- Conducting daily patrols, in order to show the population that the coalition was in control
- Conducting large-scale operations, with US air support, in order to push back the insurgents from the valleys
- Conducting Civil-Military Cooperation (CIMIC) activities in support of the population.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>Guillaume Lasconjarias, 'Kapisa, Kalachnikov et Korrigan', *Cahiers de l'Irsem* no. 9 (Paris: Irsem, 2011).

<sup>18</sup>Joshua Foust, 'France in Kapisa. A Combined Approach to Statebuilding', in Nik Hynes and Péter Marton (eds.), *Statebuilding in Afghanistan: Multinational Contributions to Reconstruction* (Abingdon: Routledge 2012), 88–103.

<sup>19</sup>Afghanistan, Six mois en Kapisa. Témoignage du Colonel Arragones', Ministère de la Défense. Available at: <http://www.defense.gouv.fr/operations/afghanistan/actualites/12-03-09-afghanistan-6-mois-en-kapisa-interview-du-colonel-aragones> (last accessed 26 November 2013).

In fact, the approach of securing lines of communications and patrolling was familiar to the French troops who had been conducting peacekeeping operations in Kosovo and Africa. In retrospect, the difficulties of the Afghan terrain seem to have been underestimated. As a French officer explained:

we had missed the Iraq War, where the Americans and the British had learnt the hard way how modern conflicts could be extremely violent. There was also this myth of the 'French touch', of the French soldier who knows how to blend in the population. In a way, we still fantasized about a romanticized Lyautey. So we went in doing what we had learned to do during the 1990s in the Balkans: peacekeeping. We paid the bloodprice for not realizing early enough that Afghanistan would be nothing like what we had encountered so far.<sup>20</sup>

The transformative moment was the ambush in the Uzbeen valley on 19 August 2008, during which 10 soldiers were killed and 21 wounded. This loss, the most important for French forces since the attack on the Drakkar building in Lebanon in 1983, was a shock for both the French population and the armed forces, triggering a number of political and military responses. First, the Ministry of Defence drastically improved the quality of the equipment. But mostly, the armed forces acknowledged that the degree of violence encountered in Afghanistan was much higher than in the previous deployments they had been accustomed to. When Task Force Tiger took over from Chimère in November 2008, the mountain troops commanded by Colonel Nicolas Le Nen battled the Taliban and kept them at bay.<sup>21</sup> The elite troops were perfectly suited to the mountainous environment of Kapisa, and Le Nen conducted a large number of kinetic operations, specifically in order to secure the surroundings of the Alasay valley. The main operation, conducted in two days in March 2009 (operation 'Dinner Out') eliminated about half of the Taliban fighters controlling the Alasay valley (80 to 120 killed or wounded out of 200), which allowed the French to establish combat outposts in the populated areas, thus allowing the PRT to conduct development activities. However, the Task Force Tiger failed to secure the entire district, and several intelligence sources reported that the kinetic operations conducted by the mountain troops were antagonising the local population.<sup>22</sup>

Following the mountain troops, Task Force Korrigan took over in May 2009. Led by Colonel Francis Chanson, the task force adopted a wholly different approach to the operations, taking into account the limitations of purely kinetic actions. Chanson organised his action around three main lines of operations: 'first, attrition rather than destruction, second, deterrent

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<sup>20</sup>Interview with a French officer, Paris, 11 June 2011.

<sup>21</sup>Nicolas Le Nen, *Task Force Tiger. Journal de Marche d'un Chef de Corps Français en Afghanistan* (Paris: Economica 2010).

<sup>22</sup>Foust, 'France in Kapisa', 2012.



pressure in the margins rather than *quadrillage* of the area of operations, third, a spatial discrimination leading to a careful control of a few selected areas through persistent presence in the villages'.<sup>23</sup> Conceptually, controlling and securing the population were seen as the key factors of success. The following Task Forces in both Kapisa and Surobi then subsequently adopted this conceptual change.

In the fall of 2009, the French forces underwent a deep restructuring with the creation of the Task Force La Fayette. A brigade-size unit, TF La Fayette reunited under a single command the French forces in Surobi and Kapisa. The units deployed in these two areas were renamed (from 'Task Force' to 'Battlegroup'), and their structure changed. Each battalion-sized unit was expanded and included four companies instead of three. Moreover, artillery capability was deployed as well as light tanks, in order to raise the firepower of the French troops. In total, the TF La Fayette amounted to about 2800 troops. The mix of kinetic and population-centric actions that had characterised the action of the Task Force 'Korrigan' were carried on by other Battlegroups. For example, the legionnaires of the Battlegroup Altor, deployed in the Surobi district between December 2009 and May 2010 conducted major operations in order to keep the insurgents at bay (operations 'Septentrion' and 'Dragon') and aimed at securing the Tagab valley, while in the meantime politically engaging the population through the dissemination of combat outposts, the use of political officers and the mentoring of the Afghan National Army (ANA).

