

Clausewitz inspired reflections on aid operations in turbulent environments: the case of Nepal 1999-2005/06

Leonard F. Van Duijn (2009)

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*Clausewitz Inspired Reflections on
Aid Operations in Turbulent
Environments*

The Case of Nepal 1999-2005/06

L.F. van Duijn

*Clausewitz Inspired Reflections on
Aid Operations in Turbulent
Environments*

The Case of Nepal 1999-2005/06

Leonard Franklin van Duijn

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Abstract

This research is an exploratory single case study, which focuses on the interplay between aspects of Clausewitz's theory on war and the practice of aid agencies in Nepal between 1999-2005/06. During which period Nepal was embroiled in an escalating violent conflict between Maoist rebels and the ruling establishment, which had a severe impact on the operations of aid agencies present in Nepal.

The study draws primarily on Clausewitz's theory on war to provide analytical tools of help to the aid industry and those in strategizing roles at country level in thinking through the challenges faced in unstable and deteriorating operational contexts, in order to further poverty and conflict reduction efforts.

The research reflects on the processes of strategizing and implementing aid operations in turbulent environments from a Clausewitz-inspired perspective and advances two main findings. First, the thesis finds that one key concept used in this reflection process, which shows itself to be of practical help, is the 'aid trinity'. The 'aid trinity' is a normative reflective framework that consists of three interacting layers, being psychological, social and managerial, which facilitates the thinking through and strategizing of aid operations.

Second, by borrowing Clausewitz notion of friction, the research demonstrates that the existence of multiple forms of friction present in processes of strategizing and implementing aid operations in turbulent contexts like Nepal, could severely hamper these operations. Friction can be understood as the mediating force between what was perceived as the ideal form of conducting aid operations in Nepal and their actual character, resulting in the inability of the international aid community to address appropriately the dynamics of poverty and conflict.

The research highlights the need to factor in the reality of these multiple forms of friction and to allow for their impact in policy, strategizing and implementation processes, in the hope of maximizing poverty and conflict reduction efforts in fragile states and other turbulent environments.

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Abbreviations

ACF	Action Contra la Faim
AD	Anno Domini
ADB	Asian Development Bank
AIN	Association of international NGO's in Nepal.
BBC	British Broadcasting Cooperation
BOG	Basic Operating Guidelines
CECI	Centre for International Studies and Cooperation
CHDP	Community Health and Development Programme
CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
CPN-M	Communist Party of Nepal-Maoists
CSP	Community Support Programme
CORD	Christian Outreach Relief and Development
DANIDA	Danish International Development Agency
DDC	District Development Committee
DERO	Dafur Emergency Response Operation
DFID	Department For International Development
DFID/N	Department For International Development/ Nepal
EU	European Union
FINADA	Finish International Development Agency
FO	Foreign Office
GTZ	Gesellschaft fur Technishe Zusammenarbeit
IED	Improvised Explosive Device
ILO	International Labour Organisation
INF	International Nepal Fellowship
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation
ISDP	Integrated Security Development Plan
KJDF	Karnali Joint Development Forum
LGA	Local Governance Act
MoD	Ministry of Defence
MSF-F	Medicine Sans Frontier-France
MSF-H	Medicine Sans Frontier-Holland
NC	Nepali Congress
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NPC	National Planning Commission
NSMP	Nepal Safer Motherhood Project
PLA	People's Liberation Army
PM	Prime Minister
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
PW	People's War
QIP	Quick Impact Project
RCIW	Rural Community Infrastructure Works
REDR	Register Engineers Disaster Relief
RMO	Risk Management Office
RNA	Royal Nepali Army
RRN	Rural Reconstruction Nepal
SAP	South-Asian Partnership
SDC	Swiss Development Cooperation

SEDC	Safe and Effective Development in Conflict
SFs	Security Forces
SNV	Netherlands Development Organisation
SPHERE	Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response
TEC	Tsunami Evaluation Coalition
UK	United Kingdom
UML	United Marxist-Leninist
UN	United Nations
UN-OCHA	United Nations Organisation for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNM	United Mission of Nepal
US	United States
USAID	United States Agency of international Development
VDC	Village Development Committee
WB	World Bank
WFP	World Food Programme
ZOA	ZOA Refugee Care
HUGOU	Human Rights and Good Governance Unit
ICJ	International Commission of Jurist
ICG	International Crisis Group
QIP	Quick Impact Project

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PART I

Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This qualitative exploratory study presents a series of reflections related to strategizing and implementing aid operations in insurgency-ridden Nepal between 1999 and 2005/06.¹ These reflections are inspired by the thinking of the military philosopher Clausewitz (1780-1831), represented in his book *On War*.² The study has its foundations in problems encountered during my time working in relief and development, in perceived gaps in my own education identified during work in the field, and in my own curiosity as to whether these might be addressed through what may be for some a rather paradoxical approach.

The research question of the study is: *How might reflections on aid operations in turbulent operational environments, such as Nepal during the period August 1999 to 2005/06, appear when inspired by Clausewitz's lines of thought and conceptualizations of war as laid out in his book On War?*

Paragraph 1.4 provides an overview of the objectives of the study.

The remainder of this chapter is structured as follows: firstly, the journey leading to the research is described, followed by a presentation of research objectives and an overview of what this research does not intend to do. The research will be positioned in relation to existing development literature and my own position regarding development work. The chapter ends with an overview of the study. In the remainder of this paragraph, I outline my overseas work experiences with the hope of enlightening the

¹ Annexe 1.1 explains the meaning of aid operations within the context of this thesis.

² I would like to thank Sir Sam Cowan, Clausewitz expert and Nepal observer, for suggesting Clausewitz's work *On War* in the context of aid and development in Nepal, to use primarily as a source of reflection, rather than a basis for theory building. Chapter Three explores Clausewitz's thinking and his book *On War*. During the course of the study reference is made to an English translation of *On War* by Michael Howard and Peter Paret (1989), referred to as H&P.

reader of this thesis as to why I arrived at such a paradoxical topic and why certain choices have been made during the course of the research.³

Albania and Nepal My main experiences of relief and development practice were gained during assignments in Albania (during the Kosovo crisis in 1999) and Nepal (1999-2005). In Albania I worked for a Dutch/ British relief consortium⁴ as assistant manager, with two competing tasks.⁵ These tasks required me to reconcile the conflicting demands generated in a chaotic context by an ongoing relief project and an envisaged development project.⁶ From August 1999 to mid-July 2005 I worked in Nepal. To put it somewhat euphemistically, this period saw Nepal's decline from a young 'democracy' into an at best a fragile state, owing to a rather unconstructive interaction between the relatively powerful Maoist rebellion and those formally holding power in Kathmandu, whose political, administrative and military response might conservatively be described as unhelpful.⁷ During these years I worked for three aid agencies,⁸ the International Nepal Fellowship (INF), The Netherlands Development Organisation (SNV) and the Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA).⁹ Though the size and resources of the three agencies varied, all three had already operated in Nepal for a considerable period and run significant projects and programmes in the country.

Initially, I went out as INF's Research Evaluation Officer within their Community Health Development Programme (CHDP). However, my main role during my 6 years

³ My educational and working experiences on the one hand explain a part of my bias in this study, which I hope to curb and compensate for, while on the other hand they form an integral part of this thesis, having shaped my perspective.

⁴ This consortium was made up of ZOA Refugee Care, Christian Outreach Relief and Development (CORD) and Tearfund Holland. They worked together with the Swiss relief agency Medair, the lead agency for the management of the camp near the city of Elbasan.

⁵ The first related to the consortium's involvement in the management of a refugee camp near a town called Elbasan. The second was to identify a long-term project, as one of the consortium members was keen to continue work in Albania after the Kosovar refugees had returned. By the time the refugees had returned to Kosovo, I had successfully identified a long-term rural development project.

⁶ ZOA Refugee Care was keen to start a long-term project. In the second half of 2004 this programme was handed over. See also <http://www.zoaweb.org/Page/sp829/index.html>, accessed on 2/09/06.

⁷ See Chapter Two, also for example Gersony (2003).

⁸ Annexe 1.1 explains the meaning of the term aid agencies within the context of this thesis.

⁹ The first three years were with the International Nepal Fellowship (INF), a faith-based international agency of British origin, with its international headquarters in Pokhara. Its main involvement is in health and community development. SNV was mainly involved in the governance, natural resources and private sectors. DANIDA was primarily involved in education, governance, natural resources and human rights.

in Nepal was in security and conflict management, mainly assisting management and agency staff through advice and training to deal with the security risks generated by the violent conflict between the Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist (CPN-M) and a succession of governments. This gave me the opportunity to observe and to listen to field-level views, and question, in a sensitive way, the dynamics of aid operations in various parts of Nepal. In both Albania and Nepal, while I had no fixed management responsibility, I was involved in processes of operational strategizing within the aid agencies I worked for.¹⁰ Moreover, in the case of Nepal, I had access to various fora where representatives of different aid agencies came together to share, analyse, strategise and coordinate specific aspects of their operations. This provided me with the opportunity to reflect on situations from a participant-observer perspective.

1.2 Contrasting education and work practice: towards a hunch

This paragraph discusses my observations about the contrast between my education and the reality of working practice.

Education While in Nepal, it appeared to me in retrospect that my education, in the field of Development Studies at the University of Wageningen (1991-1997), prepared me to become an aid practitioner able to make vertical and horizontal linkages in the development domain.¹¹ Despite the work of advocates of the actor approach and systems theory (respectively Long 1992 and Röling, who advocated Checkland's soft-system approach),¹² the assumption underpinning the Development Studies curriculum appeared to be modernist, and, intentionally or not, to be a 'linear interventionist one'. The focus was on 'preparing' students to level out the pitfalls of a de-contextualised, de-politicised, basically linear development process supporting slowly but peacefully progressing societies in the less developed parts of the world. During the course of my studies I started wondering whether the reality of aid and development was

¹⁰ See Annexe 1.1 how the term aid agency is used in the remaining of the thesis.

¹¹ It seemed that I was trained to observe and understand communities at grass-roots level and to communicate the outcomes of these interactions to policy-makers, and in turn to convince the recipients of aid of the validity of the policy-makers' decisions higher up in the aid chain. In horizontal terms, I was 'trained' to create constructive links between the technical and social domains of the aid delivery process.

¹² For further reading on Peter Checkland's soft-system approach see: <http://www.lums.lancs.ac.uk/profiles/peter-checkland/?type=000002#profilePublications>, accessed on 2/09/09.

predominantly linear. The widely broadcasted crises and interventions of that era,¹³ the deep impressions left by several trips abroad,¹⁴ a study-term at the Refugee Studies Centre in Oxford,¹⁵ my involvement in the collection of some teaching material to be used at Wageningen University¹⁶ and my first professional assignment abroad to Albania during the Kosovo Crisis all hinted in another direction.

Work practice In Albania and Nepal, the linear intervention paradigm which had formed the basis of my education proved to be thoroughly problematic and I felt forced to reject it to a very large extent in the case of Nepal. Within a few weeks of arrival, the government of Nepal withdrew the visas of ten experienced aid workers in my new agency, including the director of the programme I had started to work for.¹⁷ Having recovered from this it became clear that the project intervention theory was rife with shortcomings given the (perceived) social dynamics in the project areas, due to factors such as seasonal migration.¹⁸ To complicate matters, it also became clear to me that Nepal was full of different types of conflict (Upreti 2002), and that beyond the hills and mountains, which surrounded the well-known holiday resort in which we lived and worked (Pokhara), a Maoist-inspired rebellion was gaining momentum. After reflecting on all the available information on this issue, which did not amount to much,¹⁹ I conjectured that if this Maoist rebellion was able to sustain momentum, the rebellion could be an escalating force able to bring about a rapid and radical reconfiguration of the social and political landscape of Nepal. At the same time, as the rebellion appeared to prioritize violent struggle above all else, it would also, in

¹³ Iraq (1990), Somalia (1991), Rwanda (1994) and the war in the Balkans.

¹⁴ Travel through Yugoslavia summer 1990 (start of the war in the Balkans), South-Hungary 1991 (influx of refugees from the Croatian town Osijek) and Nepal (Bhutanese Refugee Project/ Lutheran World Service).

¹⁵ Hilary term, 1997.

¹⁶ Disaster Studies Reader (1997), Wageningen Agriculture University, The Netherlands.

¹⁷ This left my new agency in a state of crisis and subsequently the newcomers to the programme were left without a proper (organisational) introduction, amongst other things. Community Health and Development Programme/ INF (CHDP/ INF).

¹⁸ As far as I understood the project documents, it was for example assumed that the population within project area was made up of generally static and stable communities, while in fact seasonal migration, either to urban centres in Nepal or abroad, was a part of the communities' ways of sustaining themselves.

¹⁹ The agency's library was rather limited; Internet access very poor, and most staff were not really keen to talk about it. However, one of the directors of the agency could tell from personal experience who one of the leaders of the CPN-M was, having taught him at primary school in Ghorka district over 20 years previously. This informed me about the potential of the leadership of the Maoist movement to stay ahead of developments.

conjunction with the lack of a proper government response, jeopardise the efforts of many development agencies and expose their practices at the same time (Hutt 2004).²⁰ In my view Nepal became a turbulent environment.²¹

After three years of work for INF, I moved in the summer of 2002 to Kathmandu and joined SNV/ Nepal in the capacity of conflict advisor. In the meantime the rebellion did indeed grow in strength and impact. The response from the political-administrative-military centre in Kathmandu appeared to remain unconstructive. In addition, it appeared to me that SNV, instead of responding to the situation in Nepal, focused on formalising interventions based on a blueprint corporate change process, which excluded the existence of (violent) conflict.²² Subsequently, the focus of my attention shifted from countering the pitfalls of a de-contextualised, de-politicised, non-conflict linear development process to raising awareness and facilitating discussion among the different levels of management within and outside the agency about the possibility of the opposite being true, and the implications of this for the work in which aid agencies were all involved (see for example van Duijn 2004).

Towards a hunch Over time, alongside colleagues from other aid agencies, I regularly met a few expatriates with military backgrounds who were still part of the military or employed by aid agencies. In varying degrees, such individuals were able to analyse

²⁰ In 2000, I co-wrote a short report to inform the management board of INF of the possibility of increased turmoil in Nepal, the possible consequences for the agency's operational methods and ways to address these in order to remain relevant and effective (Hancock R. and L. van Duijn 2000). Despite initial disbelief among board members, who might have perceived the authors as 'green and inexperienced,' (parts of) the report slowly filtered through the organisation. The fact that agency staff on several occasions came face-to-face with the physical manifestations of the Maoist Insurgency was an unwelcome, but unsurprising help in this process. Examples included the Maoist attack on the police post and Army Barracks in Ghorai/ Dang (2001) and the attack on the district headquarters of Jumla in October 2002, causing in both cases a number of deaths and severe infrastructural damage. In both cases national and expatriate INF staff were caught up in the fighting.

²¹ Annexe 1.1 explains the meaning of turbulence and turbulent environment within the context of this thesis.

²² One might ask why aid agencies employed conflict advisors if they continued to operate conflict-blind. I got the impression, at least for the second agency I worked for that the position was created to show headquarters that the conflict in Nepal was taken seriously to a certain extent, without committing themselves to substantial adjustments in their preferred way of operating. To summarize this period I would like to paraphrase Henry Kissinger when referring to a military issue: while in SNV, I found myself forced to be involved in designing aid interventions based on abstract criteria, implementing strategies I did not really believe in and ultimately being involved in development interventions I did not understand and could only assume to be counter-productive given the ground realities as I perceived them to be (Kissinger in: Mintzberg 2000).

the developments in Nepal in a dynamic way, compared with only a few of the development practitioners with whom I had contact. Although I did not necessarily agree with their views, I was impressed by their lucidity and conciseness; but from the angle of a development worker, their views had one significant shortcoming: the analyses were not necessarily satisfactorily expressed in the terminology of aid and development, and therefore not necessarily easy to grasp by aid managers lacking a military education.²³

During the second half of 2003 I became interested in a way of thinking, an approach to reality or practice-related theory that could help me in my effort to make sense of what was going on in the course of my work; the sole focus on the organisational and institutional apparatus around decision-making and coordination within the international community did not, according to my understanding, make much sense, when aid agencies were not engaged in making sense beyond the logic of their organisational mandate, procedures or policies in their efforts to strategize and implement aid activities.²⁴ It appeared to me, without contesting its quality or relevance in other contexts, that literature related to fragile or failed states or handbooks on humanitarian aid (see for example Debiel and Klein 2002; UNICEF 1994) could not properly inform aid agencies about how to understand Nepal's increasing turbulence and its implications for the strategizing and positioning of aid operations.²⁵ It was during this period that I started to wonder if the aid and development industry operating in turbulent environments could benefit from military theory, and began to explore the possible usefulness of combining military thinking with the practice of aid operations in Nepal.²⁶ It was this, which triggered the idea of focusing on the work of a classical military philosopher as a source for exploration.

²³ Conversely, my development or humanitarian colleagues expressed themselves well about the activities they were involved in, but were less able to put this in a context of a dynamic analysis.

²⁴ In the same period, aid agency representatives engaged in getting the UN Organisation for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs into Nepal in order to facilitate different forms of coordinated decision-making. Libanora argues that these discussions around the issue of coordination were a *leit motif* during donor meetings (2003:42)

²⁵ Two thoughts arose. Firstly, why continue looking within the aid literature for means for understanding of what was going on within the context of aid delivery when it did not appear useful for the role I had to fulfil within my work. Secondly, if this were the case, was there something outside this body of aid literature that might be useful, not necessarily as an alternative, but as an additional perspective to facilitate reflection on the practice of aid delivery in turbulent environments such as Nepal.

²⁶ See Annexe 1.1 how the term turbulent environment is understood in this thesis.

After some consideration, I selected the work of the German military strategist Clausewitz titled *On War*.²⁷ By doing so I assumed that Clausewitz's work, at least in part, could provide a creative foundation to think through the activities of aid agencies in turbulent contexts like Nepal. Fortunately, my position as conflict advisor offered me opportunities to experiment with some thoughts to see what the envisaged interplay might deliver. Initially, I focused on a re-conceptualisation and visualisation of Clausewitz's paradoxical trinity concept of war (H&P: 89) and integrated this into some presentations used in training sessions, which generated a positive response from colleagues from a variety of agencies.²⁸ In brief, this research is born out of a curiosity to address two interlinked tensions, which do not appear to be uncommon (Smith and Hitt 2005: 574). The first is my university education and my personal view of it, and the second is the development practice I worked in and my own ideas about what this practice should take into consideration while working in turbulent environments such as Nepal. Klinger, a military commentator, argues that: "*in essence Clausewitz was formulating what we would now call a social science of war*" (2006). Therefore, this study assumes that Clausewitz's thinking as laid out in *On War* can provide *some* clues for reflection on aid operations in turbulent environments. The following paragraph provides a further justification of the juxtaposition of Clausewitz's theory on War with the practice of international development in fragile states.

1.3 The rational of using Clausewitz's *On War* as means of reflection

This paragraph explains point by point why Clausewitz's *On War* is applied as an inspirational lens to reflect on aid operations in Nepal and aid operations in turbulent environments in general. The points are not necessarily presented in order of importance, but should be seen as an interconnected series of reasons, which taken together, form the rationale for the juxtaposition of Clausewitz's approach to

²⁷ In retrospect, instead of turning to the readily available work of Eastern military philosopher Sun Tzu (1988) I chose the work of Clausewitz because his writing appeared to me closer to my own cultural background and way of reasoning than that of Sun Tzu.

²⁸ For example in a workshop titled: 'Conflict and Aid in Nepal', 16 December 2004, Royal Danish Embassy/ DANIDA, Kathmandu. Why was the response generally positive? I believe that, although the various presentations did not provide any answers, it offered my colleagues, who were for the most part genuinely interested in structuring the problems they were faced with, a visualisation of their own position in relation to others. Furthermore, it helped to stimulate and structure debate accordingly.

theorizing on war and aid in Nepal, with the goal of contributing to the existing literature on aid and development in fragile states.

To begin with, as indicated earlier, I saw a particular approach being applied by a colleague from another aid agency, which with some reasoning could be traced back to Clausewitz, given the status of his work as one of the major influences on current military thinking in the West. I hypothesized that this paradigm might to a certain extent prove relevant as approach to thinking through the actions of aid agencies in turbulent contexts.

In addition, as indicated in Chapter Five, Clausewitz presents as a core element in his theory the Remarkable Trinity, a concept that brings together the psychological, sociological and 'managerial' dimensions of war in one conceptual model. It was apparent to me that there were considerable conceptual similarities between Clausewitz's Remarkable Trinity concept and its implications for understanding military operations and the main elements of aid operations, the subsequent interactions of these elements and the type of dynamic this generates for aid operations embedded in this interacting set of elements. In other words, Clausewitz's enlightening attempt to mix the psychological, the sociological, and the managerial led me to believe that his work could be a valuable inspirational basis to reflect on aid operations in turbulent environments.

Moreover, as the remainder of the thesis shows, the issue of strategy was according to my understanding an undervalued dimension of the aid operations conducted in turbulent Nepal. This underlined the value of applying Clausewitz's work, since he focuses on strategizing and operating in environments of danger, uncertainty and chance.

Despite the attractiveness of the Remarkable Trinity concept, and its focus on strategy, *On War* is not an easy read. Nevertheless, Clausewitz provides, as Sumida argues, a type of straightforward, though not simplistic, discourse (2001) that, in my experience, differs in form from that used within the Nepal's aid industry. In other words, the straightforward, non-technical language applied by Clausewitz appealed to me.

Another reason to use *On War* as a source for reflection related to the way Clausewitz expressed his views on the various aspects of the conduct of war. By contrast with eastern war philosopher Sun Tzu, Clausewitz- explains during the process of writing why he arrives at certain ideas and positions (Sumida 2001). This was not only helpful while working in Nepal, but during the development of this thesis, as I aimed to capture this train of thought in the process of reflecting on aid operations in turbulent environments. In spite of the use of non-technical and straightforward language and the explicit description of the paths to his conclusions, Clausewitz yet leaves space for multiple interpretations of his texts. The numerous ways in which Clausewitz's texts can be understood gave me the freedom to use *On War* in a creative and imaginative way which I thought at that time and still think could shed light on aid operations in turbulent environments.

Last, but by no means least, *On War* held a personal appeal to me owing to its being written with a high degree of seriousness and with great passion. It is my view that *On War* reflects Clausewitz's understanding that war was a deadly serious business, under no circumstances to be taken lightly. He seems to have realized with great clarity that omissions in the various aspects of the conduct of war could have serious consequences on the battlefield and beyond, ranging from loss of life, destruction of sizeable parts of the commander's own army and the subsequent potential political repercussions. Such serious engagement was sadly lacking among at least some sections of Nepal's aid industry in thinking through interventions in Nepal's dynamic context. *On War* does not only offer a model for reflection on particular aspects of aid operations, but inspires a mindset of passionate seriousness. I have attempted to capture and incorporate this mindset in the reflective sections of this thesis. Chapter Three describes Clausewitz's *On War* in greater detail. Now we move to the research objectives of this study.

1.4 Objectives of the study

The general objective of this study is to explore the interplay between elements of Clausewitz's theory on war and the practice of the development industry in Nepal between 1999-2005/06, and by doing so enable reflection on aspects of the practice of

strategizing aid operations in turbulent environments. For these reasons the study has the following objectives.

1. To sketch the context in which aid agencies in Nepal had to operate.
2. To examine Clausewitz's ideas on war and strategy in particular.
3. To devise an approach which would enable Clausewitz's thinking on war to become a normative analytical tool to examine the practice of the development industry in Nepal and to facilitate speculative reflections on strategizing aid operations turbulent environments.
4. To examine the general conduct of aid agencies operating in Nepal between 1999 and 2005/06 and based on this to reflect on strategizing and implementation processes of aid operations in turbulent environments.

Chapter Four presents the approach to the research question. This chapter provides the hypotheses as well.

1.5 Scope of the study

1. The study focuses on the conduct of aid agencies in Nepal in general in relation to the increasing turbulence within the country, in part due to the escalating People's War. No attempt is made to single out particular agencies for close scrutiny.
2. The study primarily covers the period between 1999 and 2005/06, but this time frame is not applied too strictly.²⁹
3. The conduct of the aid agencies is analysed and reflected upon within a set of concepts elaborated upon by Clausewitz in his work *On War*.³⁰
4. In order to make the reflections more specific, the study focuses on the processes of strategizing and implementation. In this process the aid strategist, the person who is involved in strategizing processes, takes centre stage (see Annexe 1.1 for an explanation).

²⁹ The reason for this timeframe is twofold. The year 1999 is chosen on personal grounds: after arriving in Nepal in mid-1999 I started to realise the existence of low-level violent conflict in significant parts of the project areas in which my organisation was operating. The year 2005 is chosen due to developments in the country; during that year Nepal came into the international spotlight after King Gyanendra staged a coup and the UN and nine western aid agencies declared that Nepal was on the brink of humanitarian abyss.

(See also http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/4360019.stm, accessed on 02/09/09).

³⁰ How these concepts are selected is discussed in Chapter Four. Chapter Five describes the conceptual frame for the reflections.

1.6 Relevance of the Study: the fragile state debate

The issue of fragile states is currently much discussed among policy makers, academics and practitioners. The OECD developed and agreed on principles for good engagement with fragile states in 2007 (OECD 2008). Academics summarise the debates and highlight the dilemmas related to the notion of fragile states (DIIS 2008) or criticise it (Kaplan 2009), Practitioners operating in countries labelled as fragile or failed states most probably struggle on a daily basis to make sense of what is happening around them and get ‘things’ done.

Representatives within Nepal’s international community spent a considerable amount of time defining Nepal’s degree of fragility, which varied from business-as-usual to fragile or even failed. Some points became apparent to me during these discussions, which are in part reflected in the literature dealing with fragile states. To begin with, the definitions related to Nepal’s state of fragility depended more on the definitions provided by the representative’s agency, than by the representative’s own view of the dynamics in country. USAID took the view that Nepal was fragile because the government was not necessarily interested in doing what USAID wanted them to. Other donor representatives of agencies such as DFID or DANIDA were more inclined to argue that Nepal’s position was fragile because the government was weak in terms of the provision of services and security to its own citizens (own observation). Second, and partly in line with the above, discussions tended to be Nepali government-focused. What this fragility might eventually mean for groups outside the government was discussed to a much lesser extent. In connection with this, the Maoist Uprising was merely seen as a development threatening the government and Nepal as a state, while ignoring the possibility that the Nepali government and its practices could be a hindrance to a smooth functioning state taking responsibility for its citizens, and therefore a (serious) cause of grievances and violent conflict. Thirdly, and in line with the points made above, fragility was an annoyance for what the agencies wanted to do; development in terms of good governance, education, promoting democracy etc. Fragility was not directly seen as an opportunity to do the things needed, as perceived by actors in the operational environment, and by doing so reducing the possibility that aid agencies could contribute to the process of fragility themselves as an unintended consequence of their interventions (Sen 2008).

Discussions on Nepal centred on the notion of fragility and reflected the preference of the international community to respond to civil war or political transition with the tool of state-rebuilding in terms of capacity building, good governance and public sector reform (Mac Ginty and Williams 2009:59). However this preference did not necessarily add to the understanding of the environment aid agencies worked in, as it was my opinion that the reality of Nepal's operational environment was not one of fragility but one of escalating turbulence, or a situation of turbulent deterioration. Therefore, without questioning the importance of policy and academic debate centred on the notion of state fragility, the notions of turbulence and turbulent environments are used throughout the thesis in the hope of contributing to the fragile state debate from a rather different perspective.³¹

1.7 What this study does not intend to do³²

Firstly, this study neither advocates nor implies the need for increased or improved civil-military cooperation. Secondly, the study does not evaluate aid agencies and their operations,³³ nor does it aim to compare aid agencies and the military. Thirdly, this research is not advocating a Clausewitzian approach to contemporary wars, and therefore will not discuss the need to replace it with paradigms on counter-revolutionary warfare.³⁴ The study assumes, as in the work of two other humanitarian thinkers, the usefulness for the aid industry of 'borrowing' and adapting military ideas to further their own purposes (Hoffman and Weiss 2005: 212). The study should be seen as a contribution to our understanding of organising aid operations and implementing programmes in environments, which are violent, (highly) unpredictable, and with high stakes should a mismatch exist between policy and implementation. It is

³¹ Annexe 1.1 elaborates on the notion of turbulent environment.

³² In the course of this research, it became clear that some aid practitioners, academics, or military professionals had (for various reasons, in part due to the way the topic was presented) difficulty grasping the topic of my research, or did not see the value of the exercise and subsequently rejected the idea of using (certain elements of) Clausewitz's military theory to reflect on development in turbulent environments like Nepal. Too often these groups made assumptions of about the content, nature, underlying aim or intentions of my research. Unfortunately, these misplaced assumptions did not necessarily facilitate the exchange of ideas to further my research.

³³ The origin of the research might imply a critical view of the effectiveness of aid agencies, when compared with military performance in aid operations; however, this is not suggested.

³⁴ Western military doctrine is strongly underpinned by a Clausewitzian approach to war, but various authors contest these underpinnings (see Chapter Three). Military operations guided by a rigid approach to Clausewitz's theory may be part of the reason contemporary wars are lost or won with worse than expected losses.

not assumed that the primary outcome of this research will necessarily increase the effectiveness of aid operations in turbulent environments. However, it is my contention that some basic ideas in *On War* might have value for reflection on the practice of aid operations. This is the core task of my research. Chapter Four discusses, as well as the research question, the research methodology applied for this purpose.

1.8 Positioning in the literature

Here we will focus on the position of this research in the literature of aid and development. A variety of informed authors are used to show how this exploratory research stands out from other work in humanitarian and development literature.³⁵

Firstly, this work is informed by a series of themes and concepts derived from the theory devised by Clausewitz (see Chapter Three). Clausewitz's thinking also inspires the central framework (see Chapter Five), which in turn guides the reflective parts of the thesis (see Part II). Moreover, it places those staff within aid agencies centre-stage as those who have to think through issues of strategy and implementation in an uncertain and messy operational environment.

Secondly, this thesis is not criticising the idea of the existence of development or humanitarian aid *per se* (Moyo 2009; Isbister 2003) or the way it works (Bolton 2007). It is not highlighting from an ethnographic perspective the gap between development policy and practice of projects (Mosse 2005), or stressing the effects of policy interventions on those on the receiving end (Mosse and Lewis eds. 2005), neither is the thesis modestly up-beat about its successes (Riddell 2007). It is more in line with Easterly's view that there are no big answers to poverty eradication, but that 'searchers' need to take over from the 'planners' in this process (Easterly 2006). The framework presented is an attempt by one searcher to help other searchers to think through the strategy and implementation of the aid activities they are responsible for.

³⁵ One might argue that the overview given is not extensive enough. However, Stebbins in his work on exploratory research argues that literature reviews in exploratory research is there to show that not much work on the issue under exploration is done. In addition in opposite of confirmative research, the literature reviews in exploratory research can be short (2001: 41-42).

Thirdly, the thesis stands out from a body of humanitarian and development literature that provides policy prescriptions or practical guidance on how to change things from a state of being bad to a state of being good. Examples within the policy prescriptions genre include addressing the poverty of the most marginalised (Collier 2007; Prahalad 2005), fixing failed states or societies devastated by war (Ghani and Lockhart 2008; Del Castillo 2008), or installing democracy in societies experiencing conflict (Jarstad and Sisk eds. 2008). This thesis does not offer such policy prescriptions, neither does it intend to take on the character of the practically orientated “how to” guides, which can equally be found in development and humanitarian literature. Examples of this genre in the field of development include guides to dealing with information and communication within development agencies (Powell 2003) or how to assess, review and evaluate development projects (Dale 1998; Gosling and Edwards 1996) or how to run community development projects (Davies 1997). Examples of publications within the humanitarian realm include how to manage humanitarian relief projects (James 2008; RedR 1997) or operational security within violent environments (Van Brabant 2000). The thesis does not indicate the minimum standards in humanitarian relief (SPHERE 2000), or how to respond as a humanitarian agency to extreme emergencies (Sanyasi 2004). Less prescriptive literature in this genre might include Cuny’s work on how to respond as humanitarian agency in either natural disaster situations (1983) or situations with feature famine and conflict (1999). This thesis attempts to present the beginnings of a non-prescriptive approach to thinking through aspects of aid operations in deteriorating contexts.

