Capacity Building of the Afghan Special Police:

NEGOTIATING LOCAL OWNERSHIP IN TASK FORCE 7

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ABSTRACT

Local ownership is much contested both in theory and practice, yet it has still been promoted as an imperative part of the military capacity building of the Afghan National Security Forces. This paper examines how the concept of local ownership was articulated and negotiated in practice by military practitioners in Task Force 7. The empirical data is based on qualitative interviews with Danish language officers and soldiers from the Danish Special Operation Forces deployed with Task Force 7 to Afghanistan during the period 2012-2014. The empirical findings present four themes in relation to local ownership at the tactical level: ‘Trust as a basis for nurturing local ownership’, ‘Time as an enabler to local ownership’, ‘Ownership as a technical practice’ and ‘Ownership and asymmetrical power relations’. In military practice, it is difficult to translate a concept as ambiguous as local ownership because it does not conform to the practical realities that the practitioners face on the ground. Military capacity building is thus, in many ways, a delicate space in which the practitioners have to negotiate their subjective conceptualisation of the term to fit the overall structure of the mission. It is in this intersection between subjective conceptualisation and mission structure that the implications of local ownership provide us with unique and valuable insight.
LOCAL OWNERSHIP AS A CRITICAL COMPONENT IN MILITARY CAPACITY BUILDING

Since NATO’s military intervention in Afghanistan in 2001 Denmark has actively taken part in rebuilding the country and in building capacity by training and mentoring the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark & Danish Ministry of Defence 2013). Military capacity building is one of many activities promoted through the wider Security Sector Reform (SSR)1 adopted by several countries to ensure peace and stability in fragile states. As a part of SSR local ownership has been embraced by Denmark and other donor countries as a critical component of their military training in Afghanistan (Caparini in SIPRI Yearbook 2003:238-239, 258; Donais 2008b:3-5). Thus, one of three main strategic principles in the Danish Afghanistan Plan 2013-2014 is Afghan ownership (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark & Danish Ministry of Defence 2013:18). It states that:

"Increased Afghan ownership and responsibility are necessary for developing the country. The Afghan authorities are well under way in taking over the tasks that have been carried out by international military forces” (Ibid:19).

While local ownership is mentioned several times in the Afghanistan Plan as a critical component to build the ANSF’s capacity, it does not clarify what ownership entails in military practice or how it should be operationalised in missions (Ibid 2013).

Within the theoretical discussions of local ownership in military capacity building we are presented with multiple notions of how the concept can be interpreted and defined. From one theoretical perspective local ownership is argued to be ownership of the reforms. Here the reforms ought to be implemented, controlled and designed by domestic actors and the role of the external actors is only to support the local actors in fulfilling their ambitions (Nathan 2007:4-5; Donais 2008b:7-8); whereas others argue that reforms can be externally initiated, but endorsed slowly by the locals (Ismail 2008:135). The definition of ‘ownership’ depends on whose perspective the initiative derives from which makes the application of the concept even more complex (Sheye & Peake 2005:10). The imprecise definition of local ownership calls for a further investigation and understanding of ownership in military missions.

This paper examines how local ownership was articulated by the military personnel of Task Force 7, a Danish capacity building unit that was directly engaged with the Afghan Special Police. Capacity building of the Afghan police makes for an interesting case in respect to local ownership, because the unit constitutes a capacity that forms a direct interface with the population. The “legitimacy of the police will be essential in terms of public support to the Afghan authorities” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark & Danish Ministry of Defence 2013:17),

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1 Security sector reform is a policy framework that emerged in the late 1990s. It aims to reform groups, institutions and structures related to security. One of the initiatives within the SSR is to build the capacity of indigenous security forces (United Nations Peacekeeping n.d.).
and thus the mentoring by the Danish forces becomes decisive to promote local ownership at the tactical level. Hence, the empirical data is based on interviews which enable us to understand how local ownership was described, negotiated and experienced by the interviewees. This contribution argues that ownership is not easily applied in military practice due to the complex environment in which the practitioners operate. Furthermore, it argues that local ownership is often reduced to a technical practice that is shaped by individual experiences, resulting from ambiguous knowledge of the concept in military practice.

Task Force 7’s mission in Afghanistan
Task Force 7 was deployed to Camp Anders Lassen in Helmand, Afghanistan from February 2012 to February 2014. The mission was lead by the Danish Special Operations Forces (SOF), who were tasked to mentor and train 125 policemen from the Afghan Special Police which was part of the Provincial Response Companies (PRC) mentored under the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). The mission focused on three central components: ‘partner’, ‘enable’ and ‘advise’. Each illustrating the level of support and assistance provided by the Danish troops alongside the responsibility and ownership given to the Afghan Special Police in the operations, making ownership an integrated part of the mission. The overall training consisted of training tactical aspects while also mentoring the administrative and judicial conditions. The final objective of the mission was that by the end of 2014 the Afghan forces would be fully responsible for the security after which the direct involvement of Task Force 7 would gradually decrease.

This paper is based on interviews with Danish language officers and soldiers from the Jaeger- and Frogman Corps, in order to gain wider insight into how local ownership was understood and practiced by Task Force 7.

UNDERSTANDING LOCAL OWNERSHIP WITHIN A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK
The theoretical argument for emphasizing ownership as an imperative to successful reform is the following: Without the consent and involvement of those for whom the reform is intended, it is unlikely that the reforms will prove sustainable. Consequently the interactions between donors and locals become essential for the process. However, the local ownership

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(2) SOF is an umbrella term that includes both the Danish Jaeger Corps and Frogman Corps and support personnel.
(3) The ISAF mission ended the 31st of December 2014 and is now transitioned into the NATO-led Resolute Support mission. The new mission focuses on training, advice and assistance to local security forces.
(4) http://www2.forsvaret.dk/viden-om/udland/afghanistan/styrker/tf-7/Pages/default.aspx, localised the 5th of February 2015.
(5) Language officers are specially selected cadets that undergo an intensive two-year course where they are trained as military interpreters and cultural advisors. The education consists of basic military training, language, history, politics, economics, military strategy and religion.
discourse is still very much revolved around the questions: “who controls, who implements and who evaluates” (Donais 2008b:3). In practice the reforms are most commonly performed by external actors and the local actors are only involved from the outset in building the local capacities. With time the external actors allow the eventual handover of responsibility to the locals (Ibid:7, Reich 2006:6). This is due to a common paradox in security sector reform: namely, that the initiatives have to be locally owned in order to succeed, but on the other hand the previous actions of these “locals” are among the reasons that there exists a need to reform their security systems in the first instance (Scheye & Peake 2005:1). This uneven relation creates (mis)trust between donor and receiver, which then influences the implementation of ownership in military missions.