It seemed that the French efforts achieved noticeable success, despite the initial difficulties in cooperating with the American PRT.<sup>24</sup> Yet, two main factors limited the effectiveness of the French campaign. First, at the end of 2010, an 'operational pause' was imposed on the French troops by their political authorities following the capture of two French journalists by the Taliban in December 2009. It appears that the French intelligence services made contact with the captors at the end of 2010 and requested an operational pause in order to facilitate liberation of the hostages, which was finalised in June 2011. In the meantime, French forces were instructed to avoid large-scale operations and nearly stopped the patrols and the engagement with the local population. An angry French officer recalled: 'we were staying in our FOBs [Forward Operating Base], under the rockets the insurgents would fire at us on a daily basis, without being able to go out because of these two idiots [the two journalists]. What was the point of conducting so many operations since 2008, losing soldiers, if all this effort was ruined in six months?'<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>Stéphane Taillat, 'National Traditions and International Context: French Adaptation to Counterinsurgency in the 21st Century', *Security Challenges* 6/1 (2010), 93.

<sup>24</sup>Foust, 'France in Kapisa', 2012.

<sup>25</sup>Interview with a French officer, Paris, 28 March 2013.

Second, divergence of strategic priorities emerged between the TF La Fayette and the RC-E. While the French troops wanted to secure the gains obtained in the Tagab and Alasay Valleys, the American command of the RC-E wanted them to focus on securing the Main Supply Road (MSR) Vermont, an important logistical axis. French troops simply did not have enough resources to conduct both actions simultaneously. They eventually succeeded in securing MSR Vermont as requested, but this was at the expense of the security in the Kapisa and Surobi districts, where Taliban fighters could re-infiltrate.<sup>26</sup> Yet, the situation had improved, as Kapisa and Surobi were transferred to the Afghan forces in 2012, before the withdrawal of the French combat troops was completed. Nevertheless, these two districts are still violent, even by Afghan standards, and the French ultimately failed to secure Kapisa and Surobi.

### Germany

There have been three distinct phases in the engagement of the Bundeswehr in Afghanistan. The first phase was between the initial deployment to Kunduz and the summer of 2007. During this time, the Bundeswehr carried out reconstruction and stabilisation missions. The second phase, between late 2007 to late 2008 was a transition period during which mission requirements expanded due to the changing tactical situation, while the broader mandate of the contingent remained unchanged. The third phase, from 2009 until 2014, corresponds to the progressive alignment of the mandate and the counter-insurgency operations the Bundeswehr was involved in.<sup>27</sup>

Between 2003 and 2007, the Bundeswehr faced a largely stable environment. The Northern parts of Afghanistan in which the Bundeswehr was deployed had been known for their opposition to the Taliban, and the predominantly Uzbek and Tajik population had no interest in its return. In fact, the main threat for the German forces came from the clashes between warlords and their armed groups, two of which (commanded respectively by Rashid Dostum and Mohammed Atta) were engaged in clashes in 2003.<sup>28</sup> The second potentially problematic issue was the fact that the North had traditionally been an area of poppy cultivation. Yet, despite these two

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<sup>26</sup>Stéphane Taillat and Florent de Saint Victor, 'Has France Lost Afghanistan?', *Alliance Géostratégique*, 21 June 2012.

<sup>27</sup>Christoph Zürcher, 'Die Bundeswehr in Afghanistan (ISAF)', in Hans J. Gießmann and Armin Wagner (eds), *Armee im Einsatz. Grundlagen, Strategien und Ergebnisse einer Beteiligung der Bundeswehr* (Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlag 2009), 328–39; Winfried Nachtwei, 'Der Afghanistaneinsatz der Bundeswehr – Von der Friedenssicherung zur Aufständebekämpfung' in Anja Seiffert, Phil C. Langer and Carsten Pietsch (eds), *Der Einsatz der Bundeswehr in Afghanistan. Sozial- und Politikwissenschaftliche Perspektiven* (Berlin: Springer Verlag 2012), 33–48.