Fourthly, the thesis stands apart from literature focused on (I)NGOs and the various practical challenging and contradictory aspects of (I)NGO management (Edwards and Fowler 2004; Lewis 2001; Edwards and Hulme 1996). Suzuki, an expert on internal dynamics of aid agencies, highlights the internal, sometimes conflicting, dynamics of international aid agencies and how these might be addressed (1998). Bennett discusses how INGOs could improve their coordination in times of crisis in order to reach out more effectively to people in need (1995). Attention is also paid to how INGOs learn for the purpose of improving their development or humanitarian activities (Roper, Pettitt and Eade eds. 2003) or what the internal daily dynamics of NGO life might look like (Hilhorst 2003). In addition, this work does not focus on the internal functioning of multi-lateral agencies (Weiss 2009; Dijkzeul and Beigbeder 2006). Within this

strand of literature, the negative consequences of the deepening process of managerialism within the development sector are brought to the front and critiqued as well (Dar and Cooke eds. 2008). This exploratory research takes the aid strategist, the agency he works for and the aid activities he is responsible for as a starting point to reflect on the position of an agency and its operation(s) in a wider institutional and operational context.

Fifthly, this work is different from literature which focuses solely on understanding, either theoretically or practically, the causes and dynamics of violent conflict and how peace-building initiatives can be furthered (Mac Ginty 2008; Jacoby 2008; Pfetsch 2007; Lederarch 2005; Galtung 2004; Reychler and Paffenholz 2001; Fisher et al. 2000). However, these issues are to various degrees implied or explicitly present within the reflections of the thesis. This work assumes that various forms of conflict have their causes and parties have their evolving interests in the course of these conflicts, and implies that they need be taken into consideration in the course of the operations of an aid agency.

Sixthly, this work differs from the literature in that it does not primarily focus on the political and economic processes hindering development aid (Gibson et al. 2005) or the political and economic processes of conflict (Ballentine and Sherman 2005) and how aid agencies could be entangled in these processes (Le Billon 2000; Keen 1994), or how (illegal) business entities gain from and maintain processes of war (Nordstrom 2004). However, this work implies the importance of understanding and addressing the many different forms of friction within aid agencies and their interactions with either their institutional or operational environment, of which political and economic processes are a part.

Seventhly, this work differs from humanitarian literature, which mainly discusses the dilemmas of particular issues while operating in a variety of crisis areas. Weiss for example elaborates on how the aid system could deal with the 'New Wars' and the notion of the 'Right to Protect' (2007). Minear discusses critically but constructively various aspects of the humanitarian enterprise between 1991-2001 in order to suggest improvements (2002), the Humanitarian Studies Unit reflects on the principles, ethics and contradictions surrounding humanitarian action (2001), Pirote, Husson and

Grunewald eds. focus their discussions, on the basis of a variety of field situations, towards new ways of analysing crisis and interventions and the skills needed to address the new challenges (1999). Minear and Smith allow various practitioners to elaborate on the art of humanitarian diplomacy in the contexts they have worked in, including Nepal (2007). A category in itself in this type of literature might be the contributions of Terry (2002) and Marriage (2006). Terry implies that aid agencies can hardly escape the challenges they have to face when they decide to operate in crisis areas, while Marriage, in part, appears to emphasise the importance of applying a psychological lens in understanding how assistance works. This research stands out as it focuses on one country and explores various aspects aid strategists might wish to consider during strategizing and implementation processes in an evolving crisis, knowing that friction is inevitable and will be present at all times. A significant element of dealing with it fruitfully is acknowledging the psychological dimension of aid processes.

Eighthly, this piece of exploratory research stands out from large-scale evaluations or assessments of joint relief operations or interventions by particular individual aid agencies (Schümer 2008; Tsunami Evaluation Coalition 2006; Joint Evaluation of Emergency Assistance to Rwanda 1996; Minear 1991). As stated earlier this work is not evaluating individual agencies or a set of aid agencies and their operations. However, the work partially contributes to answering the question recently raised within Nepal's aid community as to what went wrong (Bonino and Donini 2009), and in that sense it adds to learning within Nepal's aid industry.

Ninthly, this work stands out from Goodhand (2007), Mac Ginty and Williams (2009), and a group of authors who have devised tools that aid agencies can use to incorporate the issue of conflict in their operations. This is not because this study assumes that conflict, development and aid agencies are separate issues and should be dealt with separately, but rather the opposite. Goodhand focuses on the changing roles of donors and aid agencies in conflict situations on the basis of a series of case studies, while this study focuses on the single context of Nepal. Mac Ginty and Williams provide a rather theoretical overview of the linkages between development, conflict and the position of aid agencies (2009). Some authors recognise the link between conflict and development and devise practical tools either to further developmental interventions or reduce negative effects of aid in conflict situations. Anderson and Woodrow devised an

approach to facilitate developmental intervention strategies in times of crisis (1998). Others engaged in devising planning approaches to minimize the harmful effects of aid interventions in conflict environments (Paffenholz and Reychler 2007; RMO 2005; Anderson 1998). This work fully recognises that development and conflict can be negatively and positively connected with each other; however, the work does not propose a technically-orientated approach to address possible negative processes or further processes perceived as positive, but aims to present the rudimentary beginnings of a way in which an aid strategist might look at various aspects related to strategizing and implementing aid activities.

Tenthly, several authors focus on either the ethical or moral dimensions of various theoretical and practical aspects of development or humanitarian aid (Pogge 2007; Chatterjee 2006; Des Gaspar 2004; Van Ufford and Giri eds. 2003; Slim 1997; Des Gaspar 1998) This work does not focus on the ethics of aid activities as such, but on how these activities could be conducted in the most effective way given the circumstances in which they take place. This is in line with Clausewitz's *On War*, which does not address the ethical aspects of war; the focus of both is on conducting operations with maximum efficacy.

Lastly, this work is not an eyewitness report of aid in war-torn societies in the direct and rather optimistic style of Egeland (2008), neither is it a flowing series of pessimistic philosophical reflections on war and suffering (Lévy 2004). However, the thesis is informed by my own observations of strategizing and implementation processes by aid agencies in a deteriorating context and by primary research among people closely involved or observing these processes in Nepal, resulting in a series of reflections, which hopefully are realistic in their goal of identifying key considerations for the aid strategist operating in a turbulent environment like Nepal.

1.9 Structure of the thesis

This thesis is divided into four parts and contains 16 chapters. Part I is comprised of the first five chapters. Chapter Two sets the scene and explores Nepal, including its armed conflict and the role and position of aid and development between 1999 and 2005/06. Chapter Three provides an introduction into the life and thoughts of

Clausewitz as described in *On War*, together with an overview of criticism of his theory. Chapter Four discusses the research methodology and elaborates on the paradoxical interplay between Clausewitz's thoughts and the process of reflecting on aid operations in turbulent environments like Nepal. Chapter Five elaborates on the main conceptual framework in which the reflections take place. This framework is mainly inspired by Clausewitz's 'Remarkable Trinity' concept (H&P: 89) and is called the 'aid trinity'.

Part II is comprised of chapters 6 to 10. Part III includes chapters 11 to 15. In both Parts the themes and the order of the chapters is, with a few exceptions, inspired by and structured along the lines of *On War*. Part II starts with an elaboration on the notion of the ideal form of aid in the Nepali context and mirrors Clausewitz's idea about the ideal war. Four chapters follow discussing various forms of friction, namely friction in general, physical efforts, information,³⁶ and danger. After these chapters we move on to Part III and address the topic of strategy and some elements Clausewitz assumes to be important to consider when thinking through strategy in the context of war, which I also perceive as important for the aid strategist. The topics are: strategy, superiority of resources,³⁷ boldness, cunning and tension and rest. A thread running through the chapters of Part III is the ever-returning theme of processes of friction, how these manifested themselves in Nepal and how they might be countered or mitigated by an aid strategist in the course of strategizing and implementing aid operations in a turbulent environment.

Each of the chapters in Part II and III is structured in a similar way. Firstly, I indicate how the concept under discussion assisted me in understanding aspects of the operational environment in Nepal. Then, Clausewitz's ideas regarding the concept under discussion are summarised. This is followed by an overview of how the concept resonated among research participants. In the final section these two are brought together and reflected upon within the context of the 'aid trinity' framework.

³⁶ Clausewitz speaks actually on Intelligence, but I thought that the term information is more suitable for the aid industry. See as well Powell M. (2003) *Information Management for Development Organisations*, Oxfam, UK.

³⁷ Clausewitz actually speaks about Superiority of Numbers, I found the term Superiority of Resources more applicable, as development work is not solely about deploying staff.

Part IV consists of the final chapter drawing conclusions from the study. Alongside these concluding ideas will be discussed as to how the results could inform theory and practice of aid delivery in turbulent environments will be discussed. Now, we move to Chapter Two, which elaborates on various aspects of Nepal, including the nexus of the insurgency and development aid.

Chapter 2 Introducing Nepal

2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a brief introduction to Nepal in order to sketch the context for the remainder of the thesis and the circumstances in which aid agencies had to operate which subsequently directly or indirectly influenced their work.³⁸ The overview begins with geography, agricultural production and the food security situation. Then issues related to caste, ethnicity, and demography are covered, followed by issues related to Nepal's history, politics and government system. The causes of the Maoist insurgency, its beginning and growth will be examined and the chapter closes with a description of Nepal's development aid sector, the general effects of development aid and effects on the conflict. This section also includes an overview of the positions the foreign countries most relevant to Nepal, namely India, China, the USA and the UK.

2.2 Geography, agricultural production and food security³⁹

Nepal is sandwiched between Tibet and China to the North and India to the East, South and West (see Annexe 2.1). Landlocked, Nepal varies in altitude from 100m in the southern plains to mountaintops up to approximately 8800m in the North, within a horizontal distance of less than 200km. This gap in altitude is bridged by rugged terrain dissected by many rain-fed rivers.⁴⁰

This astonishing altitude difference divides the country, from North to South, into four geographical zones, each running in parallel from East to West: the Terai, the inner-Terai, the mid-hills and the mountains. The first geographical zone is the Terai. This relatively narrow strip of land ranges in breadth from 15km to 40km, and borders India in the south. In terms of farmland and forests, the latter under pressure due to (il) legal logging and agricultural expansion, the Terai is the most wealthy zone in the country

³⁸ Due to its limited length this chapter cannot do justice to Nepal's fascinating complexity and the various authors attempting to describe this. It merely aims to provide sufficient background to the remainder of this thesis.

³⁹ This section follows closely Bhattaria (2003). If other sources are used it will be stated.

⁴⁰ For an insight into how rugged the terrain is, see the book 'Vignettes of Nepal' (Gurung 1980).

(Shrestha 1999). Above the Terai the inner-Terai can be found. The Terai and inner-Terai are divided by two ranges of hills; the Churia hills up to 1500m and the Mahabharat range from 1500m to 2700m. The inner-Terai is geographically comparable to the Terai, but climatologically circumstances are rather marginal. The Mid-hills form a band 50km to 100 km to the North of the inner-Terai and form the historical and physical backbone of the country. The altitude of this zone ranges from 600m to 3000m. Within this range, valleys such as the Kathmandu and the Pokhara valley are situated. In the mid-hills, agricultural production is the predominant economic activity, but the zone also suffers from chronic food deficiency (ibid). The most Northern zone is the mountain range known as the Himalayas, which can be divided into the main, inner and Tibetan Himalayas. This zone is the least populated. The physical features of Nepal's terrain generate three major drainage systems, the Khosi in the East, the Gandaki in the centre and the Karnali in the western part of the country. All three basins channel their water towards the plains of India. Livestock grazing and trading are the main economic activities in the mountains and with any agricultural production concentrated in the lower valleys along the (main) rivers (ibid). Nepal's main sources of income are agriculture, tourism, hydropower and industry; the latter is mainly based in the urban areas of the Kathmandu and Pokhara Valleys and the Terai.

The geographical circumstances add to the context in which Nepal's agricultural production takes place. In general terms the agricultural productivity reduces from the Terai (being most productive per hectare) to the mountainous zone. Overall, the agricultural resource base is deteriorating in terms of access to land and land available per capita (ibid 1999: 9).⁴¹ Within this context rural households struggle to maintain their food consumption levels. A study titled a "Food crisis in Nepal" suggests that a large percentage of households in a sample of villages are unable to fulfil minimum consumption requirements, despite the fact that members of these households are, according to the researchers, very active, flexible and willing to use every opportunity offered to them (Adhikari and Bohle 1999). The study also reveals that in the researched villages ethnic groups and non-Brahmin caste groups face more frequent food shortages and subsequently have deficient food consumption patterns than the

⁴¹ Major food crops are maize and rice. Other food crops are barley, millet and wheat. Major cash crops are potato, sugar cane, oil seeds and jute (School atlas for Nepal 1997).

much less affected high-caste Brahmins (ibid: 174). Such conclusions might be expected had the research taken place in a remote far western district. However, the research was undertaken in Kaski district, which, due to the flourishing tourism industry, is one of the most prosperous hill districts of western Nepal. While reflecting on the developments of the last 20 years in Nepal, Blaikie et al., close academic observers of Nepal, argues that the food security situation in the remoter Mid-hills has continued to deteriorate, while in the even more remote mountainous Karnali zone the food security conditions continued to be disastrous (2005: 303). Action Against Hunger argues in a similar fashion, from the basis of an intensive food security study in the Karnali (ACF 2004). Adhikari and Bohle stated in 1999 regarding Kathmandu's administrative-bureaucratic power centre that the ability of its inhabitants to feed themselves had been reduced dramatically, with many households facing a precarious food security situation. In addition, Kathmandu became increasingly dependent on India for its food supply (1999B). The Norwegian and Nepali researchers Aase and Chapagain, while agreeing with the general analysis of Blaikie et al. regarding the state of crisis in Nepal's agricultural sector, conclude on a slightly more positive note that the agricultural 'histories' of at least some districts go through a process of "profound transformation" or "agricultural recession" (2005: 54). Nepal's geography and challenges related to its agricultural production and food security situation were contributing factors to the start and development of the conflict.

2.3 Caste, Ethnicity and Demography

Caste and ethnicity⁴² According to the anthropologist Bista, Nepal's social make-up consists of a mix of mainly Tibeto-Burman and Indo-Aryan people. Alongside this mix of people, Nepal applies a caste system in which ethnic groups have found a place or a means of living alongside it. In his monograph Bista presents and describes at least 30 different groups of people living in Nepal ranging from Brahmins to Rauyte. The Brahmins and Chethri occupy the highest position in the caste system, making up approximately 16% of Nepal's total population and living throughout Nepal, while for example the Rauyte, an ethnic group totalling less than 0.5% of Nepal's population,

⁴² The information on caste and ethnicity in this section follows closely Bista (1996). Other sources are referenced where used.

survives through hunter-gatherer practices, and primarily trek around in a few districts in Nepal's far and Midwestern hills. The main other groups and their percentages are: Bahun-hill (12.7%), Magar (7.14%), Tharu (6.74%), Tamang (5.64%), Muslim (4.27%), Kami (3.94%), Yadav (3.94%), Rai (2.79%), Gurung (2.39%) (Rimal 2007). SNV reports that the high-caste groups occupy approximately 89% of all positions in the government (1998).⁴³

The 2001 census, according to Gurung, records 92 languages. However, he suggests that the number of languages referred to in the official statistics varies according to the policy of the regime in charge, as the census data for 1961, 1971 and 1981 shows a decrease in the number of languages from 36 in 1961 to 18 in 1981 (2005). The 2001 census indicates that approximately 86% of the population is Hindu, 7.8% Buddhist, 3.5% Muslim, 1.0% Kiranti, and 0.2% is Christian (Gurung 2005).

Mikesell contests the anthropological approach suggesting that Nepali people, as for example presented in a book called 'People of Nepal' (Bista 1996), can be primarily be understood on the basis of their geographical origin and culture (1999: 29).⁴⁴ A publication, based on the population census data of 2001 and sponsored by the INGO Action Aid, shows that Nepal is a complicated mosaic of caste and ethnicity rather than a country where specific groups live in designated areas (Rimal 2007). For example, the caste/ethnicity variance per district ranges from 34 castes/ethnic groups per district (Kalikot) to 98 castes/ethnic groups per district (Kathmandu district). This caste and ethnic diversity is reflected in the distribution of the 93 languages spoken in Nepal, varying from 9 in Kalikot district to 70 in Morang district (ibid 2007).

Demography⁴⁵ In terms of demography, the country has undergone rapid change. In 1971 the total population was approximately 11.6 million (Panday 1999). In 2001 this figure rose to 23,151,423, resulting in an average population density of 157 per

⁴³ Respondent A12 referred to a figure of 85%, which was still perceived as excessive.

⁴⁴ Whelpton implies a comparable point when he argues that the distinction between 'Mongolian' groups with linguistic links to central Asia and speakers of Indic languages (including Nepali) as recent migrants is an oversimplification (2006:3).

⁴⁵ The information on population and demography in this section is mainly taken from Rimal (2007), which is primarily but not solely based on the Population Census 2001. Other sources are stated when used.

sq/km.⁴⁶ Again the variance is enormous, varying from 4 per sq/km in Manang district to 2739 persons per sq/km in Kathmandu.⁴⁷ However, according to Kumar, it is significant that the demographic growth of the country has made Nepal a country of teenagers, as they are the largest demographic group (2005: 57).⁴⁸ The caste system, ethnic complexity and demographic make-up were contributing factors to the conflict in Nepal.

2.4 History, Politics and Features of the Government System

Nepal's History up to 1951⁴⁹ Whelpton states in his book "The History of Nepal" that the state of Nepal in its current form emerged only during the end of the 18th century, when much of the Himalayan foothills and parts of the Terai were brought under the control of a small kingdom approximately 80 km west of the Kathmandu valley, initiating the Shah dynasty (2006: 1). Whelpton distinguishes four different phases in Nepal's historical development. The first of which is the period before 1743 AD, characterised by migration and series of unsuccessful attempts to carve out viable kingdoms.⁵⁰ This changed in 1743 AD when Privity Narayan Shah was crowned as king of Ghorkha and started a period of conquest via a succession of rulers dealing within internal competition and external strife, laying the foundation of the State Nepal, via a process of unification and sanskritisation.⁵¹ This took place between 1743 and 1885. The third phase in Nepal's development is the Rana era covering the period 1885-1951. In this period, the role of the king was merely submissive to the Rana family, which for five successive generations provided not only the prime minister, but key positions in the government and the army as well. This period came to an end in 1951 and the monarchical years started, which lasted till 1991.

⁴⁶ Mr. Thor Gislesen, the Norwegian Ambassador to Nepal, mentioned, in a speech given on the 1st of September 2009 in Trondheim, that the figure currently stands on 29 million.

⁴⁷ Note also that, according to Kumar, 90% of the population lives in villages, There are approximately 4000 Village Development Committee (VDC) areas and some 36,000 to 40,000 village wards (Kumar 2004)

⁴⁸ The rate of population growth combined with a deterioration of agricultural production has probably forced Nepal to become a net-importer of agricultural products.

⁴⁹ This section follows closely Whelpton (2006). Other sources are stated when used.

⁵⁰ Justice argues that despite Nepal being unified, its legacy of being ruled by approximately 50 small and separately ruled principalities still marks the differences between the central culture in Kathmandu and the many local cultures within the various regions (Justice 1989: 20).

⁵¹ The process of sanskritisation is connected, according to Whelpton, with the process of imposing certain Hindu values and a uniform caste-based moral order (2006: 56).

Although each of these periods has its defined political features, they have, according to Whelpton, at least four characteristics in common. To begin with, there is the dynamic nexus between the personal drivers of those in leadership, and the overall process of becoming a nation. Secondly, there is the complex relationship between the people and the physical environment they live in, which made the Mid-hill zone of the country the backbone of Nepal. Then, European, and in particular British, influence has been only relatively recent. Throughout the ages Nepal has been a cultural contact zone between people of different regions, which still affects the internal dynamics of the country. Fourthly, Nepal's history contains the story of the attempts of small and evolving groups of people to develop a common identity. This process started, according to Whelpton, even before the British introduced the modern idea of the nation-state. Whelpton's presentation of the history of Nepal reveals a past as fascinating as it is complicated. One easily reaches the conclusion that the history of Nepal has been shaped by the dynamics of cooperating and competing elite families, able to rally the less powerful to their aid as needed, turning away from them if they became too demanding. Those in charge at any given moment have also had to walk a tightrope between the ruling regimes in India and China.

The Rana period (1885-1951)⁵² According to Thapa and Saijpata, the years of Rana rule were among the darkest in Nepal's history. The Rana family did not only supply a succession of prime ministers but ruled Nepal as their personal chiefdom.⁵³ This led to processes of impoverishing the countryside, increased migration to India and an attempt to isolate Nepal from the outside world. This led to anti-Rana sentiments among politically aware groups ranging from the political right to the political left,⁵⁴ culminating in an armed movement resisting the Ranas. King Tribhuvan responded to this development by fleeing via the Indian Embassy to India. In 1951, with the help of the Indian government, a deal was brokered resulting in the restoration of the King's

⁵² The following two sections follows closely Thapa and Sijapati (2003). Other sources are stated if used.

⁵³ Holberg et al. describe how the Rana regime organised the practice of forced labour among the Tamang in a district near the Kathmandu valley for purposes such as extracting resources to maintain the royal herds. This labour was of the order of 41,000 days' unpaid labour per 540 to 700 household units (1999).

⁵⁴ Some political groups joined each other in the Nepali Congress Party adopting the line of democratic socialism, while others political groups organised themselves around communist-orientated ideology.

powers and the formation of joint government between Ranas and the Nepali Congress Party (NC), which in effect meant the downfall of the Rana regime.

Politics between 1951 till the end of the '90's The newly formed government failed quickly and a decade of political instability began, in which King Mahendhra, King Tribhuvan's successor, was able to gain more political power to the benefit of the monarchy. Tensions within the NC leadership deepened. King Mahendhra's position was strengthened by the introduction in 1959 of a new constitution, which weakened the position of the cabinet and its prime minister. The political parties conceded, allowing the creation of a two-power centre around the king and the prime minister. At the end of 1960, the King, unsatisfied with the government's performance, dissolved parliament, arrested some of the members of the council and initiated the Panchayat system, which lasted for three decades. The Panchayat system was introduced as a form of party-less democracy, but was in fact a form of direct rule by the Monarch. The position of the monarch became so strong that the separation of powers between legislature, judiciary and executive faded into non-existence.

Triggered by countrywide student protests, in 1980 King Birendhra offered the people a referendum to choose between an amended Panchayat system and a multi-party democracy. The Panchayat system won the majority, however the political parties used the outcome of the referendum as a platform to widen their political room for manoeuvre: the Nepali Congress and other parties, including communist parties like the United Leninist-Marxist Party (UML), started to work towards an abolition of the Panchayat system. Their time came in 1990, when, in part encouraged by uprisings in Eastern Europe, political parties and their followers were mobilised for a successful uprising resulting in the abolition of the Panchayat system and an introduction of a constitutional multi-party democracy and the basis of a new constitution.⁵⁵

Despite the introduction of a multi-party democracy and high expectations among the population about the new way of governing the country, the political dynamics of Nepal remained unstable. **Between 1991 and 2002** the country had 11 prime ministers

⁵⁵ Kumar (2005) argues that the new constitution was controversial from the start, asserting Nepal as a Hindu state, catering to a religious majority on the one hand, recognising multi-religiosity, while maintaining secular posturing on the other.

in as many years (Hachhethu 2007). This high turnover reflects the political infighting between and within the mainstream political parties and intrusive behaviour by King Gyanendra towards the end of the period.⁵⁶ Kumar suggests that the state became a lucrative institution for politicians in terms of access to money, power and privileges, subsequently focusing their attention on 'the spoils of tenure in government and their terms in parliament' (2005: 65). Due to this focus the challenges the country faced stayed unarticulated. Instead of addressing them by mediation, they were repressed, becoming instrumental in triggering conflict (ibid: 66). Within this volatile context the CPN-M or Maoists could prepare, initiate and expand their People's War (PW) (Mishra 2004: 35). Before addressing this issue the government structure of Nepal will be discussed briefly.

Some features of the government system⁵⁷ Nepal's government system during the study period is shaped by the system of governance during the Panchayat period. Paudyal concludes, from doctoral research on planned development in Ivan District between 1985-1990,⁵⁸ that although the system appeared indigenous and democratic, it maintained the absolute leadership position of the King (1994: 206). Innovation was only possible if it did not challenge existing power structures, and space for discussion, debate or acknowledgement of failure was lacking, since the King, as initiator of development, was flawless. Furthermore, the system portrayed the idea of grass-roots participation while in practice the procedures of participation were used to legitimise resource capture by local elites (ibid). Moreover, due to a political use of the government bureaucracy, quality control in terms of expenditure, materials and services within this same bureaucracy was lacking (ibid). These features resonated through the government structure in place during the period of study.⁵⁹

This administrative government structure was built around five development regions (the Eastern, Central, Western, Mid-western and Far-western development regions)

⁵⁶ After the Royal Massacre in 2001, when crown prince Dipendra killed a significant part of his family including his father king Birendra, King Gyanendra took the crown. In 2002 he dissolved the parliament and assumed direct power on 1 February 2005.

⁵⁷ The focus of this section is on the governance structures related to development.

⁵⁸ Ivan District is a pseudonym for a district in East-Nepal, known by the author; I had the privilege of sharing working space with Durga Paudyal around 1994 in Wageningen.

⁵⁹ See also Barel on leadership (2005: 20). He argues that the values and norms of the panchayat era continue to guide leadership practices under the veil of multi-party democracy.

and 14 zones.⁶⁰ Each zone was administratively sub-divided in several districts, and each individual district contained several VDCs (3915 in total) and 58 municipalities. In theory the District Development Committees (DDCs) were the elected bodies at district level and could give direction to development activities in the district (Dhakal 2006). They were created in 1992 by a parliamentary decision (Sharma 2004). Nepal's administrative and political structure is presented in annexe 2.2.

The development community focused their attention in part on the strengthening of decentralisation processes within the government. SNV concludes in its 1998 evaluation report that although there have been efforts to decentralise the government, development planning is still strongly centralised. In addition, political instability, the involvement of a large number of ministers, and overlapping functions did not enhance effective planning and implementation of development activities (1998: 41). Moreover, effective transfer of authority to local development institutions did not materialise, partly due to a lack of confidence on a local level, partly due to distrust among donors (ibid).

To conclude this rather incomplete overview, I would like to refer to Justice, who during her anthropological research within the Nepali health system refers to an observant participant who suggests, surprisingly for a department of which one might expect a people-centred approach, that the objectives within the health system were primarily political, then employment and lastly healthcare (1989: 37). Assuming that during times of crisis processes intensify (Boin et al. 2005), it is imaginable that the processes described above intensified during the course of the conflict and did not necessarily contribute to a climate conducive to flourishing development operations.⁶¹ Now we turn to a brief description of the causes of conflict, the start and growth of the Maoist insurgency and the response of the government to the conflict with the Maoists.

⁶⁰ For example the Karnali zone, in the most northern part of the Mid-Western Development region.

⁶¹ For example Baral argues that the Local Governance Act (LGA) from 1999 had not been seriously implemented allowing a process whereby leaders not already based in the centre moved to the centre by attempting to obtain favours from the leaders in the centre (2005: 18).

2.5 Causes, start and growth of the Maoist insurgency and Government response

Causes of conflict Upreti suggests that the underlying causes of the conflict are a complex combination of the imbalance of political, socio-economic and cultural opportunities between different groups within Nepali society resulting in a mix of structural inequality, political oppression, corruption, social discrimination and social exclusion. As indicated earlier a succession of governments failed to address these issues (2004). Kumar puts forward a similar mix of factors triggering and driving Nepal's civil war, but he highlights the behavioural pattern of the political leadership⁶² and the problematic role of the monarch regularly antagonistically intervening in Nepal's political development. Lastly, Kumar suggest a psychological factor related to the ethno-politics of the ruling elite in favour of high-cast Brahmins at the expense of the marginalised and ethnic masses (2005: 72-73). Within this context, the Maoist insurgency could, "*...erupt as a misdirected catharsis of a system never properly cleansed*" (Gyawali in: Thapa ed.: 230-231).

Start and growth of the Maoist insurgency To begin with Kumar argues that rebellions in Nepal against the state are not unique. What makes the Maoist rebellion different is that it is the first to have begun in the western part of the country (while some others started in the eastern part), "*...being able to polarize the political scene and bring the protagonist forces to desperation*" (2005: 77). In that sense the Maoist insurgency could be labelled as '*violence from below*' to challenge the '*violence from above*' (Kumar 2005: 55).

Officially, the insurgency initiated by the Communist Party of Nepal-Maoists (CPN-M) started in February 1996, with the proclamation of a list of 40 demands to the then ruling NC-led government.⁶³ The insurgency had however, been in the making for a long time, in terms of preparing the ideological ground within the Nepali society and later practical preparations.⁶⁴ According to Mehta the overall military aim of the Maoists was to undermine the legitimacy of the government, constrain movement of

⁶² See also Kumar 2004.

⁶³ The Maoist's 40-point demand covered issues related to nationalism, the general public and its well-being, and people's living (GTZ 2002).

⁶⁴ See as well Gersony 2003; Karki and Seddon 2003.

the security forces and create moral dominance by psychological warfare (2006: 21), which culminating ideologically in the establishment of a totalitarian communist regime in Nepal (ibid: 14).

The development of the insurgency between 1996 and 2005/06 could be summarized along three interlinked lines. To begin with, in geographic terms the insurgency started in some areas in the western part of the country and moved over time to the East, eventually affecting almost all 75 districts in the country, creating a situation whereby almost 80% of the country was not under government control (A35)⁶⁵. Secondly, in military terms the Maoists evolved from a relatively under-resourced and unorganised group of cadres into a relatively well-resourced and well-organised guerrilla army, able to organise and sustain series of sophisticated and daring attacks (Mehta 2006).⁶⁶ Into the context of these processes the Maoists projected their revolutionary rhetoric, according to Kumar, with the monarchy as the centre point of all evils within Nepali society. The notion of a constituent assembly became the ultimate test case of the willingness of the monarchy to reconcile their own republican position (2005: 60). Thirdly, the Maoists evolved from being politically marginal within Nepal's political scene into a central actor, even receiving attention from powers like India and USA (Gersony 2003). The development of the Maoist movement cannot be separated from the response of the government and the role of the Royal Nepali Army (RNA).⁶⁷ This will be discussed in the section below. Annexe 2.3 provides a time line of the growth of the insurgency.⁶⁸

Economically the movement could maintain itself via an internal tax regime, 'taxing' citizen, government personnel, businesses and development agencies and project staff. In addition, the Maoists found support from within the Nepali Diaspora. Mehta estimates that they could collect approximately \$150 million, including some money looted from local banks (2006: 16).

⁶⁵ A35 and other A-numbers in the remaining part of the text are codes of interviewees.

⁶⁶ Ashok Mehta, an Indian security specialist provides an informed idea about the Maoists organisational structure and military capacity (2006).

⁶⁷ A fourth line in the development of Maoist movement might be from the perspective of the general public, which could have been evolved along lines like, being some locals taken revenge, via sympathetic rebels, terrorists, to those who with others (e.g. the RNA) make our lives difficult.

⁶⁸ The timeline emphasizes the military aspects of the growth of the insurgency and the subsequent conflict with the Nepal government. However, one should, according to Karki and Seddon, not forget that the People's War is a political movement, which finds its roots in political problems (2003: xi).

The response of the Nepali government and the RNA The response of Nepali government to the compounding insurgency could be described as reactive or better still ad-hoc (Thapa and Sijapati 2003). Mehta, an Indian Security specialist, argues that there was little evidence of an appropriate, well-articulated strategy covering the political, military and economic dimensions of a response (2006: 59-76). The lack of a well thought-through, comprehensive response was compounded by a continuous power struggle between the King and Prime Minister (ibid: 76). This reactive or ad hoc response to the insurgency by the Nepali government was seen for example by their failure to respond to the Maoists 40-point demand laid down in February 1996.⁶⁹ Further, labelling the insurgency as a law and order problem instead of a political problem might have contributed to its escalation (A5). Mehta argues that it might have been better to send in the RNA in directly, instead of the poorly trained and equipped police, as the Maoists could gain experience and weaponry (2006). Insufficient preparations, at least on the side of the government, for the various rounds of peace talks could also be mentioned (Upreti 2006). Gersony argues that the prime minister's decision not to extend the term of the elected district level representatives was unwise as elections were impossible, given the political-military climate at the time. According to Gersony, by not expanding the term a situation was created which the Maoists had aimed for in the first place, namely the undermining of the government's presence in rural areas (2003: 41). This decision might have added to psychological insecurity among the political leadership in Kathmandu (Kumar 2005: 65).⁷⁰

Against this backdrop the RNA came into play.⁷¹ Mehta, on the one hand, respects the RNA for its international UN peacekeeping missions. On the other hand, he argues that before and after their deployment in November 2001,⁷² the RNA showed a reluctance to fight, perhaps in part because of their history as a ceremonial force (2006). The RNA were deployed in around 350 locations throughout the country, but mainly concentrated in the urban areas (ibid: 55, 77). Despite an apparent apathy towards

⁶⁹ After the declaration of the 40-point demand on 4 February 1996, the then Prime Minister decided to ignore the demands and visits India (Thapa and Sijapati 2003: 85).

