Doing one's job: Translating politics into military practice in the Norwegian mentoring mission to Iraq[1]

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Abstract

This article investigates how political ambitions are translated into military practice in the small Norwegian contribution to the International Coalition against ISIL in Iraq from 2017 to 2019. The most important Norwegian political aims do not correspond clearly to a military objective, and thus military practice must take on a symbolic function. Understanding the processes of translation that this requires and the social complexity of operating with such aims with partners and Coalition forces is not straight-forward. The analysis of my interviews with commanders and seconds-in-command concludes by suggesting that such missions may require small-state militaries like the Norwegian to reconceive what constitutes core military practices, and that practice theory or the wider disciplines of sociology and anthropology may inform such a reconception.

Keywords: security force assistance, advise and assist, Global Coalition against ISIL, practice theory, military practice, military operations

Author bio

After graduating from the University of Oslo in 1998, Kjetil Enstad worked as a journalist and editor until he received a Ph.D. scholarship at the University of Oslo in 2005. He finished his Ph.D. on the novels of South-African author J.M. Coetzee in 2008. Since then he has been

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Carl von Clausewitz famously stated that "war is not merely an act of policy but a true political instrument, a continuation of political intercourse, carried on with other means."[2] In the wars of his time, viz. the campaigns of Frederick the Great and Napoleon in particular, the political interests at stake were quite different from those of our present-day international coalition operations. Modern-day stabilization operations are carried out by coalitions from a range of different countries with varying degrees of commitment and a host of motives and caveats. They have another kind of complexity from the military operations with which Clausewitz was concerned. They are, in the words of Emile Simpson, "highly politicised, kaleidoscopic conflict environments."[3]

Yet, Clausewitz had a keen eye for the nuances of the "political intercourse" of war. While he maintains, in line with his famous maxim, quoted above, that "[t]he political object will […] determine both the military objective to be reached and the amount of effort it requires," he recognizes that "[t]he political object cannot […] *in itself* provide the standard of measurement."[4] To determine the appropriate military action, military leaders need to interpret what the political object means in military terms. Clausewitz continues:

> Sometimes the *political and military objective is the same* – for example, the conquest of a province. In other cases the political object will not provide a suitable military objective. In that event, another military objective must be adopted that will serve the political purpose and symbolize it in the peace negotiations.[5]

The international military intervention against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) has an overarching political objective that corresponds to a military objective: to defeat ISIL. The statement by the Coalition partners, of whom Norway is one, issued on 3 December 2014, identified wider political aims, such as delegitimization through exposure of ISIL's "true nature" and "addressing associated humanitarian relief and crises."[6] However, on the face of it the military objective seems clear.

Norway may, in the greater scheme of things, play an insignificant role through its small advise-and-assist mission under US command to the Anbar region in Iraq. However, the Norwegian political interests are far-reaching. For Norway, the contribution to the US-led Coalition is first and foremost part of a central defense and foreign-affairs strategy aimed at bolstering transatlantic and NATO relations to ensure US and NATO support should there ever be a threat to Norwegian territory. There is only a symbolic and somewhat tenuous relation between such a political aim and the military practice that is meant to achieve it.

This article examines how such Norwegian political aims are translated into military practice. Understanding these processes of translation is key for military professionals and

politicians alike. However, for small countries especially, who deploy with small units under the command of relatively junior officers, understanding the social dynamics in the Coalition and partner settings and how the conditions on the ground affect the interpretation and implementation of the political ambitions, is paramount. This article provides a brief overview of Norwegian policy concerning participation in international operations. Second, some of the challenges which small countries face in security-force assistance missions are highlighted. This will constitute the backdrop for the third part, which investigates how political aims are operationalized as military practice by military professionals. The complexity of the political aims for small-state contributions like the Norwegian one, challenges the notions of what constitutes military practice, and I argue in conclusion that this insight will have implications for planning, training, and the range of practices recognized as 'military practices.' My analyses in the final part are based on qualitative interviews with the commanders and the seconds-in-command from two contingents to Anbar from September 2017 to August 2018.