Another determining aspect for the reforms is the vague definition of who the stakeholders are (Donais 2008b:3-4). One perspective views the locals as “customers” of the reforms. By doing so they are identified as the primary beneficiaries and thus their needs and interest become central in determining the initiatives. Nonetheless, in a complex and changing security environment, not every local would position themselves as a beneficiary. Rather these actors see the initiatives as a direct challenge to their power, livelihoods and practices. In such cases, resistance to the reforms is likely to appear within different spheres of society and cultures (Scheye & Peake 2005:2-5). With the absence of an identified target group it becomes extremely difficult for external actors to operationalise initiatives that take their point of departure in the local actors’ conceptualisation of their security structures. This is due to the different expectations to the local security system (Ibid:10-11).

Defining and understanding the environment and population in which donor countries operate, require patience and time. Time often occurs as a vital factor in the discussion of local ownership in capacity building. Many practitioners have jettisoned the concept of ‘local ownership’ because embracing the concept would mean that SSR most likely would be implemented slowly and episodically, which would presuppose that donor countries would need to rethink their agenda, funding mechanisms and timelines. Rethinking this would mean that the timeframes for donor assistance would be extended to longer periods (Ibid:10-12).

The critique often directed at ‘ownership’ frequently addresses that its meaning is often unclear and instead used as a rhetorical device that has more of a psychological effect than a political one (Ibid:5-6). As a result of these “unrealistic” policy guidelines, the field practitioners are left to their own devices and ignore local owners in an attempt to impose SSR on the host countries. This kind of implementation, given their affiliation to their own country systems, adhere to the formal and institutional security architecture of the donor country and not to the culture, practices, histories, finances and traditions of the host country. Reforms therefore end up disregarding the informal structures and methods without substituting these with other equivalent possibilities (Ibid10-11).
LOCAL OWNERSHIP FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF MILITARY PRACTITIONERS

During interviews with Task Force 7 representatives, local ownership was not a concept the interviewees would introduce themselves. However, when asked directly about ‘local ownership’ they did express an understanding of the concept’s importance in military capacity building. The empirical data of this paper presents four themes that all provide insight into the direct and indirect implications of local ownership in military practice. The themes are ‘Trust as a basis for nurturing local ownership’, ‘Time as an enabler to local ownership’, ‘Ownership as a technical practice’ and ‘Ownership and asymmetrical power relations’. These themes should not be reduced to separate entities, but instead seen as interrelated with one another. While emerging from analysis of data generated during interviews, these identified themes closely relate to the theoretical discussions of local ownership presented above.

Trust as a basis for nurturing ‘local ownership’

One theme that was prevalent in the conversations with the interviewees was the aspect of creating trust between the Afghan mentees and the Danish mentors. Trust was addressed as being imperative to the mission’s success. The argument was that a good relationship at the individual level would provide a healthy foundation to build the capacity of the Afghan Special Police. It thus became an enabling factor to operate within Afghan cultures by getting access to unique insight into the dynamics and structures of the Afghan Special Police. A platoon leader, from the Frogman Corps explained:

”There [in Task Force 7] I have a regular [local] interpreter I work with all the time (…) and then he tells me, in order to put things into perspective, that [the Afghan commander] actually has been – because he [the Afghan interpreter] spoke about some deeper things (…) – a Taliban commander” (SOF, 08.01.2015).

The above quote illustrates how Afghan interpreters in their work provide contextualised knowledge by putting certain aspects, such as the individual’s past, into perspective. He states that this kind of knowledge should not be taken for granted in capacity building missions. It is only obtained because the interpreter would confide in him with ‘deeper things’, implicitly implying that they have built a relationship of trust and mutual understanding that enables this situation.

In general the Danish SOF personnel were complimented by the language officers on their ability to interact with the Afghan Special Police. One language officer said:

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(6) All interviewees and persons mentioned in this paper have been anonymised.

(7) Original quote: ”Der [i Task Force 7] har jeg så fast tolk, jeg arbejder sammen med hele tiden (…) og så fortæller han mig, at [den afghanske kommander] faktisk har været - for han talte om nogle dybere ting kan man sige (…) - Taliban kommander, for at sætte tingene i perspektiv"
“All [SOF] were really good at creating fellowship and asking and showing interest, genuine interest (...) in family history and then inquiring further about this which helps you build a really good relationship. Then, you continue the same conversation over a longer period of time and ask if there is something bothering the person”8 (Language officer, 18.12.2014).

Good relations between the Danish mentor and Afghan mentee are articulated as being vital for a successful mission as the training would be based on mutual respect and recognition of each other’s abilities and backgrounds. The above quote was spoken in relation to the approach that she had observed used by the British mentors in relation to the Afghans. In contrast to their approach the Danish mentor would include the Afghans actively in the training instead of relying on one-way communication. One SOF personnel articulated a similar difference between the Danish and British approaches:

"We have an eight-hour work day from 8:00-16:00. They rest in the middle of the day (...). These things quickly clashed (...). This, the British expected that you could change from one day to the other, but this is something you don’t just do from one day to another. So, it was things like these that created frustrations. And the more you start yelling and screaming and try to talk down – and then this colonialist attitude and arrogance comes in – then what also comes out is that it’s just the Afghans we are dealing with and it’s just a crappy country, right?” 9 (SOF, 08.01.2015).