<sup>28</sup>Antonio Giustozzi and Christoph Reuter, 'The Northern Front, the Afghan Insurgency Spreading Beyond the Pashtuns', *Afghan Analyst Network*, Briefing Paper No. 3, 2010.

potentially dangerous issues, the security situation remained stable. The most dangerous situations the German soldiers faced were the management of drug-related criminal activities. This is fortunate, because the Kunduz PRT was seriously under-resourced in terms of military presence, with only 90 infantry soldiers- not enough to patrol the entire province. The PRT also lacked critical capabilities, such as armoured vehicles, aerial reconnaissance, air mobility and heavy weapons.<sup>29</sup>

The mandate itself was fairly limited. The Bundeswehr was tasked with establishing a secure environment for Afghan government officials and the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA); engaging in the demobilisation, disarmament and reintegration (DDR) of the local militias; and supporting the reform of the ANSF. There was a political reason for this restraint: the government did not want the German mission to be associated with the use of military force: 'the intention was to keep the visible military presence "as limited as possible" and emphasize Germany's political, economic and social engagement, as specified in the government's *Afghanistan-Konzept* of 2003'.<sup>30</sup> This preference for a limited military engagement was translated in the rules of engagement (RoEs) and the caveats imposed on the German military action. Most notably, German forces were tied to the northern part of Afghanistan, and thus could not be redeployed to support the allies' military actions in other parts of the country. German troops could use force only in self-defence and after repeated warnings to the enemy; they were not allowed to pursue retreating adversaries; and, as of 2006, they could only patrol in armoured vehicles.<sup>31</sup> This posture attracted harsh criticism, especially from the allies deployed in Southern parts of Afghanistan such as the United Kingdom and Canada, but the German government successfully resisted the pressures to increase its contribution and, considering the relatively stable situation in the German sector, could easily portray a flattering picture of the differences of approach between the German troops focused on reconstruction and stability and the 'trigger-happy' British and American forces.

This quiet phase was disrupted in May 2007, however, when a suicide attack on the Kunduz market killed three German soldiers. There was a brutal realisation in German political-military circles that the security situation had suddenly deteriorated, and the nature of the mission was about to change.<sup>32</sup> During 2006

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<sup>29</sup>Sascha Lange, 'Die Bundeswehr in Afghanistan: Personal und technische Ausstattung in der Einsatzrealität', *SWP-Studie* 9, March 2008.

<sup>30</sup>Timo Behr, 'Germany and Regional Command-North: ISAF's Weakest Link?', in Hynek and Marton (eds), *Statebuilding in Afghanistan*, 50.

<sup>31</sup>Stephen M. Saideman and David P. Auerswald, 'Comparing Caveats: Understanding the Sources of National Restrictions upon NATO's Mission in Afghanistan', *International Studies Quarterly* 56/1 (2012), 67–84.

<sup>32</sup>The author was working in the French military mission in Berlin at the time, and recalls a large number of meetings with German colleagues during which it was clearly expressed that the Kunduz market attack was a turning point for the German involvement.

and the beginning of 2007, the Taliban managed to re-infiltrate the North using Pashtun refugees as a cover. They gradually gained control of the small Pashtun areas in the northern provinces, and used them as bases of operation. The new operational reality suddenly became the increased attacks on the coalition troops, to which the Germans were slow to adapt. The initial reaction was to reduce the Bundeswehr patrols and concentrate on force protection. The result was to further increase the physical distance between the German forces and the population.<sup>33</sup> Facing an increase of insurgent activities, German commanders devised a number of 'clear-hold-build' operations in order to regain momentum. In the fall of 2007, the Bundeswehr conducted Operations Harekate Yolo I and II in order to drive the Taliban out of Badakhshan and Faryab provinces.<sup>34</sup> Yet, the operational role of the German forces was extremely limited, as they only provided support to the combat troops furnished by the Norwegian forces and the ANA. In 2007–08, the Bundeswehr remained limited to a support role. Yet, there was a growing gap between the actual mandate and the mission requirements, which called for an increasingly aggressive force posture. The rules of engagement were increasingly out of tune with the events on the ground. For example, during Operation Harekate Yolo II, the German helicopters were still not authorised to conduct MedEvac nighttime operations, which forced the operations to stop at dusk, allowing the Taliban forces to disperse.<sup>35</sup> Thus, the 2007–08 period is marked by a gap between the political constraints imposed by Berlin (where political leaders wanted to maintain the image of a Bundeswehr mission primarily focused on reconstruction and development) and the reality of the changing military situation on the ground.

The German approach to the Afghanistan mission changed in 2009, with policy-makers realising that the aforementioned gap between the mission and the mandate had to be bridged. The mandates started to evolve at the end of 2008, when the Bundeswehr no longer had to *protect* the UNAMA and the Afghan government, but had to *support* them in establishing a secure environment. In 2010, the mandate was further extended to include the protection of the civilian population. This evolution had direct consequences for the German campaign plans on the ground: 'these two adjustments provided German forces with considerably greater leeway to use force in a proactive manner in fulfilment of their mission requirements'.<sup>36</sup> The rules of engagement were also considerably relaxed, and allowed German soldiers to use force pre-emptively and pursue the enemy, eased the restrictions on the use of heavy weapons and gave more freedom to local commanders. This change had immediate consequences. By May 2009,

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<sup>33</sup>Zürcher, 'Die Bundeswehr in Afghanistan', 328–39.