Bolstering the Alliance through Participation

Norway was one of the founding members of NATO and its NATO membership has been a key factor shaping security policy ever since. Numerous other factors contribute to policy, of course, including the policies of the EU, Nordic cooperation, and Russian politics, but NATO has been the cornerstone for Norwegian territorial defense. The fear that the US may no longer see NATO as an important element in its foreign and security policy since the first phase of the war in Afghanistan has been tangible. Norwegian participation in coalitions has therefore been a key priority so that, in the words of former Minister of Defense Kristin Krohn Devold, "the US still benefits from European allied cooperation through NATO."[7] In fact, a driving force behind the largest Norwegian military engagement in recent years, the 2001-2014 engagement in Afghanistan, was participation to bolster the alliance. The official

report, entitled *A Good Ally: Norway in Afghanistan 2001-2014*, states it quite clearly.[8] The Norwegian government had

> three overarching objectives for its engagement in Afghanistan, presenting it as a battle fought together *with* the US and NATO, *against* international terror and *for* a better Afghanistan. The first and most important objective throughout was the Alliance dimension: to support the US and safeguard NATO's continued relevance.[9]

The report continues by observing that the Norwegian military contribution "did not influence the big picture in Afghanistan. The most important objective for Norway, however, was to maintain good relations with the US and help to ensure NATO's relevance."[10]

The latest policy statement from the Norwegian government, the white paper entitled "Veivalg i norsk utenriks- og sikkerhetspolitikk"[11] ("Choice of Path in Norwegian Foreign and Security Policy"), restates the importance of transatlantic ties in Norwegian security policy. It identifies three paths, the first of which is to develop the "long lines in Norwegian security policy." ”Long lines" means that Norway will "seek to maintain the strong transatlantic ties and further develop the long-term security policy cooperation with the USA."[12] The second path is to "strengthen the European and Nordic dimension in Norwegian security policy,"[13] and the third path is to increase "the efforts in the unstable regions near Europe" partly by "implementing a strategy for Norwegian efforts in vulnerable states and regions."[14] This strategy is currently being developed, but the white paper identifies specifically capacity building and military contributions as possible components of such a strategy, in addition to for instance humanitarian efforts and peace and reconciliation diplomacy.[15]

The current advise-and-assist mission to Iraq is thus clearly in line with the stated policy of participating to strengthen the ties across the Atlantic and contributing to efforts in vulnerable states and regions. The Norwegian contribution to the fight against ISIL is quite

small in military terms (around 110 troops, most of whom are there for force protection, and a surgical unit of around 20).[16] It might, therefore, be tempting to see the contribution as merely symbolic. In fact, former Chief of Defense Sverre Diesen and researcher A. W. Beadle from the Norwegian Defence Research Establishment (FFI) claim that the Norwegian Defense cannot influence the outcome of an international operation.[17] Such a categorical claim does not hold in light of evidence for example from the air campaign in Libya in 2011,[18] nor, in fact, in light of the events in the initial phases of the Norwegian training-and-mentoring mission in Iraq, to which we return below.

At the political level and especially at the practitioner level Norway desires to make a substantive contribution in the missions to which it deploys troops. However, the policy aim of strengthening transatlantic ties leads to some vagueness regarding the appropriate military practices in a mission. In some respects, Norway had already achieved its most important objective in Iraq when Defense Secretary Ash Carter in 2016 was photographed with the Norwegian Minister of Defense Ine Eriksen Søreide on his visit to Norway and the website DoDLive.mil published an article stating that "Norway has become a valuable contributor in combatting terrorism worldwide, especially recently in the campaign to deliver ISIL a lasting defeat."[19] A news bulletin from the Norwegian government on 12 September 2016 covers the same visit, and in it Søreide says

> The USA is our most important ally, and Carter and I have discussed topics that are of great significance to both the USA and Norway. The strategic significance of the oceans around Norway increases, and it is important for us that our allies see the challenges in the North. I have also emphasized showing that Norway takes responsibility for our own security and is a credible ally.[20]

The bulletin continues with Carter's statement that "Norway is a strong and invaluable security partner for us in many areas, and they are a valuable contributor in the fight against

ISIL."[21] Despite such successes at the political level, however, the Norwegian officers and soldiers still have to determine what "being a good ally" means in terms of military practices on the ground.