The differences in how the international troops approach the Afghan mentees are articulated as being decisive for any successful training of the Afghans. By ignoring the local societal structures such as working hours the possibility of gaining trust is hampered. Due to the frustrations these interactions create the risk that the Afghans will discard the mission. One language officer explained that the significance of a good relationship is not only confined to the mentor and mentee, but that the Afghan interpreters for instance play an equally important role in achieving a good relationship:

"Given that the Jaegers were able to build this relationship with the interpreters also meant that the interpreters were on our side. So the Danes had many talks with the interpreters..."

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(8) Original quote: "Alle [SOF] var rigtig gode til at skabe et fællesskab og spørge ind til og vise interesse, oprigtig interesse (...) i familie historie, og spørger så ind til det hvor man opbygger en rigtig god relation, at så har du den samme samtale over lang tid og spørger ind til hvis der et eller andet der generer en"

(9) Original quote: "Vi har jo 8 timers arbejdsdag fra 8 til 16. De har hvile midt på dagen (...). De her ting de kolliderede hurtigt (...). Det forventede briterne at man kan kunne gøre fra den ene dag til den anden, og det gør man ikke lige fra den ene til den anden dag. Så det var sådan nogle ting der skabte frustrationer. Og jo mere man begynder at råde og skrive og prøve at tale ned og så kommer den her lidt kolonialistisk attitude ind og arrogance, så kommer det også frem at det er jo også bare afghanelerne vi har med at gøre og det er også bare et lorteland, ikk"
about Afghan culture, on how one can do different things and how one can defeat some of the problems that can occur in educational situations” (Language officer, 18.12.2014).

Indirectly, there is a common perception that a good relationship will create an incentive for mutual understanding of their experienced differences whereby the Afghans are more likely to engage and take ownership of the mission. However, even though all my interviewees agreed that the SOF were very capable of interacting with the Afghan Special Police, some of the language officers addressed certain circumstances where the Afghans and Danish troops would clash. The Danish troops would express a lack of understanding towards the Afghans, or the Afghans would feel the same towards the Danes. These tensions became apparent when one language officer went on leave. The language officer explained that one of the reasons was that the Afghans were opportunistic and consequently chose not to cooperate with the SOF after she left:

“The Afghans I met were very opportunistic in their behaviour. It was especially evident in the interpreters. If there was the slightest chance that they could get an advantage they would take it. (…) When I was gone on leave (…) there occurred big problems with the [local] interpreters. They completely backed down. And the Danes didn’t like the [local] interpreters and the [local] interpreters didn’t like the Danes” (Language officer, 18.12.2014).

Another language officer provided further insight into the underlining causes of the Afghans’ behaviour:

“Yes, they were tired of the Jaegers, because they felt that they snapped at them and just didn’t feel that they appreciated their work and (…) that there wasn’t anyone who took care of them, so why should they then take care of us and (…) be loyal to us. Not because they represented any kind of threat, not at all, but you know, they didn’t want to do their work (…) As we trained more with them and they felt more like a part of our unit, well, then they started slowly to loosen up a little. But small frictions like these

(10) Original quote: “I og med at Jægerne fik opbygget dette forhold til tolkene, betød også at tolkene var på vores side, så danskerne havde mange snakke med tolkene om afghansk kultur, om hvordan man kan gøre forskellige ting og hvordan man kan afhjælpe nogle af de problemer der kan være i en undervisningssituation”

(11) Original quote: “De afghanere jeg mødte var meget opportunistiske i deres måde at være på. Det kom især til udtryk gennem tolkene. Hvis der var den mindste chance for at de kunne få en fodel, så tog de den. (…) Da jeg var væk på leave (…) der kom der så store problemer med tolkene. De satte sig fuldstændig på bagben. Og danskerne kunne ikke lide tolkene og tolkene kunne ikke lide danskerne”
just can’t be present when you are on operations etc., which was very much the case in the beginning!” (Language officer, 18.12.2014).

The above quotes demonstrate that frictions were not only limited to the British but also were present with the Danish SOF. It was not clarified what initiated the frictions between the SOF and interpreters, but miscommunication was articulated as the main reason. In this language officer’s view these frictions pose a direct threat to the mission because there is no loyalty, which indirectly, hinders the opportunity for gaining trust. A major challenge to trust was also caused by the fear of insider attacks:

“The Danes were very worried about this green-on-blue. That our collaborators would shoot on us. (…) People were very nervous about that - Very, very afraid of it. As well as that you don’t assault the Afghan’s honour because then it could rapidly turn this good relationship of trust one had built” (Language officer, 18.12.2014).

This was a recurring concern among the interviewees and so their approach to the Afghans would also reflect this fear. Trust was expected from the Afghans, but the Danes did not fully exhibit trust in the Afghans, mainly because of mutual scepticism. However, in order to avoid distancing themselves from the Afghan mentees some interviewees did express a wish to live closer to the Afghan recruits and be more inclusive of their expertise and needs (SOF, 08.01.2015 & Language officer, 18.12.2014).

Applying this mindset on the field of practice within the training mission of Task Force 7, respect and trust then became imperative in creating an incentive for ownership amongst the Afghan Special Police. Without a mutual understanding between the international troops and the Afghan police the mission would be most likely to fail. When the interviewees speak of trust they indirectly provide insight into how local ownership was translated into practice by the military practitioners in Task Force 7. At least, it provides a space in which local ownership is negotiated through communication. At the same time it also reflects some of the core dilemmas of promoting local ownership in military practice. If the foundation of giving ownership is rooted in any mistrust or insecurity towards the Afghans’ reliability then it becomes harder to give them full ownership of the process. In military missions the security of the troops becomes

(12) Original quote: “Ja, de var trætte af jægerne, fordi de syntes, at de vrissede af dem og syntes bare ikke, at de værdsatte deres arbejde og (...) de følte ikke rigtig, at der var nogen der tog sig af dem og hvorfor skulle de så egentlig tage sig af os og (...) og være loyale overfor os. Ikke fordi de var nogen trussel, slet ikke, men du ved, de gad ikke deres arbejde (...)]. [I] takt med, at vi trænede mere med dem og de følte sig lidt mere en del af vores enhed, jamen så begyndte de lige så stille og løsne lidt op. Men det er sådan noget, det er sådan nogle små gnidninger som bare ikke rigtig må være der når man er på operationer osv., som var der meget i starten”

(13) Original quote: ‘Danskerne var meget bekymrede for det her ‘green-on-blue’. For det, at vores samarbejdspartnere skulle skyde på os. (...) Det var folk meget nervøse for. Meget, meget bange for. Også den der med, at man skulle ikke angribe afghanernes ære, fordi så kunne det meget hurtigt vende det her gode tillidsforhold man havde opbygget’
an essential priority and for obvious reasons the security of the Danish troops indirectly also becomes more important than that of the Afghans. Consequently, transferring ownership is not straightforward but takes time and patience.