<sup>34</sup>Timo Noetzel and Thomas Rid, 'Germany's Options in Afghanistan', *Survival* 51/5 (2009), 71–90.

<sup>35</sup>Jerome Starkey, 'For us ze War is over by Tea Time, Ja', *Sunday Times*, 18 November 2008.

<sup>36</sup>Behr, 'Germany and Regional Command', 53.

German forces were involved in the active pursuit of insurgents for the first time. In July 2009, the first German ground offensive since the Second World War (Operation Oqab) took place and involved 300 German and 800 Afghan soldiers.<sup>37</sup> Operation Oqab was the first German attempt to reclaim the strategic initiative from the insurgents.

In 2009 and 2010, Germany conducted a number of offensive operations aimed at establishing FOBs that could be handed over to the ANA. These various operations (Operation Sahda EhlM, Operations Taohid I and II, Operation Gala-e-Gorg and Operation Halmazag) resembled the major COIN-type operations that were conducted in the South by other countries, involving close air support, artillery and light armoured tanks.<sup>38</sup> This evolution towards a more assertive posture was facilitated by the arrival of American troops in Northern Afghanistan in 2009, which also focused on fighting the Taliban.

It is in this context that the infamous “Kunduz incident” occurred. In September 2009, a German commander, Colonel Klein, called in an airstrike based on one single HUMINT (human intelligence) source, which led to the deaths of 142, of which at least 100 were Afghan civilians, including children.<sup>39</sup> While German politicians initially tried to justify Colonel Klein’s actions, a number of revelations in the press and allegations of a cover-up led to the resignations of Franz-Joseph Jung (defence minister at the time of the incident), Peter Wichert (deputy defence minister) and Wolfgang Schneiderhan (chief of the joint staff).

The Kunduz airstrike did not stop the process of military adaptation to the situation on the ground. In fact, the government reacted in granting local commanders a greater say in determining the shape of the German mission. The “Kunduz incident” revealed a number of flaws in the German conduct of operations, in particular the violation of ISAF rules of engagement. However, the German performance cannot be reduced to this event. It appears that the German conduct of operations at the tactical level strongly improved over time to match the level of skills showcased by more experienced nations. For example, the first staff officer to receive the newly created (or more accurately re-created) German Cross of Bravery, Lieutenant-Colonel Sembritzki, was awarded this honour after he successfully managed to defend a German outpost outnumbered by insurgents, regrouping his soldiers, organising the defence and counter-attacking.<sup>40</sup> This type of actions is proof of a real tactical

<sup>37</sup>Timo Behr, ‘Germany’, in Toby Archer (ed.), *Afghanistan’s Hard Summer: the Impact on European Troop Contributing Nations*, UPI Briefing Paper 43, September 2009.

<sup>38</sup>Hans-Christoph Grohman, Thorsten Kasper and Jan Hecht, ‘Der Einsatz der QRF3 in Afghanistan vom 14.04 bis 18.10.2009’, *Der Panzergrenadier* 26/09 (2009) 35–38.

<sup>39</sup>Constantin Schüßler and Yee-Kuan Heng, ‘The Bundeswehr and the Kunduz Air Strike 4 September 2009: Germany’s Post-Heroic Moment?’, *European Security* 22/3 (2013), 355–75.

<sup>40</sup>Thomas Rid and Martin Zapfe, ‘Mission Command Without a Mission: German Military Adaptation in Afghanistan’, in Theo Farrell, Frans Osinga and James A. Russell (eds), *Military Adaptation in Afghanistan* (Stanford: Stanford University Press 2013), 207.

improvement for the Bundeswehr after the political-strategic level had been willing to loosen the rules of engagement. In 2010, Germany initiated a strategy of progressive transfer of responsibility to the Afghan forces. German forces were reorganised with the addition of two 700-strong battalions operating with the Afghan forces. By 2013, the Germans had begun to hand over the FOBs to the Afghan National Security Forces, and the northern districts were considered less violent than other regions of Afghanistan. However, a debate emerged in Germany about the overall conduct of the campaign after a report released by the Afghan Analyst Network in November 2013 revealed that by partnering with the local power brokers, the Germans had actually reinforced the local distribution of power in favour of known warlords.<sup>41</sup> While the debate was heated in the German press, the problem is similar throughout Afghanistan.