The training-and-mentoring mission to Iraq is also an element in the third main path in the current Norwegian security policy, which is to increase the efforts in vulnerable states close to Europe. This type of mission under the broader category of capacity building is commonly referred to as Security Force Assistance.[22] There is a general drive in NATO countries towards SFA initiatives rather than direct military operations in unstable areas, as evidenced for instance by the decision to establish six SFA brigades in the USA.[23] The motivation for this shift in emphasis is, for the US, that it is "tired of large land wars,"[24] and the US hopes that it can instead achieve its strategic goals with a much smaller footprint. Biddle et al. have offered the most substantial critique of this assumption, arguing that there is little empirical evidence to support that such missions are successful.[25] Furthermore, using principal-actor (PA) theory as a framework for their analyses, they argue that SFA missions suffer from "interest misalignment between the provider (the principal) and the recipient (the agent), difficult monitoring challenges and difficult conditions for enforcement – a combination that typically leaves principals with limited real leverage and that promotes inefficiency in aid provision."[26] These challenges are not impossible to overcome, they argue, but that requires "a larger […] footprint than many would prefer."[27]

The concerns of a small state such as Norway in an SFA mission are quite different from the situations analyzed by Biddle et al. Small countries usually only deploy smaller units at the tactical level, and so what size the overall footprint has can only be very marginally determined by Norway. Nor is Norway in a position to influence the interest alignment of the principal and the actor, which Biddle et al. identify as one prerequisite for success in SFA missions.[28] The restrictions following from the limited Norwegian military capacities are

obvious to policy makers, which is why emphasis is put on participation as a policy goal. Beadle and Diesen argue, however, that contrary to Norwegian policy, participation alone may not continue to engender the goodwill of Norwegian allies in the future. Qualitative contributions will come to be expected.[29] For small-state contributions like the Norwegian deployment to the Anbar region, the PA framework for understanding and gauging successes and failures, is less relevant. The main strategic objectives are in a completely different realm from the objectives that the services, in the vocabulary of PA theory, provided by the Iraqi army are intended to achieve. To understand the nature of small-state contributions to larger military operations and the conditions for achieving qualitative contributions, one must therefore investigate the particular dynamics of these operations and how the political aims can be and are translated into military practice. The beginning of such an analysis is what the remainder of this article offers.

95 Key Leader Engagements

To understand how a qualitative contribution can be achieved (and through that the defense and security policy goals), it is necessary to understand the dynamics of such operations as they play out at the tactical and operational levels, and as they are managed and interpreted by the military professionals. Insight into how the professional military practitioners translate political aims and ambitions into military practice, what challenges they encounter in doing so, and how these challenges are met, is essential. Yet, despite the significant policy aims attached to the deployment of small units at the tactical level commanded by officers with relatively low military ranks, very little research has been done into the tactical and operational realities of such missions.

The advise-and-assist mission to Ain-al-Assad in the Anbar region of Iraq is part of the Norwegian contribution to the International Coalition against ISIL. The overarching goals

are to contribute in the fight against ISIL, to make the Iraqi military better, and to be a good ally. The contingents consist of around 110 troops, most of whom are primarily concerned with force protection. The mentoring team consists of five officers. Specialists – medics, engineering and artillery troops in particular – offer training to their Iraqi counterparts. The first contingent, which consisted of soldiers and officers from the Telemark Battalion, had a small pre-deployment team in Iraq from May 2017, followed by the full advise-and-assist team and their force-protection troops from mid-August 2017. The second contingent, which came mainly from the Armoured Battalion, deployed in February 2018 and returned in August the same year.

The following analysis is based on semi-structured and explorative qualitative interviews with the commanders and their seconds-in-command. The interview subjects were encouraged to bring up whatever they thought was important to say about the mission, since understanding how political aims are translated into practice entails noting not only what is emphasized, but also how it is presented and articulated. However, I wanted to touch on five areas in the course of the interviews: 1) specific practices and important events; 2) challenges, successes, and failures; 3) reflections on important and other potentially relevant competencies; 4) general training and pre-deployment training; and 5) motivation.

Two interesting points emerged from the interviews. First, due to some level of indifference on the part of the Iraqi forces, the Norwegian forces had to recast the idea of *offering* advice and assistance to the Iraqi forces, into an idea that advice and assistance was something they had to achieve in order to meet other political aims. Second, complex challenges, such as the lack of access to Iraqi forces and the vague goal of being a good ally, were met with emphasis on simple, military basics, such as attention to dress, equipment maintenance, etc.

Admittedly, further research is required to validate the findings from these interviews. However, in light of the long-standing Norwegian policy and aims relating to participation in international operations, and in light of the particular challenges small-state armed forces such as the Norwegian Defense face when it comes to specialization for its range of tasks, I draw two tentative conclusions from these findings: First, such missions cannot rely exclusively on traditional military planning, but require a vocabulary for and understanding of social dynamics from mission design, through pre-deployment training, to execution. Second, to the extent that missions like these become staple parts of a military's duties, as Beadle and Diesen suggest,[30] key competencies, such as the ability to analyze social dynamics must become part of what is considered core military practices.