**Time as an enabler for local ownership**

Achieving trust between the Afghans and Danish troops demanded patience and understanding of the cultural implications. Thus, rushing the training could jeopardise the relationship.

From the interviewees' perspective time was addressed as an enabler for gaining 'local ownership', but in relation to military practice it became an utopian imagination. One language officer replied to a question on how she understood local ownership and whether it was relevant to capacity building missions such as the one Task Force 7 was carrying out: "*I think that it is relevant, but it is difficult in a military unit (…)*"\(^{14}\) (Language officer, 22.12.2014). In relation to her academic studies she attended a course about sustainable engineering for developing communities, which focused on sustainability in development work and she continued to explain:

> “There was really much focus on this local ownership and there I spoke with some who had worked with some Ethiopian village. They have been there for two years now, well on and off, and they haven't built anything yet because they have to get to know the locals, identify their needs etc., and that is also very important, but two years is perhaps a bit overdone in my opinion”\(^{15}\) (Language officer, 22.12.2014).

The language officer reflects on the implications of local ownership in relation to her experiences from the developing world, where the concept has been widely discussed and applied in practice. This quote clearly demonstrates that she interprets local ownership as getting to know the local population, to identify their needs, and therefore she associates an important element of capacity building with obtaining insight into the local structures of the societies. By reflecting on the experiences and knowledge from this particular conference the language officer associates some of the aspects of local ownership in developmental contexts to be relevant for the military's capacity building. At the same time the language officer also challenges the concept's applicability in military practice. It is clear that she believes that a long timeframe is important. However, she does not necessarily agree that this process has to take as long as two years because such a timeframe seems unrealistic in conflict areas:

> "Sometimes [one] didn't have more than two hours in a village because then you were getting shot at. So it is very difficult in the military and defence to build this relationship

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\(^{14}\) Original quote: "*Jeg synes at det er relevant, men det er svært som militær enhed (…)"*

\(^{15}\) Original quote: "*(…) der var virkelig meget fokus på det her 'local ownership' og der snakkede jeg med nogle der har arbejdet sammen med en eller anden Etiopisk landsby. De har været dernede i to år nu, altså 'on and off' og de har endnu ikke bygget noget, fordi at de skal lære de lokale at kende, identificere deres behov osv., og det er også rigtigt vigtigt, men to år er også måske lidt overdrevet efter min smag*"
of trust, e.g. with a village, finding out what they are in need of, because you don't have the time\textsuperscript{16} (Language officer, 22.12.2014).

Her practical experience in the military demonstrates that practitioners work under time constraints as security related threats pose challenges to developing a healthy foundation with local ownership in the area of operations. So, even though there is an understanding of time as an enabler, in practice it becomes difficult to apply this in military capacity building. Another aspect of time in military practice was addressed by one of the interviewees from the Jaeger Corps. His argument was that in order to understand the local structures and dynamics of Afghanistan, they needed to enter the area of operation in the preface of a conflict. The SOF can: “enter in a phase zero or in the pre-conflict and ascertain the existing power relations\textsuperscript{17}” (SOF, interviewee1, 16.01.2015). In his opinion the expertise of SOF ought to have been exploited better than had been the case. Because by entering into a conflict zone prior to escalation they are able to provide military assistance or collect intelligence that can provide unique and relevant insight into local (in)formal societal structures. In his opinion this would have benefitted the work of Task Force 7 in Afghanistan. The consequence of trying to understand the local context after military troops have entered the area of operation is that people in the surrounding environment become guarded, as they feel intimidated or insecure because of the presence of the military:

“Listen, as soon as we start rolling over the border with our military hardware, artillery pieces, cannon, aircraft dropping bombs, then we become the bad guys, and then it is a closed country. Then events turn around a whole different axis and then we forget to support this [part] over here, which (...) is also important to the local population as well for the police officers (...)”\textsuperscript{18} (SOF, interviewee1, 16.01.2015).

Timing in this context becomes essential for gaining access to decisive information about the local context and it is highly critical whether or not information is gathered before or after the military intervention. This may be because there are certain notions connected to the physical appearance of the military and soldiers which affects the local population’s views. These perceptions create a breeding ground for opposition and hostility, conditions through which the troops have to navigate:

\textsuperscript{16} Original quote: “(...) nogle gange ikke havde mere end to timer i en landsby, for så begyndte man at blive skudt på. Så det er rigtigt svært i militæret og forsvaret at få opbygget det her tillidsforhold med en landsby for eksempel, finde ud af hvad det er de har brug for, fordi man ikke har tiden”

\textsuperscript{17} Original quote: “Men hvad er det Special operationsstyrker de kan (...) gå ind i en fase nul, eller præ konflikten og fastlægge de magtstrukturer som der er”

\textsuperscript{18} Original quote: “(...) så snart at vi begynder at rulle over grænsen med vores militære isenkram, artilleri, kanoner, flyvemaskiner der kaster bomber, prøv og hør så bliver vi det onde sådan her og så er det et lukket land. Så kører det om en helt anden akse og så glemmer vi at understøtte det herover, som (...) også er vigtigt for lokalbefolkningen og også for de politibetjente (...) ”
“This is the kind of pressure we are under, having to find out how we ensure that the tasks and the way we handle the police side, so that both power structures are taken into account. Fortunately we had some good Afghan colleagues who could understand and act in those circumstances” (SOF, interviewee1, 16.01.2015).

In Task Force 7 knowledge of the local context was limited to their Afghan colleagues and balancing the informal and formal structures was a challenge. He further articulated that access to the informal parts of the local structures was almost impossible for the military personnel and that neglecting these aspects in military capacity building makes the concept of local ownership inexpedient for their work in Afghanistan.