⁷⁰ I recall a meeting in late 2003/ early 2004 between agency representatives in which one of the ambassadors elaborated on a meeting held with representatives of the political leadership within the government. The ambassador stated that the representatives appeared to be "*blocks of ice*", not being able to discuss, despite its importance, the insurgency and the need for an appropriate response.

⁷¹ The RNA saw action for the first time during the aftermath of a Maoist raid in Holeri, were they were charged to negotiate the release of approximately 70 police captured by the Maoists (Gersony 2003).

⁷² The deployment was a response to a Maoist raid on the army barracks in Ghorai/ Dang district.

conflict with the Maoists, Mehta argues that, the RNA appears to have operated in “overkill mode”, not always able to keep its trigger-happy soldiers in check (ibid: 62), which is in contrast to its performance during peacekeeping missions under the responsibility of the UN (ibid: 63).⁷³ A leadership vacuum compounded this behaviour, as the RNA expanded in a relatively short time frame from approximately 50,000 soldiers to a force of 83,000 soldiers (ibid: 44). In short, under neither civilian nor royal leadership could the RNA outmanoeuvre the Maoists, and in particular the PLA. They could at best repel attacks against their fortified positions and prevent Kathmandu being taken over by the Maoists. By contrast with the Maoists, one of their key problems was a lack of clarity regarding whom they were fighting against.

2.6 Development aid, its impacts and its implications for the conflict

Development Aid Development is one of Nepal’s largest ‘industries’ and highly visible in terms of signposts to aid agency offices, research centres or development businesses (Hindman 2002).⁷⁴ Development, or ‘bikas’ in Nepali, entered Nepal in the ‘50s (ibid) and has been the key ideology of the state, its bureaucracy and development agencies in terms of increase of productivity, with the promise of the sharing of wealth (Mikesell 1999: 208). From 1951 up to 1995, the year before the start of insurgency, Nepal had received USD 3.7 billion in loans and grants (Hoftun et al. 2005: 258).

A multitude of players in the field of development can be found in Nepal, including multi-lateral agencies like the World Bank (WB) and Asian Development Bank (ADB), members of the UN family,⁷⁵ and various bi-lateral agencies.⁷⁶ The European

⁷³ Mehta cites a Human Rights Watch report published in March 2005 which named the RNA as “one of the worst perpetrators of enforced disappearances” (2006: 63).

⁷⁴ Hindman shows in her article that in the case of USAID, the lives of the first generation of American aid workers and way they engaged in development work in Nepal were primarily determined by the institutional arrangements of their agency and only secondarily by Nepal’s specific operational environment, and that this still influences the way in which USAID staff are operating in Nepal today.

⁷⁵ Examples include: United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN-OCHA). OCHA began operating in Nepal in 2004.

⁷⁶ Examples include: Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), the Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA), the British Department for International Development (DFID), the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ), the Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC), the Netherlands Development Organisation (SNV) and United States Agency for International

Union was also represented. Various International-Non Governmental Organisations (INGOs) were active in Nepal, including CARE, various branches of Save the Children, Terre des Homes, Helvetas and Oxfam. After 2000 when the conflict started to intensify, more humanitarian-orientated agencies arrived, such as Handicap International, Doctors without Borders France and Holland (MSF-F and MSF-H) and Ockenden International. A part of these agencies were organised under the umbrella of the Association of International NGOs in Nepal (AIN). Local Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) were also represented, some with national coverage like SAP (South-Asian Partnership) or Rural Reconstruction Nepal (RRN), others with a more local orientation, such as for example the Karnali Joint Development Forum (KJDF), which only focussed on issues in the Karnali. One interviewee observed that, based on his own experience of working in Africa and other parts of Asia, Nepal's development scene was organised in an exceptionally complicated manner (A42).

These agencies operated formally within the context of the 10-Year Plan or the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP), covering a wide variety of sectors including agriculture, forestry, road building, education and health, both providing policy guidance in the process of addressing poverty. However, according to one close observer, in reality neither the 10-year plan nor the PRSP, constituted a practical guide for the actions of aid agencies (A13).⁷⁷ Below, an overview of opinions is provided about the overall effects of development aid in Nepal.

The overall effects of development aid Among commentators, development aid overall appears to have at best mixed results. Former finance minister Dr. Mahat states in his book *"In Defence of Democracy,"* that in the post-panchayat era a shift in focus of development aid took place from the urban to rural areas which had a significant impact on all social development indicators including education, literacy, life expectancy child and maternal mortality (2005: xv). In addition, not only did the macro-economic indicators, in terms of production structure, trade and balance of the national budget, point towards improved development, but the expansion of physical

Development (USAID). SNV was in the process of changing from being the implementing arm of the Dutch Ministry of Development Cooperation towards being an INGO.

⁷⁷ I have to confess that I cannot recall one meeting in the agencies I worked for where the 10th plan or the PRSP were used as explicit reference points. However, it were points of reference during meetings with government officials.

infrastructure in terms of roads, bridges, irrigation and drinking water facilities made a tangible difference on village level (ibid). He also argues that the gap between expectations raised by the introduction of democracy and the progress achieved by development remained unchanged.

A series of other commentators are less positive. Dixit in his article "*Foreign Aid to Nepal: No bang for the buck*" argues that foreign aid, in the way it is provided (for example being top-down, with regularly changing fads and not engaging in real partnership) has not helped Nepal to develop. Despite the positive exceptions of some development interventions, Dixit suggests the need for a visionary leader with the courage to refuse the money foreign aid is bringing (1997). Pandey, also a former minister of finance like Mahat, goes a step further in his book "*Failed Development*" and argues that Nepal's development failed, not necessarily because of what has been achieved in the 50-year history of development in Nepal, but because of the lack of interest and commitment at the centre of power for those living outside this centre (1999). Shrestha is equally reserved about the overall impact of development aid in Nepal, partly because of its predefined and predetermined character. He argues that the Europe-centric economic and technical assumptions behind it led to a total devaluation of the local modes of life and economy, subsequently creating a culture of dependency on other countries (1999). Mishra in a group of essays on the sociology of Nepal states that the foreign aided development failed to fulfil its promises, firstly, because Nepal's mode of production has over the years hardly been affected. Furthermore, agriculture, the mainstay of the Nepali economy, has not benefited from reinvestment of the profits generated by the sector. Aid projects, with the exception of road projects, suffered from an urban bias and as a result tended to be concentrated on the Central region, the Eastern Terai and the Kathmandu valley. This bias is not necessarily solely caused by Nepal's elite, but is rooted in the behaviour of foreign donors as well (Mishra 2007). Dahal cites one example where a vice-chairman of the National Planning Commission (NPC) stated that "*the donors wish to invest in political, social, philosophical and business fields of their own interests,*" subsequently inhibiting investment in Nepal's priority sectors (Dahal 1995: 119 in: Tamang 2002: 330).⁷⁸

⁷⁸ Former finance minister Dr. Mahat echo's this view by stating that: "the donor perception of priorities does not always conform to that of the recipients" (2005: xvi).

Foreign aid had its effect on the country's political dynamics as well. Mishra argues that the role of foreign aid furthered 1) the creation of a centralised and nationwide power-network, 2) the westernization of Nepal's upper-class and the rise of an administrative, technical and business 'middle-class', which did not necessarily help understanding of production systems and subsequent problems of the under-class, 3) a crisis of institutionalising development programmes, whereby donors incorrectly assumed that projects would be taken over by either the government or other players in society and 4) the contradictory application of the notion of people's participation (2007: 169-172). To conclude this rather discouraging section on the impact of development in general, Blaikie et al. argue that the essentially negative affects of foreign aid, already thoroughly researched and highlighted by them in the mid-1980s, appear a critical feature of the political economy of contemporary Nepal (2005: 309). All in all, the above opinions would seem to suggest that despite the volume of development funding available, the multiple development interventions were at best perceived as having mixed success. Now we move to an overview of the consequences of the conflict and its impact on aid and development.

Consequences of the conflict and its impact on aid and development This section, while not pretending to be complete, discusses the general consequences of the conflict and its impact on development work in particular. In general terms, the conflict produced a broad range of negative and positive consequences. In relation to the state of Nepal, Kumar refers to four interlinked processes or trends generated by the conflict: it fell into a militarization trap;⁷⁹ as a result of this social tension increased; the state completely stopped delivering public goods to its citizens, and finally due to the King's Gyanendra claim of executive power on 4 October 2002, the state moved towards anarchy (2005: 61).

Within the context of these state-related processes a series of other negative consequences could be observed, beginning with the direct human cost. Dhakal reports based on a compilation of various data sources that the number of conflict-related deaths between the start of the People's War in 1996 and March 2006 is 13,190, of which 8457 were caused by the state and 4733 by the Maoists (2006). Dhakal also

⁷⁹ Dhakal reports that the security budget increased from 4.94 billion Nepali Roepies in 1996-97 to 17.97 billion Nepali Roepies in 2005-2006 (2006).

estimates that the costs related to damage of physical infrastructure could be around 6 billion Roepies (2006).⁸⁰ As to indirect costs, Pyakurayal, a professor in economics, argues, despite not being able to provide exact figures, that the conflict induced a reduction of aggregated outputs in sectors such as agriculture, tourism and hydropower (2004). In addition, in part due to economic circumstances and in part due to direct consequences of the conflict, Nepal's complex migration patterns changed (Von der Heide and Hoffman 2001) and an emerging category of Internal Displaced Persons (IDPs) could be identified (Irwin et al. 2003; Dhakal 2006).⁸¹ The position of women in Nepali society also underwent significant changes. Deuba records for example an increase in decision-making power, while also observing a process of feminization of poverty as well (2005: 77-78). In addition, the level of human rights abuses, executions, disappearances and torture increased (Metha 2006; Pathak 2005; Thapa and Sijapati 2003: 150-151).⁸² Upreti mentions further consequences including an increase in criminal activity and robbery (by fake Maoists) and a subsequent increase in insecurity and fear. Furthermore, villagers reduced their participation in social activities, while they were sometimes forced to join Maoist activities as well. The Maoists introduced arbitrary laws and due to demands for support in cash or in kind, economic hardship increased (2004). In addition, people lived within a culture of terror, causing fear and hampering the social dynamics in villages (Pettigrew 2004).

Upreti suggests that the consequences of the conflict on society were not solely negative. According to him the positive consequences of the conflict might include an increase of entitlements to land and assets by the poor; a reduction of gambling and alcohol abuse in villages; a decrease of interest rates charged by moneylenders and an increase of political awareness at grass roots level. Moreover, the conflict created a situation whereby local elites had less opportunity to exploit the less advantaged. In addition, the sense of group identity could be enhanced and collective activities increased. Moreover, various forms of decision-making mechanism could be introduced at grass roots level (2004).

⁸⁰ Mainly caused by damaged government facilities, such as VDC buildings, post offices, telecommunication centres, bridges and (micro) hydropower installations. The industry sector suffered as well (Dhakal: 2006).

⁸¹ Dhakal estimates the number of IDPs at around 500,000, while in 2003 Irwin et al. (eds.), provided a conservative estimate of the number of IDPs between 100,000 and 200,000.

⁸² This was partly, but not solely, caused by the RNA.

The Maoists' approach to and effect on development⁸³ Overall, the Maoist approach to aid and development was embedded in their military strategy if aid activities could benefit them they would not hinder them (Upreti 2007). According to Upreti (2004), the Maoist approach to development activities was contextual and inconsistent rather than a reflection of an anti-aid agency position.⁸⁴ Upreti identifies a series of positive and negative effects. The negative effects were as follows: aid agencies were threatened with expulsion from project areas (for example Helvetas) or asked to leave (for example CARE and UMN); staffs were abducted⁸⁵ and project offices had to move to safer places, which effectively meant withdrawal to a district or regional headquarters. The volume of development services in the districts decreased because of the expulsion of development workers and service providers. Moreover, Maoists could damage or destroy developmental infrastructure, such as local government buildings, roads, and facilities related to drinking water, electricity, and telephone connections. Maoists could also manipulate project user groups for their own purposes. Lastly, Maoists, seeking recognition by the international community, demanded from aid agencies written agreements with representatives of their local parallel governments. All of these negative effects intensified after the collapse of the second ceasefire in August 2003.⁸⁶ As to the positive effects of the growth of the Maoist movement and subsequent escalation of the conflict, Upreti cites an increase of transparency by aid agencies, an improved use of resources, a reduction of corruption, increased monitoring of government expenditure and clearer thinking by aid agencies about the allocation of money who actually benefitted from it.

Thapa and Sijapati argue that some development activities could remain unaffected by the Maoists, such as UNICEF's vitamin A campaign that operated throughout the

⁸³ This section is firmly based on Upreti 2004; other sources are stated when used.

⁸⁴ While I agree with the latter point, I would modify the former by suggesting that contextual approaches to aid agencies and their activities do not necessarily lead to an inconsistent position, rather perhaps to a situation outsiders do not sufficiently understand and therefore may call inconsistent. My overall impression was that if an agency was pressurized in any way by the Maoists, for example by a request to leave a project area, there was a rationale behind it.

⁸⁵ This happened in the case of staff of SNV (own observation).

⁸⁶ From my own observation, the pressure on aid agencies by Maoists intensified in the build up to the Nepal Development Forum in May 2004. Due to this pressure some aid agencies, for example SNV, in collaboration with GTZ, DFID and other members of the BOG group, felt themselves forced to withdraw their operations from the Karnali and had to make a statement during the forum (own involvement, May 2004).

country (2003).⁸⁷ While it is not unlikely that some aid agencies could continue some of their operations, however, I would suggest that such operations tended to be local rather than national.

Aid and development had negative and positive effects on the conflict dynamics as well. The negative effects included resource transfers in cash or in kind from projects and staff to either side of the conflict (Adhikari 2003; personal observation in 2004 and 2005). Then, aid agencies continued financial support to various government structures without visible improvements in terms of poverty or conflict reduction. Donors continued to feed into the existing patronage system and an increase in inequality was noted resulting in an increase of feelings of grievances among ordinary people. In addition, due to continued application of inappropriate intervention models, combined with a consequent concentration of effort on easily accessible areas, frustration among people compounded. This feeling of frustration was furthered in cases of (sudden) withdrawal of aid activities.

The positive effects of continued development activities were several. Some aid agencies started trying to address some of the root causes of the conflict, though, according to Upreti, with minimal effect (2004). Also, aid agencies started to support actors within civil society, such as advocacy and network organisations, who could, it was assumed, in turn put pressure on the conflicting parties to further peace efforts.

Within this context of positive and negative effects of the conflict on development activities and vice versa, grass roots aid workers active in those programmes and projects that maintained a presence in rural areas contested by the Maoists and the RNA, according to Adhikari, had to walk on a metaphorical 'tight-rope' between them. These development workers developed several mechanisms for doing so, such as being alert to covert monitoring by either side of the conflict, communicating in code, paying levy to the Maoists, being sensitive to the psychological state of combatants, and

⁸⁷ I am not sure if Thapa's statement about the continued nationwide reach of UNICEF's Vitamin A campaign is correct. I recall a field trip in the second half of 2004 with a newly arrived OCHA representative visiting the area between Nepalgunj and Gulariya. During meetings with local communities and Maoist representatives at various locations, this representative asked explicitly several times about the existence of the UNICEF' vitamin A campaign. To my knowledge all responses were negative: people had not heard about it. Respondent A47 suggested that the UN family, and UNICEF in particular, were in denial about the conflict and its potential impact on development work.

checking information from both sides of the conflict, without giving information away (2003). Adhikari concludes in defence of grassroots aid workers that those in Kathmandu assumed wrongly that aid activities could continue with few problems and by doing so exposed the remaining fieldworkers to risk at great physical and psychological costs (ibid).⁸⁸

Key international actors and their positions regarding the growing conflict⁸⁹ India and China, as direct neighbours, and the US and UK governments as international powers with interests in the region, each have their own individual historical interests in Nepal and were all in their own way concerned with the growth of the Maoists insurgency in Nepal.⁹⁰ Their positions and concerns are briefly discussed below.

For India, the growing insurgency generated a series of challenges, not least that the core areas of the Maoist rebellion were relatively close to New Delhi, while the rebellion was also spreading to the eastern part of the country and could affect stability in the corridor between eastern Nepal and Bangladesh, potentially cutting off the north eastern part of India from the rest. Then, the Nepali Maoists could seek closer cooperation with Maoist groups based in South-Asia and India in particular, or even inspire them to reignite armed struggle within India itself. Lastly, the interest of the West and the UN and their willingness to mediate between the government of Nepal and the Maoists, could set a precedent dealing with the conflict in Kashmir, a situation India wanted to avoid. Against this backdrop and within a context of various levels of distrust, India's policy makers found themselves in a very difficult position. Supporting the government too much would antagonise the Maoists with the possibility of

⁸⁸ I support Adhikari's view, having conducted approximately 35 one or more-day security training sessions to aid agency staff throughout the country between 2000 and 2005. On one occasion (a training session for DANIDA forestry staff in Nepalgunj, September 2004) each training participant referred, during the introduction, to at least three security incidents they were directly or indirectly involved in. On my return to Kathmandu I mentioned this to my director (I still worked for SNV during that time), who responded that this could not be true, as they did not know what they were talking about. This refusal to accept the idea that field staffs were affected by the conflict demonstrates the denial present in some aid agencies.

⁸⁹ This section summarizes Pandey (2005). Other sources are referenced when used.

⁹⁰ For information about the historical relationships between India, China, the USA and the UK see Hoftun et al. (1999) 'People, Politics and Ideology: Democracy and Social Change in Nepal,' Mandela Bookpoint, Kathmandu, Nepal, or Khadka (1997) *Foreign Aid and Foreign Policy: Major powers and Nepal*, Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi, India.

escalation, while at the same time a large section of the elite within Kathmandu and foreigners suspected that India implicitly supported the Maoists.

China had other concerns to deal with. Firstly, China's strategic interest appears to be stability in the region. An escalation of conflict could mean increased US interest in Nepal, a country close to their borders. The insurgency could inspire those sectors of Nepali society with Tibetan leanings, opening up the possibility of the insurgency spilling over into Tibet. This could then further escalate if the Maoists could acquire more modern weaponry. China perceives the monarchy as a source of stability in Nepal; for China a reduction of the role of the monarchy could lead to an increase of instability, which might be in conflict with their long-term goals. Lastly, a deepening of the conflict could lead to closer cooperation between India and the US, which could develop into a serious threat to Chinese interests. Thus a deepening conflict was not in their interest. Against this backdrop, China aimed to focus on regional stability and kept low profile, distancing themselves from the insurgency, while observing closely.

The US had established diplomatic and bilateral relationships before India and China. It might be fair to say that the US is, since the 50s, more closely involved in Nepal and supportive during the panchayat days and the period of multi-party democracy than any other western donor country, with the possible exception of the UK. The involvement of Peace Corps volunteers is one significant example. However, this continuous development support was not always appreciated.⁹¹ Nepal received more attention after 9/11 from the US as part of their War on Terror. To stress Nepal's importance in this General Colin Powell visited Kathmandu in January 2002.⁹² The Nepali government under the leadership of Prime Minister Deuba also made use of 9/11 to portray the Maoist insurgency as terrorism. The intensification of military cooperation and support, going back to the 1980s, was justified by the events of 9/11, since from a US perspective Nepal became a country facing a terrorist threat, which in

⁹¹ Mainali connects a USAID-funded project in the Rapti zone with the start of the Maoist movement. The 15-year project finished a month and a half before the start of Maoist insurgency in the Rapti zone in February 1996. Mainali raises the question: "if that is what you get after 15 years of American-funded development, we are perhaps better without it", Mainali M., Nepali Times, No. 32, 2-8, March 2001, in: Thapa D. (2003) 'Understanding the Maoist Movement of Nepal,' Centre of Social Research and Development, Kathmandu.

⁹² This visit should also be seen in light of a SAARC summit held later in the month, during which Nepal proposed accepting UN resolution 1373, as a starting point for dealing with terrorism in the future.

turn could generate a threat to the US.⁹³ However, US military involvement was limited by the US desire not to upset Nepal's neighbours China and India.

The UK was firmly interested in Nepal's conflict as well, but categorised the Maoist insurgency not as terrorism. The UK line was that the conflict, while having some terrorist characteristics, was more about ignored political, economical and culture issues. Perhaps for this reason and in contrast with India and US, the UK did not supply any lethal military hardware. Two helicopters were provided for humanitarian purposes and perhaps other non-lethal material. Other than this assistance, in 2003 the UK appointed Sir Jeffrey James as special envoy as a response to the cease-fire.

The growing influence and attention of the US, and to a lesser extent the UK, worried both India and China. This potentially hampered the involvement of countries like Norway and Switzerland, or multi-lateral bodies like the EU or the UN, who may otherwise have expanded their roles in Nepal during the conflict, for example in the field of mediation. To close this impressionistic chapter and this section on international actors, it appeared to me that, despite the various positions within the international community, ultimately the Maoists would not be allowed to take over Nepal by violent means, and this in turn influenced the aid agencies' room for manoeuvre in strategizing and implementing aid activities.

⁹³ I recall two instances whereby expatriate development workers told me that they encountered Americans in military uniform on some sort of reconnaissance mission. These encounters took place in Surkhet and Mustang, both in 2002.

Chapter 3 Clausewitz and *On War*

3.1 Introduction

The German military philosopher Carl Von Clausewitz and his work *On War* are well debated among those with an interest in military affairs.⁹⁴ This chapter introduces Clausewitz and *On War* in order to follow the exploratory interplay between some of Clausewitz's ideas on war and the reflections on aid operations in turbulent environments like Nepal.⁹⁵

The chapter is divided as follows. First, the main philosophical characteristics of the era in which Clausewitz lived will be outlined, together with how Clausewitz dealt with these, which in turn shaped *On War*. Then, the structure, features and key themes of *On War* are explored, leading to a critique of the main strengths and weaknesses of *On War*, elucidating why certain choices were made in the course of the research. Before looking at the philosophical traditions, which influenced Clausewitz's thinking, his life will be briefly outlined below.

Clausewitz was a Prussian and lived from 1780 to 1831.⁹⁶ From the age of twelve until his death he was involved in the military, mixing military practice with periods of scholarly reflection. According to the military historian Howard, he died, somewhat ironically given the theme of this thesis, on a 'humanitarian' assignment, organising a '*cordon sanitaire*' in Poland to prevent the spread of a cholera epidemic (2002: 2).

⁹⁴ For example the Clausewitz homepage, <http://clausewitz.com/CWZHOME/CWZBASE.htm>; accessed on 11/9/06; See also the conference "Clausewitz in the 21st Century", 21 March 2005, Department of Politics and International Relations, University of Oxford, http://ccw.politics.ox.ac.uk/events/archives/tt05_clausewitz.asp; accessed on 11/9/06.

⁹⁵ Clausewitz specialists and other military thinkers might be disappointed with this chapter for its limited scope which cannot fully acknowledge the complexity of Clausewitz's thinking or the impact of *On War* on military thinking and the vast amount of literature available on the subject. However it should be stated that this is not intended to be an exhaustive review, since Clausewitz and *On War* as such are not the prime object of this research; rather they are a source of inspiration for or perhaps better a window through which to view aid operations in turbulent environments like Nepal.

⁹⁶ This section is based on the Clausewitz homepage, maintained by the military historian Bassford. <http://www.clausewitz.com/CWZHOME/FAQs.html#Chronology>, accessed on 11/9/06. For those interested in how Clausewitz thinking developed due to developments in his time the book 'Clausewitz and the State; The man, His Theories and His Times, by Paret (1976) is recommended.

After his first battle experience, he was garrisoned for six years and made use of the well-stocked library of Frederick the Great, brother of Prince Henry (ibid: 6).⁹⁷ In 1801, while Clausewitz was at the Military College in Berlin, General von Scharnhorst became aware of his talents, and gave him access to the higher circles of Prussian society. According to the military historian Paret, Clausewitz's first article critiques those wanting to turn war into a form of applied mathematics (1986: 190).⁹⁸ According to the associate professor of politics Smith, his thinking was further shaped by a lost battle against France (in 1808), a period of imprisonment in France (2005: 7) and a stint in Switzerland where he met Swiss intellectuals (ibid: 7). In 1807, after his return to Prussia Clausewitz started to assist General Scharnhorst in the restructuring of Prussian military institutions, while writing extensively on almost every aspect of war (Howard 2002: 9). His professorial career took off in 1810 when he was appointed to the Prussian War College. Alongside tutoring the Crown Prince August on military subjects, he had the opportunity to take on a variety of responsibilities related to the technical, organisational and political challenges of rebuilding an army organisation (Paret 1986: 193). At the end of 1811, according to the military historian Keegan, he defected from the Prussian army to support the Russian army in countering invasion by Revolutionary France (1994: 16). His primary involvement during the Russian campaign was diplomatic in nature, arranging the defection of the Prussian corps from Napoleon's army (Paret 1986: 195). He re-entered the Prussian army in spring 1813 and was wounded in battle together with Scharnhorst, who died a few weeks later (Smith 2005: 12) and later given charge of a non-descript force in northern Germany (Howard 2002: 10). In 1815, during the Waterloo campaign, he was chief of staff in a Prussian Army Corps (Smith 2005: 13) playing an important role in Napoleon's defeat, though he did not actually engage in battle himself (Howard 2002: 10). In 1818, at the age of 38 and with 25 years of field experience, he accepted a directorship at the Military College in Berlin, which he occupied until 1830 (Howard 2002: 20). He began, according to the military historian Bassford, a study of campaigns of various kinds, preparing the theoretical work that eventually became *On War* (2002).⁹⁹ In 1829 Clausewitz was called back to active duty to contain a Polish Revolution and to set up

⁹⁷ He studied mathematics, history and French and developed a capacity for independent thinking (Smith 2005).

⁹⁸ With this article Clausewitz hints at some of the key themes he develops in *On War* (Aron 1983:41-48).

⁹⁹ <http://www.clausewitz.com.cwzsumm/cworkhol.htm>, accessed on 12/26/2003.

a ‘*cordon sanitaire*’ to avoid the spread of a cholera epidemic (Smith 2005: 17). He contracted cholera, and died in Breslau on 16 November 1831, leaving *On War* unfinished (Howard 2002: 11).¹⁰⁰

3.2 Enlightenment and counter-enlightenment at the time of Clausewitz

Clausewitz’s perspective on conduct and study of war was not only influenced by social, political and military developments but also by the two competing paradigms colouring the intellectual climate of his time: the Enlightenment and counter-enlightenment or Romanticism (Smith 2005: 53). The Enlightenment favoured ideas such as the use of reason, an enthusiasm for science, and a conviction in and dedication to progressive development. Superstitious and religious thought were distrusted, and, according to Smith, there was a belief in the existence of a certain level of: “...uniformity in time, place and human nature” (ibid). According to the military researcher Gat, this paradigm was challenged by the counter-enlightenment. Ideas of uniformity in time, place and human nature were countered by the belief in historical diversity and the complexity of society and politics (2001: 189), with emphasis on the importance of faith and moral values was stressed (Smith 2005: 55).

The debate between these two competing paradigms found its way into Prussian military circles and was echoed in the paradigms of the military-enlightenment and military-romanticism. According to the historian Lynn Clausewitz’s thinking was a reflection of this debate (2004: 194). The remainder of this paragraph focuses on the main characteristics of both paradigms and how Clausewitz reconciled them in *On War*. When Clausewitz entered the Prussian army in 1792, enlightenment ideas shaped military thinking and practice, for example in an emphasis on routine, and on understanding the spatial relationships between the forces available, their bases and supply lines (Smith 2005).¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ Gat suggests that Clausewitz intended to revise the manuscript in the light of new insights on the conduct of war and its implication for policy (2001: 201).

¹⁰¹ Jomini, a representative of this strand, intended for example to construct “...a ‘system’ which aimed to tell the commander how to conduct war on a higher level” (Van Creveld 2002: 105).

The military author Von Berenhorst (1733-1814) preceded Clausewitz's challenge to the enlightenment hegemony within the Prussian military (Smith 2005: 57). In addition, according to the military historian Van Creveld, Clausewitz emphasized war as essentially irrational, unpredictable and dependent on chance (2002: 207). By doing so Clausewitz recognised the importance of the frequently changing states of mind of commanders and troops and the role of chance, while supporters of the military enlightenment portrayed war as a rational activity conforming to rules and principles. According to Lynn, it is precisely these ideas of military romanticism that penetrate the essence of war (2004: 194). However, it is these same ideas that cannot be fully captured in a military theory (ibid: 192). A schematic overview of some of the other differences between military enlightenment and military romanticism is presented in Annexe 3.1.

Thus, according to Smith, "*On War is a battleground between enlightenment and counter-enlightenment*" (2005: 67). Clausewitz believed in the application of reason and the role of passion, chance, friction and intuition during the conduct of war. He did not perceive war as a purely rational exercise (ibid). Handel, a former professor of National Security and Strategy at the U.S. Army War College, states that Clausewitz "...combined the best of the two worlds – the tradition of the Enlightenment, which emphasised rational objective analysis and the search for clarity, with the German Romantic tradition (...), which focused on the psychological, emotional, intuitive, and subjective dimensions in the interpretation of the surrounding world" (2005a: 6). According to Bassford, Clausewitz was not confused by enlightenment and counter-enlightenment thinking, even the opposite; "*Clausewitz combined Enlightenment and Romanticism, not because he was confused, but because war has both rational and irrational roots and characteristics. Clausewitz did not throw the ideas of the Enlightenment away, but complemented these ideas with the ideas of the counter-enlightenment, while developing his thoughts on the conduct of war*" (2004). According to Smith, it is this ability to reconcile Enlightenment and Counter-Enlightenment ideas in a single framework enabling a depiction of the complex activity of war, which constitutes Clausewitz's key achievement in the development of military theory (2005: 68). It is this that makes parts of *On War* attractive as a context for reflection on aid operations in turbulent environments such as Nepal. However, *On War* is not without its flaws.

3.3 *On War as a text*

On War is a lengthy and complex text, in part due to the topic, in part due to the attempt to reconcile military enlightenment and military romanticism, and in part due to its non-linear development as reflected in its structure, features, themes and concepts. These issues are addressed below in the light of my stated aim to use selected parts of *On War* to reflect upon aid operations in turbulent environment like Nepal.

Development *On War* was not written in a linear fashion, which is mirrored in its complicated structure.¹⁰² In his early years Clausewitz tended to critique ideas based on the military enlightenment negatively.¹⁰³ Despite this negativism, according to Gat, he nonetheless allowed the possibility of formulating a positive theory on war, in which he could integrate, the diversity of historical experience with a universal approach military theory (2001: 193). He made this integration possible by arguing that beyond the diversity of historical experience and the changing ‘manners’ of each period, universality exists (ibid).¹⁰⁴ In the second part of his life, while leading the military college in Berlin, Clausewitz thoughts on war became more comprehensive and started to condense. Optimistic about the possibility of developing a theory on war, he began to explore issues concerning Strategy, Engagement, and Defence and Attack.¹⁰⁵ Later, around 1828, Clausewitz opened up to two new ideas. The first was the possibility of two types of war: limited and all-out war. The second idea was that war was a continuation by other means (Aron 1983: 85; Gat 2001: 201).¹⁰⁶ This change in thought influenced the structure and logic of *On War*, which will be discussed below.

¹⁰² Gat argues states that “the opening part of *On War* reflects in effect the last part of Clausewitz’s intellectual development, while the middle part of the book reflects the earliest, and the last the intermediate stage. Therefore ideas presented throughout the book are not necessarily consistent, and can be even be opposing to what is said” (Gat 2001: 254).

¹⁰³ In particular the strategic ideas of Von Bülow who interpreted war as a kind of applied mathematics. (Paret 1986: 190)

¹⁰⁴ This universal and constant element was seen by Clausewitz as the true object for theory (Gat 2001: 193). This idea evolves in Book Two of *On War*.

¹⁰⁵ According to Gat is it possible to summarize Clausewitz theory as fighting being the nature of war, the primacy of the engagement supported by massive concentration of forces, and aggressive conduct aimed at a total defeat of the enemy (Gat 2001: 201).