When the first contingent arrived in the Anbar region, the final campaign against ISIL was already under way. The Norwegian commander had deployed early and had managed to establish very good relations with his Iraqi counterparts, primarily in the Iraqi Army's 28th Brigade, but filled an important role in this last major campaign as advisory team to the 9th Armoured Division, to which I return below. After that, the Norwegian troops accompanied Iraqi forces on a few operations, such as various desert and *wadi* (dried river bed) clearance operations, but by the time the second contingent arrived, ISIL had been driven out of the area, and focus shifted to stabilization operations, minor desert-clearance operations, and potential threats of violence in connection with the May 2018 parliamentary elections.

Although an allied field exercise in northern Norway is clearly beneficial to the allied defense of Norway, it is less clear what kinds of military activities in an advise-and-assist operation in Iraq will bolster the alliance. The interviewees all recognized that bolstering the alliance was an important element of the mission, and perhaps even the most important one. In a casual aside, one interviewee said that, "of course we were there to keep the Americans happy." Expanding on what that would mean in practical terms, the interviewee mentioned

always behaving professionally, being punctual, keeping all equipment in perfect condition, and having frequent meetings with their US superiors. Such professional behavior is important in a military unit. The importance, however, usually relates to how these practices increase the chances of winning a military conflict. In an advise-and-assist mission in Iraq, these practices lose their moorings in what Clausewitz termed the realities on the ground and become symbolic gestures to show that one is a reliable and credible ally. Somehow, the act of buttoning your shirt properly in the Iraqi heat constitutes defense of the cold Norwegian North.

One interviewee from the second contingent responded to my question about what they had achieved by saying that they had had “95 key leader engagements.” This quantitative measure of success was a direct result of their experience: a significant level of indifference to what the Norwegian forces had to offer in terms of advice and assistance. This interviewee recognized, however, the symbolic significance of interacting with Iraqi forces and the importance of achieving such interaction, as did the other interviewees. The Norwegian forces understood, in other words, that the act of mentoring fulfills several political goals. Another interviewee conceded that this quantitative measure is rather vacuous, saying that “when what is important cannot be measured, the measurable becomes important.”

Norwegian experiences in Iraq are not challenges of a traditional military nature, but rather concern dynamics of social interaction and domestic and international politics. Norwegian doctrinal approaches to military planning and decision-making emphasize the importance of situational awareness and of understanding, and one interviewee emphasized the Norwegian military’s skills in military planning as a key competence in the mission. The NATO Comprehensive Operations Planning Directive (COPD) has, for instance, a chapter on *knowledge development*, where it states that the “KD process converts basic data to more usable information, information to awareness […] and awareness to understanding […]”.[31]

Considering all actors, their individual capacities, the terrain – including time, the weather, the human terrain, etc., is one aspect of such knowledge development. *Capacities* in military planning, however, primarily concern military capacities such as armored units, artillery, air support, logistics etc. Given that the Norwegian forces were to engage in combat only in self-defense, capacities of this kind only play a limited role. To achieve the political aims, other capacities turned out to be more important or entirely lacking, as the case may be. Having access to aerial surveillance, for example, was a military capacity which the Norwegian forces could use to attain situational awareness and reduce risk in operations. On the other hand, it was also a capacity they could exploit to gain access to Iraqi leaders so that mentoring could be achieved. In the latter case aerial surveillance is not just a military capacity, but also an element that plays a role in social interaction. It was *capital in a social field* in Bourdieu's sense.[32] The Norwegian forces also exploited the Iraqi interest in the artillery and engineering expertise that the Norwegians could offer to achieve access to "key leaders." Furthermore, Iraqi indifference to Norwegian mentoring was also in part determined by the relative lack of combat experience in the Norwegian mentors as compared to the significant experience of their Iraqi counterparts.

The first contingent reported positive social interactions with their Iraqi counterparts. The first goal of the Norwegian battle plan was to be accepted by the Iraqi brigade commanders and the division commander. Courage and the display of courage were identified as an essential factor in attaining acceptance, and so they made a conscious decision to accept risks as their Iraqi counterparts did, which often meant accompanying commanders very close to the frontlines. Having been accepted by the Iraqis through courage and display of courage, the Norwegians could then use other assets to achieve the mission goals. The very flexible Norwegian mandate enabled the first contingent to relocate quickly to the 9th Armored Division in the final campaign, where there was no Coalition mentoring team, and provide

invaluable satellite imagery and precise enough map coordinates for the 9th division to receive US close air support. In other words, the Norwegian commander and his men used a range of assets, military and personal, in a social game to achieve the Norwegian mission goals of being a credible ally.