To summarize, time played an important factor in military capacity building for Task Force 7. The pre-deployment phase was articulated as an opportunity to gain access to local societal and power structures which allows the military practitioners to gain valuable insight into the local context of the area of operation. Capacity building initiatives that promote local ownership are more effective when executed over a longer period of time, as time enables the practitioners to build up a good relationship and understand the local structures and power dynamics. However, according to the interviewees this is not the common military practice because of security concerns and thus knowledge relies heavily on Afghan colleagues.

Ownership as a technical practice
Task Force 7’s capacity building largely involved technical assistance to the Afghan Special Police. Thus, the practitioners often related their experiences directly to their engagement with the Afghan mentees:

“I think that for the individual Frogman on the ground who has the direct contact with a police officer this has more to do with the completion of the training during the course of the day (...). Success depends a bit on whether they venture out and properly execute what they’ve learned” (SOF, 08.01.2015).

Capacity building becomes a technical practice between mentor and mentee, in which the success is measured by how well the Afghan executes the instructions given to him. The primary focus of the Danish mentors became limited to the Afghan Special Police and the surrounding population became secondary. Local ownership was not articulated as part of the above, but it was part of their overall strategy. Task Force 7 operated with three types of tasks namely partner, enable and advise. Each of these tasks would consider to which extent the Danish troops

(19) Original quote: “Det er så det pres som vi står i, det er at finde ud af hvordan sørger vi for at de opgaver og den måde som vi håndtere politidelen på, at den tilgodeser begge magtstrukturer. Der havde vi heldigvis nogle gode afghanske kolleger, der kunne forså og agere i det krydsfelt”

(20) Original quote: “(...) jeg tror at for den enkelte Frømand på jorden som har den direkte politimand, det er jo mere det her med træningens gennemførelse i løbet af dagen kan man sige (...). Succesen afhænger lidt af det forhold at de går ud og gør det godt det de har lært dem.”
would engage and support the Afghan Special Police on the operational level. On the question whether local ownership plays a role in the military practice of Task Force 7 the answer was:

"As a minimum, when you do partnering, and that was the lowest form of Afghan participation, that is where we control the operation and we tell them where they have to stand (...). There local ownership means nothing, because if there is something they are capable of, it's executing commands (...). But the moment you move towards advising, which is instinct, that is where we have to leave them to themselves; then they'll do it their own way"\(^{21}\) (SOF, interviewee1, 16.01.2015).

Local ownership depended on which task they were executing. The Afghan Special Police goes from not having any ownership to gradually achieving it by converting their military skills to ownership. One of the language officers described this gradual transition of local ownership where the first Danish team in Task Force 7 focused:

"On the practical (...) and of course also on the basic lessons there is not much focus on, “O.K., now you can do it by yourself”. Whereas team three, from my impression, were those who went on really, really many operations (...). And as mentioned, during the team’s deployment period, they [the Afghan Special Police] started more and more to take the lead"\(^{22}\) (Language officer, 18.12.2014).

The language officer continued to explain:

"I think that the ownership we tried to give them was that we would (...) prepare them (...) for when x or y happens or help them in situations which they maybe weren't able to handle out there, (...) then they could handle them next time they were exposed to such a situation."\(^{23}\) (Language officer, 18.12.2014).

The concept of ownership was approached differently from team to team. She defined the concept of ownership as the Afghans owning the instructions given to them by the Danish troops. So when the Afghans outwardly took control of the operations it was seen as a decisive

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\(^{21}\) Original quote: "Som minimum når du kører partner og det vil sige det var den laveste form for afghansk deltagelse, det er der hvor vi styrer opgaven og vi fortæller dem hvor de skal stå (...). Der betyder lokalt ejerskab ingenting, fordi hvis der er noget de kan, så er det at følge på kommando (...). Men i det øjeblik du går hen af imod advice, det som er instinkt, det er jo at vi skal overlade dem til sig selv, så gør de det på deres egen måde (...)

\(^{22}\) Original quote: ",(...) var rigtig meget fokus på det praktiske (...) og selvfølgelig også læren om det mest basale og der er ikke så meget fokus på, ok nu kan I selv.. Hvor hold tre, mit indtryk er, var dem der kørte rigtig rigtig mange operationer (...). Og som sagt i takt, i løbet af holdet, begyndte de [afghansk Specialpoliti] at gå mere og mere forest selv (...)

\(^{23}\) Original quote: "Jeg synes det ejerskab, vi prøvede at give dem var, at vi ligesom ville (...) ruste dem (...) til, når det her sker eller hjælpe dem i situationer, de måske ikke kunne håndtere derude, (...) så kunne de håndtere dem næste gang de blev udsat for det"
factor for giving them ownership of the process. Thus, ownership was reduced to a technical practice. The majority of the interviewees supported this notion. In practice the ownership was exemplified through the commander propagating orders to the Afghan unit:

“And then you figure out those solutions and then it is the commander of the Afghans that goes out and presents them (…). It was never the Danes who did this, at least not when I was down there, because it’s him they have to have respect for and it’s him who has to lead them”\(^24\) (Language officer, 18.12.2014).

Emphasising that Afghans take the lead and deemphasising the Danish role indirectly illustrates that without the Afghans’ consent the mission would not be sustainable. Afghans leading became a symbol of local ownership. As a result of this notion the Afghan commander was seen as critical to promoting ownership in Task Force 7. Hence, recognising their background and including it in the mentoring became essential to promoting ownership in their practice:

”You can’t get an Afghan to lie down the same way and do the same exercise for four hours straight, you know? You have to acknowledge that they actually know how to use a weapon. See the whole picture instead of details. That is also an important thing because they will manage out there.”\(^25\) (SOF, 08.01.2015).

The interviewees’ understanding of the local context was often related to the Afghans technical ability of having a strong respect for authorities by adhering to a chain of command. This aspect was articulated as a central Afghan component on which to base further initiatives. By including the local context into the training, an incentive for ownership was created. However, the cultural context was often reduced to technicalities as the interviewees associated and referred to Afghans as good weapon handlers, being particularly familiar with AK-47s.