¹⁰⁶ Raymond Aron was a French philosopher, sociologist and political scientist.

Structure Despite its non-linear development, *On War* appears at first sight to follow a logical sequence.¹⁰⁷ However, Paret argues that the organisation of the work into eight main parts does not constitute a sure guide for the reader, that for example its internal structure is somewhat less than straightforward (Paret 1986: 198).¹⁰⁸ According to Paret, this translates into a network of themes and arguments characterised by movements, cross-references, and allusions, not only to other parts of the book, but also to the experience of the author and of his generation (Paret 1986: 198-199). Lastly, although Clausewitz was able to re-write Chapter One of Book One before his death, he was unable to revise the work any further to include the theoretical consequences of his most recent insights. Such are the flaws in the internal structure of *On War*. For practical purposes I have addressed these complexities in the process of reflecting on aid operations in Nepal by taking selected parts of *On War* as they stand and understand them.¹⁰⁹ This will be further discussed in Chapter four on research methodology.

¹⁰⁷ *On War* contains eight books, which are divided into 128 chapters over 576 pages (Howard and Paret Translation 1987). This includes the author's preface, comments and two notes. The eight books cover a wide range of topics. Book One addresses the nature of war, in terms of purpose and means, the importance of genius, danger and the physical effort necessary to conduct war, intelligence and friction. Book Two addresses the relationship between the theory and practice of war and lays the methodological foundation for the entire book. Book Three deals with the issue of strategy in general, including the elements of strategy, the moral factors of boldness and perseverance, concentration of forces in time and space and the economy of force, suspension of action and tension and rest. Book Four covers general and specific issues related to the engagement in war, such as the significance, duration and decision of engagement and the effects of victory. Book Five examines military forces, covering issues like the theatre of operations, the relationship between the arms of service, the general disposition of the army, the operational use of advanced corps, maintenance and supply base of operations, lines of communication and terrain. Books Six and Seven cover the nature of defence and attack and their reciprocal relationship and provide practical advice on how they might be conducted. *On War* closes with Book Eight, which discusses planning together with concepts such as absolute and real war, military objectives, the relationship of war with political aims and the idea of limited war.

¹⁰⁸ The complexities, which may be explained as inconsistencies, of *On War's* internal structure have several causes. To begin with, the practical circumstances of Clausewitz's time were not necessarily advantageous. Secondly, and more importantly, *On War*, according to Paret, is in some respects an almost biographical document, which not only reflects Clausewitz's evolving ideas about history and society, but his position in that society as well (Paret: 1986).

¹⁰⁹ Other ways to address these internal complexities are firstly accepting that Clausewitz's most developed understanding of his subject is not fully integrated with the available text, or to argue that *On War* is a united or integrated whole (Bassford: 2002). My daughter Elly suggested overcoming this problem by saying one morning, after overhearing a discussion on this topic, "Dad, use that book as you understand and used it, which seems obvious to me". It was helpful advice, which I would like to thank her for, as that was precisely the way I used the book in Nepal.

Methodological Features *On War* has several characteristic methodological features, which are presented in a somewhat arbitrary way, but should be understood as an interlinked whole. Firstly, according to the military historian Sumida, Clausewitz aimed to use simple, straightforward and non-technical language (2001).¹¹⁰ Secondly, the ideal-type method is applied, although not consistently (Handel 2005). Thirdly, according to the sociologist Kaldor, issues are often presented as pairs of opposites, for example reason and emotion, art and science or defence and offence (Kaldor 2005a: 24-25). Fourthly, according to the military sociologist Klinger, Clausewitz's reasoning jumps back and forth from theory to practice, from the general to the practical while building his thoughts and lines of argument, which is characteristic of Clausewitz's manner of thinking and expression (2006: 87; Paret 1986: 203). Lastly, according to military historian Wallach, the most notable feature of Clausewitz's theory in *On War* is that it does not prescribe a particular course of action, though it does assert that events should happen according to lawful processes (Wallach in: Handel 2005: 213). Wallach comments that this naturally irritates many soldiers, who prefer to be presented with clear-cut instructions; the same may also be true for development workers and humanitarians.¹¹¹ There follows a review of the themes discussed in *On War*.

Themes *On War* deals with several interconnected themes and concepts in its efforts to develop a theory able to analyse war. This thesis makes use of a few of them. Although difficult to separate out, Clausewitz's main themes will be discussed below.

The first theme is the relationship between politics and war, which underpins *On War*. Clausewitz states: "...war is not merely an act of policy but a true political instrument, a continuation of political intercourse, carried on with other means...the political object is the goal, war is the means of reaching it, and means can never be considered

¹¹⁰ However, this may not be the impression gained by the modern English reader. The Howard and Paret translation of *On War*, despite being recognised as the best available, is a challenge to penetrate due to the abstract and theoretical language applied, which is not so much the fault of the translators, but of Clausewitz's penchant for long and complex sentences (Heuser 2002: xi).

¹¹¹ In March 2009, I was invited by ZOA Refugee Care/ the Netherlands to give a presentation at their bi-annual country-directors' conference in Nunspeet/ the Netherlands. During the presentation of some concepts, one country director (a colleague educated at the same university in the same field and belonging to the same student batch I belong to) raised his hand and said something in the line of "I am a country programme manager, please tell me exactly what I should do". This comment to my understanding underlines the problem I highlighted in the first paragraphs of Chapter One.

in isolation from their purpose” (H&P: 89). This implies that in Clausewitz’s view political concerns set the agenda and govern the aims, resources used and duration of any subsequent military action.¹¹² This idea is implicitly echoed throughout the thesis by assuming that development aid is politics by other means. However, it is very rarely explicitly addressed, as Clausewitz himself speaks hardly explicitly about this throughout his work.

On War's second theme is the concept of the paradoxical trinity (H&P: 89). This concept is the most fundamental theoretical structure underlying Clausewitz’s military theory. The notion of the trinity has two interlinked levels. The first is psychologically orientated involving the basic elements of irrationality, non-rationality and rationality. The second is socially orientated consisting of people, commander and army, and government. Clausewitz describes the connection between the first level of the trinity and the subordination of military means to political goals as follows: *“as a total phenomena, its dominant tendencies always make war a paradoxical trinity –composed of primordial violence, hatred and enmity, which are to be regarded as a blind natural force; of the play of chance and probability within which the creative spirit is free to roam; and of its element of subordination, as an instrument of policy, which makes it subject to reason alone”* (H&P: 89). This trinity is, according to Bassford, a dynamic, inherently unstable interaction of the forces of violent emotion, chance and rational calculation (Bassford 2007). Clausewitz goes on to link the first level of this trinity with the second level: *“The first of these three aspects mainly concerns the people: the second the commander and his army, the third the government”* (H&P: 89). According to Handel, this trinity can form countless unique combinations reflecting the individual character of any war. He continues that, given the limitless series of possible combinations, no two wars are the same, and there is a need to understand the nature of a war before embarking on it (1997). For the purpose of this thesis an adjusted version of Clausewitz’s paradoxical trinity is used to further reflection on aid operations in

¹¹² The reasoning behind this subordination of military action to political will comes from Clausewitz’s understanding of the factors that brought French victories on the battlefield, for example the radical changes in politics and administration in France, and the need for statesmen to understand the political conditions that influence the military means available and how they can be utilised (H&P: 609). However understandable, this theoretical position of the military subordination to political authorities is not always without tension for those who support the idea that the military should be involved in politics (Klinger 2006).

turbulent environments, which is labelled the ‘aid trinity’. This concept is elaborated upon on in Chapter Five.

A third theme is the polarity between ideal war and real war. Clausewitz argues that theoretically there is no limit to the application of force in terms of its aim, use and application of strength (H&P: 75-77). He refers regularly to the idea of ideal war, as an abstract concept, to explain certain features of war. He acknowledges however that, war in reality looks quite different, as it never acts in isolation, nor does it produces definitive results (ibid: 78-80). The thesis uses this ideal-type model. Chapter Six explores the notion of ‘the ideal form of aid’. While the reflective sections of Chapters 7 to 18 refer to this ideal type model as well.

The fourth theme of *On War* is the relationship between military theory and practice. To begin with, the aim of theory is, in Clausewitz’s words “...to educate the mind of the future commander, or, more accurately, to guide him in his self-education, not to accompany him to the battlefield; just as a wise teacher guides and stimulates a young man’s intellectual development, but is careful not to lead him by the hand for the rest of his life” (ibid: 142). In addition, theory should keep close to practice in order to stay down-to-earth: “...theoretical results must have been derived from military history or at least checked against it” (ibid: 144). Moreover, the purpose of theory is, “... to demonstrate what war is in practice, not what its ideal nature should be” (ibid: 593). Gat states that Clausewitz rejected doctrine or prescriptive theory, rather he theorised from the position that any theory would always be partial and require carefully judged application (Gat 2001: 213).¹¹³ Chapter Four elaborates on the research question and research methodology will touch upon on how Clausewitz’s ideas on theory and its use will be used in the remainder of the thesis.

The fifth theme to be outlined here relates to psychology. Clausewitz puts psychological forces governing war at the core of his attempts to understand it. According to Paret, and in line with Kantian philosophy, Clausewitz recognised that,

¹¹³ Within this context Clausewitz, according to Paret, differentiated between the cognitive, pedagogic and utilitarian potential of theory (1986: 204-205). Therefore, according to Gat, Clausewitz approached the writing of *On War* with fairly advanced ideas about the characteristics and contents of military theory (Gat 2001: 197).

although not all things could be understood, they should not be ignored. This psychological dimension is in his work linked with concepts like friction and genius (1986: 204-205). Chapter Five explains how this psychological theme will be used in the remainder of the study.

The final theme from Clausewitz's theoretical scheme is friction. Friction is the intermediate idea between war in its ideal or absolute form and the practice of war in reality (H&P: 119). Friction affects military operations and therefore "... cannot, as in mechanics, be reduced to a few points, [it] is everywhere in contact with chance, and brings about effects that cannot be measured, just because they are largely due to chance" (ibid: 119-121). The concept of friction evolved to be the red thread throughout the thesis and is explicitly addressed in the chapters 7 to 10. Each elaborating on how particular aspects of the idea of friction played out in the context of Nepal. In that sense the remaining chapters are exemplars of how friction is an ever-repeating theme in strategizing and implementing aid operations in turbulent contexts. We turn now to a synopsis of the various negative and positive critiques of *On War*.

3.4 Negative and positive critiques

Opinions of Clausewitz's *On War* vary dramatically. At one end of the spectrum there are authors like Keegan (1994) Van Creveld (1991) and Kaldor (2005a) who criticise *On War* for its flaws. At the other end of the spectrum there are Paret (1986) and Howard (1986) and the military sociologist Shaw (2005), who rate Clausewitz highly for his thinking as presented in *On War*, despite its flaws. Presented below are various positive and negative critiques of *On War* by the main thinkers on the topic; they are described in order to shed light on particular limitations or potential of Clausewitz's ideas and subsequently the way they are used in the remainder of the study.

Negative critiques Walzer, an American political philosopher, argues that Clausewitz seems not to perceive war as a problem in itself and that as a result *On War* is relatively quiet on moral issues, discussing the nature rather than the consequences of war (2006: 22). Keegan's problem with Clausewitz is that he deals not in advice but in what he insists are inescapable truths (1994: 354). He refutes Clausewitz's key argument and probably most quoted statement, that war is a continuation of politics by

other means.¹¹⁴ In other words, Keegan argues that Clausewitz was blind to the fact that war differs from culture to culture and is not necessarily fought with well-defined armies guided by states. (1994: 23). This brings us to Van Creveld, who argues that wars are no longer fought in a Clausewitzian way and that the key Clausewitzian concept, the trinity of people, army and government, no longer exists with respect to modern warfare. Subsequently, he suggests that war is structured on a non-trinitarian model (1991).¹¹⁵

Van Creveld is echoed by Kaldor (2005a). Her point of departure is not historical, as with Keegan and Van Creveld, but her own understanding of contemporary war. She identifies a new type of violence, which she labels as ‘new wars’ (ibid: 1). Features of ‘new wars’ are, according to Kaldor, fragmentation of the state, low levels of participation among the local population, low levels of legitimacy of the warring parties involved and meagre domestic production (ibid: 90). As a consequence, Kaldor continues, war efforts are dependent on local predation and external support. Within these wars, battles are rare and most violence is directed against civilians; cooperation between warring parties is common (ibid). The distinctions between public and private, military and civil, internal and external have been eroded. This blurring of lines can even be extended to the distinction between war and peace itself (ibid: 29). She continues to argue that the causes that lead to failed responses by the international community are not so much found in short-term thinking of politicians, the role of the media, the lack of coordination of governments and international agencies and a lack

¹¹⁴ H&P Book 1, Chapter 1.

¹¹⁵ Van Creveld argues that Clausewitz’s work must be understood in its proper context (1991: 35). According to Van Creveld, Clausewitz saw war as being moulded by social relationships, by the type of society by which it was conducted and by the kind of government, which that society admits (ibid). Van Creveld continues that Clausewitz took for granted that ‘war’ as form of organised violence that could only be waged by the state, for the state and against the state (ibid: 36). Consequently, according to Van Creveld, if it was governments that made war, then their instruments for so doing were their armies (ibid: 38). Most of these soldiers were conscripted civilians. Therefore, according to Van Creveld, the civilians formed the third vital element in any war and should therefore be included in Clausewitz’s trinity (ibid: 39). Van Creveld further reasons that the Clausewitzian universe and Trinitarian war, i.e. war of state against state and army against army, is a temporary phenomenon. He argues that Trinitarian war was unknown during most of history (ibid: 57), and that the concept does not automatically apply in the contexts of contemporary low-intensity wars. For example, some societies do not have armies: the civilians themselves are the armies (ibid: 56). Therefore, Van Creveld argues that due to rise of modern, non-Trinitarian, low-intensity conflict after the Second World War II, Clausewitz’s world is outdated and can no longer provide us with a suitable framework for understanding war (ibid: 58). This is especially true in developing countries, which form the implicit contextual background of this study, and where non-Trinitarian warfare is the norm (ibid: 58).

of resources, but in the misperception about organised violence and the inability to understand the character of and the logic of new warfare (ibid: 113). In other words, the use of a Clausewitzian perspective by the international community contributes to the failure of interventions by this same community. Kaldor's position offers an intriguing foil to this research, as it contends the opposite view. Based on my experience in Nepal, it is not so much the case that a Clausewitzian understanding of war causes improper responses to war, rather it is a rigid, linear view combined with a dispassionate, non-political treatment of the design and implementation of aid operations, combined with insufficient consideration of the dynamic working environment which at the root of sub-optimal responses to violent and unstable working environments. An operational paradigm that addresses these shortcomings is lacking.

Gray, a British-American strategic thinker and professor of International Relations and Strategic Studies and a 'supporter' of Clausewitz's thinking, discusses several shortcomings in Clausewitz's work (1999). Firstly, Clausewitz says little about the dynamics of policy (ibid: 101). Then, Clausewitz barely addresses the causes of war, the political objectives to be achieved and ways of accomplishing this through statecraft or diplomacy (ibid: 106). Further, Clausewitz seems to be concerned with the operational military level (ibid: 104) and focused on how a particular will can be imposed upon an enemy. He does not offer much reflection on how an enemy might seek to impose its will (ibid: 103-104). Lastly, Clausewitz, according to Gray, does not give much attention to issues such as economics, logistics, administration and technology, which are of vital importance to a comprehensive understanding of the conduct of war.¹¹⁶ Gray sees these shortcomings as opportunities to further, perhaps in a Clausewitzian style, the fundamentals of a general theory on war (ibid: 100).

Positive Critiques Clausewitz has, next to Grey, other supporters too, of whom a sample follows. To begin with, Brodie, an American military strategist and theorist, argues in the Howard and Paret translation of *On War*, that Clausewitz's work stands out as one of a small number of historical texts which have presented profound and original insights that have not been adequately absorbed in the later literature (H&P:

¹¹⁶ See for example Van Creveld (2005) *Supplying War, logistics from Wallenstein to Patton*, Cambridge University Press.

50-53). Gat, a researcher of military history, states that Clausewitz offers a sophisticated theory of war, based on a highly stimulating intellectual paradigm, and brought the conception of military theory in line with the forefront of the general theoretical outlook of his time (2001: 255). However, the majority of supporters do not embrace *On War* as an unfinished theory; they value it because it provides the foundation for a theory on war, but recognise that it needs to be worked on and modified to accommodate developments in contemporary warfare. Within this context Roxborough, a sociologist, argues that despite *On War*'s historically rooted theoretical shortcomings, its theory should not be cast off (1994: 627).

Regarding the various critiques of, for example, Keegan, Van Creveld and Kaldor and the use of Clausewitz in the context of this exploratory thesis, I would like to argue that their critiques might be valid for the analysis of war, but that does not necessarily imply that aspects of Clausewitz's theory on war are by definition not useful as inspirational frame for reflection on strategizing aid operations in turbulent environments.

Some of the strengths of *On War* will in various degrees be exploited in the remainder of this thesis. To begin with, Clausewitz has a lot to say on how to fight war effectively (Howard 2002). Then, although the social trinity attracts criticism, the prime, psychologically orientated trinity is under-explored, but, according to Gray, still has validity as a theoretical framework for thinking about and conceptualising war (1999: 92). Shaw appreciates Clausewitz's theory for two other reasons. Firstly, it presents war as a type of social action, which can be compared with other types of social action such as commerce. Therefore his framework is in principle open to understanding the parallels and connections between war and other types of social action. Secondly, according to Shaw, Clausewitz's theory contains a primitive sociology that addresses the connections between social forces and the elements of his famous trinity of war, i.e. rationality, chance and violence (ibid: 41).

Two further viewpoints conclude this chapter. The first is that of Gray, who realised over his thirty-year career as an academic and military adviser that *On War* provides the basic conceptual toolkit for the education of the strategist (2006: 5). In line with this, it is my personal view that concepts such as the remarkable trinity and other

concepts discussed in *On War* such as strategy, boldness and perseverance, which were invented or discussed by Clausewitz (Heuser 2002: xi), and the way these discussions are formulated and shaped are not only helpful when approaching particular military issues, but could, in an adapted form, helpfully guide reflections on aid operations in turbulent environments. In addition, Clausewitz's approach to discussing different dimensions of strategizing battle shows that he realises the severe consequence of mistakes made. In my view this is of considerable worth, and it is this aspect which the reflections on strategizing aid operations in turbulent environments aim to echo.

In this chapter we have briefly discussed Clausewitz's life, the intellectual climate he lived in and the way these are reflected in *On War*. We have described the development of *On War*, its methodological features, its themes and its various critiques for and against. The following chapter describes in methodological terms how selected elements from Clausewitz's theoretical toolbox will be used in the process of reflecting on aid operations in turbulent Nepal.

CHAPTER 4 Research Question and Methodology

4.1 Introduction

The apparently contradictory juxtaposition of Clausewitz's thinking as laid out in *On War* with the practice of aid agencies in turbulent environments like Nepal may come as a surprise to those who are suspicious of military activity or thought.¹¹⁷ Why would those who attempt to do good borrow ideas from 'evil'? And if it is to be done, how is the contradiction between Clausewitzian thinking and contemporary aid practices to be reconciled for the purpose of reflecting upon strategizing and implementation processes of aid operations in turbulent environments like Nepal? Borrowing from Patton, an author on qualitative research methodologies, the short answer is that this research intends to apply a pragmatic strategy of matching a concrete method, in this case a single case study, with a specific research question (2002: 69).¹¹⁸ This chapter aims to elaborate on the research methodology of the study.

The remainder is structured as follows: the hypothesis and research question are stated, following which I briefly elaborate on the philosophical and personal points of departure of the research position. This is followed by a discussion of how the single case study approach is applied in the course of the study and data is collected. Then, the method of data analysis is discussed. The features of the various reflections are elaborated upon, and issues of validity and reliability concerning this research are discussed. This is followed by an overview of possible biases. The final paragraph elaborates briefly on how the research meandered and which research alternatives were considered during the early stages of the study.

¹¹⁷ One might argue that military activities are a practical hindrance for the advance of development activities in the first place, or that military theory has not much in common the field of aid and development. Or, as Kaldor argues, it is precisely a Clausewitzian understanding of contemporary conflicts and the misunderstanding that this creates which has led to failed interventions in conflict situations (2005: 113).

¹¹⁸ Patton suggests that this implies that any study must be judged by its intended purposes, available resources, procedures followed and results obtained (2002: 71).

4.2 Hypotheses and research question

This study has two hypotheses:

1. *That the development industry operating in turbulent environments could benefit from ideas within military theory.*
2. *That Clausewitz's theoretizations on the conduct of war as laid out in his book *On War*, when applied in a creative way, form a fruitful basis to formulate a normative framework which furthers (speculative) reflections on aid operations in turbulent operational environments such as Nepal.*

The research question of the study is: *How might reflections on aid operations in turbulent operational environments, such as Nepal during the period August 1999 to 2005/06, appear when inspired by Clausewitz's lines of thought and conceptualizations of war as laid out in his book *On War*?*

The study mainly elaborates on concepts discussed by Clausewitz which are related to the ideas of friction and strategy, such as intelligence, physical effort, boldness, perseverance and cunning, and how these subsequently interact with friction in the course of strategizing and implementing aid operations in turbulent environments like Nepal, between mid-1999 and 2005/06.¹¹⁹ I assumed, while preparing the fieldwork that a key issue related to aid and development in Nepal related to the issue of strategy. However, while conducting the actual fieldwork and analysing the data, I started to believe that aspects related to friction are of equal importance to think through processes of strategizing aid operations. That is the reason why I focus in this thesis primarily on the nexus of strategy and friction, acknowledging that Clausewitz elaborated in his theory on a range of other themes as well.¹²⁰

¹¹⁹ The period of time covered in the research is somewhat arbitrary and corresponds basically with my six-year period in Nepal from August 1999 to July 2005. However, I do not apply this time frame strictly, as respondents appeared to face challenges when answering my questions solely within this time frame. For example one respondent (A4) referred regularly to the beginning of the 90s, suggesting that during visits to the Midwestern part of Nepal there were observable indicators that Nepal was ripe for a Maoist-inspired revolution.

¹²⁰ See also paragraph 4.9, which indicates how this research shifted in focus.

4.3 Research: points of departure

Huff, a professor in strategy and innovation, in a paper on theory-building argues that it is important that a researcher clarifies his/ her own views and experience as much as possible, as it helps the researcher to formulate his or her own position in relation to other researchers (Huff in: Smith and Hitt 2005: 350). In Chapter One I presented my practical working experience and position related to development aid. Below, I clarify the philosophical research position applied during the course of the research. This section explores the underlying philosophical point of departure and personal approach of this exploratory research.

Philosophical point of departure In an ideal world it would be admirable if a researcher could adhere to a form of truth-finding which combines three philosophical research positions in one research redesign, following pragmatism, coherency theory and the correspondence theory at the same time (Ouweneel 1984).¹²¹ Despite this ideal, due to the exploratory nature of this research combined with the pragmatic nature of the field of study (Kennedy 2004: 235-323), I apply a pragmatic approach to truth in the course of the study.

This pragmatic view on truth making assumes that no solid foundation for knowledge exists and that subsequently assumptions are necessary to underpin any set of beliefs (Hammersley 1989: 47). Furthermore, pragmatism holds that science develops from the problems of life and should therefore be directed towards the solutions of these problems (ibid: 53).¹²² Although many aid practitioners might subscribe to this view, the position has some drawbacks in relation to this research. Firstly, it might be perceived as a minimalist approach towards the development of a series of reflections on aid and development in Nepal. Secondly, the study might make sense in a theoretical world, but that does not automatically mean that it is useful in the practical

¹²¹ These three approaches deviate from the more conventional distinctions of enlightenment, counter-enlightenment and post-modernism (Ouweneel 1984). According to Ouweneel, coherency philosophies, as developed by for example Kant, Leibniz and Hegel, consider statements as true when these statements are coherent, in terms of internal consistency and connectedness. So, if the outcome of a study is internally consistent then it is a product of good science. Correspondence theory goes a step further and argues that a theory can be coherent but that does not mean that it corresponds with reality, even if it works according to pragmatic criteria (ibid). So in the context of correspondence theory a product of good science within the world of aid and development is if the outcome of the research is in line with the reality of aid.

¹²² Chapter One describes the problem I encountered in the course of my work in Nepal.

world of aid and development.¹²³ Thirdly, following on from the second point, the series of reflections developed might ‘work’ in terms of understanding reality and therefore might be perceived as close to the truth, but this does not mean that its implications are necessarily straightforward.¹²⁴ In other words, conclusions might be reached too early. Despite these drawbacks, I apply a pragmatic approach in the course of the study on the basis of a pragmatic line of thought being that even if an incoherent set of (speculative) reflections are derived from the interplay between Clausewitz’s thinking and the development practice in Nepal, these reflections might not be necessarily without value or unworkable in other comparable situations.

Personal approach Mintzberg argues that interesting theory will evolve “...when we let go all scientific correctness, or to use a famous phrase, suspend our beliefs, and allow our minds to roam freely and creatively” (Mintzberg in: Smith and Hitt 2005: 574). Despite Mintzberg’s suggestion that relevance should prevail over rigour, a balanced approach is adopted, which is reflected by a personal approach to research, at the heart of which is the attempt to be an *eclectic, imaginative and committed explorer*. Being eclectic is reflected in the various sources and academic disciplines used and combined during the course of the research.¹²⁵ The attempt to be imaginative refers to two issues, namely the use of creativity in the process of reflecting on aid activities in Nepal via some of Clausewitz’s ideas and the application of Mills’ approach to sociology as a form of imaginative craft (2000).¹²⁶ Finally, the notion of the committed explorer refers on the one hand to remaining committed to the study’s structure, for this purpose the case study method laid out by Yin (2003: 50), and on the other hand, to my desire to use the methodological freedom allowed in the course of exploratory research (Stebbins 2001).

¹²³ The idea that what works is truth might even be a paradox. Spin, which appears to me an unfortunate factor within the practice of aid, might work for example in the process of getting aid projects financed or implemented, but it is not necessarily true or ethical. Respondent A3 hinted at this practice within the context of the Nepali development community.

¹²⁴ For example, if aid agencies argue that rebels randomly attack development projects, it is easy to suggest that aid in general is under attack by rebels and therefore actions to improve security do not make sense or cannot be taken. The argument works in the sense that it assists the process of labelling rebels as terrorists and gaining the moral high ground of being a victim of their terrorism. However, it does not assist at all in developing an appropriate response to a wide variety of security risks, which might be induced by the agencies under risk. Short-sighted pragmatism is therefore not helpful.

¹²⁵ Clausewitz used an eclectic approach in his study of war; failure to acknowledge this in my approach could undermine my research.

¹²⁶ Wright Mills encourages using the life experience of the researcher in his work, and to examine, interpret and reflect on it (2000: 196).

Within the above context, this exploratory research comes to a satisfying conclusion when the following standard is applied. Mintzberg suggests that good theory does not necessarily need to be finished. He sees theory as a perspective on reality that holds until a better one is developed (Mintzberg in: Smith and Hitt 2005: 356). This implies that one key aspect of good theory is that, despite being incomplete and unfinished, it generates discussion and debate. Although this thesis is not primarily focused on developing theory, but on a series of reflections, one could argue, in similar fashion as to what might constitute a good series of reflections. Therefore, acknowledging that I cannot judge the product of my own reflections, this thesis takes the rather pragmatic and minimalist view that the minimum acceptable outcome of the research is that it potentially stimulates debate among those aid practitioners who read it.

4.4 The case study method and method of data collection

This exploratory research is qualitative and adopts a single case-study design, which will be elaborated upon below. The justification of the latter is twofold.¹²⁷ The case is unique and typical at the same time. Firstly, the case is unique in terms of context, Nepal being the only Hindu state in the world, having to face a rather 'successful' insurgency based on Maoist-Marxist and Leninist ideology during the second-half of the 90s. Secondly, the case appears to be replicating the not uncommon phenomenon of an aid community, acting in general terms as 'blind' to a deteriorating operational context (Uvin 1998).¹²⁸ In addition, adopting a single case-study design also relates to the exploratory nature of the research topic, which is a reflection on the conjuncture between Clausewitz's thinking on the conduct of war and the practice of the aid industry in a particular context, in this case Nepal. Moreover, it is Clausewitz himself who argues that studying one case deeply might be more instructive than exploring several cases (H&P: 170-174), advice which I have followed by conducting a single case study. The unit of analysis within this study is the international development

¹²⁷ Yin suggests that a single case study design is justified where the case is a critical extreme or unique one, or a representative or typical case, or a revelatory case, or a longitudinal case (Yin 2003: 40-42).

¹²⁸ Uvin explored the role of the aid community in Rwanda in relation to the genocide of 1994, including its (non-) response to preparations for the genocide. I recall a conversation with my director whereby I stated that SNV/ Nepal's response to the growing instability in Nepal almost echoed SNV/ Rwanda response to the build up of the Genocide, with the difference that Nepal would most likely not face a genocide (Autumn 2003). In the build up of the Rwanda Genocide SNV/ Rwanda appeared unaware of the dramatic social, political dynamics in its operational environment. (Task Force SNV 2002).

community in Nepal in relation to the conflict dynamics within the country. On the basis of concepts and themes derived from Clausewitz the study investigates how in general terms the aid community and their operations responded to and interacted with these conflict dynamics. The study does not aim to analyse individual agencies, their projects or programmes, though these will be used on occasion as examples to clarify, illustrate or prove particular points made. In addition, as stated earlier, the study is not an evaluation of the aid industry in Nepal, or of particular aid sectors in Nepal.¹²⁹

Methods of data collection The study draws on secondary and primary data. A chapter-by-chapter overview of the data used is provided.

Part I Chapter One is mainly based on a recapitulation of my own experience while studying Development Studies, and my working experiences in Nepal. In addition, secondary data is collected and used to elaborate on various aspects related to development aid and fragile states, which include literature related to anthropology, sociology, political science, development studies and crisis management. These sources helped me to position the research. Chapter Two is primarily based on secondary sources related to Nepal in general and development aid in Nepal in particular. These secondary sources are mainly anthropological, sociological or political science-orientated academic works, or (project) reports produced, or commissioned by aid agencies themselves. Information from applied research institutes, or journalistic sources are used as well. Chapter Three is based on Clausewitz's work *On War*, the insights of various military historians and strategists about Clausewitz's life, his work or the theoretical and practical implications of his work for military practice. The methodology chapter is based on literature related to research methodology. These sources facilitated my explorations as to how I conducted this research.

All chapters in Part II and III consist of three sets of data. Firstly, selected parts from Clausewitz's *On War* are presented, together with reference to Clausewitz specialists where necessary to shed light on the meaning of these excerpts. Then, interview data are used. The chapters in Part II and III are further informed by my own reflections on

¹²⁹ Aid agencies themselves might be much better positioned to conduct evaluations.

the interplay of the other sets of data. In addition, throughout the thesis, I draw on my own memories of events between August 1999 and August 2005, being aware that these memories are partial, fading like batteries, and therefore not necessarily accurate.

Interviewees and (grey) literature Primary data informs Part II and III, and interviews were conducted and (grey) material produced by aid agencies collected for that purpose. With respect to interview data, the selection criteria for participation in the research were twofold. Firstly, potential interviewees needed to have worked for aid agencies in Nepal or had to be in regular contact with some of these aid agencies between 1999 and 2005/06, or had to be a close observer of Nepal in general or development aid in particular. The second criterion for selection was that potential interviewees had to be close to or observers of central decision-making processes within these aid agencies. This would include Heads of Mission, project or programme managers, or key advisors (for example as conflict advisor or security officer), but expatriates, being either an academic or consultant with long-term relationship with Nepal and its aid community or Nepali nationals with the same background as well.

Recruiting research participants began with an initial selection of key informants whom I considered knowledgeable about the dynamics of Nepal's aid community vis-à-vis the conflict in Nepal.¹³⁰ From there most of the other research participants were purposely selected via the snowball method (Bernard 1995: 95-98). To my benefit I already knew a significant portion of the total number of people interviewed.

Initially, I thought that a sample of approximately 36 people would be sufficient in order to get a reasonable cross-section of interview responses.¹³¹ This idea was proved reasonably correct. However, during the fieldwork in Nepal, which took 6 weeks (from

¹³⁰ These individuals were considered knowledgeable in this context because of the extent of their involvement with the aid community of Nepal and because of their social networks within this community. One of them has lived and worked in Nepal for the last 20 years and is conducting PhD research on learning in Nepal's aid community, the second has published widely on Nepal and visits Nepal regularly as a consultant, the third has been regularly involved in consultancy work for one of the biggest donors since 2003 and the fourth key informant was a former colleague, professionally tasked with maintaining contacts with a wide variety of actors in Nepal.