Access to technology was thus important capital. So was the international legitimacy that the Norwegian and allied presence lent to the Iraqi operations. These were among the capacities that gave Norwegians access to the Iraqi forces and which enabled the Norwegian forces to achieve their aim of being a good ally. High military rank is important capital in this social field, also in interaction with allies, especially the French, as one interviewee pointed out. One interviewee experienced that being bookish, and being able to have conversations about military history, general history, and politics was of great importance in interacting with the Iraqi generals, who were well-read. Asked about his past as a battalion commander fighting the Americans and about changing sides, one Iraqi general pointed out that Norwegians have done the same: Norway was taken from Denmark and donated to Sweden after the Napoleonic Wars, which is an observation that few Norwegians could have made. Another interviewee observed that "in the Iraqi culture, age and a few gray hairs matter," and so the second contingent advised that the Norwegian government send officers with higher military rank. Military planning for such missions must therefore reconceptualize notions of what constitutes key capacities for achieving the political aims. Considering one's capacities is not simply a question of management of military force and violence. The mission could benefit, it seems, from a fundamental understanding of social dynamics in all stages of mission planning from force composition, through pre-deployment training, to execution.

"Softer" aspects of military missions, such as cultural understanding, gender issues, and many of the elements of what has been termed comprehensive approach, are often tasked to specialists or to civilian organizations. These specialists are often, but not always, civilians

(e.g. gender advisors and legal advisors). In other words, the answer to unfamiliar challenges in military operations very often seems to be hiring specialist to advise the military.

The first Norwegian contingent to the Anbar region expected to train and mentor their Iraqi counterparts in the planning processes, and so they were prepared to assign mentors to the Iraqi commander and all the key staff functions, such as intelligence/security, operations, communication, logistics, etc. These staff functions are key in Norwegian and NATO planning processes. However, the Iraqi forces' planning processes did not resemble the ones with which the Norwegian forces were familiar. Usually everything was decided quite quickly by the force commander alone. While the Norwegian mentors seemed to adapt quickly to the realities of the Iraqi operational culture, the interesting aspect that emerged from the interviews concerned how they responded to frustrations and partial achievements.

To address the soldiers' disappointment over not being taken out on operations alongside the Iraqis, the force commander impressed upon them the importance of being professional, of diligently maintaining the equipment, and of always going through the checks and inspections thoroughly in preparation for operations, even if they would never get past the camp gate. Maintenance tasks were also assigned to combat boredom. The response to the lack of participation actual warfighting was to focus attention on military basics. Mentors, with a small exception of the Norwegian force commander, experienced related issues due to the lack of access and even relevance of their planned effort.

While admitting that they had not emphasized specific training for interaction with the Iraqi counterparts enough in pre-deployment training, the interviewees emphasized for example "general officer competence" and "experience and competence in military problem solving" as the key competencies for the mission. When asked what competencies had been *useful*, one interviewee pointed to his MA in history, which helped to understand phenomena in their context, and his experience from military intelligence, which helped to understand

statements in terms of their motives and not just their superficial meaning. However, he maintained nonetheless that “core military leadership” was quite sufficient to lead the mission successfully. To the extent that the limited data allows generalizations, unfamiliar situations during military operations (such as being ignored and left out, having vague and difficult-to-assess mission objectives) spurred emphasis on core competencies and military basics.

This is not the whole picture, of course, since the Norwegian forces also responded in creative and resourceful ways to these challenges by maximizing the opportunities they had. The first contingent managed to establish very good working relationships with Iraqi forces and, with some exceptions, allied forces as well. The Iraqi corps commander observed to the first contingent, that he had never experienced a foreign unit that worked so well with the Iraqi forces. However, this interesting attention to and emphasis on military basics in the interviews indicate an aspect of social practices in general and of professional practices in particular which must be understood to optimize the efforts of such complex missions: practices depend on what it makes sense to do in a specific setting.

Military practices

Practices constitute according to Theodore Schatzki “the central phenomenon in the tangle that is human sociality.”[33] Schatzki emphasizes precisely the *meaning* of practices. Rather than spelling out the conditions under which practices are shaped and developed, Schatzki builds on Wittgenstein’s concept of *family resemblance* and conceptualizes two realms of practices, *dispersed practices* and *integrative practices*.