Even though there was a consensus among the interviewees that, by including the Afghans in the training local ownership was practiced, there was no coherent practice or approach. The interviewees designated a criticism concerning Task Force 7, because they observed an unsustainable approach being practiced by some of the troops. An example was when the Afghan Special Police was supported with weaponry and transport options which they would only benefit from temporarily. One language officer reflects on the team deployed before her:

”They also planned many of the operations for the Afghans and they for example made helicopter operations, which, of course gave the Afghans a boost, but it is just not so-

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\(^{24}\) Original quote: "Og så finder man så frem til de der løsninger, og så er det så afghanernes commander der går ud og fremlægger det (…) Det har aldrig været danskerne der gjorde det, i hvert fald aldrig da jeg var dermede., fordi det er ligesom ham de skal have respekt for og det er ligesom ham, der skal føre dem ikk."

\(^{25}\) Original quote: "(…) du kan ikke få en afghaner til at ligge ned på samme måde og lave det samme i fire timer i streg vel. Det her med at anerkende at de faktisk kan bruge et våben. Se helheden i stedet for detaljer. Det er også en vigtig ting for de skal nok klare den derude."
mething they can do when we are gone because then there are no helicopters, so how sustainable this is can be discussed. (…). Our team was a little more at the opposite extreme where we didn't drive that much and everything had to be Afghan lead, etc. So it was like from one extreme to the other”26 (Language officer, 22.12.2014).

Instead of a coherent approach the practitioners adopted a pragmatic approach to engage the Afghans. A consequence of such an approach was that the Afghans were left confused:

"It just left the Afghans a little uncomprehending and [thought] “the others they helped us with everything; why are you not helping us with anything?” I have great respect for where you take the decision and believe that the Afghans have reached that point where they are able to do the things themselves. But it has to be a more gradual transition and you have to inform the Afghans about why you’re doing what you’re doing”27 (Language officer, 22.12.2014).

There is indirectly an expectation that allotting the Afghans a level of self-determination will lead the mission towards sustainability. However, it is equally important that when it is decided that the Afghans are capable of owning the mission by executing the operations themselves the transition should be more coordinated and gradual. The reality is often another in military practice:

“(...) the thing that I saw as the biggest problem in this capacity building and [which was] usual for military contributions (…). Every team has a new idea on how things should be run, so the common approach is missing, not only for the Danes but also for the Afghans, because they [the Afghans] are there the whole time. (...) [The Afghans] might have experienced 20 different teams, 20 different bosses who all have their own ideas on how to go about things and how to distribute resources, tasks and responsibilities (...) and that just makes it really, really confusing”28 (Language officer, 22.12.2014).

(26) Original quote: “De planlagde også mange af operationerne for afghanere og de lavede for eksempel helikopter operationer, hvilket selvfølgelig gav afghanerne et kæmpe ‘boost’, men det er bare ikke noget de kan gøre når vi er væk for så er der ingen helikoptere, så hvor bæredygtigt det er, det kan man jo så diskutere. (…) vores hold var lidt mere over i den anden grøft, hvor vi ikke kørte særligt meget og det hele skulle være ‘Afghan lead’ osv. Så det var ligesom fra den ene yderlighed til den anden”

(27) Original quote: ”Det efterlod bare afghanerne sådan lidt uforstående og ‘de andre de hjalp os med alting, hvorfor hjælper I os ikke med noget’. Jeg har stor respekt for at man tager den beslutning og mener at afghanerne er nået til det punkt godt kan kører tingene selv. Men det skal være en mere gradvis overgang og man skal informere afghanerne om hvorfor det er man gør som man gør”

(28) Original quote: “(…) det som jeg så som det største problem i det her kapacitetsopbygning og (…) [som var] generelt (…): Hvert hold har en ny idé om hvordan tingene skal køres, så der mangler en rød tråd både for danskerne, men også for afghanerne fordi de [afghanerne] er jo bare der hele tiden. (…) [Afghanerne har] oplevet måske 20 forskellige hold, 20 forskellige chefes der har hver deres idé om, hvordan det her skal køres og hvordan kagen skal skæres (…) og det gør det bare rigtig rigtig forvirrende”
On long-term missions, such as Task Force 7 a pragmatic approach becomes central as this provides the Danish troops access to context-specific knowledge, but at the same time this also provides a cause for inconsistency. The mentors and the different teams had different approaches to the training which became a cause for frustrations among the Afghans. The quote further describes how a local context, which occurs as a result of the military’s presence, was not taken into consideration in relation to the military capacity building. In order to promote ownership in military capacity building, the differences in the Afghan and Danish timeframes are appropriate to label as imperative.

To promote local ownership in the mission of Task Force 7 the practitioners had to adhere to the technical background and knowledge of the Afghans. These factors were grounded in a common reference to the military training and thus the approach was central to the capacity building.

Ownership and asymmetrical power relations
The capacity building mission of Task Force 7 was constituted by Denmark, a foreign donor country. Such interactions make asymmetrical power relations a central theme to understanding local ownership in military practice. From the perspective of the interviewees it is apparent that one of the main ways to create local ownership in military practice is by actively involving the Afghans themselves. Hence the communication between the Afghan commander and Danish platoon leaders became an interesting nexus which demonstrated some of the power relations that became apparent in Task Force 7:

“The commander says everything and can do everything (…) because you (…) have the right to advise; you don’t have the right to command. (…) You can advise and then you have to create shared values with them, so that you have good relations (…). When they say something then it’s actually what you say and then they do it. Instead of yelling louder, louder, louder and then thinking that you can command and decide”29 (SOF, 08.01.2015).

This provides insight into the delicate balance of mentoring. There was an expectation from the donor side that the Afghan Special Police adhere to the teachings of the Danish forces. On the other hand they also acknowledged the importance of the mission being Afghan lead which is why they did not command but rather advised the Afghans through the Afghan commander. An example of how this was practiced was described by one SOF personnel:

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29 Original quote: “Commanderen siger alt og kan alt, kan man sige, fordi du har (…) rådgivningsret, du har ikke befalingsret. (...) Du kan rådgive og så må du jo skabe værdierne med dem, således at du har gode relationer (...). Når de siger noget, så det faktisk det du siger og så gør de det. I stedet for at råbe højere, højere, højere og så tro at du kan befale og bestemme”
"We called him over to our camp, also because we would then be on our turf. I would
then have an interpreter with me and a chief of staff and the PRC commander" (SOF,
08.01.2015).