### The Evolution of Counter-Insurgency Doctrines

Following the difficult experience in Iraq, the US Army and the US Marines produced a new counter-insurgency doctrine that was trying to encapsulate and institutionalise the lessons learned from the difficult fights of 2004 and 2005. The now-famous FM 3-24 that emerged as a result focused on the links between the protection of local populations and the legitimacy of counterinsurgents, thus acknowledging the fundamental political character of an insurgency. The doctrine comprised five elements:

- First and foremost, it acknowledged that an insurgency is a specific type of conflict, whose characteristics and dynamics differ from those of conventional operations.
- Hence, the source of success in any counter-insurgency campaign does not primarily depend on the effectiveness of military operations as such, but lies in the capacity of military operations to contribute to the establishment of a legitimate political context favouring the ruling government (delegitimising the insurgents).
- The missions undertaken by the armed forces are consequently varied and numerous. In addition to fighting the insurgents, armed forces can also engage in reconstruction work and local development, in partnership with civilian organisations (governmental or non-governmental).
- The use of force must be limited, in order to avoid alienating local populations.
- The length of a counter-insurgency campaign is always long.

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<sup>41</sup>Philipp Münch, 'Local Afghan Power Structures and the International Military Intervention', *AAN Report*, 12 November 2013; Böge, Friederike, 'Die Bundeswehr als Komplize der herrschenden Klasse?', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 12 November 2013.

The adoption of FM 3-24, which introduced important conceptual innovations while codifying a number of incremental adaptations and new practices already adopted and enforced by US troops on the ground,<sup>42</sup> is considered a turning point for the US campaign in Iraq.

NATO was quickly interested in this doctrinal innovation, in particular following the degradation of the military situation in Afghanistan between 2006 and 2008. Two American officers based at the Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers in Europe (SHAPE) initiated the first studies aimed at establishing a NATO doctrine for counter-insurgency in 2008. The doctrinal document, known as AJP 3.4.4 (Allied Joint Doctrine for Counterinsurgency) was circulated in 2009 among member-states, and showcased the American influence by identifying the same five key points as the FM 3-24.<sup>43</sup> In the meantime, member-states also began to revise their own COIN doctrines.

When the French armed forces increased their commitment to the Afghan campaign by deploying troops to the Kapisa and Surobi regions in 2008, their doctrine was still marked by peacekeeping experiences in the Balkans in the 1990s, and emphasised the 'control of violence'. However, the change in military practices that followed the Uzbeen ambush was accompanied by a renewal in doctrinal thinking. The Army doctrinal research centre (CDEF by the French acronym) published a new doctrinal document in 2009, avoiding the term 'counter-insurgency' and preferring the name 'counter-rebellion'. In the document, 'rebellion' is understood as a generic name for a wide range of tactical modes of actions, such as guerrillas and terrorism. To justify the use of the term 'rebellion', the authors explained that the word 'insurgency' was equivalent to the 'levée en masse' which, in the French political mythology, was a reference to the battles of revolutionary France against monarchist Europe. It would then have been improper to use a positively connoted word to describe enemy activities.<sup>44</sup> The document itself cautiously borrows from the Algerian war a number of tactical principles and tactical actions, without mentioning the larger political context of the conflict. The document therefore cannot be considered the equivalent of FM 3-24, since the latter does not shy away from making operational and strategic recommendations while the French document, aware of the touchiness of dealing with the Algerian war, only uses it as a source of tactical lessons.

A first change occurred with the publication, by three French officers with command experiences in Kapisa, of a book using the term 'counter-insurgency'

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<sup>42</sup>Chad C. Serena, *A Revolution in Military Adaptation* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press 2011); Russel, James A., *Innovation, Transformation and War: Counterinsurgency Operations in Anbar and Ninewa Provinces, Iraq, 2005-2007* (Stanford: Stanford University Press 2011).

<sup>43</sup>Olof Kronvall and Petersson Magnus (2011), 'US and NATO COIN Doctrine. Logic, Content and Implications', paper presented at *International Studies Association* annual meeting, Montréal.

<sup>44</sup>Interviews in Paris, June 2012.

in early 2010.<sup>45</sup> The book itself is a good summary of the international debates on COIN that followed the publication of the FM 3-24, which is a clear source of inspiration. Although it is not an official publication, the book was widely circulated and commented on in military circles and in the professional literature. These three officers, having been exposed to international literature on the topic during their time in Afghanistan, served as bridge-builders and facilitated the importation of the main themes and concepts from FM 3-24.