Dispersed practices are practices, which are “widely dispersed among different sectors of social life.”[34] For the sake of simplicity, we can call these everyday practices. One interviewee, for example, mentioned how “younger mentors should have been better at indirection and not stating things directly. Mentioning things, for example, was perceived [by

the Iraqis] as a promise." Such misunderstandings concern dispersed practices. These problems belong to the realm of cultural differences and cultural understanding, and such questions have been prominent in much literature on international operations.[35] The ability to communicate efficiently and to recognize spatiotemporal practices as elements of communication are important preconditions for a successful mission, and the interviewees all recognized this and wished that there had been more time to address cultural understanding in pre-deployment training.

The emphasis placed on military basics in the face of the complexity of achieving one of the primary mission objectives, concerns the other category of practices in Schatki's practice theory: *integrative practices*. Integrative practices are "in and constitutive of particular domains of social life."[36] Examples Schatzki gives include "farming practices, business practices, voting practices, teaching practices, celebration practices, cooking practices, recreational practices, industrial practices, religious practices, and banking practices."[37] For our present purposes, we will add *military practices* as a case of integrative practices. What sets integrative practices apart from dispersed practices and constitute them as a category, is that integrative practices are joined by

> (1) understandings of Q-ing and R-ing (etc.) [i.e. the domain-specific practices of social life], along with "sensitized" understandings of X-ing and Y-ing (etc.), the latter carried by the transfigured forms that the dispersed practices of X-ing and Y-ing adopt within integrative practices; (2) explicit rules, principles, precepts, and instructions; and (3) teleoaffective structures comprising hierarchies of ends, tasks, projects, beliefs, emotions, moods, and the like.[38]

Schatzki's concept of integrative practices allows us to see the practices of military operations as doings and sayings that attain meaning and are transfigured by belonging to and happening within the special domain of social life that is military practices. Distinct practices

within the military, e.g. “flanking” or “fire and movement” (Q-ing and R-ing), as well as practices that also belong to social life generally, e.g. “greeting” or “questioning,” become intelligible against the explicit rules of the domain. Thus, the emphasis the interviewees placed on military basics – discipline, punctuality, equipment maintenance – is indicative of these specific rules of professional military practices. These practices hold prime position within the hierarchies that characterize the military domain. In the setting of a military mission and as part of a military profession it *makes sense* to emphasize them.

While Norway has sent individual officers on training and mentoring missions for a long time, the prevailing experience for Norwegian officers from international operations is to plan and lead military operations. Admittedly, there is a very wide range of military operations, not just seizing and holding terrain. There are cordon-and-search operations, patrolling, vehicle check points, escorting, information gathering, in addition to operations that utilize the full range of the standardized NATO mission task verbs, verbs such as HOLD, TAKE, BREACH, SECURE, DESTROY. Practices related to missions and operations throughout this spectrum are clearly recognized as belonging to the realm of the armed forces. These practices are often offhandedly referred to as *doing military things* in every-day conversation in the Norwegian army, and in military culture *doing military things* is related to conceptions of *what it's really about*. As with any concept, its meaning is never fixed, and in the Military Academy reference to “what it's really about” is often made in order to disqualify perspectives on what an officer should know and learn (“sociology or IR theory is irrelevant because that is not *what it's really about*”). Such rhetorical uses of the language of military culture signal notions about a core of practices, ideas and ideals that belong to the military, that characterize the military profession and its representatives, which is what the regress to military basics in the advise-and-assist mission in Iraq signals, too.

The crucial and unresolved question is, however, how apt these military basics are as means to achieving the range of political goals for the mission. As I discussed above, they seem not to provide all the solutions and may not even address the crucial problems. Understanding how to use military capacities as capital in social interaction (e.g. aerial surveillance employed to get access to Iraqi leaders) is not recognizable as *doing military things*. While the interview subjects recognized that "we should have spent more time [in pre-deployment training] on practicing mentoring,"[39] military planning lacks a vocabulary and a framework for understanding social dynamics. Therefore, the regress to military basics, which seems to have been one response to complex and unfamiliar challenges, seems to indicate that new conceptions of what constitutes military practices must be developed.