¹³¹ Stebbins advises a minimum of 30 interviewees per process or situation studied (2001: 27). Out of these 36, I assumed that I could interview approximately 12 former aid staff who had returned to Europe. The remaining 24 research participants, I assumed, could be interviewed successively in Nepal.

the 2nd of February till the 15th of March 2008),¹³² I decided to go beyond this number, as it was easier to approach possible interview candidates than expected.¹³³ In the end a total of 70 people were interviewed.¹³⁴ This does not mean that I have used all the interview material equally intensively; after transcribing and summarizing approximately 45 interviews a saturation point was reached, with not much by way of substantial new insights connected to the themes related to strategy coming to the fore (Strauss and Corbin 1998: 136).¹³⁵ Before starting the interview series two pilot interviews were conducted with two former project managers of larger INGOs, successively working in Sri Lanka and Sudan.¹³⁶

In the process of presenting the data, respondents are represented with a single code, ranging from A1 to A70.¹³⁷ While presenting the material no distinction is made between nationalities, aid agency background, role within or outside an aid agency and gender. Although indicating the backgrounds of the various respondents (for example their nationalities)¹³⁸ or even separating responses on the basis of these backgrounds might have been valuable for those with anthropological or sociological research interests, within the context of this study I am of the opinion that it would not provide additional information that could bring me closer to answering the research question, as the emphasis of the research question is the interplay between Clausewitz's thinking on war and the overall processes within the aid community in Nepal between 1999 and 2005/06. In addition, it could reveal the identity of the respondents, which I wanted to avoid. Therefore I chose to treat all responses as having equal value for the research,

¹³² As I was familiar with the context, the fieldwork period could be short.

¹³³ Firstly, I could draw on my network of contacts, which was stronger than expected. Secondly, but more importantly, there were more former 'colleagues' present during the fieldwork in Nepal than expected, although some were operating in other positions. Some had even returned, after a period of absence.

¹³⁴ 21 out of the 70 respondents were Nepali. 15 out of the 70 respondents were women.

¹³⁵ This does not mean that I have not used material from the other interviews, but went back to them occasionally if thought necessary.

¹³⁶ Interviews took place by skype (Sri Lanka case) or face-to-face in the Netherlands (in the Sudan case). Both interviewees were Dutch and the results of the interviews are not used in the research.

¹³⁷ An anonymised list of research participants can be found in Annexe 4.1. The research participants are listed in alphabetical order.

¹³⁸ These 70 interviewees represented a wide variety of nationalities. In alphabetical order there were contributions from nationals of the following countries: America, Australia, Canada, Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, France, Italia, Japan, Nepal, Switzerland and Sri Lanka.

regardless of the nationality of the interviewee who contributed a particular point.¹³⁹ Therefore, while quoting a respondent, I do not indicate if the respondent was a Nepali or an expatriate. All interviews were recorded with permission¹⁴⁰ and notes were taken during the interviews. Out of the 70 interviews 3 recordings failed.¹⁴¹

The majority of interviews took place in the capital of Nepal, Kathmandu, with the remainder being conducted in different parts of Europe.¹⁴² Some of the Europe-based interviews took place before the fieldwork, while a few other interviews were conducted after the field research. During the time of the interviews, at least 41 out of 70 research participants had changed, or were on the verge of moving into another position.¹⁴³ I assume that this allowed them to respond more freely to my questions, than if they were still in the positions they held between 1999 and 2005/06. 13 potential research candidates kindly declined to participate or did not respond to my invitation to participate. For my part I cancelled three interviews, one of which turned out to be logistically impractical and two of which were unlikely to add substantially to the outcome of research, given the amount of data available. The research participants ranged from Nepali and expatriate project managers, (formerly) based in (very) remote districts, to Nepali Nationals and expatriate staff, who were able to influence direct or indirectly decision-making processes within aid agencies. During the course of field research in Nepal, the opportunity unexpectedly arose to interview Dr. Baburam

¹³⁹ Where helpful I may introduce a quotation by indicating if the interviewee was a key advisor or close observer etc, but without does not reveal his or her nationality.

¹⁴⁰ However in one case the interviewee requested that the recording be stopped before answering a certain question. The interviewee allowed the continuation of the recording after giving their response.

¹⁴¹ Notes were still made of these interviews. One of the respondents of these three failed recordings wrote a 30-page document to recapitulate the points made during the interview, which I gratefully accepted.

¹⁴² An introductory letter and a verbal explanation of the aim of the research preceded the interviews. In addition I explained to research participants that questions raised during the interview were based on the various themes discussed by Clausewitz. The non-Nepal based interviews took place in the United Kingdom: St Goran (1), Penrith (1), Oxford (1), London (2), Norwich (1), Easneye (1); Switzerland: Geneva (2), Bern (1); Denmark: Copenhagen (1); the Netherlands: Utrecht (1), Oosterbeek (2), Hilversum (1) and Zwaagwesteinde (1).

¹⁴³ In a few cases respondents were in their last month or even week of their job. In one case I was offered the opportunity to interview a respondent in the last 48 hours before leaving Nepal, between the respondent's visit to the dentist and the usual final farewell party.

Bhattaria (CPN-M);¹⁴⁴ however I did not interview representatives of either the government or the army.¹⁴⁵

I envisaged having only one chance to interview the majority of research participants. I used for the purpose a semi-structured interview plan (Bernard 1995: 209). This semi-structured interviewing led in a small number of cases to a form of unstructured interview, while keeping the issues I wanted to explore in mind.¹⁴⁶ This happened for example in instances where interviews were a sort of mini-reunion, or where experiences were very similar or where the interviewee indicated that he or she was also struggling with the paradoxes of aid and development in Nepal.¹⁴⁷ Before each interview I decided which issues I definitely wanted to cover during the interview, which in turn depended very much on the background of the interviewee (for example whether they were a Head of Mission or conflict advisor, or a consultant with a long term relationship with aid agencies in Nepal), and the amount of data already gathered during earlier interviews. Another factor was the time available on the part of the interviewee.

Rapport-building was often not necessary as in many cases I already knew the research participants from my earlier work, or other research participants had introduced me and my research, which smoothed my introduction considerably. However, in some cases I had to make clear and remind interviewees that I was focusing on dynamics within the aid community between 1999 and 2005/06.

¹⁴⁴ Dr. B. Bhattarai together with respondents A18, A59 and A35 were the only four who indicated having read significant parts of Clausewitz's *On War*.

¹⁴⁵ This potential shortcoming is partly mitigated by the fact that some participants observed closely what was happening within the higher echelons of Nepal's government system.

¹⁴⁶ For the difference between semi-structured and unstructured interviewing see Bernard (1995: 209).

¹⁴⁷ For my part I perceived some of these unstructured interviews as re-unions and 'therapeutic' moments in which common experiences could be freely shared and reflected upon. I had the feeling during a number of interviews that interviewees felt they were being understood and listened to (for example in case of respondent A63). In addition, in those instances of unstructured interviewing there were, other than discussing the paradoxes of the past, also moments of learning from each other. In that sense the interviewee and me as interviewer were often equally positioned (see also Craig and Cook 2007), for example in case of the interviews with respondent A8 and A59, which in part circled around the question as to why the international community only focused on 'Maoist conflict' and was not able to 'see' the existing ethnic problems in the Terai.

In terms of grey material, reports produced by aid agencies were collected in the course of the fieldwork, though these were not actively gathered,¹⁴⁸ since this material is quite often the official agency line, and not likely to deal with those issues the study is directly interested in. However, if material was provided it was used if found appropriate for the research.¹⁴⁹

4.5 Method of data analysis

The central aim of this thesis was to develop a set of (speculative) reflections on aid and development in Nepal, based on the interaction between selected parts of Clausewitz's thinking about war and the processes of aid and development in Nepal between 1999 and 2005/06. This aim shaped the structure of the chapters in Part II of the thesis, each chapter consisting of four sections. The first section of each chapter provides an idea how I used the concept in Nepal and why I think the theme under discussion is relevant for development practice. This is followed by a brief summary of Clausewitz's view on that particular theme (for example titled 'Clausewitz and Boldness').¹⁵⁰ This section is followed by a presentation of how the various interviewees responded to this specific theme (for example titled 'Boldness and Nepal's development community'). The final section of the chapter is a reflection on the conjuncture of the second and the third section of the chapter and is simply titled 'Reflection'. This reflective part is informed by the 'aid trinity' concept, which will be explained in chapter 5. Paragraph 4.6 elaborates on the features of the reflections.

The selection of themes and summary of Clausewitz's thinking of regarding that particular theme is based on a mix of three elements. Firstly, it reflects what I perceive to be key elements in Clausewitz's thinking about a given topic. Secondly, it reflects what I think 'resonated' positively or negatively with the responses of actors in the aid community of Nepal. And thirdly, the summary reflects of what I thought could inspire reflections on aid and development in Nepal.

¹⁴⁸ So, for example material produced by agencies from which I did not interview staff was not collected.

¹⁴⁹ In once case, I received a full document on how individual staff members of a donor agency experienced the conflict. However, I was asked not to make use of it in the course of my research.

¹⁵⁰ Definitions of the various Clausewitzian themes presented will not be given by me, but merely presented. The reason being that Clausewitz himself was not concerned with definitions but with phenomena. I follow this line. (See as well Strachan 2008: 427).

Relevant interview material was collated theme by theme from the whole of the interview material. This collated material was then thoroughly thematically analysed, and a 'code map' (Crang and Cook 2007) was constructed laying out the various storylines, views, factors, and elements around a particular theme.¹⁵¹

The analysis focused on showing how a particular Clausewitzian theme or concept resonated among research participants and what this said on the one hand about aid and development in Nepal during the period under research and on the other hand what it could eventually mean conceptually. During this analysis issues and storylines emerged which I structured within the context of the theme under exploration. Although all interviewees had given consent to be interviewed, implying that the interview data could be used, I decided more than once not to include material or to anonymise it entirely, in order to avoid harming individual research participants, their colleagues or the agencies they worked for. However, I decided, contrary to the advice of Stebbins (2001), to quote extensively and by doing so obtained a well-informed impression of the overall performance of the aid industry in Nepal between 1999 and 2005/06.

Each reflection was equally based on a summary of Clausewitz's ideas about a particular theme and the stories that emerged from the interview data related to this theme. In addition, three concepts or devices guided each reflection. The first notion is the 'aid trinity', which is described in detail in Chapter Five. The second notion is that of the ideal form of aid (discussed in the first Chapter of Part II). Lastly, the idea of the aid strategist is used to frame and focus the reflections (See Annexe 1.1). To a large extent the order of themes as presented by Clausewitz is kept intact; however deviations have taken place to bring the themes and their sequence more in line with aid and development.¹⁵²

4.6 The features of the reflections

The reflections are on the one hand guided by the summary of selected parts of Clausewitz and the various stories which emerged from the interview data. On the

¹⁵¹ During the analysis of interview material no special software package was used.

¹⁵² For example Chapter 9 focuses on information, instead of intelligence.

other hand the reflections are to various degrees guided by the triad of the 'aid trinity', the ideal form of aid, and the notion of the aid strategist. However, there is more to say about the features of these reflections. They have other Clausewitzian methodological marks, which were mentioned in the chapter on Clausewitz, not least the attempt to use plain, uncomplicated and non-technical language. In addition, the reflections will jump between practice and theory and the specific and the general. However, in contrast with Clausewitz's non-prescriptive approach, the reflections sometimes suggest courses of action to consider.

4.7 Validity and reliability¹⁵³

Validity and reliability in this exploratory research should only be applied to the extent that the research is able to provide an accurate picture of how interview participants responded to the questions related to the Clausewitzian concepts and themes with regard to the practice of the development industry in Nepal between 1999 and 2005/06. The issue of validity and reliability is in the course of this part of the research resolved in the first place by interviewing more than the double number of people required for exploratory research.¹⁵⁴ Then, at the end of the fieldwork in Nepal, where the majority of interviews were carried out, tentative results were presented to an audience of research participants.¹⁵⁵ This confirmed to a large extent the initial findings as well as providing new insights. I have not, however, provided tentative written texts to research participants to validate the extent to which Clausewitzian concepts and themes resonated among those interviewed. In spite of this, and in light of the rather pessimistic outlook of Nepal's development industry, I made every effort to find any counter evidence in the interview material, and included this in the presentation of the material. Regarding the issue of reliability, it is my opinion that a researcher with comparable background, in terms of experience in Nepal, methodological approach and access to and rapport with the group of research participants would be able to provide a similar overview of observations.¹⁵⁶ A report published in June 2009

¹⁵³ According to Stebbins, in explorative research validity refers to gaining an accurate and true impression of the phenomena under study. In addition, reliability points to the possibility of another researcher to replicate the research (2001: 25).

¹⁵⁴ 70 interviews vice the recommended minimum of 30 advised by Stebbins (2001).

¹⁵⁵ 11 out of the 54 people interviewed during the fieldwork in Nepal.

¹⁵⁶ According to Stebbins, the issue of reliability in exploratory research relates to the reproducibility of the observations of a researcher (2001).

covering aid and development in Nepal during the period 1996-2008, written by well-respected researchers, confirms the general tenor of my research.¹⁵⁷

The reflective component of the research should not be arbitrated on the basis of validity or reliability but on the basis of the criteria laid out above, namely the pragmatic view that an acceptable outcome of the reflective part of the research is the potential stimulation of debate among current or future aid practitioners. Should the reflections turn out to be useful in terms of operational or even theoretical value, this would be an added bonus.

Throughout the research opportunities were taken to present research material and receive comments and critique. Firstly, initial research results were presented at the end of the fieldwork in Nepal to an audience made up of the interviewees. The presentation produced positive critique and discussion among participants. Then presentations were given to various groups of students following courses in Humanitarianism or Development Studies.¹⁵⁸ Again, these were generally constructively perceived. In addition, a presentation was given in Oxford during a study day organised by the Nepal-British Academic Society (Autumn 2008).¹⁵⁹

4.8 Biases

Several factors could have biased the research outcome:

1. My own evolving perspective on aid and development in Nepal during the period 1999-2005/06 as being an insufficient response to the conflict and changing situation of poverty in the country.
2. The perspectives of the various respondents who were to a certain extent emotionally or even politically engaged with Nepal and their own understanding of

¹⁵⁷ This study concludes 'While it will be impossible to correct the errors of the past, the soul searching exercise within the aid community around the core question of "what went wrong?" is a positive sign.' Bonini, F., and Donini, A. (2009), *Aid and Violence: Development Policies and Conflict in Nepal*, Feinstein International Centre, Tufts University.

¹⁵⁸ These groups were located at Uppsala University/ Sweden, Rijksuniversiteit Groningen/ The Netherlands, Birkbeck College/ London and Oxford Brookes University.

¹⁵⁹ The main comment here was made by Sir Sam Cowan, to use Clausewitz solely as a source for reflection on the aid industry in Nepal.

how they understood the questions around the concepts used in the course of the interviews.¹⁶⁰

3. In addition, the majority of research participants had a rather pessimistic view of the performance of the aid community in Nepal in general. I did not perceive an especial difference between Nepalis and expatriates.
4. The imbalance between men and women in the interview sample.
5. The rather unusual concepts used to reflect on strategizing and implementation processes within turbulent environments, namely the triad of the ideal form of aid, 'aid trinity' and aid strategist, tend to make the research aid agency-centred.¹⁶¹

4.9 A meandering research trajectory and research alternatives

The research did not follow a straight route. Below I describe briefly the journey this research underwent and the research alternatives developed and looked at.

Shifting focus The study 'travelled' in terms of focus. This shift of focus did not affect the inclusion or exclusion of Clausewitz's thinking throughout the thesis. The idea of applying the ideas of Clausewitz to aid and development stayed the same throughout the thesis. However, the research meandered on two levels towards its current position. On the first level, the initial, but rather ambitious idea was to turn selected parts of Clausewitz theory on war into some sort of new theory on aid operations in turbulent environments. The second level concentrated on which element(s) of Clausewitz's work to focus on. At first, while in Nepal, I had the idea that a transformation of an old theory on war into a new theory on aid operations would be achievable in the context of a PhD thesis. In addition, I thought that the issue of leadership, or in Clausewitzian terms genius, within the development sector, could evolve as the central theme within this transformation process.¹⁶² However, while in Oxford, the transformation of old theory into new appeared to be less straightforward than expected.¹⁶³ So, the research

¹⁶⁰ As stated earlier a large number of research participants had changed or were on the edge of changing jobs. It is not unlikely that interview responses would have been less outspoken if this had not been the case.

¹⁶¹ Despite this aid agency-centric approach, the research itself is not aid agency-centric, as due to the use made during the reflections of the 'aid trinity' concept, a 360° degree view is advocated.

¹⁶² I owe this idea partly to Jean-Marc Mangin, Former Head of the Humanitarian Department within CIDA and CIDA/ Nepal.

¹⁶³ This coincided with the discovery of the complexity of Clausewitz's theoretical world, which led me to spend some time researching military history.

became focused on developing a set of reflections instead. In addition, the focus of the research shifted away from the notion of leadership towards the notion of strategy. This idea was still prominent while preparing the fieldwork; however during the course of the fieldwork this focus shifted towards the notion of friction, without ignoring the importance of strategy, as various aspects related to strategy turned out to be sources of friction. To bring the study full circle, this thesis reflects on how someone in a leadership position could potentially understand and overcome various forms of friction, which are primarily related to different aspects of strategy.

Research alternatives Several alternative research approaches were considered during the initial stages of the study. Based on the idea of maintaining the central nexus between Clausewitz's ideas on war and aid operations in turbulent environments, a multi-case study was considered to conduct, exploring how in two or more different contexts representatives of the respective aid communities would respond to the various Clausewitz-related concepts and themes.¹⁶⁴ Another option considered was rather than solely applying aspects of Clausewitz's theory on war to the Nepal aid industry, comparing his thoughts within this context to that of the well-known eastern military philosopher Sun Tzu (1989). After due consideration both of these research alternatives were rejected as being impracticable for exploratory research. Aware that the product of this thesis is not definitive, these approaches could be considered in follow-up research. Now, we move to Chapter Five, in which the concept of 'aid trinity' is explored.

¹⁶⁴ These case study contexts could be selected on the basis of the identification of four different clusters of countries labelled as fragile states (OECD 2004: 21). Alternatively, particular themes could have been addressed within the context of a multiple case study approach, for example a single issue such as an aid community's response to an IDP or refugee crisis.

Chapter 5 The Aid Trinity

5.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to describe the ‘aid trinity’, which builds upon and echoes Clausewitz’s ‘remarkable trinity,’ briefly touched on in Chapter Three. The notion of the ‘aid trinity’ is the basic theoretical framework used in Part II to further reflection on various aid activities in Nepal during the Maoist insurgency between 1999 and 2005/06. This chapter visually constructs and presents the ‘aid trinity’. Although the ‘aid trinity’ echoes Clausewitz’s remarkable trinity, it goes beyond his model in crossing into the realm of aid and development. In addition, the way in which the different elements of the ‘aid trinity’ fit together and relate to each other is described.

5.2 Constructing the ‘aid trinity’

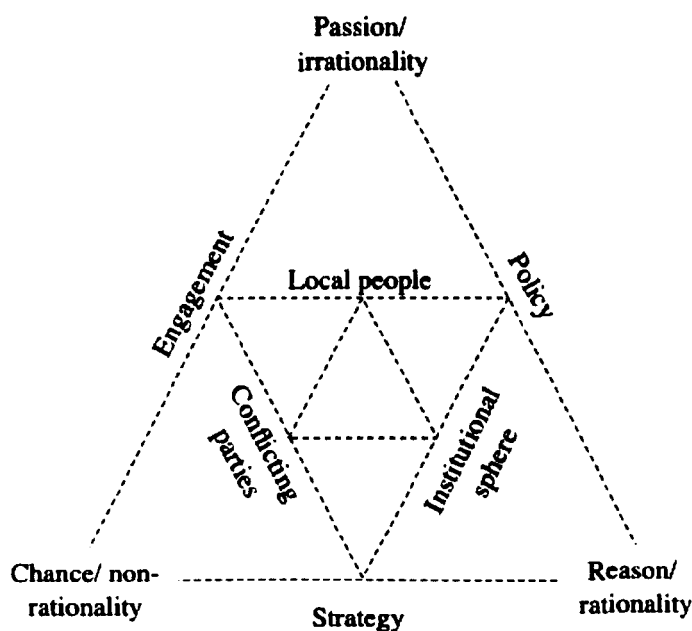
The ‘aid trinity’ is an attempt to frame, from the perspective of an aid strategist, essential elements in analysing and understanding the dynamics of aid operations in connection with the turbulent environments in which they operate. The ‘aid trinity’ echoes the remarkable trinity, while also being based on an eclectic combination of partial and not necessarily consistent interpretations of Clausewitz’s remarkable trinity.¹⁶⁵ This paragraph constructs the ‘aid trinity’, indicating layer by layer which ideas have been taken from Clausewitz’s ‘remarkable trinity’ and how it transmutes into the ‘aid trinity’. To support the above-described process the model is presented as a whole, instead of being introduced in stages. The visualisation of the ‘aid trinity’ is shown in figure 5.1.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁵ The following sources are extensively used (and (very) closely followed) in this chapter: Smith’s work entitled ‘On Clausewitz’ (2005), especially Chapter 10 which discusses the distinction between ‘Pure and Real War’ (2005: 111-124); the work of military historian Rothe-Herberg entitled ‘Clausewitz’s Puzzle’ (2007), in particular Chapter 4 which discusses ‘Clausewitz’s legacy: The Trinity’ (2007: 91-118). In addition, ideas from the actor-orientated approach are used (Long: 1993), as briefly described in Chapter 1. Furthermore, my field experiences in Nepal are utilised as well.

¹⁶⁶ I am not very content with the way the ‘aid trinity’ is visualised and actually prefer a three-dimensional model consisting of three eclipses, circling around each other in an irregular fashion.

The 'aid trinity' framework consists of three interacting layers or trinities: a psychological triad (outer layer), a social triad (inner layer) and a managerial triad (middle layer). Layer by layer a description of the model is given. Simultaneously, the source of ideas related to the different layers is indicated and where they differ from Clausewitz's remarkable trinity model.

Figure 5.1: The aid trinity



Inspired by and adapted from Smith 2005

The outer layer of the 'aid trinity' model is a psychological trinity consisting of the notions Passion/ irrationality, Chance/ non-rationality and Reason/ rationality. This triad of psychological qualities borrows from and expands on Clausewitz's psychological dimension of the trinity, and subsequently pulls it away from its military psychological orientation.

Several caveats are necessary. To start with, Clausewitz's, psychological triad speaks about the ideas of *'primordial violence, hatred, and enmity. ...the play of chance and probability...subject to reason'* (H&P: 89). This has been simplified to passion or irrationality, chance or non-rationality and reason or rationality'. Passion/ irrationality refers here to emotional qualities not to notions such as foolishness, insanity or sheer stupidity. Chance/ non-rationality refers to notions of possibility in the form of chance

and probability. Reason/ rationality refers here to notions related to the spectrum of logic and reason.

Secondly, Clausewitz's psychological trinity has a military orientation, not so much because it recognises the existence of non-rationality (chance and probability) or rationality (to ensure subordination of an activity to policy), but due to the idea of '*primordial violence, hatred and enmity, which are to be regarded as a blind natural force*'. (H&P: 89). I contend that these emotional characteristics are able to interfere with an aid operation (for example as exhibited by a belligerent actor), but are not the right motivational basis for initiating or maintaining an aid operation. Therefore, it is proposed that we shift the notion of Passion/ irrationality towards a more humanitarian or developmental orientation, allowing room for notions such as sympathy, compassion or solidarity, without excluding negative emotions like hatred. So, the 'aid trinity' implies the existence of various forms of emotions in the course of an aid operation. These emotional motivations might range from 'passionate compassion' on the part of those actively involved or benefiting from it, to pure hatred for the aid activity itself and/ or those conducting or benefiting from it.¹⁶⁷

Thirdly, Clausewitz's schema of the qualities of irrationality, non-rationality and rationality appear to be primarily linked with distinct social entities, the people (civilians), the military and the government, and appears therefore rather static. This thesis puts forward that in the theoretical concept of the 'aid trinity' no special links are made between the individual qualities of the psychological trinity and the groupings in the social trinity. Each psychological entity is related to each social group simultaneously. In addition, the qualities of these relationships are not fixed, but may vary with time.

Fourthly, and in an extension of the last point, the psychological qualities in Clausewitz's scheme appear to be fixed qualities as well. In the 'aid trinity' psychological qualities can blend with and transform into each other. For example, irrationality can transform into rationality or might follow a rational course. Decisions

¹⁶⁷ Mac Ginty and Williams underline the importance of the psychological dimension when they state that the affective dimension integral to human life, including hate, rage, revenge, hopelessness, bitterness, ignorance, love, joy and mercy, is most often overlooked during the analysis of processes of conflict and development (2009: 4).

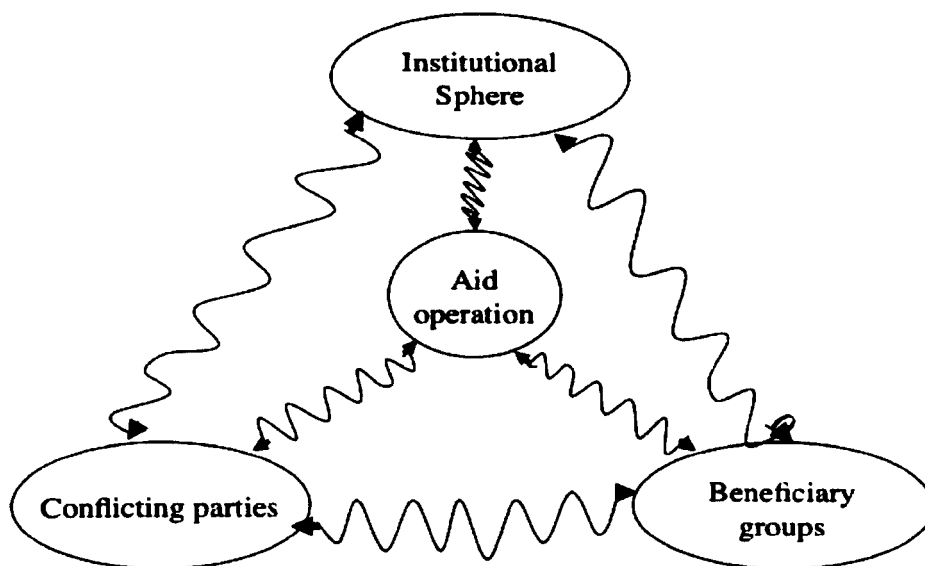
taken on the basis of emotion can be followed by a response, which not only appears rational, but is well thought through as well, as one interviewee recognised while reflecting on his agency's response after the Royal take-over of February 2005 (A70).

What does the above entail? As the 'aid trinity' echoes Clausewitz's psychological layer of the remarkable trinity, and appreciates non-rationality in terms of chance and probability, an aid operation in a turbulent environment can be portrayed as a rather unpredictable affair in terms of process, consequences, opportunities and set-backs. Reason/ rationality, Passion/ irrationality and Chance/ non-rationality might collide in rather unpredictable ways; consequently it is more likely that the route an aid operation takes will be different than that which originally planned. This has partly to do with the turbulence of the environment in which the aid operation is embedded and which it is contributing to. The 'aid trinity' assumes, like Clausewitz does in relation to war, that luck and chance cannot be excluded from an aid operation, and that they are an integral and inseparable part of it. In addition, the 'aid trinity' suggests that an aid operation is not merely a technical exercise, which can be initiated, planned and executed solely on the basis of rationality. However, chance and probability with perceived negative consequences can be addressed by prior rationality, for example by thinking through what might go wrong during the various stages of an aid operation. Moreover, chance and probability cannot be overcome by rationality alone. A combination of rationality and emotion with an active awareness of the roles chance and probability might overcome the various forms of bad luck.

The inner layer of the 'aid trinity' consists of the interacting triad of Local people, Conflicting parties and the Institutional sphere. Six interconnected caveats are suggested. To begin with, Clausewitz's model suggests a social trinity consisting of government, army and people as suitable for the analysis of war. This triad might be appropriate for the analysis of war but it is postulated here that it is not suitable for the analysis of an aid operation in a war-like scenario. Therefore, based on discussions with Nepali colleagues while conceptualising the challenges faced by a particular

project, an alternative social trinity is suggested: Beneficiary groups, Conflicting parties, and the Institutional sphere.¹⁶⁸ These discussions resulted in figure 5.2.

Figure 5.2: The dynamic aid trinity



Own Source: 2001

Secondly, in Clausewitz's social triad the three entities, (government, army and people) are conceptualised as single entities or as being homogenous. The social triad of the 'aid trinity' implies the opposite: the social groupings consist of a diverse range of multiple actors. In addition, each group represents various sub-groups of actors, and within each group some actors operate centre stage, while others are more peripheral.

For each grouping, subgroups can be identified on the basis of several criteria. For example, the institutional sphere might contain four sub-groups based on a matrix consisting of two spectra: having or not having an institutional direct or indirect relationship with the aid operation and being in or out of country. The local population group might contain four sub-groups based on a matrix consisting of the spectra: (non-)

¹⁶⁸ In mid-2001 while discussing with some colleagues (Padam Shresta, Kum Gurung, Shaha Gurung, Phil Lindsay, Russell Hancock and Bert Jan Bouman) and others the challenges faced by the project we were worked on, they argued that the project faced pressures from three sides: firstly, the 'Conflicting parties' (for example the Royal Nepali Army and Maoists, but branches of local government and political parties as well); secondly the various communities and groups in the project area, those caught up and linked with these belligerent groups, and thirdly the 'Institutional sphere' the project was part of, namely the headquarters of the organisation and the project donors. By appreciating these various pressures and resisting them by acting flexibly, the project was able to challenge to manage them to a certain extent.

victim of violence and (non-) beneficiary of aid. The group of Conflicting parties might comprise four sub-groups based on a matrix consisting of the spectra: violent or non-violent and belonging to the core group or being peripheral. Of course, boundaries between each category are not black and white and other distinctions are possible. However, in line with the actor-oriented approach, each of these actors has their own agency.

Thirdly, in Clausewitz's social triad the social groups appear to be linked with each other via single relationships. Based on the point above and the actor approach it is suggested that the 'aid trinity' framework assumes that the various actors in the different social groups maintain multiple different dynamic relationships with each other. The type of relationships might range from unconditionally warm and positive via mildly antagonistic to violent. The dynamic relationships might be direct or indirect, intentional and unintentional, extremely cordial or violently antagonistic. One example of the direct and intentional way in which belligerents might try to influence the institutional sphere of an agency is to use the media or send a representative (Bob 2005). Another example of direct and intentional influencing of relationships might be the way in which local women's groups might express their discomfort with the behaviour of one of the conflicting groups, such as the uprising of women's groups against the Maoists in Dailekh District in 2004.

Fourthly, Clausewitz's trinity appears to a certain extent to assume a primarily 'uni-directional' influence over war, whether it is people showing enthusiasm for war, governments setting policy or armies conducting battle. The 'aid trinity' suggests something slightly different. Although the triad of Local people, Conflicting parties and Institutional sphere influence, from initiation to end, the course of an aid operation, it is suggested that the relative (transformative) influence of each grouping over the aid operation varies with time and is multi-directional.

Fifthly, Clausewitz implies that the social triad of his trinity is mutually exclusive. Based equally on the actor-oriented approach and my own field experience, the 'aid trinity' assumes that the groupings in the social triad are not mutually exclusive. Overlap between the Conflicting parties and Local population are feasible. Or, more rarely, but not less importantly, overlap between actors in the Institutional sphere and

the group of Conflicting parties or Local people could exist as well. In one such case a Nepali working for a renowned international dialogue centre in the heart of Europe was involved in facilitating negotiation processes between the government and the Maoists (CPN-M).¹⁶⁹

Lastly, Clausewitz's trinity suggests that war is composed of the social triad of people, army and commander and the government. The 'aid trinity' assumes that the triad of the Institutional sphere, Conflicting parties and Local people not only makes up the aid operation, but that the aid operation is embedded in and shaped by this social trinity as well. From this perspective the opposite is also assumed, i.e. that the aid operation is able to influence the three social groupings and their interactions as well.