Counter-insurgency was finally integrated in the French doctrine at the end of 2010, with the publication by the Joint Doctrinal Centre (CICDE) of a 'Joint Doctrine on Counter-Insurgency'. While the army doctrinal centre was reluctant to use the term 'insurgency', the Joint Doctrinal Centre had no such hesitations, and clearly stated that the French doctrine is 'the national complement to the NATO doctrine of counter-insurgency AJP 3.4.4'. Exemplifying this inscription within the international vulgate on COIN, the definition of counter-insurgency is directly borrowed from the NATO doctrine. Some differences remain nonetheless, and the French doctrine is not a copy-paste from the NATO doctrine. For example, the French document is more cautious than the NATO one on the issue of 'winning the hearts and minds', and the nature of the operations designed to secure the population. For the French armed forces, counter-insurgency is one of the various ways to conduct a stabilisation campaign, and is not a specific way of warfare. The aim is then to disaggregate the insurgency and deprive it of popular support as part of a wider manoeuvre involving both civilian and military elements. The concept is more akin to the American 'Clear-Hold-Build' than to the British 'Shape-Secure-Develop'.

The French doctrinal adaptation is then the result of a selective importation of the NATO doctrine of counter-insurgency, which is done in steps and through a gradual exposure to international experiences. The Algerian war serves as a second intellectual source mitigating the full importation of the NATO doctrine. As such, the influence of the NATO doctrine is exerted on the conceptualisation of counter-insurgency and operational level activities, while the Algerian war serves as a resource for tactical lessons but without any further thinking on the operational-strategic consequences of such actions, due to the sensitivity of the topic within the French military and French society at large.

In Germany, the doctrinal evolution is set against the backdrop of the reticence of the population and most civilian elites towards the use of armed force.<sup>46</sup> In that regard, German policy-makers were in the difficult

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<sup>45</sup>Hervé De Courrège, Emmanuel Germain and Nicolas Le Nen, *Principes de Contre-Insurrection* (Paris: Economica 2010).

<sup>46</sup>John S. Duffield, *World Power Forsaken: Political Culture, International Institutions and German Security Policy after Unification* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press 1998); Kerry Longhurst, *Germany and the Use of Force* (Manchester: Manchester University Press 2004); Olivier Schmitt 'Strategic Users of Culture. German Decisions for Military Action', *Contemporary Security Policy* 33/1 (2012), 59–81.



situation of having since 2001 presented the intervention in Afghanistan as similar to the peacekeeping missions in the Balkans, although the operational reality was an increase in violence. The adaptation of the political discourse to the actual experience of German soldiers was slow, German policy-makers being reluctant to use a vocabulary ('war', 'killed in action', etc.) routinely employed in other countries.<sup>47</sup>

In that regard, the adoption of COIN by NATO and the US military was a conceptual challenge for German policy-makers, as the word *Aufstandsbekämpfung* (German for COIN) had become associated with the combat operations in Ukraine during the Second World War. Although the term was invented before the Second World War, it has become a potent myth that it was a Nazi term,<sup>48</sup> which created political difficulties. As a civil servant from the German MoD explained:

All of our partners had, as western democracies, counterinsurgencies in their history, the British in Kenya, the Dutch in Indonesia, the French in Algeria, and so on and this it is easier for them to deal with counterinsurgencies today, politically, socially, culturally. Not so for us; our experiences with insurgencies are mostly based on the partisan combat of the Second World War with which we by no means want to associate again.<sup>49</sup>

This uneasiness is obvious when looking at the doctrinal documents produced by the *Bundeswehr*. Since 2005, the German army had codified a concept of operations against irregular forces, which was a compilation of tactical good practices lacking the socio-economic analysis of an insurgency, as it exists in the FM 3-24. Influenced by the 'COIN turn' occurring under US leadership, the German army drafted in 2009 a document originally entitled 'Initial conceptual thinking on counter-insurgency', which was eventually renamed 'Initial thinking on the military contribution to the establishment of security and public order in crisis regions' after a long and painful inter-ministerial debate, while still using the acronym 'COIN' (in English) in the text itself. The document does not discuss the issue of civil-military relations in COIN, and is not even compulsory. However, it is the first import of the 'clear-hold-build' vocabulary derived from the FM 3-24.

As of 2011, Germany still did not have any COIN doctrine comparable to those of France, the United Kingdom or the United States, leading the German ministry of defence to issue a call for proposals, and awarding a contract to Kiel University. Under the leadership of Professor Joachim Krause, four workshops were organised with John

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<sup>47</sup>Carolin Hilpert, *Strategic Cultural Change and the Challenge for Security Policy. Germany and the Bundeswehr's Deployment to Afghanistan* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan 2014).

<sup>48</sup>The author is grateful to a reviewer for this remark.

<sup>49</sup>Hilpert, *Strategic Cultural Change*, 142.