In integrative practices, the meaning of practices along with notions of hierarchies of doings and sayings, in short what it makes sense to do in that domain, takes on "transfigured forms." That is not to say that focusing on military basics is somehow wrong. As a translation of the complex political aims it may be insufficient, and that the domain of military practices needs a greater repertoire. The complex range of political aims in such missions cannot readily be translated into traditional conceptions of military practices, and therefore new practices must be developed and become integral parts of the profession as integrative practices. Recognizing that accepting risk was crucial to gaining the trust and acceptance of the Iraqi commander, as the Norwegian commanders did, is not an element of integrative military practices. Risk reduction is a central concern of military planners. In fact, one second-in-command mentioned resistance and opposition to such risk-taking in the unit. While that is understandable, as force protection was their responsibility, it indicates that a key to success in this mission lay in changing common practices. Less important, perhaps, but even more dependent on chance qualities in the Norwegian commander, was the connection established through one commander's personal interest in history and in broad reading. The

nature of this mission and its goals seems to challenge core conceptions of what *doing military things* entails and what the integrative practices of the military are.

One interview subject summed up his deployment and responded to my question of motivation for his participation in the mission towards the end of the interview by stating that, at the end of the day, “it is my job.” The statement is interesting because it reduces the difficulties and disparate and intricately interlocking set of interests, aims, and ambitions to a matter of loyalty to a decision at the political level. It simultaneously appeals to responsibility, (particularly loyalty, obedience and conscientious performance of duty) while at the same time possibly sidestepping the difficult question of the responsibility to achieve any material progress towards the less measurable mission aims.

Educating for the Future

The FFI report on the Norwegian Armed Forces towards 2040 identifies several crucial choices that need to be taken concerning priorities. Two demands seem inevitable: first, the need for a credible threshold defense to deter potential aggressors at home, and second, the need for participation in international operations.[40] Professional military education (PME) in Norway, as in many small countries, is uniform. There are different campuses and different educational programs for the different branches of the armed forces, but there is no specialization in officer training beyond a few electives in the higher officer training program. The PME programs are designed for the first of the two demands, viz. for threshold defense of Norwegian territory, and that often means focus on core military competencies as a matter of *what it’s really about.*

SFA is, admittedly, normally a task associated with special operations forces. However, regular forces are often deployed as well, as the mission to Iraq shows. Yet, there is no regular SFA unit. If participation in SFA missions is to be an element of Norwegian policy

in the future, and there is good reason to believe that it will be, a much broader analysis of the particular demands put on small contingents from smaller NATO countries is required. Furthermore, PME and pre-deployment training may need to be adapted to develop the best possible military practices for such missions.

War is not an abstraction, Clausewitz says, it concerns realities.[41] The political aims and ambitions, particularly the international "political intercourse" that informs the use of military force in security-force-assistance operations, are in many respects far removed from the realities faced by an individual officer or soldier on the ground. Furthermore, what the officer or soldier does is not a matter of simple rational choice in a situation open to structured theoretical analysis, nor is it a mechanistic response arising from the historical, natural, social, personal and other conditions of the situation equally open to objective analysis. What they do – what anyone does – is a matter of life lived in the world, and making sense of what that means is never a simple matter. Understanding of and responses to the realities one encounters emerge from the complex interplay of historically and socially determined dispositions, rational reflection, external conditions, expectations, hopes, and a multitude of other factors. However, there has been a long tradition, and some identify the beginning of that tradition with Clausewitz, of trying to structure available knowledge and develop tools to aid analysis, planning, and execution of military operations to increase the chances of success. The experiences from the first two contingents who have returned from the Norwegian advise-and-assist mission in Iraq may seem to indicate that NATO military planning procedures and the notions of what constitutes military practices are only partially suited to the particular challenges of SFA missions.

Part of the present analysis relies on practice theory. Practice theory has found resonance in a wide range of areas, and one explanation could be that it has the "capacity to resonate with the contemporary experience that our world is increasingly in flux and

interconnected, a world where social entities appear as the result of ongoing work and complex machinations, and in which boundaries around social entities are increasingly difficult to draw."[42] Practice theory adds to our understanding of the specific challenges faced by small states in SFA missions by focusing attention on experiences beyond the reflective and rational mental processes in social interaction and in the individual's sensemaking. Second, practice theory provides a vocabulary for understanding the particular challenges encountered in the complex social settings of the operation and for understanding how certain practices are arrived upon. These perspectives are not just tools for the outside academic-observer position, but they can be operationalized for better-informed professional military practice.