The middle layer of the 'aid trinity' The managerial triad closely follows Smith's model for explaining Clausewitz's approach to the essential activities constituting war, namely fighting, strategy and policy (2005: 111-126). As the concept of fighting in this triad of essential activities is unhelpful when thinking through aid operations, it has been replaced in the 'aid trinity' with the concept of 'engagement', a term in use in the aid industry.¹⁷⁰

Below the triad of engagement, strategy and policy will be explored, together with how they fit with the other elements of the 'aid trinity', again building on Smith's model. Smith argues that *'fighting is the interplay between passion and chance'* (2005: 122). In the 'aid trinity' engagement becomes the nexus between passion/ irrationality and chance/ non-rationality. Aid agency staff must to a certain extent feel compassion for and solidarity with the local people they work with. Simultaneously, chance/ non-rationality influences the intensity and direction of the engagement, and the element of reason/ rationality should not be bypassed in the analysis. For example, reason within the institutional sphere of the aid agency might overturn passion in the course of an aid operation, should one of the conflicting parties threaten the operation with violence. On a social level the engagement of an aid operation primarily takes the form of

¹⁶⁹ One of the Interviewees, being the best man at the wedding of this person pointed me to this connection.

¹⁷⁰ See for example: Paffenholz T. (2006) Nepal: Staying Engaged in Conflict: experiences and lessons learnt from Conflict sensitive programme management (CSPM) in fragile context and armed conflict, SDC, Bern Switzerland.

various interactions between conflicting parties and local people. For an aid operation to be effective, the local people should at the end of the day be positive about the aid operation. At the same time, actors within the institutional sphere influence the engagement of an aid operation for better or worse. An aid operation as an act of passionate solidarity dealing with Chance/ non-rationality is removed from Reason/ rationality, however the institutional sphere of an aid operation seeks to moderate this via policy constraints and strategy guidance.

Secondly, in Smith's explanation policy '*represents a combination of reason and passion*'. He states that policy draws on the interplay between government and people (2005: 122). The 'aid trinity' suggests to approach these linkages less strictly: policy regarding an aid operation is indeed a collision between Reason/ rationality and passion/ irrationality, but the 'aid trinity' model proposes not to underestimate the potential influence of Chance/ non-rationality in the process of policy formulation. Moreover, on a social level, in the process of formulating policy it is unlikely that an aid operation is solely generated on the basis of the nexus of the institutional sphere and (their perceptions of) local people. Even the most people-focused aid agency must, at a certain point consider the turbulent dynamics of the operational environment of the aid operation. An open-minded institutional sphere will consider equally the social grouping of conflicting parties and how they interact with the nexus of the institutional sphere and local people. In theory, the policy underpinning aid operations should be far removed from the notion of Chance/ non-rationality, as the policy aims to grasp in logical terms not so much the process of aid operations, but what aid operations subsequently aim to address in terms of the reduction of poverty and turbulence. In reality however, the logic of the policy underpinning the aid operation is violated by unanticipated and unknowable factors in the operational environment of the aid operation and its institutional sphere, the sphere that formulated the policy in the first place. Therefore, policies concerning aid operations should be flexible to respond to ways in which the nexus of engagement and strategy might enter the domain of chance and non-rationality.

Thirdly, Smith argues that strategy in war '*can be seen as reason coming to terms with change and uncertainty, seeking to impose a pattern on fighting in order to achieve its objectives*' (2005: 122). The 'aid trinity' applies this to the conceptualisation of

strategizing aid operations as well, implying that strategizing is rationality accepting turbulence in the operational environment of the aid operation, coming to the fore via chance, so that the aid operation can achieve its objectives. Simultaneously, the strategy of an aid operation is an expression of Passion/ irrationality, which in turn is influenced by Reason/ rationality and Chance/ non-rationality. The 'aid trinity' suggests that the strategy of an aid operation is the hinge between the theory of policy and the practice of engagement. Strategy is central, and must be reasoned enough to fit the policy, while able to engage constructively with the uncertainties in the operational environment.

On a social level the task of strategy is threefold. First, theoretically it would be ideal if local people could design strategy. In practice this is most often unworkable, depending on the character of the institutional sphere governing the aid operation. However, a strategy is tasked to address the issues of local people as closely as possible. Furthermore, strategy needs to be acceptable to the institutional sphere and conflicting parties to such an extent that it is supported and allowed. In other words, even if a strategy is impressively elegant on paper, if it does not enable full engagement, it will fail to be (fully) effective. It is not argued here that conflicting parties should have a say in the scope of the aid operation, rather that a key task of strategy is to seek acceptable forms of engagement. So, although strategy is closely connected to reason in its attempt to minimize chance, it must take into account the dimension of Passion/ irrationality regarding both local people and conflicting parties. The nexus of engagement between local people and conflicting parties is thus a point of concern for the strategy of an aid operation. Thirdly, following on from this, it must not be overlooked that it is the aid agency staff that implement the strategy. They are in the front line and face direct consequences if the interplay between Chance/ non-rationality and Passion/ irrationality has negative consequences. To face these possibilities constructively, staff needs to be motivated by strategy to accept them in the first place and, equally important, to guide them in the course of their engagements.

5.3 Conclusion

To conclude, the aim of this chapter was to unpack the remarkable trinity and construct the 'aid trinity'. The 'aid trinity' builds upon Clausewitz's remarkable trinity and the

commentaries on it and is a transmutation of this model applied into the realm of aid and development. What the 'aid trinity' concept and the actor-orientated approach have in common is that they both refute the traditional linear intervention model as mentioned in Chapter 1. Advocates of the actor-oriented approach might not be content with this model, with its attempt at visualisation and strong Clausewitzian echoes of the psychological, social and managerial triads. Therefore, advocates of the actor-oriented approach might call the 'aid trinity' concept a retrograde step in the process of reflection on aid operations in turbulent environments. However, aid practitioners might take the contrasting view that the model is a step forward in relation to understanding processes of strategizing and implementing their particular aid operation. From my own perspective, as a 'theoretically-orientated' practitioner, the 'aid trinity' model offers a practical blend of approaches by which to enhance reflection on aid and development, primarily in the particular case of Nepal between 1999 and 2006. As this is the primary aim of this thesis, the model can most helpfully be judged on this basis.¹⁷¹

¹⁷¹ Annexe 5.2 presents two models each conceptualising aid activities. Their disadvantages as tools for understanding the dynamics of aid management in turbulent contexts and with regard to the 'aid trinity' are briefly discussed.

Part II

Chapter 6 On the Ideal Form of Aid

6.1 Introduction

Clausewitz regularly uses the concept of the ideal form of war in his work. This is a heuristic device to think through the question as to why there is a difference between war in theory and war in reality. In retrospect, I did not use the concept of ideal war to understand the political military interaction of the conflicting parties and how this played out in the struggle to gain control of significant parts of rural Nepal. Without elaborating on it, with the benefit of hindsight one could argue that the government preferred to be there without being present, while the Maoists opted for a presence without actually being there. However, sometimes I used, as an aid practitioner, the idea of an ideal type as a heuristic methodological device to think through the ‘ideal’ way of forging forms of development in the context of compounding instability: “What is, without considering the limitations and preferences of the agency I work in, the ideal way to further development and peace in this dynamic context?”¹⁷²

6.2 Ideal form of aid in Nepal

Smith (2005) calls Clausewitz’s idea of ideal war a “*logical fantasy*”. The idea of ideal form of aid, as presented below, can be seen likewise. However, throughout the remainder of the thesis the concept is used intermittently. For that very reason, a description is given of what the ideal form of aid might have looked like in Nepal between 1999-2006. The description emerged from respondent’s suggestions, and does not purport to be exhaustive or consistent.¹⁷³

Ideal-type presentations might sometimes suggest moral judgement (Bruce and Yearly 2006: 143). Although the notion of an ideal type of aid is used throughout thesis, it is not intended to provide moral judgements about Nepal’s aid community in terms of right and wrong. The overview provided below should be understood as an

¹⁷² So, here the idea of ideal does not relate to what is (ideologically) ideal in ‘normal’ circumstances, but what is seen the ideal way of operating in a given operational environment.

¹⁷³ Ideal types do not have to be necessarily consistent (Berlin 1990).

accumulation of elements of what respondents in general terms longed to see in the operational modalities of the various aid agencies between 1999 and 2006.

The responses regarding the features of the ideal form of aid ranged from rebuttal of the whole idea of aid in general (A21), to a rather defensive response, expressed as follows: *"it has been proven that development projects do exist"* and *"that they should not be threatened by humanitarian agencies"* (A3), to a rather negative reply from a very well-informed aid practitioner: *"I do not see it...in terms of the ability of any agency or an INGO actually to deliver on a project...there are so many complications and there are so many limitations on what you can do..."* (A24), via suggestions that this is a big issue with no right answer (A5/ A24/ A33) to a series of answers with a more positive tenor that, if taken together, might constitute a basis for the ideal form of aid in the context of Nepal between 1999 and 2005/06.

Respondents related responses to questions about features of the ideal form of aid between 1999 and 2005/06, allowing the following six interrelated ingredients to emerge.¹⁷⁴ To begin with, it was suggested that aid activities should have been contextualised and contextual (A4). Contextual did not relate only to the issue of having a historical understanding of poverty in Nepal but being aware of the history between the political and conflict dynamics as well (A5/ A52/ A27). In addition to this, within the context of having contextual understanding, it was suggested that the issue of social and political exclusion should be understood in combination with technical connected issues like education, health provision and government capacity (A29).

Secondly, the ideal form of aid relates to conflict-sensitivity on two levels, being conflict-sensitive in a narrow and a wider sense. Conflict sensitivity in a narrow sense relates to ideas of staff security and the avoidance of conflict-fuelling resource transfers (A29) Conflict sensitive in a broad sense relates to the procedures, mechanisms and modes of working of an aid agency working in a conflict situation (A1).

¹⁷⁴ The order in which the six features are presented does not suggest the level of importance.

Next to being contextual and conflict sensitive the ideal form of aid is demand-driven based on "the principle of the poor first" (A56) with a bottom-up approach to development focusing on grassroots and community-driven support (A2/ A3/ A6), in addition, focusing on the local civil society (A6), enabling strong community participation (A3) and reinforcing local capacities throughout the whole process (A42). The concept of the ideal form of aid also relates to the idea that aid is *"...locally led not donor or security led"* (A26) subsequently directly addressing the needs of the poor (A53). Within this process, the relationship between recipients and donor should be well considered (A39/ A67) ensuring that the people and government both have a stake in the process (A56).

Fourthly, the concept of ideal form of aid relates not necessarily to poverty reduction *per se*, but to addressing the underlying drivers of poverty (A15), namely pertinent social issues (A4) such as the hierarchical power structure, exploitation of labour and social injustice (A15) and social exclusion (A2). Some argued that this should be ideally underpinned by a rights-based approach (A3/ A39). In the case of Nepal, the ideal form of aid does not necessarily relate to material issues alone, as suggested by one respondent when he argued, *"...No hand-outs but reform of the government via inclusive participatory transparent reform itself would be the peace-dividend"* (A33). Another respondent felt that development work related to the notion of regime change (A11).

The ideal form of aid relates further to the way in which conflicting parties are seen and approached. It was suggested that the War on Terror hindered the treatment of the Maoists as political entities instead of outlaws or terrorists, which would have been beneficial at an earlier stage of the conflict (A52). In addition, and as a consequence, the Maoists and the government could have been equally approached more rapidly in the conflict (A3), such that programmes or projects could be used sooner as platforms for dialogue and conflict transformation (A52). The focus should then be on remaining engaged, enabling to move from *"a really difficult situation to at least a slightly improved situation"* (A52).

To close with, the ideal form of aid relates to ideas of organisational flexibility (A26/ A3), allowing a *"...little support here and little support there"* (A29), for example

using Quick Impact Projects (QIPs) (A3), capable of delivering a mix of responses covering long and short term needs, whereby the latter is not disturbing the former (A26). Furthermore, requests for assistance should be legitimate (A24), and agencies must be able to understand "*what aid can do and what it cannot do*" (A29). Furthermore, intermediary organisations should be avoided if possible (A45) or if necessary partnerships would be sought with intermediary organisations (A3) as long as they were capable of proper implementation (A11). It was also suggested that the ideal form of aid implied a serious input by aid agencies towards the local people (A5) and downward transparency (A3).

To conclude: some respondents suggested that there was a form of synergy in the agendas of the Maoists and the aid agencies (A1/ A58). Although, it is not clear to what extent aid agencies actually cooperated with the Maoists, it is possible to argue that the ideal concept of aid has a lot in common with what Maoists officially aimed for: aid being initiated by the people, with the people in control of it and with it being based on people's potential and resources (A58). The agencies and the Maoists differed in their approach, however, with the former focusing first on attitude change, while the latter aimed to change behaviour (A15). Now, we turn to the reflection.

6.3 Reflection

The series of ingredients presented above are part of what those respondents, questioned on this issue perceived as essential elements underpinning an ideal programme or project, relevant during the compounding conflict between 1999 and 2005/06. There might be further elements, which did not emerge from the data.¹⁷⁵

The responses highlighted above, might present a romanticised view of what is possible for aid agencies to achieve within turbulent environments. They could equally be understood as a critique of aid agencies. Following this line of thought, the responses suggested that aid agencies were deficient in being contextual, conflict-sensitive, being focused on the poor or on the drivers of poverty. In addition, it was

¹⁷⁵ It is worth noting that none of the respondents indicated that they had been involved in or had observed what they could call an ideal programme or project given the dynamic in the operational environment.

suggested that aid agencies fell short of approaching the Maoists as political entities and being insufficiently responsive towards the dynamics of the conflict. What the various responses appear to have in common is that a central element of the ideal form of aid delivery during the compounding conflict in Nepal should have been a firm focus on the capacities and demands of local communities on one hand and a flexible response to these capacities and demands at the other.

The above does not mean however that there were no programmes or projects containing one or several ingredients of the ideal form of aid provision. Moreover, I would suggest that there were programmes and projects with elements that would come close to the ideal as indicated above. DFID's Livelihood and Forestry Programme (LFP) and the Helvetas Trail Bridge Building Programme (TBBP) might be examples in this respect, as the first was flexible in its response to the conflict, while the second could almost double the production of suspension bridges despite the compounding conflict. Both LFP and TBBP were very much guided by local needs and local capacities as well (A2/ A51).

There might appear to be an underlying assumption that, had the various ingredients of an ideal form of aid been present, aid delivery could have been more appropriate during the compounding conflict in Nepal; of course this is speculation. However, when we look carefully at the various elements, we might see that they have something in common, namely that almost all elements constituting the ideal form of aid suggest first seeking a good fit with the operational environment in which an aid operation has to take place. Next to "bottom up" and "rights based" approaches, respondents do not appear to provide suggestions based on prescriptions driven by the institutional sphere of an aid agency. However, one should be aware that the elements mentioned might very well be context-specific and therefore irrelevant for other operational environments.

For an aid strategist the notion of ‘ideal form of aid’ as a tool for thinking through the strategies of aid operations might have some advantages and disadvantages.¹⁷⁶ We will consider the disadvantages first.

The idea of the ideal form of aid, as a heuristic device to strategize aid operations has three inter-related drawbacks. To begin with, the ‘ideal form of aid’ or the ideal way to design an aid operation in a given context is not necessarily easy to identify or to recognise, as it assumes being informed by its operational context. Gaining an understanding, as an aid strategist, of this context takes not only time but probably requires considerable intellectual efforts as well. Both might be attractive reasons to drop efforts to understand the context and to think about the implications of an aid operation, which might unconsciously have been the case in Nepal among at least a small portion of development managers.

Second, next to understanding the features of what an ideal aid operation might be given the operational environment, designing and implementing an aid operation in these terms might be a challenge as well. Taking the case of Nepal, the ideal aid operation would have been primarily guided by local communities and less by aid agencies or the government. Shaping an aid operation towards an ideal form, as might have been attempted via DFID’s Community Support Program (CSP), could be (unwittingly) hindered by the preferred way in which the institutional sphere of an aid agency operates or is resisted by one or more conflicting parties present in the operational environment.

In the specific example of CSP, according to one respondent observing CSP modality first hand in one district, DFID’s focus on low overhead costs forced CSP to employ inappropriate staff (being too young and without technical skills) to initiate and to support communities in their process of identifying, designing and implementing small scale projects of a primarily technical nature (A26). In addition, the Nepal government was not content with it, as CSP by design was an attempt to bypass government structures in order to directly reach communities living in Maoists controlled areas.

¹⁷⁶ The ideal form of aid is firstly discussed from the perspective of the aid strategist interested in making a positive difference within local communities.

Thirdly, once identified, the features of an ideal aid operation do not stay static, but might change according to the dynamics of the conflict. So, ideally pro-actively re-strategizing needs to take place. This again requires understanding of the operational environment and indications of change. When the turbulence in an operational environment is increasing an aid strategist might prefer to focus on those things that can be understood which are within his control. Deepening understanding of the context and modifying a program or project quickly might not be part of this. Now, we will consider the possible advantages of using the idea of ideal form of aid in the process of strategizing aid operations.

The benefit of using the notion of ideal form of aid is that it might force an aid strategist to lower expectations of what an aid agency could do with an aid operation. In other words, it could help an aid strategist to make the strategy and implementation modality more realistic. How does this work? To answer this question, I would like to start with a key point made in Chapter Eleven “On strategy”. This chapter appears to suggest in general terms that the aid community within Nepal lacked strategic direction during the period of compounding conflict. By and large, aid activities were planned on the basis of development plans of the Nepali government as set out in a particular year and how the (individual) agencies could support it (A28). This process does not appear to encourage clearly thinking through the reality of the operational environment and subsequent frictions an aid operation might face in the course of its implementation. The notion of the ideal form of aid could be used to reverse this by drawing attention not to what should be done in an ideal world, but what is realistically possible given the specificity of the context and the possible multi-faceted (un) expected challenges an aid agency might encounter in the process of implementing an aid operation.

What the sum of the various chapters in Part II and III suggests in part is that it appears that the overall process of aid allocation in Nepal was not so much focussed on the specificities of the context and what that might have meant for individual aid operations, but on the aid agencies corporate intervention preferences.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁷ This process might have been reinforced within individual agencies and within the collective of aid agencies by increasing levels of uncertainty and a subsequent decrease of confidence on an individual, organisational and collective level, there by augmenting the processes of friction.

I would like to make a few closing remarks, though by no means closing the matter. First, in the process of strategizing an aid strategist needs to be confident in the process of looking into the specificity of the operational environment and to reflect on what that might mean for the ideal form of aid intervention, if anything, as it might mean that he has to look for new ways of working (Dörner, 1986). Secondly, using the notion of the 'ideal form of aid' in strategizing processes might not guarantee a successful aid operation, as the ideal might be not well-thought through or acted upon, or unforeseen factors might affect the running of an aid operation negatively.

To close, the use of the concept might, in extreme cases lead to a form of inertia, should an aid strategist be unable to comprehend the context. In this case, he must judge whether to further his understanding of the context or to act without further considering the context, eventually acting on the basis of what has proved itself in the past (ibid: 158), in the hope that any unforeseen friction can be overcome and that it does not simultaneously deepen the turbulence in the operational environment of the aid operation concerned.

Chapter 7 On Friction

7.1 Introduction

Clausewitz introduces the notion of friction in *On War* Book 1 Chapter 7. In less than two and half pages he proposes a concept that expresses simply why war on paper differs from war in reality (H&P: 119-221) and refers to the idea of friction in war as being “*movement in a resistant element*” (ibid: 120). Chapter 8, 9 and 10 discuss successively physical efforts, information and dangers. These are dimensions of the concept of friction Clausewitz elaborates on.

The concept of friction enabled me to understand further the hampering factors faced by both conflicting parties, in relation to their military and political manoeuvring. The concept relates to minor and major practicalities, which take place (un)expectedly in the course of political or military action. This idea could also be transferred to aid operations taking the form of events, which hamper progress, which were not necessarily foreseen during the preparation or implementation of an activity. The concept of friction provides a perspective to assess how an aid operation might be hampered and how this could undermine implementation of the aid agency’s strategy. In other words, the concept of friction enabled me to be more realistic about what was realistically possible.

I therefore suggest that the concept of friction is of key importance not only to understand how operations can be hampered, due to unexpected or undesirable circumstances, and how friction can have a negative impact on the possible strategic success of an aid agency or group of aid agencies, but more importantly to foresee and, if possible, appropriately address friction in the process of aid delivery, which of course should not be an aim in itself, but must further the reduction of poverty and conflict in a given turbulent operational environment.

7.2 Clausewitz's Friction

Clausewitz argues, *"everything in war is very simple, but the simplest thing is difficult. The difficulties accumulate and end by, producing a kind of friction that is inconceivable unless one has experienced war"*. According to Clausewitz, the notion of friction resembles a concept that, *"more or less corresponds to the factors that distinguish real war from war on paper"* (H&P: 118-120).

The reason for friction, is according to Clausewitz, that *"despite that the military machine -the army and everything related to it is basically very simple and therefore...easy to manage-...is that none of its components is of one piece: each part is composed of individuals, every one of whom retains his potential of friction"*.¹⁷⁸ Thus, Clausewitz argues that the conduct of war and its management appears straightforward, however as humans are central to every part of the process, it is vulnerable to friction throughout the course of implementation.

Clausewitz argues that experience in battle is essential as the reality of friction cannot be understood by the one who: *"...has never personally experienced war"*, and cannot therefore *"understand...what the difficulties constantly mentioned really consist of, nor why a commander should need any brilliance and exceptional ability"*. From the outside, *"Everything looks simple: the knowledge required does not look remarkable, the strategic options are so obvious that by comparison the simplest problem of higher mathematics has all impressive scientific dignity"*. So, although the theory used to engage in battle might look flawless without allowing room for friction, war in reality uncovers this apparent theoretical flawlessness as, according to Clausewitz: *"every fault and exaggeration of the theory is instantly exposed in war"*.¹⁷⁹ Clausewitz seems to suggest perceiving war as *"a string of small incidents... everywhere in contact with chance..."*, subsequently, *"causing tremendous friction"*. To overcome this, the best commander is not the commander with an *"iron will power"*, or *"the one who is most familiar with the idea of friction"*, but the one who is able *"to overcome it whenever possible"*. Clausewitz asserts that in this process, instinct, based on experiences about what is possible and what not, is essential.

¹⁷⁸ This point might be seen as an early military precursor of the contemporary sociological notion of multi-actors. See for example Long N. and Ann Long (eds.) 1992.

¹⁷⁹ This might be the case in war, but is not necessarily true in the realm of aid and development. For example a lack of monitoring might mean that aid agencies are not confronted with their omissions.

7.3 Friction and Nepal's international aid community¹⁸⁰

Interview responses to the concept of friction varied hugely, which might be a reflection, as one respondent suggested, of the positions respondents were holding and the sectors they worked in (A55). One respondent indicated not having seen any friction during the course of implementation of his programme, except of some local disturbances, traffic jams and blockades of some roads to remote district headquarters (A45). Despite this rather limited interpretation of the idea of friction, respondents suggested two interconnected sources of friction which stood out in relation to the implementation of aid and development.

The first source related to not understanding the conflict (A55). The second, which is an extension of the first, related to the widespread denial of the conflict within the aid agencies and the government (A12), repeatedly arguing, "*there is no conflict, there is no conflict*" (A2). Not understanding the conflict related to difficulties grasping the nature of Maoist movement –ranging from being a copy of the Vietnamese Vietcong, via the Maoists as a group of rebels which mislabelled themselves to a "*bunch of outrageous people aiming for revenge on the local elite*" (A69). Denial within the government and aid agencies was in case of the former in part imposed by those leading the government (A4/ A11) and in part a reflection of insufficient reporting by government staff working at field level (A2). Within aid agencies denial of the conflict and its programme implications originated, according to one respondent, in the "*tendency to maintain the shop instead of challenging models and strategies*" (A6).

Against this backdrop respondents mentioned a wide variety of examples of sources of friction. Friction appeared more to be inter-connecting, causing knock-on effects, which might yield a picture of what friction is and how it interacts with an aid operation. The sources of friction are grouped around four clusters being: the institutional sphere, the conflicting parties, the internal dynamics of aid operations, and the operational environment.¹⁸¹

¹⁸⁰ These will exclude friction related to physical efforts, information and danger.

¹⁸¹ Surprisingly, respondents did not imply the cluster of local communities as a source of friction, perhaps because, as one of the respondents suggested, these local communities were relatively powerless (A60).

The institutional sphere of aid agencies This domain of friction could broadly be divided in two sets of factors. According to one respondent the first set related to the complex set-up of the international aid system, in terms of multiple actors, multiple mandates and multiple approaches, which was reflected in Nepal (A33). In addition, the drive for harmonisation and pursuing the Paris Declaration was a point of friction (A33), contributing to a focus on the application of "ethnographically poor" economic and politically oriented development theories (A5), which, it was argued, hindered smart and intelligent responses by agencies on the ground (A33). The second set related to commonly held perceptions and the difficulty in diverting from a given narrative. If there was a smart response, there was disbelief about the appropriateness of programmes (A60). This disbelief was partly shaped, according to the respondent, by a un-nuanced view of security specialists as they "*...had to sell as well their business to their funding agencies and the whole world...they were right in 99% of the cases, as the government could not work and was vulnerable, but they had a storyline and could not divert from that...as it was difficult to acknowledge that my programme was one of the better programmes*" (A60).

Conflicting parties A second source of friction related to the domain of conflicting parties. One respondent spoke about the so called "*tension triangle*" of Maoists, donors and government, and the centre of gravity in this triangle of actors related in turn to the centre of gravity of each actor (A18).¹⁸² This implied that friction faced by a programme was partly shaped by how a conflicting party perceived a particular aid activity. For aid agencies, the overall process of friction related to the domain of conflicting parties originated in the compounding inability of the government to work outside most of the district headquarters. This in turn hampered the ability of these aid agencies to work outside these headquarters (A33). Subsequently aid delivery was often seen with suspicion, hampered by red tape and therefore not supported (A26), while those on the side of the government in higher government positions ignored the existence of conflict (A2).

If aid delivery was possible outside district headquarters, Maoists were not necessarily obstructing aid delivery, but often "*standing in the way*", not allowing operations if

¹⁸² Clausewitz uses the notion of Centre of Gravity in his theory, but it will not be discussed in this thesis.

certain 'requirements' where not fulfilled, for instance payment of donations and signing agreements, which needed to be negotiated via Nepali staff (A26). This led, in turn, to more suspicion on the side of the government and often more restrictions. In this environment, conflicts and tensions between aid agencies and the government could take a long time to resolve (A2).

Aid operations themselves Friction also occurred in relation to the internal dynamics of aid operations. These can be grouped in four different but inter-connected and overlapping sets: personal dynamics, organisational dynamics, planning aspects and the use of intermediaries.

Personal dynamics provided a varied source of friction within aid agencies. To begin with, there were tendencies among staff towards "*a trust in one's own goodness and invincibility*" (A17). In addition, "*Warnings by new expatriates were received as 'scare-mongering' by those already longer in the country*" (A17). Furthermore, emotionally attached expatriates had at least some difficulties accepting the changing realities, while at the same time the national and international "*experts*" were resisting change (A6). Moreover, (expatriate) managers, insecure in their understanding of the context (A5), might find themselves simultaneously caught up in the rigidity of the rules of their organisation while clinging to these same rules for safety (A6).

Organisational dynamics within aid agencies constitute the second set of sources of friction. To begin there can be the natural tension between office and field staff (A17), which in the case of one respondent was compounded by poor internal communication and a lack of trust in those making decisions (A17). Then organisations could face within the agency a "*dysfunctional team bordering on naivety*" (A12). Furthermore, it was also suggested that agencies did not value outside information, or the knowledge and insights of anthropologists (A5).

One other respondent put the idea of friction in a more historical perspective; arguing that the respondent's organisation, due to a rather unhelpful succession of directors, had no idea about the existence of the conflict. Moreover, the way the agency was structured did not allow the development of a cohesive or corporate strategy. The respondent concluded, "*I think it was total ignorance of what was going on in the*

country and what the implications might be (A12). Another respondent referred to agencies collectively suffering from “*the boiled frog syndrome*” (A17),¹⁸³ meaning that there was a tendency within aid agencies to respond only when forced to adapt or even to stop (A6), and therefore to respond too late.

Aspects of planning were also mentioned as sources of friction. To begin with, it was suggested that a lack of clarity in terms of mission and goals together with “*not having a clue how to deal with the conflict*”, added to friction (A17). Then, the tension between long-term decision-making by the agency versus short-term needs and actions led to friction (A18). Next, one respondent suggested, one could have sufficient resources, but a lack of staff for proper monitoring, subsequently causing friction because timely adaptations to decrease failure could not be prepared for. “*The conflict triggered an increase of overhead costs of 20% to 25%, paired with a increased failure rate, up to 20%*” (A6). In addition, it was suggested that possible negative turns in the course of the conflict were not always incorporated in the planning of programs. The breakdown of the 2003 ceasefire was given as example, leading in this case to inappropriate programme assumptions and the implementation being hampered, as the programme was intended to be locally led, but became in the end centrally led (A60). To close this section, it was mentioned that it was difficult to move away from operating on the basis of a preferred implementation theory towards a mode that was acceptable in the operational environment (A17).

Intermediaries are the fourth source of friction related to the internal dynamics of aid operations. Within this context the lack of quality and quantity of intermediaries used by aid agencies was mentioned (A6). Friction occurred as well because of the complex reporting mechanisms between intermediary and donor (A33).¹⁸⁴ This correlated with a lack of transparency (A6) and a tendency among intermediaries to tell donors what they wanted to hear. “*In that sense there was a willingness on the side of intermediaries to avoid any friction with donors*” (A31).

¹⁸³ The ‘boiled frog syndrome’ is a metaphor used to describe aid agencies not responding to gradually increasing security threats. Here the respondent used the metaphor to describe the aid agencies as not responding to the compounding conflict and growing instability.

¹⁸⁴ According to respondent A33 a donor initiative supported by the National Human Rights Commission and administered by the UNDP was a good example of the existence of complex reporting mechanisms.

The operational environment Friction sources originating in the operational environment could be grouped in two overlapping sets. The first set related to the international community in Kathmandu and was primarily friction within and between agencies about their mandates (A26), “*psyches*” (A18) and different opinions as to how to understand the insurgency in particular and conflict in general (A18/ A26/ A31/ A67). This was compounded by a lack of coordination between Kathmandu-based donors (A33). In addition, it was felt that the strength and capacities of donors were under-used, such that the small agencies followed the big ones “*as small fish following the sharks, without conducting political or contextual analysis not knowing where they were heading*” (A33). Moreover, this led, according to the same respondent to a lack of risk-taking and the absence of flexible and responsive reactions to the conflict (A33).

The second set of sources of friction originating in the operational environment was related to the national staff within the agencies. One respondent suggested that the Nepali elite –those holding key positions within western agencies- were not the right people to handle the task of poverty reduction. “*Most aid staff were from a certain caste group...who were English-speaking and elite...we got the growing perception that these people were not the ideal people to deliver programmes for the poorer and excluded groups...and that perhaps some of the decisions they were making would not have been made if they had been filled by people who were from those poor and excluded groups themselves*”. This contributed to an “*elite workshop culture*” whereby, “*the rich were constantly attending workshops to empower this or that, but actually did not do anything to change things*” (A29). This might suggest that, if you want, as an aid agency, to avoid action, the organisation of workshops is indispensable. Another source of friction in the aid delivery process related to the multiple layers of dispersing parties (A29) and the subsequent corruption, mis-management and misuse of resources involved (A2/ A29). Lastly, there was growing suspicion on the side of the government towards aid agencies, which was partly accelerated by the arrival of humanitarian agencies (A26), subsequently increasing additional control measures and red-tape (A60). Here, we close the section on sources of friction originating in the operational environment.

Above we have examined friction occurring in four domains: the institutional sphere of aid agencies; the domain of conflicting parties, the domain of internal dynamics within aid operations and the operational environment. Now, we move on to conduct a reflection on the issue of friction.

7.4 Reflection

The above clearly shows that the aid community in Nepal was subject to the effects of friction, which moved beyond issues of physical efforts, information and danger discussed in the next three chapters. If we could generalise the situation of the aid community in Nepal during the research period, I would like to contend that an aid strategist could not strategize and implement a friction-proof aid operation in a turbulent environment, because friction can not be fooled as it is fool-proof itself.