Nagl, fellow of the Center for a New American Security and co-author of the FM 3-24, as a special advisor. The final report, published in 2013, is an analysis of the lessons learned in Afghanistan and of the NATO doctrine of COIN, as well as a series of proposed institutional reforms designed to increase the Bundeswehr's operational effectiveness. The report is, unsurprisingly, heavily influenced by the NATO doctrine and FM 3-24: it puts the civilian population at the heart of the main effort and calls for cooperation and the design of mutually reinforcing activities between civilian help and the military operations. The report is then the first to go beyond purely tactical concerns, and adopts the same conclusions as the American, British, French and NATO doctrines. The implementation of the recommendations is nevertheless difficult, in particular because of the resistance of the German development agency GIZ (*Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit*) that fears being instrumentalised and views its role as a neutral technical help, rather than as the civilian component of a civil-military campaign. To this day, the report's conclusions have not been implemented in a new German doctrine.

There is, then, in Germany a temptation to adopt a COIN doctrine, which is frustrated by a cultural reluctance to use the term and a bureaucratic resistance of the development agency. It is nevertheless interesting to observe that the doctrinal thinking on this topic is directly imported from the US and NATO experience, in particular through the participation of key individuals serving as bridge-builders such as John Nagl.

For both France and Germany, NATO is then a major source of inspiration in the development of a new COIN doctrine, but we can observe a selective importation due to the weight of national experiences of COIN.

## Changes in Equipment

Following the Uzbek ambush, Afghanistan became the operational priority for French forces, a theatre of operations in which new materials were introduced. The French APC, (called VAB for *Véhicule de l'Avant Blindé*) was equipped with a tele-operated turret in 2009 in order to protect the gunner, who could stay inside the vehicle. This upgrade of a fighting vehicle first introduced in 1976 is the direct consequence of the observation of the British and American experiences in Iraq. The arrival of the new helicopters, *Tigre*, in 2009 – the result of a joint Franco-German programme launched in 1984 – also gave more flexibility to the commanders on the ground, thanks to the firepower and endurance of the system.<sup>50</sup> The decision to engage the

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<sup>50</sup>Brice Erbland, *Dans les Griffes du Tigre. Libye-Afghanistan 2011* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres 2013).

helicopters was taken after analysing the role of Close Air Support in protecting the British outpost of Musah Qaleh in 2006, which was almost overrun by insurgents in 2006.

France also conducted a number of off-the-shelf acquisitions, equipping its forces with proven technologies available on the international market. One-hundred and sixteen types of equipment were purchased between 2008 and 2011, for a total of €31 million. Some of these funds were used to purchase equipment devoted to personal protection, such as new flak jackets and night-vision goggles similar to those used by American forces. However, the most noticeable evolution was the acquisition of anti-IEDs vehicles from the United States. France purchased five *Buffalo*-type MRAP (mine-resistant ambush protected) vehicles from the US Marines in 2008, as the historical truck manufacturer of the French army (Renault Truck Défense) was unable to furnish MRAP vehicles in time for operations requiring force protection. The system was purchased because French analysts considered it effective after evaluating its use by the American forces.<sup>51</sup> Of course, France developed its own systems. But it is striking to observe that the main anti-IED system adopted by the French forces comes from the United States, and that the employment of major national weapon systems such as the *Tigre* helicopter or the VAB is predicated on the observation of the British experience. These two examples illustrate how the French forces combine the existence of major national programmes of defence procurement with the observation and importation of solutions from other NATO members.

The adoption of new materiel by the German forces was more complicated, as it was constrained by a political speech emphasising 'stabilisation' and downplaying any combat activity. Until 2011, German leaders refused to acknowledge the degradation of the situation on the ground. Because they were trapped in the stabilisation narrative, the answers to the growing difficulties on the ground were found in the augmentation of force protection, instead of battling the insurgents.<sup>52</sup> This initial reaction of avoiding contact with the local population delayed the process of adopting counter-IED systems. Only in 2009 did the Bundeswehr acknowledge the capability gap created by the absence of counter-IED systems comparable with those already adopted by other NATO countries. A comparative study was conducted and, although the American system was identified as the most efficient, it was not introduced. The official reason was the difficulty in fitting the system to German vehicles. However, according to a German official, 'acquiring an American anti-IED system was inconvenient for German politicians, who were at the same time criticising the allegedly counter-

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<sup>51</sup>Camille Sicourmat, 'L'Adaptation des Forces Terrestres au Théâtre Afghan, 2008-2011', in Camille Sicourmat and Michel Goya (eds), *L'Académie de la Boue. Regards Croisés sur l'Apprentissage des Forces Armées* (Paris: Irsem 2011), 54.