What this article has shown is, tentatively, that military planning needs a vocabulary for understanding social dynamics and that core military practices must be adapted to meet the exigencies of such missions. Practice theory may provide parts of such a vocabulary and constitute a starting point for developing military practices for such missions. However, the standardized approach to planning and mission execution, which is essential to achieving the efficiency, speed and coordination required in military operations generally, is fundamentally challenged at least in small-state contributions to advise-and-assist missions. Standardized approaches, which the military professionals refer to as methods, must give way to profound sensitivity to the unique specificities of the social realities in the situation. The "ground truth" demands that the officers can appreciate, in the words of Paul Feyerabend, that "[t]he worlds in which cultures unfold not only contain different events, they also contain them in different ways."[43] There is no general military planning framework suited to discerning the ways in which differences are different. Thus, practice theory and the related and more established disciplines of sociology and anthropology may not just provide a vocabulary for analysis, but

can more profoundly and in essential ways inform the military professionals' capacity for understanding.

Notes

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1 The author acknowledges funding from the Research Council of Norway under the Peace Research Institute Oslo project *SFAssist* (project number 274645).
2 Clausewitz, *On War*, 99.
3 Simpson, *War from the Ground*, 5.
4 Clausewitz, *On War*, 90.
5 Ibid*.,* 91
6 United States Department of State, "Joint Statement Counter-ISIL Coalition".
7 Quoted in Græger, "Norway between NATO", 91.
8. The Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Minstry of Defence, *A Good Ally*.
9. Ibid., 11.
10. Ibid.
11. The Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Veivalg norsk sikkerhet- og utenrikspolitikk*.
12. Ibid., 6.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid., 7.
15. Ibid., 36.
16. The Ministry of Defence, "Militære bidrag i kampen".
17. Beadle and Diesen, *Globale trender mot 2040*, 157.
18. Beadle and Diesen are not entirely clear on this point. On the one hand, they state that the ability of the Norwegian Defence "to affect the outcome of the conflicts in question, can be counted as close to zero" (157). On the other hand, they acknowledge that Norway made a substantial contribution in Libya and with the special forces in Afghanistan, and that Norway thereby gains military recognition and credibility among our allies (*ibid*.).
19. Lange, "How Norway is helping the U.S.".
20. The Norwegian Ministry of Defence, "USAs forsvarsminister besøkte Norge". My translation.
21. Ibid.
22. There is a plethora of terminology related to activities aimed at stabilizing a host nation (HN) and enabling it to deal adequately with internal and/or external threats to its security. In the USA the umbrella term Security Sector Assistance covers a range of programs, including building partner capacity (BPC), security cooperation (SC) and security sector reform (SSF). Such programs, in turn, comprise efforts along different lines, civilian as well as military, that are broadly aimed at improving safety, security and justice in the HN. The term Security Force Assistance (SFA) refers, in the NATO context, to "all NATO activities that develop and improve, or directly support, the development of local forces and their associated institutions in crisis zones". NATO, *Allied Joint Publication 3.16*, 1. SFA concerns activities by special operations forces (SOF) or regular forces at the military strategic, operational, and tactical levels aimed at improving the HN's capability to deal with threats against its stability and security. SFA falls under the broader general term military aid, but in NATO terminology does not include military assistance, which concerns SOF operations that "support and influence critical friendly assets". Ibid., VIII.
23. Lopez, "Security Force Assistance Brigades".
24. Biddle, Macdonald and Baker, "Small footprint, small pay-off", 89.
25. Ibid., 92.
26. Ibid., 94.
27. Ibid.
28. Biddle, Macdonald and Baker, "Small footprint, small pay-off", 94.
29. Beadle and Diesen, *Globale trender mot 2040*, 157.

30. Ibid.
31. NATO, *Allied Command Operations*, 2-2.
32. Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*.
33. Schatzki, *Social Practices*, 12.
34. Ibid., 91.
35. See for example Luft, *Beer, bacon and bullets*; Ruffa, *Military cultures*; Soeters and Manigart, *Military cooperation*.
36. Schatzki, *Social Practices*, 98.
37. Ibid.
38. Ibid., 98-99.
39. By necessity, the main element of pre-deployment training consists in practicing such things as "action on IED", i.e. what to do if one encounters an improvised explosive device, and preparing for potential biological or chemical attacks.
40. Beadle and Diesen, *Globale trender mot 2040*.
41. Clausewitz, *On War*, 91.
42. Nicolini, *Practice theory*, 2.
43. Feyerabend, *Farewell to Reason*, 105

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