An aid strategist who assumes that he has strategized the perfect aid operation deceives himself and his judgement could be questioned. However, accepting the possibility of friction and being blasé about its existence in either the operational environment, the operation itself or its conjecture, is thoughtless and might lead to at best sub-optimal results in terms of the reduction of poverty and turbulence in the environment. In other words, it would be naïve to be lay-back about friction. Such naivety allows the possible negative consequences of friction for the progress of an aid operation to be underestimated, potentially with harmful results. Hence, being naïve about the possibility of friction might be easy for an aid strategist, but it is not wise; however taking an opposite position and seeing friction everywhere might maybe very realistic, but it risks slipping into fatalism. Indeed fatalism might be in turn a source of friction in itself, preventing the practitioner or the agency to take hold of opportunities if they occur.

An aid strategist could easily be irritated about the friction within the institutional set up of the international aid community. And, in the case of the Nepal perhaps many within the international aid community were. At the same time, the aid strategist should, despite this potential frustration, also pay considerable attention to the organisational processes of friction.

This might appear logical as the first can be relatively easily understood and might be perceived as unnecessary, while, the second type of friction can be assumed to be in check by the aid strategist without too much difficulty. However, in the case of Nepal, this type of friction was most likely not the most when it came to hampering processes of strategizing and implementation of aid operations. One possible source of friction in reaching local communities underestimated by the international aid community could have been *'the atmosphere of cunning'* within the Nepali bureaucratic establishment while dealing with the international aid community.¹⁸⁵

Clausewitz suggests that a good commander is not the one who can identify friction, but is able to overcome it.¹⁸⁶ Before exploring how an aid strategist could overcome friction, it might be helpful to examine various characteristics of friction.

Clausewitz talks about the military machine, which is perhaps easy to manage. However, he also says that this machine is an assembly of individual people each potentially contributing to friction, and it is just the same with aid agencies. In other words, friction is, in part, caused by people and has to be dealt with by people. This makes friction not only person-specific, but agency- and context- specific as well. The context of an aid operation is turbulent; friction might therefore change over time, in part due to the changing conflict dynamics. In the case of Nepal, this could be for example intensified pressure from the Maoists to force aid agencies to sign up to their 'local governments', if they wanted to work beyond district headquarters. One could expect friction to increase when the turbulence within an operational environment increases. In turn, when turbulence in the operational environment decreases, friction might decrease as well. Should the level of friction increase, opportunities for an aid strategist to further the ideal form of aid might decrease. The opposite might be the case when the level of friction in the operational environment goes down. In the case of Nepal, examples of the fluctuating levels of friction might be the two ceasefire periods. In these periods, aid agency staff had more opportunities to move to the field than in the periods of active violent conflict between the PLA and the Security Forces.

¹⁸⁵ See Chapter 14 On Cunning.

¹⁸⁶ This might imply that successful commanders try their best to identify and understand the widest range of friction as possible in the course of strategizing and implementing operations, as it is only possible to overcome frictions what you have identified and understood. I would like to thank Brigitte Piquard for this thought.

However, periods of lesser turbulence do not provide a necessarily clear view on what the future political-military interaction might be between conflicting parties. The risk is that the periods of reduced turbulence might be seen too positively, as respondent A60 did while planning his program during the second ceasefire. Periods of reduced turbulence in an operational environment might just be interludes between intensified turbulence.¹⁸⁷

In addition, friction affects an aid operation most likely not in a sequential manner, but it can come in many different forms and combinations of sources. In the case of Nepal one respondent suggested that as a response to the Royal Coup on the 1st of February 2005 (a source of friction in the process of program implementation), the donor he worked for became very restrictive in allocating funds to the program, compounding the totality of friction the program had to face in the process of implementation (A60).

Moreover, friction could be further divided into technical and non-technical friction. Technical friction relates to flaws in internal procedures, the lack of technical skills or the absence of certain instruments etc., while, non-technical friction might relate to the socio-political dimensions surrounding an aid operation. Furthermore, friction can be understood retrospectively, but it is much more challenging to foresee it and take avoiding action, which for the process of strategizing an aid operation might be a source of friction in itself. Having briefly explored the nature of friction, now we move to the question of how to address friction.

The key question for the aid strategist is how the reality of friction can be dealt with in a balanced way, neither ignoring it nor completely focussing on it, to further the ideal form of aid in a context of turbulence.

Friction is not a phenomenon that will go away in a turbulent environment, as it is grounded in human nature, as Clausewitz indicated. Therefore, a good starting point for the aid strategist might be the realisation that an aid strategist himself does not only face friction, as he is producing and reproducing it as well in processes of strategizing

¹⁸⁷ See also Chapter 15 On Tension and Rest.

and implementing aid operations. So, self-awareness is vital to understanding not only how you respond to friction, but how you contribute to its reduction as well.

Skills and knowledge might play a role in addressing friction as an aid strategist, but so does attitude. One well-informed aid practitioner stated *"I do not see it...in terms of the ability of an agency or an INGO actually to deliver on a project in the current context, there are so many complications and there are so many limitations on what you can do...."* (A24). This quote might show a sense of fatalism. An aid strategist should, however, realise that an attitude of fatalism, however correct the assessment of friction in a given context might be, does not encourage a creative or imaginative approach towards overcoming the various sources of friction in order to get aid operations strategized and implemented.

As stated earlier Clausewitz argues that the successful commander is not the one who can identify friction, but the one who can overcome it. It is not that identifying friction is not important, but rather that it may be inadvisable to try to gain an exhaustive understanding of it. For an aid strategist, this might mean that he should not focus all of his attention on researching in detail how friction might surface and develop during the course of an aid operation. Having said that, although friction is difficult to pre-empt, it might be wise to think imaginatively about the nature of friction in a given operational environment and how it might hamper an aid operation. A realisation that friction might manifest itself, chameleon-like, in different shades or guises might help. It is perhaps as much a question of sensing the character of the main 'domains of friction' an aid agency and its operations are caught in, with the hope of generating productive insights to help in the processes of strategizing and implementation and to avoid or mitigate foreseen sources of friction.

At this point it might be worth asking, as aid strategist, to what extent one should try to avoid or mitigate friction. Is the goal a total elimination of friction? Do you concentrate on addressing the key foreseeable sources of friction? Or do you for example, attempt to create a mixed approach, addressing foreseeable sources of friction beforehand and creating a mitigating capability within the agency for unforeseen friction at the same time? There is no right or wrong answer, but attempting to eliminate friction altogether is most likely not helpful, as it might lead to aid activities far removed from their ideal

form. One such example from the Nepal context might be the agency of respondent A67, which, owing to decisions on corporate level, shifted its operational attention away from the field-level to Nepali partner organisations (mainly the government), apparently with hardly any concern as to what actually happened to the input of the agency to the benefit of local communities.¹⁸⁸

Next to understanding self and 'domains of friction', it might be advisable to realise that staffs, despite their inherent fractious nature, are an essential organisational asset in the process of overcoming friction. For that reason, an aid strategist need to ensure that they are not only enabled to deal with friction if and when it happens, but are to a certain level protected as well against friction (for example danger). Staffs are useful for an aid agency and an aid operation when they are able to remove more friction, than they create in the process. It is advisable for an aid strategist to understand within the context of the dynamic of the 'aid trinity', which types of circumstances the staff within his agency is capable of dealing with and were his staff needs additional support or training, or need to be replaced. In the case of Nepal, it appears that at least a few aid staff preferred to deal with challenges in the turbulent environment in a rather technical way, while the situation was precisely not a situation that could be solved constructively with "...another aid instrument" (A47). In other words, aid staffs in Nepal were overall, in varying degrees, technically capable people and could deal relatively well with technical related friction. However friction of a more political nature proved more difficult to deal with, due to a lack of preparation or experience. However, an aid strategist should be aware of deficiencies in dealing with politically generated friction, which could partially be mitigated by training or experiences. One such example of the latter would be the growing ability of aid staff to interact confidently and comfortably with Maoists (A2). In other words, certain forms of friction, caused in part by staff themselves, for example being lacking in confidence, might reduce over time, assuming that they accumulate learning throughout their work.

Though much more could be said on the issue of friction, I want to close this chapter with one last remark on how friction could be dealt with in a balanced way. Based on the whole of the data gathered in Nepal, it might be possible to argue that pushing an

¹⁸⁸ See also the Chapter 11 On Strategy.

aid operation towards an ideal form generates, although not necessarily in a linear fashion, a certain level of friction. To build a constructive approach to the reality of friction, an aid strategist could review where the cut-off points may lay for him and his staff, beyond which an unconstructive approach to overcoming friction might get the upper hand and stands in the way of engagement with local communities. While there are flaws in any approach, this might, depending on the context, be preferable to an aid strategist who is not willing to or capable of dealing with the fundamental sources of friction in the operational environment. He may succeed in keeping his agency 'alive', but in turn reduces the agency's capacity to contribute constructively to the reduction of poverty and turbulence at the same time. The next three chapters discuss particular aspects of the concept of friction, namely physical effort, information and danger.

Chapter 8 On Physical Efforts¹⁸⁹

8.1 Introduction

Clausewitz discusses physical efforts, as a dimension a war strategist should take into consideration, in Book 1 Chapter Five. According to the German military theorist it is important to understand the physical efforts involved in a war as it is “...*like danger...one of the greatest sources of friction in war*” (H&P: 115).

In a mountainous country like Nepal, it is likely that the RNA and the PLA did incorporate the dimension of physical efforts required during strategising and planning of their operations. For example, it is reasonable to suppose that if case studies on Maoist military operations were conducted, for example for the attack on Jumla Bazaar, the administrative headquarters of Karnali region, that they would have shown that in most cases the physical efforts necessary to make the attack militarily successful would be more than sufficiently incorporated into the planning of their military operations, simply because of the harsh, sometimes inhospitable mountainous terrain and fluctuating climate.

One could equally reasonably expect that development agencies would do the same and would incorporate the idea of physical efforts needed, firstly on the part of staff to travel and navigate the terrain and secondly by the local communities targeted by the aid agencies. However, it appears that this is not always the case. A field worker from the Karnali –the remote North-western development region in Nepal, with mountains up to 7500m and mountain passes up to 4000m- once told me something along the following lines: “*These guys in the country office in Kathmandu do not seem to realise that I need to spend approximately 50% of the time on my own survival when I am up there. How can they expect to get such ambitious results?*”.¹⁹⁰ The point here is not that this person is exactly right in his time estimate. The point is that this insight

¹⁸⁹ The coming three chapters address explicitly aspects of the notion of friction. It was decided to change Clausewitz order of topics in friction in general, physical efforts, intelligence and danger.

¹⁹⁰ Conversation with a SNV field worker, Nepalgunj, Autumn 2002. The term survival related to arranging food, clean drinking water, shelter, keeping clean, warm and safe etc.

suggests that the higher management within aid agencies do not always understand or consider the physical hardship field staffs go through and the physical efforts required to work successfully in an unforgiving operational environment. If aid agencies do not always understand the circumstances field staff work in, it might mean as well that aid agencies insufficiently understand the conditions local communities live in.

This chapter contends that, just as in war situations an understanding of the physical efforts required from soldiers is important to strategize operations properly, it is important during the strategizing processes of aid operations to incorporate the physical efforts required by aid workers to navigate the physical environment they are operating in.

8.2 Clausewitz and physical efforts¹⁹¹

Clausewitz perceives physical efforts as an important source of friction in the course of a war. However, the degree of friction it can cause in the course of an operation is very difficult to assess, as it's "...limits are uncertain..." due to its "...elasticity..." In other words, the physical efforts of people can vary depending on personality and the circumstances, which are difficult to estimate.

While discussing the concept of physical efforts, Clausewitz focuses on "...*the efforts that a general can demand of his troops, a commander of his subordinates, in other words although we are concerned with the courage it takes to make the demand and the skill to keep up the response, we must not forget the physical exertion required of the commander himself*". So, this might suggest that the way in which Clausewitz approaches the issue is rather 'own army-centric', including the efforts required of those commanding it.

Clausewitz implies that the task of a commander, in relation to physical efforts of the army under his command is to be like "...*a powerful archer...*" bending his bow, "...*beyond the average, so it takes a powerful mind to drive his army to the limit*". However, according to Clausewitz, the limits of an army in physical terms are difficult to judge objectively. However, according to Clausewitz, it can be done subjectively

¹⁹¹ H&P: 115-116.

based on the validity of “*the speaker’s experience*”. In other words, the practical war experience of the commander himself. So, Clausewitz stresses the importance of actual field experience on the side of the commander in understanding the physical efforts required to operate in harsh terrain and to what extent physical demands might reasonably be met.¹⁹²

8.3 Physical efforts and Nepal's international aid community

Chapter 2 of Part I suggests that Nepal in terms of physical circumstances is a very challenging country to work in. However the interview data suggest that aid agencies did not necessarily match the physical circumstances of Nepal with physical efforts of staff. A couple of issues could be mentioned in this respect.

To begin with, it was suggested that aid agencies did not always take the physical circumstances of the project areas into consideration while planning and strategizing aid activities (A35/ A39). This bordered almost on assumptions of Nepal being as flat as some countries in Western Europe (A9).¹⁹³

Secondly, it was suggested that aid agencies, if not working via basket funding or a sector approach, worked in rather physically limited areas. For example, one agency was active in only a few districts covering, within each of these districts, only a limited number of VDCs (A22).

Thirdly, a link was suggested between at best insufficient physical efforts by aid staff to reach communities in need and the growth of the Maoist insurgency. A respondent told the following story based on observations obtained during various project

¹⁹² I am not sure if Clausewitz suggests here that only a commander is able to access the physical efforts necessary for a particular operation. I think he underlines that a commander need to access for himself the challenges of the field so that he can understand better the information he receives on this matter.

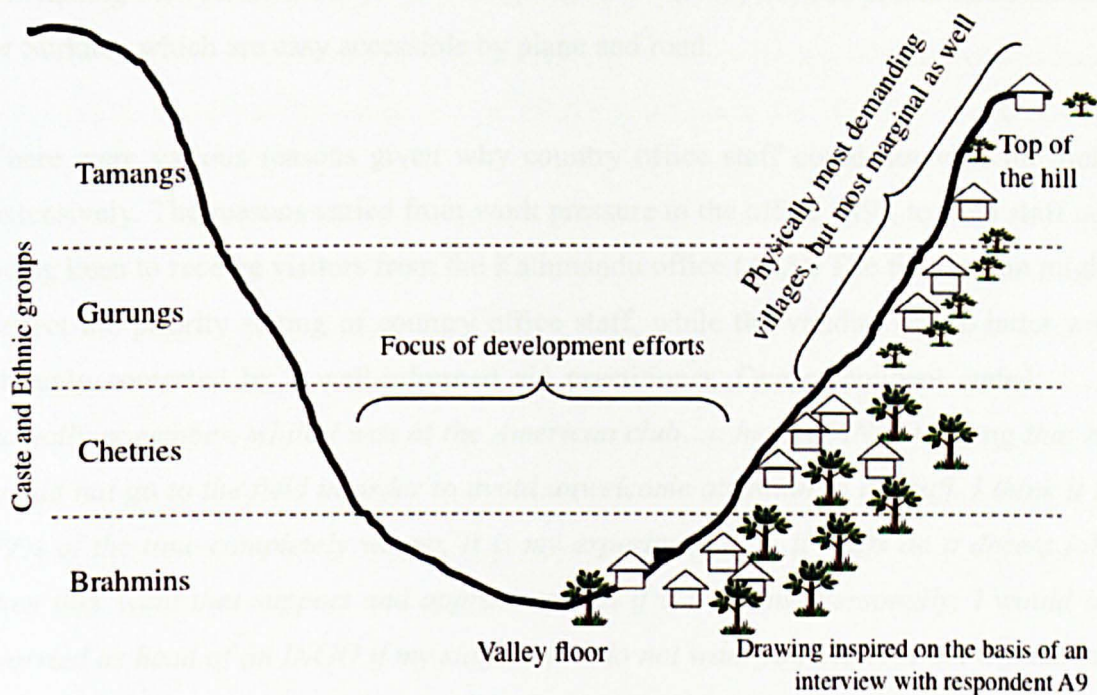
¹⁹³ I can remember a story about a community development program that operated both in the Terai and in the hill districts. Despite the distinct geographical differences of these districts, the program had allocated an equal number of staff to each district, while staffs operating in Terai district were given motorbikes as well. However, the expectations about the number of staff needed to visit communities was the same as well. Thus staff in the Terai district could relatively easily travel from one community to another nearby community by motorbike, while the program staff operating in the hill district might had to walk for between half a day to two days to bridge the distance between one community and the next.

evaluations and field visits in different parts of the country: *"The social composition of a hill in a project area is roughly as follows: first you have the Brahmins, then the Chetris, above them are the Gurungs. The Tamangs have their villages on the highest altitudes. Although the last group faced the biggest problems, the project worked only with the Brahmins and Chetris. This process works as follows. When 'Boris' and the rest of the project team arrived in a village close to the road on the valley floor the smartest of the Brahmins and Chetris say: 'hey...that is 'Boris', he must have money, let's reserve him for ourselves. Then they engaged with 'Boris' and the rest of the project team. The engineer of the team was a bit fat, the other team-member was a bit lazy...Next, the Brahmins and Chetris said that the few villages on top of the hill had only a few small problem compared with theirs...then the project team discussed it and said: 'yes... in addition, the villages on the higher altitudes are rather small as well, so let's work with the poor people here, they can use our assistance as well...' So, the project and the money stayed close to the valley floor...close to the road...and on top of the hill no project arrived... 'Boris' and his team were happy with this, because they did not have to climb the hill to remoter villages, they did not have to eat with the very poor, and they could fulfil their targets more easily. So everyone is very happy about this"* (A9).

However, those not receiving any form of assistance, *"were less educated, and faced more unemployment and more poverty and were less happy with the government"*. (A9) In this climate the Maoists could flourish, *"...as it was more easy to recruit, easier to control and to manipulate by the Maoists. As a consequence, it became more difficult to have projects on the higher altitudes..."* (A9). In addition, the Maoists were less vulnerable to attack by the Security Forces at the higher altitudes. The process described above is visualised in figure 8.1.

The same respondent saw a comparable process while visiting a GTZ/ WFP project in a mid-western hill district. *"Also there, the Brahmins and Chetris lived relatively near the valley floor and received two out of the three projects, while the majority of the district was inhabited by Magars..."* (A9). So, these examples appear to suggest that the physical effort of aid agency staff did not always match the physical circumstances in the operational environment, and therefore limited access to assistance from aid agencies to groups more in need of assistance.

Figure 8.1: Physical efforts and focus of development efforts



The notion of physical effort was not only linked to aid agencies being active in limited areas and planning on the basis of particular assumptions about the physical circumstances in project areas, or the unsatisfactory efforts of aid agency to match the physical features of the terrain. The notion of physical effort was linked to the idea of moral standing of aid agency staff as well. It was implied that a part of the essence of an aid worker's job in Nepal is showing physical effort (A50) and the ideal aid practitioner should be willing to match their physical efforts with the physical challenges of the operational environment (A18).

There were specific examples of aid agency staff trying to match physical challenges of the operational environment with personal physical efforts (A2/ A53/ A63/ A65). However, these would appear to be the exception rather than the rule and not necessarily part and parcel of the organisational culture of most aid agencies; only a few key managers of smaller (donor) agencies seem to lead by example, in terms of actually going regularly into the field and attempting to stay there longer than usual (A50/ A52/ A11).

It was suggested that the majority of key aid managers within aid agencies did not visit the field regularly, perhaps going just once a year (A43), or shied away from “...visiting the remote areas for any length of time” (A35) beyond places like Pokhara or Surkhet, which are easy accessible by plane and road.

There were various reasons given why country office staff could not visit the field extensively. The reasons varied from work pressure in the office (A9), to field staff not being keen to receive visitors from the Kathmandu office (A35). The first reason might reflect the priority setting of country office staff, while the validity of the latter was strongly contested by a well-informed aid practitioner. One respondent stated; “...I actually remember, while I was at the American club...a head of INGO saying that he would not go to the field in order to avoid unwelcome attention to its staff. I think it is 99% of the time completely wrong. It is my experience that, if staffs do a decent job, then they want that support and appreciate that if it happens. Personally, I would be worried as head of an INGO if my staff said ‘I do not want you there.’ I am wondering what they have got to hide and why they got themselves in that situation” (A35).

Those agencies and staff who, during the conflict, were willing to provide assistance beyond the areas close to roads or district headquarters in remoter parts of districts, and by doing so were challenging the physical challenges with an equal physical effort, faced set-backs due to damaged infrastructure, such as suspension bridges disrupted by conflicting parties, sometimes extending travel times to four to five days (A2). Other events disrupting travel plans included bandhs, blockades, strikes, landslides and bad weather conditions preventing planes and helicopters from flying regularly. Now we move to the reflective section of this chapter.

8.4 Reflection

Allowing for the relatively small amount of data on this topic, it might nonetheless be possible to paint an initial of a process, namely that the physical reality of Nepal was not always sufficiently taken into consideration in the process of strategizing and implementing aid operations. In addition, agencies did not always encourage staff to tackle the physical challenges of the operational environment, with personal physical efforts, or by providing sufficient additional (human) resources to overcome them.

Both processes caused friction in the process of aid delivery, subsequently excluding communities located in the rural areas.

Without doubt there might have been exceptions however, as a rule this process could have added to an imbalanced allocation of aid resources in the country, to the benefit of those communities in easy reach of aid agencies staff and the aid agencies themselves. These communities were often, though not always affiliated by caste with aid agency staff. As a consequence, communities located at remoter places had less access to the aid agency resources and this, in turn, added to a situation whereby these peripheral communities were more open to the Maoists and their ideology. And because in a later stage of the conflict, the Maoists gained control over these peripheral areas, it became even more difficult for aid agencies to provide assistance to communities in these areas, while these communities were in greater need of support from aid agencies due to increased pressures they had to cope with.

So, what might the issue of physical efforts mean for aid strategists operating in turbulent environments? First of all, the physical environment is a relatively predictable feature of a given operational environment. However, conflict situations, as in Nepal, might make it harder to travel through, for example due to disruption of infrastructure, which is more readily damaged than constructed. Moreover, physical constraints in the operational environment have an effect on physical efforts required from aid staff to engage with communities. It might be worth considering whether physical constraints might not be a contributory factor when deciding whether or not to engage with inaccessible communities, which in turn might reflect the lack of willingness on the part of an aid agency or its staff literally to 'walk the extra mile', or in the case of Nepal to engage with communities living at the higher altitudes of hills and mountains. Secondly, with the usual caveats, the story of respondent A9 implies, that the more physical efforts are needed to reach peripheral communities, the more is required from aid staff, the greater the likelihood that a minimalist approach is taken by the same staff, to the detriment of peripheral groups and to the benefit of the less needy groups in the population and the aid agency itself. This brings us to the question of how to overcome this in processes of strategizing and implementation of aid operations.

Suggested practical measures might include matching staff composition with the ethnic/ caste composition of communities in living in remoter areas, increasing the number of staff, or improving monitoring to ensure that aid operations are focused on the more physically demanding locations. These measures might help, but Clausewitz encourages us to think in a different direction. He refers to the metaphor of the archer stretching his bow beyond the average to suggest that a commander, by force of will, could encourage his army to go to its limits. This metaphor does not provide an aid strategist with advice on what to do in practical terms, however suggests that the will of the leadership within aid agencies can be essential in the process of attempting to match the constraints of the physical environment with the staff's physical efforts to reach communities in peripheral areas.

The archer needs to have a feeling of what pressure the bow is able to withstand, how often and for what purposes it is useful. In other words, the archer needs to understand if the bow, under a given set of circumstances, is able to deliver an arrow to its intended target. Likewise an aid strategist needs to gain a feeling for whether the staff within his agency fits the (physical) challenges at hand, to what extent they can be encouraged to go to their limits to deliver services to peripheral target groups, and ultimately what this might mean for the strategy of an aid operation, and its actual implementation.

Is a correct judgement about the capability and willingness of staff to reach out to peripheral communities sufficient for strategizing processes? The data above might suggest that if aid agencies could have increased their physical efforts to reach peripheral communities, these communities would have had easier access to services of aid agencies. However, it must be borne in mind that it was not merely a question of staff being willing to walk 'an extra mile', but their affinity with these peripheral communities in terms of caste or ethnic background. So it is not only capability and willingness that are important, but caste or ethnic background of staff as well.¹⁹⁴

It might also be helpful to take into consideration that in thinking through the human resource side of aid operations, aid strategists, might be incorrect if they assume that

¹⁹⁴ This stresses the point as well that an aid strategist should know the context in which he works.

local staff, just because they are local, can cope with the physical hardship of the operational environment and are able to exert the physical efforts required to contribute substantially to an aid operation.

At the same time it is not very likely that the institutional sphere will offer a sympathetic ear to the argument that local staff cannot cope with the physical demands of the operational environment so as to successfully implement an aid operation. In this respect an aid strategist might have a double task, encouraging staff to do more, while educating actors in the institutional sphere to lower their expectations of what is actually possible.

The metaphor of the archer suggests one further line of thought: if an archer might in case of need stretch his bow to the limit, he must also handle it with care. The same can be said of an aid strategist: he could push his or her staff to the limit of their physical capabilities, for example by postponing leave, but if he goes over a certain threshold he might 'harm' a staff worker. We might also extrapolate from Clausewitz's archer metaphor, that the single bow is more important than the arrow, of which there may be many. If applied to the realm of aid and development in turbulent environments this could mean that an aid strategist might need to take more care of its staff than for the aid operations they are involved in. However, although good staff are important and are not easy replaceable in the short term, they can be replaced in time, while in a turbulent environment there might be only a few small windows of opportunity to reach communities via the activities of an aid operation. Hesitating to make extra-demands on staff could have therefore negative consequences in terms of what benefit peripheral communities might eventually receive from aid operations.

Assuming that in the process of compounding conflict, the level of physical hardship among various groups of the local population increased and therefore the need for assistance, we could have expected, in the case of Nepal, that aid agencies tried to demand more of their staff in physical terms, in order to reach these communities. However, it would appear, with the usual caveats that the opposite happened: demands for services increased, while organisational demands of staff to reach out to communities lessened. One could speculate that in the case of peripheral communities, not having access to the limited services in the district headquarters, created first of all

a need for additional resources and agency's efforts to get staff in contact with local communities might have seen as less important.

Another issue to consider in connection with physical effort is that of morale among staff. Aid strategists should be aware of the possibility, especially in physically demanding operational environments, that low morale could undermine the physical effort being made by staff. Decreasing levels of morale could be countered with some forms of success.

One possible process might be that if an aid operation does not produce success and subsequently demoralizes staff, a downward spiral could be countered by demanding more from the staff, for example by increasing working hours, operating in more risky places and facing more physical hardship. If it results in a successful operation this might be for a set time the right course of action. However, if it does not bring success closer, demanding more physical effort from staff will not counter but reinforce demoralising processes amongst aid agency staff.

Low morale and subsequent low appetite for physical effort amongst staff might indicate a mismatch between operational strategy and conditions in the operational environment, as success is not forthcoming. If perceived appropriate from a policy angle, an aid strategist might consider changing the strategic approach of an aid operation. For many reasons staff might be encouraged by this change and willing to make increased physical efforts, going beyond their limit to make the aid operation successful. There is of course no guarantee that this strategic change and extra physical efforts from staff will make an aid operation successful, however, this is less demoralising than the first option, as staff have at least the feeling that different approaches have been tried. Such strategic change however, does not necessarily satisfy all actors within the operational environment, especially those within the cluster of conflicting parties. These groups might prefer an unchanged operation, with demoralised staff even if it does not benefit them completely, since a change of strategy for the aid operation might even be less beneficial for them.

The opposite might also happen, where actors within the operational environment might be encouraged by the strategic change of the aid operation, while agency staffs

are not. If it leads to success, and during the process staff are pushed beyond acceptable limits in terms of physical effort, then an aid strategist could take the long view: the progress made in terms of the reduction of poverty and conflict may outweigh staff discontent and the physical efforts they have to make to overcome the physical constraints of the operational environment. However, the aid strategist, owing to his distance from the field and, in all probability, the less risky, more luxurious environment he works in, tends to forget, but must really understand and take responsibility for, the consequences of the hardship and risks his staff are undergoing. It appears to me that in the case of Nepal managers were not always aware of this. Although there might be more things to say on this issue, this concludes the reflection on physical efforts in turbulent environments.

Chapter 9 On Information

9.1 Introduction

Clausewitz suggests in a short chapter titled “On intelligence” that intelligence constitutes a key source of friction in the course of a military confrontation (H&P: 117-118). This chapter uses the term information, instead of the term intelligence, and suggests that information processes were indeed a source of friction within the aid community in Nepal.¹⁹⁵ Like intelligence in war, information is important for decision-making during the course of an aid operation. Information is here loosely defined as every sort of information about the operational environment in which the aid operation takes place, ranging from quite factual information about the geography of the area concerned, through poverty statistics, to quantitative and qualitative information regarding the political-military dynamics as well. What I want to stress here is that the information necessary to address poverty and conflict in a turbulent environment is not only gathering quantitative data about poverty or assessing the causes of a conflict.¹⁹⁶

Although not the object of this thesis, Clausewitz’s thoughts on intelligence make it possible to assume that the conflicting parties lacked at various stages of the conflict and in various degrees sufficient reliable information about each other’s military and political positions. In addition, the application of Clausewitz’s ideas on intelligence enabled me to understand the information processes within the aid agencies in relation to the data gathered from the operational environment development projects were located in. Over the years, the increasing military and political turbulence created difficulties in gaining a sufficient understanding of the overall conflict dynamics. The manifestations of the conflict also contributed to unsatisfactory collection of reliable information and interpretation of information on the impact aid activities were having on poverty reduction and the conflict-peace dynamics. A respondent acknowledged

¹⁹⁵ For that reason I have titled this chapter On Information.

¹⁹⁶ For example, the agency I worked for excluded a proper conflict assessment in the process of planning activities on the basis of the argument that they were an agency focussed on poverty reduction. Personal communication with the Country Director.

that at one point the situation of his program was that of a submarine being underwater and without sonar (A41).

This chapter will show that information related-friction did exist within the aid community in Nepal between 1999 and 2005/06. From this I want to suggest that an aid strategist active in turbulent environments should pay special attention to the issue of information related-friction to mitigate the consequences for the activities his organisation is involved in.

9.2 Clausewitz and intelligence¹⁹⁷

For Clausewitz intelligence is one of the most prominent sources of friction in war. For him intelligence means “... *every sort of information about the enemy, and his country- the basis, in short, of our own plans and operations*”. At first sight this appears a narrow definition if the enemy is only emphasised as an object for information gathering. The scope of the definition is much bigger if the emphasis is on information needed to plan and conduct operations successfully, because this might entail the need to gain information beyond that which relates directly to the enemy.

Clausewitz does not disagree with those theorists who argue that in war only reliable information should be believed, but gives a realistic warning stressing that reports in these situation are most often “...*contradictory; even more are false, and most are uncertain*”. To counter these contradictory, false or uncertain reports, Clausewitz suggests, that those in command, “...*should possess a standard of judgement*”. This judgement however varies with difficulty. It is challenging “*when plans are drafted in an office, far from the sphere of action; the task becomes infinitely harder in the thick of fighting itself, with reports streaming in.*” After pointing to the challenges related to the issues of reliability and judgement, Clausewitz argues that it is more likely that a “*novice*” will need to rely on chance than a more experienced commander when assessing the information received. What Clausewitz might mean here is that the lack of experience makes it more difficult for the novice to appreciate information appropriately and that luck in this process could be of help.

¹⁹⁷ H&P: 117-118.

Although Clausewitz recognises the need for intelligence to plan and conduct war, his overall assessment of its value is rather bleak: *"...most intelligence is false, and the effect of fear is to multiply lies and inaccuracies. This is according to him partly caused by the fact that "...most men would rather believe bad news than good, and rather tend to exaggerate the bad news"*.

To counter this process Clausewitz suggests something that is not easy. *"...A commander must trust his judgment and stand like a rock on which the waves break in vain...If he does not have a buoyant disposition, if experience of war has not trained him and matured his judgment, he had better make it a rule to suppress his personal convictions, and give his hopes and not his fears the benefit of the doubt. Only thus can he preserve a proper balance"*.

Clausewitz appears to suggest here that in the process of judging information human nature, which tends to focus on the negative aspects of information, should be compensated for with a hopeful attitude to overcome the gap between the execution of a war and its preparation.

9.3 Information and Nepal's international aid community

Actors in the Nepali aid industry recognised the importance of reliable information, as *"misinformation leads to mis-development"* (A22). It was suggested that reliable information within aid agencies is *"...important for everything, from strategic decision-making to day-to-day decision making...it is everything"* (A29). In other words, the quality of information has an effect on organisational performance (A8). During a conference held in London in June 2002, the need to improve the information sharing processes about Nepal was recognised (A44). However, despite its perceived importance and agreement to improve information sharing, the interview data suggest that it still remained a significant source of friction within Nepal's aid industry.