<sup>52</sup>Rid and Zapfe, 'Mission Command Without a Mission'.

productive American efforts in the Southern and Eastern parts of Afghanistan. They could not publicly admit that we had to do like the United States, because we were facing a similar situation'.<sup>53</sup> When the official narrative of stabilisation collapsed in 2011 because of the clear degradation of the situation on the ground, the lack of relevant equipment was criticised. The MP Helmut Könighaus even mentioned a 'drama' of defence equipment. This change in political discourse forced the Bundeswehr to quickly identify and adopt a counter-IED technology in order to replace the previously declined American solution. The Swiss *Mini Minewolf* technology was then adopted and distributed at the end of 2011. We observe here again a selective emulation, with the research and identification of a tested and approved technology within NATO, whose adoption is delayed because of the specificities of the German political context.

The second evolution is related to the German decision to acquire armed drones, or UCAVs (unmanned combat air vehicles). Following the 1999 intervention in Kosovo, the Bundeswehr had already decided to acquire a number of observation drones. However, the Germans realised the tactical utility of armed drones through observing the use of armed drones by the British and Americans. As the German state secretary for defence Rüdiger Wolf explains: 'The experiences of our partners have demonstrated the value of armed drones in combatting [asymmetric] threats – especially because of their high availability and the low risks that own forces are occurring by using them. Hence, our Afghanistan experience had a practical impact on our general assessment of UCAVs'.<sup>54</sup> Here again, the acquisition decision is heavily influenced by the German political context.

The use of armed drones by the Bush and Obama administration largely shaped a popular opinion of drones as terror instruments, conducting illegal missions and creating heavy civilian casualties. As such, a public debate emerged in Germany regarding the opportunity to acquire armed drones, with the German Minister of Defence, De Maizière, declaring in 2012 that drones were essentially planes flown from a distance, and since planes were armed, there were no reasons why drones could not be armed too. The chief of staff of the German air force, General Müllner, also explained that reconnaissance drones were already in use in Afghanistan in order to discover enemy positions, and that it would make no sense to attack such positions with planes for 'political reasons' while they could be directly attacked with the drones themselves. Influential German decision-makers are set on the idea of acquiring armed drones because of their tactical and operational efficiency at the hands of British and American operators. Yet, the German public opinion needs more convincing and, if the acquisition of MALE

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<sup>53</sup>Interview in Berlin.

<sup>54</sup>Hilpert, *Strategic Cultural Change*, 152.

(Medium Altitude Long Endurance) drones is already decided, it remains to be seen whether they will be armed or not, a consequence of the political debate that emerged in 2012–13.

Comparing the French and German experiences, we observe that France must reconcile the existence of major national programmes with operational constraints and import tactical solutions from the British or the Americans, or even buy new materials off the shelf when a national solution is not available. German policy-makers are less constrained by the national defence industry than by a political context in which the German population is reluctant towards the use of force or the Afghanistan mission: there is then a dynamic of emulation filtered by the political context.

## Conclusion

This article's goal was twofold. First, it introduced the concept of 'selective emulation' to explain the patterns of military change within states fighting in the framework of a multinational intervention. Second, it aimed to look at whether there was something 'exceptional' about French military adaptation, in particular in the light of some French experts' claims that France is good at looking at its own historical experience but not at other countries.

In both cases, we can observe a similar process of selective emulation. In both France and Germany, the importation of doctrinal solutions was filtered by national historical experiences with COIN. Regarding the materials, the process of French emulation was filtered by the importance of the national industrial base, while the German process was filtered by a strategic culture reluctant to the use of force (Table 2).

As such, there is a form of exceptionality of French military adaptation, based on a combination of historical experiences and the existence of a strong defence industry. But these two elements are intervening variables within a larger framework of selective emulation. The French armed forces are as quick as others to borrow from other countries what seems to be an efficient solution to a tactical/doctrinal problem, especially in the context of a multinational military intervention whose institutional framework facilitates such exchanges.

The result should not be surprising: as military organisations should be aiming at efficiency in order to achieve victory on the battlefield, sometimes

**Table 2.** Filters to emulation.

|           | France  | Germany   |
|-----------|---|---|
| Doctrine  | National historical experience of COIN (Algeria)                                    | National historical experience of COIN (Ukraine)      |
| Materials | Major procurements programmes and national industry constraining available options. | Strategic culture reluctant towards the use of force. |

efficiency means importing already-tested solutions. This observation might be less romantic than the myth that some in the French defence community (and outside) like to tell of the French armed forces having something special when it comes to military adaptation for war amongst the people, something of a 'French touch' or 'French flair'. But this might instead be the upside of belonging to an alliance: the experience of one benefits the others. In that regard, the French armed forces are no exception.

## Notes on contributor

*Olivier Schmitt* is an Associate Professor of political science at the Center for War Studies, University of Southern Denmark (SDU), Denmark.

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