Another SOF personnel also supported this notion:

“We actually also started to mentor upwards and (…) we had meetings with them now
and the commander had to go over and talk to someone: Well, which messages was
it that we wanted there, what was it we wanted the PRT to take along? So there was
actually a strategic planning for how we would promote the PRC” (SOF, 16.01.2015).

The above quotes are significant for understanding local ownership in military practice as they
demonstrate how power relations come into play in the mission. The aim is that the Afghans
feel that they have ownership, when in reality the ownership is an expression of persuasion.
Consequently the development of the PRC depends on the ‘we’ (the Danish troops), because
they are in a position to call the commander over for meetings, through which they decide
which messages they want to promote and how ‘we’ expect the PRC to conduct itself, etc. In
reality this constitutes an expression of the donor’s wishes and is thus an imposition. Con-
sequently, the concept of local ownership is a strategic device that enables reforms from the
outside. On the other hand the interviewees articulated that SOF mentors as individuals were
good at listening to their Afghan mentees:

"Of course, there are times when you listen and times when you do not have to listen.
But in the breaks, when one had a better suggestion then they would be listened to. Not
necessarily because it would be implemented but because people gained this feeling of
ownership" (Language officer, 18.12.2014).

Arguably ownership was an artificial device which was built on consensus of the concept's
applicability in military practice. At the same time it was implicitly communicated that the
foreign troops were superior to the Afghans in terms of knowledge. The Danish mentors are
the experts as they provide resources and knowledge for building the Afghan Special Police’s
capacity which is why they gain more credibility among themselves and the Afghans. Thus

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(30) Original quote: “Vi kaldte ham over til vores egen camp også fordi så var på vores jord. Så havde vi en
tolk med mig og så en ‘chief of staff’ og så PRC kommanderen”

(31) Provinsial Reconstruction Teams

(32) Original quote: “(…) vi begyndte jo egentlig også at mentorer opad og (…) vi holdt møder med dem nu
og kommanderen skulle over og tale med en eller anden, jamen hvad var det så for nogle budskaber vi gerne ville
have over, hvad var det vi gerne ville have PRT'et til at tage videre så der var egentlig en strategisk planlægning for
hvordan får vi skubbet PRC'et frem i verden”

(33) Original quote: “Selvfølgelig er der tider, hvor man skal lytte og tider hvor man ikke skal lytte, men
hvis der en i pauserne der havde et bedre forslag, så blev der lyttet til det. Ikke fordi det nødvendigvis blev
implementeret, men folk fik den her ejerfølelse”
balancing the local knowledge and the “expert” knowledge becomes a delicate exercise. One of the language officers argues that these imbalances can lead to a mistaken consideration for what is believed to be the locals’ needs, rather than being attentive to their actual demands:

“One should not come with such an idea of, okay, they probably need a well here, and then come in and say: Do you want a well? Of course, they would want that. Who says no to a well? But it isn’t certain that that is what they need, and one can be absolutely sure that when you return a couple of weeks later, then the pump is probably broken, and no one has tried to repair it because they didn’t have that much need for it. So this is why it is important, because or else (...) you waste many resources if there is no local ownership” (Language officer, 22.12.2014).

In the case of Task Force 7 the Danish troops are the “donors” and so this dilemma is likely to be present in the training missions, which then risk neglecting the local context in certain situations. This may also explain the approach where the Afghan Special Police is gradually “given” local ownership in training missions. Therefore, how local ownership is understood and operationalised is essential to the outcome of the mission. There is no doubt that misunderstanding the local context in which the Danish army and Afghan Special Police are operating can have consequences for the ownership and thus hinder the sustainability of the military capacity building. The language officer points out that there is only local ownership when the demand comes from the Afghans themselves and that it is not local ownership when ‘we’ come from the outside and assess what ‘they’ need. This approach does not provide sustainability, nor does it contribute to Afghan autonomy, rather it may result in resources being wasted. It aptly demonstrates the dynamic and dialectic positioning between donor and recipient. Arguably the Afghans are inclined to accept whatever is offered them, since the Afghans themselves also are aware of these power dynamics and they are not in a position to make demands.

To summarise, gaining ‘local ownership’ is highly influenced and enabled or disabled because of the power dynamics between the Danish troops and the Afghans. Military capacity building projects in Afghanistan are in many aspects implemented top down because of the country’s fragile condition. However, to sustain these projects there is no doubt a need for the Afghans to feel a sense of ownership and self-determination.

(34)  Original quote: "Man skal ikke komme ind med sådan en idé om, okay, de har nok brug for en brønd her og så komme ind og sige vil I have en brønd. Selvfølgelig vil de gerne det. Hvem siger nej til en brønd, men det er jo ikke sikkert at det er det de har brug for og man kan være stensikker på at når man kommer tilbage et par uger efter så er pumpen formentligt gået i stykker og der er ikke nogen der har forsøgt at reparere den fordi så meget havde de måske ikke brug for den. Så derfor er det vigtigt fordi ellers så går der, man spilder rigtig mange ressourcer hvis der ikke er noget 'local ownership'"
THE COMPLEXITIES OF LOCAL OWNERSHIP IN MILITARY PRACTICE

Local ownership has largely been a rhetorical device that is detached from practical experiences and has thus been inherently difficult to operationalise (Nathan 2008:19; Reich 2006:5-6). The four empirical themes discussed above confirm that there is a clear discrepancy between the practical implications of local ownership and the conceptual framework of ownership in military practice (Reich 2006:6-7). One of these discrepancies is represented through power dynamics which can be divided into two levels: the overall donor-recipient asymmetry and the tactical level where these overall dynamics were translated into the practice of Task Force 7. It is in this space that local ownership is negotiated and practiced. In an ideal situation for a conflict that has started within a society, sustainable ownership is only achievable when domestic actors shape and decide the reforms (Reich 2006:5). However, the empirical reality of military capacity building dismisses this, which very aptly characterises the paradox of local ownership in military practice. The unstable environment of Afghanistan has been ineffective in providing internal security in the first place, whereby the responsibility for designing reforms to build the capacity of Afghan security forces is not easily left in the hands of the Afghans (Donais 2008b:8; Nathan 2008:23-24). Task Force 7, as an initiative led and conceived by the Danish SOF, lacked the local participation in these initial phases. As a consequence, the likelihood of donors imposing changes that they deem best for the country’s security are prioritised. Additionally, with a major part of the funding for the capacity coming from Denmark and other external donors the Afghans were more inclined to be persuaded to accept the reforms (Donais 2008b:7; Mateos 2011:8). Hence, ownership became absent in one of the most decisive phases of capacity building.

Persuasion was a critical part of Task Force 7 at the tactical level, as the notion of Afghan ownership prevented the Danes to dictate the course of action in their work without the Afghans’ consent. Persuasion thus becomes a convenient operational tool through which external actors have control of the process while still promoting ownership (Martin & Wilson 2008:86). With such a practice the individual interactions become central to promoting ownership in military capacity building. The empirical data shows that good relations and trust enable the possibility to understand the Afghans as this provided the mission with valuable contextual insight, which can thus be seen as a basis for sustainability. The more trust, the greater the possibility that the “locals” endorse the security initiatives that the foreign military presents and that they will be more inclined to take over and maintain the capacity that has been built. In theory the argument is that local ownership is a precondition for sustainability in capacity building (Donais 2008a: 278, 288; Nathan 2007:76, 87). Thus, trust and persuasion become one way of translating sustainability into practice and become enabling elements for local ownership. However, the reality on the ground is not as ideal due to the circumstances under which military practitioners must work. For example, the fear of insider attacks evidently limits trust and thereby the possibility for the Afghans to practice ownership. The argument is that when trust is reduced the Danish troops are less inclined to give the Afghans responsibility in the training and mentoring process. The more responsibility the Afghans receive, the more
ownership they gain. So in military practice ownership highly depends on the individual relationship in question.

Distrust between the Danes and the Afghans seems unavoidable as the fear of insecurity and hostility will be an inevitable part of the environment in fragile states (Mateo 2011:8), but this aspect seems neglected in strategies for military capacity building. Instead of asking naively, local ownership to be a part of the military capacity building, the real question posed should be to which extent can ownership be applied in military practice, and if so, will it work as intended?

The power dynamics and the role of trust in sustainability are complex notions but were nevertheless operationalised by the practitioners of Task Force 7. Their way of navigating with a contested concept in military capacity building was by associating their observations and practices to something tangible with the tools they already possessed (Sheye & Peake 2005:10-11). One way of doing it is by reducing local ownership to technicalities which refers directly to the training and mentoring of the Afghans. Including the Afghans and their backgrounds actively in the training is one way to transfer ownership. This is in accordance with the theory, which argues that because local ownership is a rhetorical device without guidelines for those who are going to practice it the practitioners are left to themselves and their own devices (Sheye & Peake 2005:10). Consequently, the implementation of ownership becomes based on subjective interpretations that are adjusted pragmatically to the environment in which they operate. Such an approach may be suitable for some practitioners, because they have the freedom to adjust the training to the practical realities they face. On the other hand, the subjective interpretation of local ownership as a technical element can also lead to misrepresentation of the Afghan context and disregard important societal structures. Ultimately, it can have serious consequences for successful capacity building of the Afghan security forces.

This is why it is essential that the practitioners take the time to understand the environment in which they are operating. For this reason the theory argues that long-term perspectives and patience are crucial to promoting ownership in practice, but these are often neglected (Sheye & Peake 2005:11-12). Fragile societies as Afghanistan, where there is no strong central, legitimate authority and where competing groups fight for influence, require even more patience and time (Nathan 2008:25, 34). The empirical data presented implications of time at different levels. One level was the tactical where the individual practitioner was deployed for “short” periods of four months whereas the Afghan counterparts stayed for years. It was a clear cause for frustrations among the practitioners and Afghan police as they had not experienced equal preconditions. Furthermore the training and capacity building did not take an evolutionary development, but instead would “reset” some of the achievements after each deployment. However, experiences with redeployments did have a positive effect on the training as trust was sustained. In this way it enabled faster transfer of ownership to the Afghans as there were fewer setbacks.
The other level represents the overall timeframe for missions. This timeframe is seen as a determining condition to map structures and power dynamics that are present before and during a military intervention. It is important to recognise that it takes even more time to understand the structures and dynamics of societies in fragile states, as they have changed considerably during the conflict. So, in order to gain sustainability the missions should continue with a coherent approach for several years (Sheye & Peake 2005:12).
CONCLUSION

Local ownership is a rhetorical device in military capacity building. Even though the concept has proven to be contested, both in theory and practice, it has been promoted as an imperative part of the military capacity building of the Afghan National Security Forces. Task Force 7 was deployed with the purpose of building the capacity of the Afghan Special Police through military training and mentoring. The empirical findings discussed in this paper confirm that local ownership was a part of the military practice of Task Force 7, but was limited due to the uncertain environments in which they operated. Moreover, there were no common criteria to what ownership was and how it was expected to be applied within the mission. Consequently, practice was shaped by the subjective interpretation which enabled a pragmatic approach.

All interviewees presented different notions regarding the applicability of ownership in military practice from which four empirical themes derived: ‘Trust as a point of departure for nurturing ‘local ownership’, ‘Time as an enabler to local ownership’, ‘Ownership as a technical practice’ and ‘Ownership and asymmetrical power relations’. Each of these themes presents certain recurrent notions and implications that (in)directly influence the applicability of local ownership in military capacity building. They also confirm that local ownership in military practice is complex because of structural and conceptual limitations. The findings suggest that local ownership, despite virtuous intentions, is more of a practical action strategy that is seen as a convenient device for imposition, rather than a goal of military capacity building. An approach that ignores the practical implications of ownership in military practice will remain problematic if left unaddressed. Before forcing local ownership into the field of military capacity building, there is a need for reconsideration and clarification regarding its practicality. Only then will the concept could add strength to military capacity building.
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