This paragraph provides an overview of how the idea of information resonated among respondents while reflecting on their experiences with (sections) of the aid industry. First, the context in which information processes took place is sketched and then various aspects related to information processes among the aid agencies, together with

how they subsequently added to the friction in the process of their work, are laid out. The paragraph ends with an overview of measures taken by sections within the international community to reduce information-related friction.

The context The context in which information sharing on developments about Nepal took place was characterised by four perspectives. First, it was seen as a competitive field, in which the UN family and donors “...see their common ground in many cases as a competitive ground, whereby individual personalities and institutional rivalries play a role” (A18). In other words, it was argued that potential gains in the process of information sharing via possible common ground were often cancelled out by rivalries between individuals or institutions. As a result a wide variety of viewpoints sprang up about situations, and about what kind of information to look for and how to analyse it (A47). Secondly, and in relation to the dynamic described above, it was suggested by one respondent, based on his rich field experiences in other crisis settings, that the formal and informal networks in which information was processed was dynamic and “...were not only very complex, but permanently on the move” (A42). A third dimension characterising the context in which information processes took place is put forward by Joergensen, the former head of the WFP in Nepal. She states that within the development and humanitarian arena of Nepal, “...information seemed completely *unsystematic and disorganised*” (Joergensen in: Minear and Smith (eds.) 2007).

Fourthly, in this context it might be useful to know that during the build up of the conflict in the early years of the People’s War, a dichotomy arose between local knowledge and the bigger picture which became a source of information-related friction. It was suggested that this dimension played a special role in the early stages of the conflict. It took the aid community in Kathmandu some time to realise and react to the nature and scale of the insurgency. Two elements appear to have influenced this process. Firstly, although evidence of the conflict was available from observations in project areas, project staff did not always pass the information on, because, as one respondent suggested “...the conflict was seen as an internal thing and we did not expect it in ‘98 and ‘99 to turn into a national size conflict” (A61). Secondly, if information from a field office was passed on to a country office in Kathmandu, it was not always valued appropriately. “...it was very easy for people to say, oh... this is just a local disturbance, because of the specific conditions in that particular area” (A5).

This stance led to a situation, whereby pieces of local knowledge were not always connected with the bigger picture and mistaken conclusions could be drawn, as events were seen as discrete and not connected with each other as part of a larger whole. Moreover, it was suggested that information could also be discredited by agencies in Kathmandu by arguing that messages coming in were very area-specific or that the messenger showed a lack of political understanding as well (A5). This meant at least for one agency representative that he only became aware of structural disruptions to the programs he was involved in around 2002 (A22), six years after the start of the People's War, and more or less coinciding with the London Conference held in the same year (A44).

After it became evident that the conflict in Nepal was more than a law and order problem, various other aspects contributed within the aid community to information related-friction, namely intra- and inter-agency dynamics and some processes summarized under the heading of cross-cutting issues.

Intra-agency dynamics Intra-agency dynamics contributed in various ways to information-related friction. To begin with, the fear of blame of failure among Nepali staff (A47) and the possibility of job loss were suggested as a key reason as to why information about the situation in project areas was not reported or was under-reported (A4/ A5/ A26). Paradoxically, this process coincided with a process whereby aid activities contracted, subsequently leading to a reduction of field staff actually being present in the field resulting in less information about what was happening (A49).

In addition, despite this contraction of aid activities, frontline staffs of aid agencies were in contact with Maoists. With hindsight it was estimated that 60% to 70% of frontline staff made "...*inappropriate relationships with the Maoists and...that in 90% of these cases this was not passed on...*" to higher levels of the agency concerned (A35).¹⁹⁸ Thus, for some agencies at least, it was difficult to estimate what the situation in their project areas beyond the district headquarters was, or verify the status of aid activities. Indeed some agencies were hardly aware of the content of the relationships between their staff and Maoists representatives, adding to information-related friction.

¹⁹⁸ It is not unlikely that a number of those aid agency staff who had contact with the Maoists were Maoists themselves or sympathisers. However, I am not in the position to estimate a percentage.

This brings us to the third process linked to information-related friction. Although less information about what was going on beyond the district headquarters became available, it was precisely this information that was necessary “...to feel the pulse in districts” (A4). “...Feeling the pulse in the district” was hampered by the practice of agency representatives “parachuting in” for a few days in (potential) project areas (A5) and often solely focusing on issues of poverty during these short visits (A65). Along with under-reporting, the practice of “*parachuting in*” and focusing on a small range of issues, information-related friction was compounded by insufficient monitoring of aid activities. During the compounding conflict this became for some agencies at best very difficult or at worst impossible (A28). So, it was not always clear if aid activities progressed as planned and what their impact was.

A fourth source of information-related friction was the information-gap between program and the respective donor. One respondent explained this gap when he recalled his experience regarding the reduction of daily information after moving from a job within a program to a position within the country office of the donor: “*When I left the program office the noises were switched off, while sitting in the country office of the donor, E-mails and phone calls were not coming in from the districts anymore, because I was not responsible anymore. It was like someone had turned the sound off. It was bizarre. I suddenly realized that I was working in this ‘Cocoon’ in Kunaekanta, cut off from reality. While working in the program, I got the regular reports but in the donor office I did not receive the day-by-day information any more. Suddenly I felt I don’t have information anymore. I don’t know anymore what the reality is. So, communication is hugely important*” (A2). This story suggests that even within one agency, depending on the role a staff member plays access to particular information can vary hugely.

Finally, notwithstanding that frontline staff might not have passed information on to the higher levels of their agencies or that agencies might not have shared information properly, an agency could also decide not to report. It was suggested that at least in one case, an embassy had instructed the staff of their implementing arm not to report any more on what was happening in the field. “...for a long time we were not supposed to report on what is going on...you were supposed not to put things in writing of what was happening...the embassy did not want to have things in writing... this is how bad

the denial was, but all of these things were happening and everyone knew it...but you were still supposed to carry on, with the business you were doing...” (A39). It is not unlikely that this process of instructing staff not to report about the situation in the areas of operation occurred in more than one agency.¹⁹⁹ Now we will look at the processes around inter-agency information related friction.

Inter-agency dynamics contributed in various ways to information-related friction. Interviewee responses tended to cluster around the issues of sharing of conflict- and security-related information.

The first source related to incongruence of information available among aid agency representatives. Practical factors, such as poor communication facilities or difficulties to speak freely, since telephone conversations took often place in public spaces, were given as reasons why it was challenging to pass on information from the field to the country office in Kathmandu (A63/ A68). On a national level, information might have been passed around relatively smoothly within an agency or a group of agencies, but might struggle to get into other agencies or might have been incongruent with the kind of information other agencies had available. One respondent recalled an event in 2005 whereby the Maoists had forced all aid activities to stop in a particular district for about 6 months. *“Our staffs were very honest about the fact that they could not get into the field. Yet the UNDP representative was reporting during meetings that they could. That was bizarre, because nobody was working or allowed to work in that district”* (A2). At one point the respondent went to the district where Maoists obstructed development work, in order *“...to talk to all our teams, partners and other agencies, and it was interesting everyone was talking about the problem, but the same messages were not going back to the centre. So, to me there was something seriously wrong, the UNDP staff basically said we do not report the problems and the information of our agency was not being shared within other organizations”* (A2). This story illustrates

¹⁹⁹ I recall a comparable occurrence in the agency I worked for between 2002 and 2005. The liaison officer called the agency representative in the regions regularly, around twice per month, to get information about the local situation, and subsequently reported on it. At one point he was instructed by the management not to do this any longer. After inquiring why this did not happen any more, an answer was given along the lines that the reports were all the same and therefore did not add to what was already known, and were therefore a waste of time. I do not remember exactly when this practice of reporting was halted, but it must have been during Autumn 2003.

the friction hindering the establishment of a common understanding among agency representatives in Kathmandu.

A second source, linked to the first, related to the processes of formal and informal sharing of information. The latter was perceived as less problematic than the former; a well-informed insider reflecting on this stated “...my impression was that 60% of the time it was pretty awful...in the sense that incidents and cases of intimidation by the Security Forces or by the Maoists or whoever was not discussed properly...it was hidden. On an informal level I think that the record was much better and probably 80% of important and significant incidents were discussed, there was a group of people, and you know who they are who discussed these things” (A35).

The reason why Heads of Agencies were not fully sharing conflict- or security-related information was not necessarily to do with for example their workload or busy work schedule, but it was suggested that it was out of fear of the possible political consequences if they did. “...Information was not often shared on heads of agency level, because it automatically means that it becomes a high tension thing, it immediately means that information given needs to go back to their capitals...this is what they did not want...” (A35). So, as a consequence conflict and security-related information was not always properly shared among those in charge of the agencies.

A third source of information-related friction was associated with the issue of relationships with partner-organisations, which can be seen as a part of the implementation process of an aid operation. In cases where these partner organisations were local NGOs, it was suggested that they were not always transparent or accountable and might withhold information about failure out of fear of losing their contract (A5),²⁰⁰ subsequently compounding information-related friction. In addition, Joergensen, the former head of the WFP/ Nepal argues that the atmosphere of mistrust among partner organisations and fear of being reported to the Security Forces or the Maoists hampered information sharing (Joergensen in: Minear and Smith eds, 2007).²⁰¹

²⁰⁰ Respondent A64 stated clearly that he questioned the notion of partnership.

²⁰¹ One respondent, who will remain anonymous, suggested that the head of WFP herself forbade her staff to talk with staff of certain other organisations belonging to the UN family. The respondent became aware of this after the head of WFP was replaced and staff of the WFP mentioned the existence of this policy to the respondent.

In cases where the government was the key partner, information sharing could not only become sanitized, with references to the existence of conflict being removed from reports (A41), but it could also mean that even agencies within the UN family were echoing what ministers told them to say about the progress made in a program or a sector, “...while all anecdotal information pointed in a totally other direction” (A47). Now, we will turn to three miscellaneous issues each bearing on information-related friction.

Miscellaneous sources of information friction Three other information-related friction sources were identified. The first related to the process of denial among various players within the aid community in Nepal. One respondent referred to the presence of denial as a paradoxical process within the aid community: “...there were certain parts within the UN system who did not want to know. Some of the donors, I think did not want to know, while certain donors were both very conscious and that they need to work in conflict and be conflict-sensitive, but also did not want to know that there was a conflict at the same time. This was very paradoxical” (A47). This quotation appears to suggest that information-related friction is compounded by the tension between knowing, and the need to act on this knowledge, and avoiding the acquisition of knowledge in order to ensure the need to act. This paradox was not necessarily exposed but needed resolve by agencies involved in these processes after the Royal take over in February 2005. International media exposure made the deniable undeniable and even agencies such as the World Bank had to accept and address the reality of violent conflict in Nepal (A47/ A11).

The second source of information-related friction relates to the media. Without intending to portray them as a homogenous entity, the media appeared to play a role in the process of information-related friction in at least two ways. Firstly, it was suggested that the Nepali media, owing to forms of self-censorship, “enhanced” rumours within the aid community, as less news about the conflict in the rural areas was reported, and triangulation of information by individual and the collective of agencies became more difficult (A47). Having said this, there were examples of brave reporting by investigative journalists trying to expose the situation in remote parts of

Nepal.²⁰² Secondly, it was suggested that representatives of the international media based in Kathmandu faced difficulties in getting news items accepted in the Western press about the compounding situation in Nepal (A7). In part this problem was exacerbated by the sometimes-unhelpful attitude of aid agencies and the government towards the press in terms of the provision of information about development activities (A7/ A30). However, it was suggested that the reason for this, on the side of the development agencies, had to do with avoiding questions back home about their development practices in terms of progress or applied paradigm (A5), all of which of course generated additional information-related friction.

The third source augmenting information-related friction is the concept of information spinning. The following example is given in detail, as it describes the Royal Nepali Army (RNA) spinning information in a security briefing. The suggested aim for doing so was, according to the respondent, to secure additional military assistance to fight the Maoists. The respondent recalls: *"...I have seen it several times, as there were plenty of briefings, which had a series of slides in the middle, that showed the link of the Maoists with the other Maoists movements in South-Asia, which is by and large politically correct, then the RNA showed a slide of the broader revolutionary movements in the world like the Shinning Path, just to indicate that there was a broader world out there. Somehow they managed to produce a slide with a link to Al Qaeda, They said this in front of Michael Malinovski (the American Ambassador LvD),...it was for him, it was to help him to persuade Washington, that the army needed more assistance, as they were part or of the Global War on Terror. But they were not. The Maoists have no interest whatsoever in Islamist-fundamentalism. Zero"* (A47). The above is a good example how one of the conflicting parties spun information for their own ends. It is not unlikely; that in connection with the process of denial discussed above, individual agencies also spun the information they passed on to others for their own ends. It was suggested by one respondent that the WFP was for a certain period in time involved in this, claiming that the food security situation in the North-western part of the country was near normal (A16).²⁰³

²⁰² For example Mohan Mainali. Unfriendly Fire, Nepalitimes, Nr 106, http://himalaya.socanth.cam.ac.uk/collections/journals/nepalitimes/pdf/Nepali_Times_106.pdf accessed on 20/09/09.

²⁰³ After arrival of a new head of WFP, WFP decided rather rapidly in 2006 to start up an emergency feeding programme in parts of North-western Nepal. See, "WFP Starts emergency food deliveries in

Reliable information, free from spin is an asset for an aid agency. In the case of Nepal, aid agencies were not the only actors having to deal with information-related friction. It is not unlikely that conflicting parties also had to deal with similar friction. One such example was given in which a high-ranking Nepali government official approached an aid agency in order to get briefed about the overall security situation in the country. Staff of one particular agency was known for having reliable information about the situation in the country at their fingertips. A respondent from this agency recalled a situation in which he and a colleague were at one point requested to meet at a newly installed high-ranking Minister. During the meeting the minister, acknowledging an omission on the side of his government said frankly, “...*look I do not trust what I am being told, by the army, by the civil authorities...and by other agencies...please can you tell me what is happening in the country...*” (A35). Assuming that the government official indeed did not trust his normal sources of information, it appears to me that the government official was in need of an overall picture of the situation of the country, which he perceived as balanced.

The example above indicates a government minister in need of reliable information about the country in general. It is therefore reasonable to assume that top-level Maoists at times faced similar deficiencies of information. On a local level however, it was suggested that the Maoists generally had access to very detailed intelligence about the aid community. One respondent recalled a meeting with a Nepali member of an INGO working in the Terai: “*The staff member said: “...The Maoists came to my office and said, ‘Right we want 10 % of your salary as tax for the war’...so he gave them an amount of X hundred Roepies and they said: ‘ No Comrade! 10% of your salary is Y amount’ ...and they knew what the salaries were*”. Now, we turn to measures to reduce information-related friction.

Ways to reduce information related friction Respondents suggested various ways to reduce information-related friction, which can be grouped according to whether they are inter- or intra- agency level measures.

At intra-agency level, respondents suggested four types of measures an individual agency could take. The first measure –and this was not necessarily a default option for every aid agency- related to nurturing good contacts with local communities despite not being able to work in their areas. This could be achieved by for example organising activities in district headquarters, as requested by communities (A17). In addition, it was suggested that agencies should stay focused and put effort into what happened beyond district headquarters (A17). An extension of this option was the establishment of a special liaison position tasked with maintaining communication channels with the Maoists and the government at district level (A52).

Secondly, alongside nurturing good relationships with local communities, it was suggested that establishing and maintaining good relationships with national staff was essential to enable sharing of sensitive information to take place. This included not only knowing staff personally, but also the creation of a positive incentive culture whereby staff know that they can get support from the country office if needed (A2). In line with this, it was suggested that information sharing within aid agencies could improve if expatriates and Nepalis could establish family-type relationships (A22).

Thirdly, it was suggested that a creative approach to the triangulation of information could help to reduce information-related friction. This might mean gathering information via local partners, the use of second- or third-hand sources or cross-checking via other branches of the agency of origin or like-minded agencies (A2/ A4/ A28). In relation to this two respondents suggested that leaving Kathmandu and visiting the field regularly was also a means of obtaining detailed information about developments in districts (A52/ A11). It was also suggested that getting representatives from HQ into the field on a regular basis was not so much a way to triangulate information at country level, but an effective way to explain the situation in Nepal to HQ via first-hand information (A52).

Fourthly, it was suggested that information-related friction correlated with the type of program an aid agency implemented. Old-fashioned programs with an agency's own staff in the field were perceived as more useful by at least one respondent for gathering information from the field than sector-wide programs working via or in close cooperation with the government (A2). However, it was argued, that a substantial

presence on the ground might not necessarily lead to a better overall picture, nor would it necessarily improve an agency's political analysis (A33).

Respondents indicated four different ways to reduce information related friction on inter-agency level. The first way, which was successful, but rather short-lived, was the initiative of the British Embassy around 2001 to organise monthly security meetings, chaired by Ambassador Nash. The success of this initiative - at one time between 40 and 50 agency representatives participated in these meetings- made the meetings not impractical, but unsuitable as a forum for sharing sensitive information, as it was not clear who were around the table. After the departure of Ambassador Nash, the monthly meetings were cancelled by his successor Mr Bloomfield (A12).²⁰⁴

Another crucial element in the process of opening up the flow of information and reducing information-related friction within the aid community was the establishment of the DFID/ GTZ Risk Management Office (RMO) in 2002 and the initiation of an OCHA unit in mid-2004. It was suggested that both enabled inter- and intra-agency sharing of information (A2/ A47), firstly, by the products they delivered. The RMO delivered field-based security briefings and analysis focused on safe and effective delivery of aid (A18), which were shared with in the DFID/ GTZ network and made accessible for colleagues from other agencies,²⁰⁵ while OCHA established an online database, including maps. The implicit task of OCHA was perceived as: *"...to get across to people that assumptions behind programs were invalid"* (A47). It was however doubted by some whether the briefings produced by the RMO went beyond DFID and GTZ and their partners (A33), while it was suggested that the downside of the OCHA products lay in the retrospective nature of the information generated (A15).

Thirdly, the formation, in mid-2003, of the Basic Operation Guidelines group, chaired by the head of SDC, created a key forum; one regular participant reflecting on this forum said that *"...the discussions we had in the BOG group were invaluable, because one of the things was that it did allow people to see that they were not the only one dealing with these problems"* (A47). Despite improved communication among donors,

²⁰⁴ This happened under the pretext that the new to establish Risk Management Office supported by DFID and GTZ was better positioned to gather, analyse and disseminate security related information.

²⁰⁵ Based on my own experience.

it was suggested that the existence of the BOG group had its down side as well, as it hindered agencies from connecting with a wide range of other networks, preventing access to “...*a particularly broad band of political perspectives...*”, resulting in a bias towards listening to the moderate left (A4).

Finally, in addition to the initiatives detailed above, various informal meetings were organised by aid agency staff. The first initiative was called the Conflict Advisor Group (CAG) and was initiated in mid-2002 (A29). This group met regularly and was attended by those staff within the donor agencies focusing on the political dimensions of the conflict (A29). The second initiative was the Security Information Group (SIG), initiated and hosted by the UN and aimed at agency staff focusing on the security-related dimensions of the conflict (A35). Designated staffs of INGOs (Nepali and expatriates) were allowed to participate in these meetings.²⁰⁶ At INGO level, AIN organised monthly one-hour meetings to discuss security-related issues.²⁰⁷

Having described the dynamics and dimensions of information-related friction, including factors, which might reduce it, and before moving to the reflection part of this chapter, I would like to refer to a point made by one respondent suggesting that there was no lack of information in Nepal, but that it was not always actively sought. “*There was plenty of information, but they were sitting in their compounds*” (A51). Those agencies, units within agencies or individual staff members actively gathering, analysing and disseminating (balanced) information about what was going on in the country gained a certain reputation (see the example given above). This reliable information and a good reputation could be used to their benefit to influence their own government, other agencies within the aid community, or even the national government itself (A35/ A11), because a government representative does not or cannot always rely on the information he or she has access to.

9.4 Reflection

The material above suggests that information-related friction was a factor in Nepal during the period under study, and that information was, as a consequence, not

²⁰⁶ I attended these meetings on regularly basis.

²⁰⁷ I had access to all these four forums and it appeared to me that the AIN meetings were least informative, due to the one-directional presentation of information.

necessarily always reliable, if not contradictory, adding to the existing levels of uncertainty. The data appear also to suggest that aid agencies were seeking ways to address this friction, with varying degrees of success. In the light of this it is therefore advisable that an aid strategist should always remain alert for processes of information-related friction in his task of strategizing aid operations, even though it might appear easier and therefore preferable to assume that the (limited) information available does not have to be questioned for its reliability and can be taken as providing a complete picture from which operations can be adequately strategized.

The down side of ignoring or avoiding processes of information-related friction in this way might lead to ill-informed decisions and unexpected outcomes. The aid strategist may for example discover that the progress made in project areas is less than had been suggested, or that information received from other organisations, which was thought to be reasonably correct, was in reality all but false, perhaps forcing the strategist to question fundamental assumptions behind the strategy of an aid operation, which may even be generating or contributing to processes opposite to what was intended. In other words, understanding the various ways in which information-related friction can surface in a turbulent environment is important to strategize aid operations effectively. Having said that, it is not helpful either for the aid strategist to assume that all information is unreliable because of the reality of information-related friction. A default position of distrust might lead to ignoring potentially reliable information, or putting unnecessary effort into scrutinizing information to understand its value in terms of reliability. This requires a lot of resources and time that could be spent differently, and may hamper thinking through an aid operation strategy and its implementation. So, being aware of information-related friction becomes impractical if taken to the extreme. However, one might argue that the more turbulent an operational environment, the greater the likely processes of information-related friction are, the less reliability the information an aid strategist has to work with.

The reflection here will focus primarily on how to obtain reliable information to understand an operation in a given turbulent context, rather than how to obtain reliable information about a turbulent context in which an aid operation functions. To help with this analysis we could formulate the following question: how could the existence of information-related friction be approached in the context of a compounding conflict in

order to strategize aid operations successfully? Before investigating this question, the relevant interview data will be summarized.

The context in which information sharing on developments in Nepal took place was characterised by competition (A18), being permanently on the move (A42) and according to the former head of WFP, by being unsystematic and disorganised (Joergensen, in: Minear and Smith (eds.) 2007).²⁰⁸ I tend to believe that these characterisations are reasonably accurate. However, we should be aware that these characterisations might also have been used as arguments to disqualify information in order to avoid the need to act on it.

Information-related friction occurs in the context of several processes. First, fear of blame for failure by staff, resulting in at best sub-optimal reporting. Secondly a process emerged related to a contraction of aid activities and a reduction of staff present in the field (A49), which did not help aid agencies to stay in touch with the local dynamics in their project areas. Then, the practice of '*parachuting in*' and focusing, as short-term visitor, on a small range of issues (A5/ A65), did not bring about a deep understanding of the context in which aid activities took place. Fourthly, information gaps within parts of the same agency could add to information-related friction (A2). And lastly, the suggestion of a non-reporting instruction does not serve to deepen an understanding of the operational environment (A41).

On inter-agency level, sharing of information at an informal and formal level was not necessarily smooth (A35), or available information between agency representatives was incongruent, hampering the process of collective understanding of what might be going on in particular parts of the operational environment (A2). Lastly the role of partners was seen as a potential source of friction in relation to obtaining reliable information (A5/ A47/ A41). In terms of crosscutting issues, the process of denial (A41/ A47), the role of media (A7) and instances of spinning information (A47) were linked to processes of information-related friction.

²⁰⁸ In addition, it appeared to me that the to my understanding unhelpful dichotomy between local knowledge and the 'bigger picture', played a role as well.

Next to processes contributing to information-relation friction, measures or processes addressing them could also be identified. On intra-agency level these included for example nurturing good contacts with local communities (A17), gaining and maintaining good relationships with staff (A2/ A22), applying innovative approaches to triangulated information (A2/ A4/ A28), or attempts to exploit the benefits for 'old-fashioned programs' (A2). On inter-agency level, fora to discuss conflict and security related information such as, the monthly meetings organised by the British Embassy (A12), the establishment of the BOG group (A47), and other groups like the SIG and the CAG (A29/ A35) were useful in easing information-related friction.

Now we focus on the question raised at the beginning of the reflection: how does the aid strategist deal constructively with the issue of information-related friction?

To begin with, I would like to mention a few caveats. Firstly, the 'overview' of information-related friction processes might be incomplete. Respondents did not mention for example issues such as cultural differences among staff and between agencies, and language barriers. Neither was any reference made of the possible impact of continuous uncertainty about the next steps of either Maoists or government. Secondly, the processes of information-related friction highlighted above might be context-specific and may not be present in other turbulent environments. Thirdly, certain means of addressing information-related friction might not work in other contexts, as the initiatives might have been successful due to the existence of a rather unique mix of enabling factors, such as for example in the establishment and functioning of the GTZ/ DFID Risk Management Office.²⁰⁹ For this reason I will refrain from detailed exploration of practical measures to reduce information-related friction, in the remaining part of this chapter.

The above implies that it is advisable for an aid strategist to understand the notion of information-related friction within the contextual characteristics of his operational

²⁰⁹ Without going into too much detail, it is my belief that idea of the Risk Management Office worked as a concept because certain conditions came together which made it into a success. For example, the position of the two donor agencies regarding the conflict, the quality of Nepali and expatriate staff, the nature of the conflict (allowing (knowledgeable) expatriates to walk relatively freely into areas out of government control), the timing of the initiative and the absence of alternatives during the first phases of the project.

environment and not to hold any preconceived fixed ideas on it before engaging in a particular environment.

Below, a couple of suggestions are formulated which an aid strategist could consider in relation to strategizing aid operations in turbulent environments. To begin with Clausewitz suggests that *"the only situation a commander can know fully is his own: his opponent's he can know only from unreliable intelligence"* (H&P: 84). To deal with the reality of information-related friction in the context of compounding conflict, Clausewitz might suggest an aid strategist should begin by understanding himself and how he deals with various pieces information. In other words, reliable information is only as good as its user.

There might be several pertinent questions in this respect. Does the aid strategist recognise within himself preferences towards particular sources of information, for example giving more credence to information provided by those high up in the organisational hierarchy than to that from lower down the hierarchy? In a similar vein, does the strategist consider information to be trust worthier if the source has an international reputation, or are they willing to consider the insights provided by near-anonymous people in a remote district? Then, questions related to the quality of information might be raised. For example, does the strategist need a series of thorough analytical reports, analysing every aspect of the challenge at hand, or are they satisfied with meeting a few key informants who brush over the dynamics in the operational environment? Third, an aid strategist might have preferences for certain types of information over others. Does the strategist tend to believe bad news more readily, than good news or vice versa? Linked with this, what might be the strategist's emotional response to actually seeing or hearing news about violence, injustice and suffering? To what extent might this affect their capability to analyse information rationally? Finally, the strategist might consider their aptitude for dealing with sets of not necessarily closely linked pieces of information. Do they tend to treat these pieces on an individual basis, or are they capable of connecting apparently disconnected pieces of information as part of wider dynamic system? How would they respond if information about the operational environment turns out to be contradictory to earlier information or to their own preconceived ideas? How would they deal with the above under time pressure, through long working days and the possibility of extensive periods of uncertainty? Do

they have an instinctive recognition of the value of information on how it might inform understanding of the past, the present or the future?

These questions, while by no means being exhaustive, might offer an aid strategist some help in getting to grips with fractured, incomplete and sometimes inconsistent or entirely conflicting information and it might help understand how that might affect the input of the aid strategist in strategizing processes. This implies that an aid strategist should be aware that not only he, but others as well, respond differently to information-related friction and play a role in these processes as well. To enhance their judgement of the reliability of information aid strategists are therefore first tasked with trying to gain understanding of themselves and others in these processes of information-related friction. This understanding might start within the aid strategist's own organisation and could expand to those outside this agency with whom he has regular contact regarding the situation in the operational environment.

This brings us to the question of whom to focus on within aid agencies in order to obtain reliable information. It was suggested that those at Head of Mission level were less willing to share information formally amongst each other than the second layer of staff within aid agencies (A35). However, the latter group, although perhaps showing more appetite to discuss and speculate on the available information, might have a less developed capacity to judge information on its true merits than the former group, owing to their age and experience of working in turbulent environments.²¹⁰

This might bring us to another issue for consideration: the importance of understanding how different agencies, and networks within these agencies, might approach information and what their own (political) reasons might be for doing so.

With reference to the case in hand, I have to confess that I was rather sceptical about the way aid agencies in general dealt with information, with some exceptions. On the basis of my partial observations with the aid community in Nepal it appeared to me that a few tendencies played a role among key decision makers within the aid agencies.

²¹⁰ Having said this, one respondent, a former agency head, perceived by many as one of the leaders in the international aid community, acknowledged not having had any experience of working in conflict zones before (A64).

Firstly, hard data was preferred above soft data, for example statistics, even if it could be reasonably assumed that the information, precisely due to the conflict-induced dynamics, could be out of date. Secondly, information produced by an agency's own information system was perceived as more reliable than information that originated outside the agency or group of like-minded agencies. Thirdly, 'positive news' (about practical success), which at the same time was not contradictory to an organisational mandate became highlighted, overvalued or exaggerated and was more readily accepted than 'bad news', which, if it surfaced, was downplayed and undervalued because of the possible consequences for programmes, especially if this bad news contradicted the assumptions behind the aid agency's activities. One very practical explanation for this is that human nature has a tendency consciously or subconsciously to use information in a way that is beneficial for those generating the information. In Nepal, it was evident that humanitarian agencies tended to stress the possibility of a looming humanitarian crisis caused by the conflict, and reported as such, while development agencies tended to minimize the impact of the conflict on development activities on one hand and highlight their importance in the process of addressing the structural development problems in the country on the other hand.²¹¹

In addition, aid agency networks concentrating on particular issues in the country had their own (limiting) foci. For example, meetings held by the Security Information Group (SIG), hosted by the UN, tended to focus on discussing the various security incidents, which had happened since the last meeting, without necessarily pro-actively considering security trends and possible repercussions for aid operations.²¹² However, the Conflict Advisor Group (CAG) worked on a different basis. It tried to understand the present in order to think through possible future political scenarios and the meaning of these scenarios for development agencies and their activities.²¹³ So, in short, understanding the approach of aid agencies and the various fora within the network of aid agencies, in order to understand the information generated by them, might considerably enhance the functionality of the aid strategist.

²¹¹ See for example ACF/ Nepal (2005) Field Assessment Report, Kathmandu Nepal.

²¹² Own observation (period 2002-2005).

²¹³ *ibid.*

Alongside gaining an understanding of themselves as an aid strategist, as well as an understanding of others, be they individuals, agencies or networks, and an understanding of how information-related friction is produced, an aid strategist should also take into consideration the assumptions behind the 'aid trinity', namely the dynamic interactions between the local populations, conflicting parties and the institutional spheres of aid agencies involved. Even if an aid strategist has a full range of reliable information available, enough to plan an aid operation successfully in strategic terms, the availability and usefulness of this full range of reliable information is not necessarily a guarantee that the implementation of the aid operation will automatically be successful. Why? Because, between strategizing design and actual implementation of an aid operation, the situation in the operational environment will more than likely have changed. This gap between design and implementation adds to information-related friction, as strategizing aid operations is an activity based not so much on information about the past and the present, but rather on what the aid strategist thinks that might happen in the future in a given operational environment, which information is necessarily unavailable. This observation is not original, however it appeared to me that during the period under review more than one aid agency preferred to strategize their aid activities on notions which related more to the Nepal of the past, than to the present reality or to what Nepal might become. One respondent elaborated on the lack of a capability among his agency's expatriate and Nepali colleagues, during a scenario building workshop for thinking through scenarios related to the possible futures of Nepal (A16). Having said this there was also one example of an aid agency thinking in terms of a range of potential future scenarios and making preparations, so that it could function in each of them (A52/ A11).

By contrast with the need to take into consideration an unknown and unknowable future, an aid strategist must also deal with real-time information. The research data suggests that estimating future developments in an operational environment may be easier for an aid strategist than obtaining reliable real-time information about what is actually happening in aid operations and their operational environments.

To elucidate this seeming contradiction: on one hand, real-time information is by nature specific, and due the combination of processes described above is not easy to obtain quickly, though swift transfer of information might be necessary. On the other

hand, it might be easier to gain an understanding of the overall direction in which the dynamics of poverty and conflict in a country are heading, because these overall processes develop at a slower pace than the time necessary for formulating an educated guess regarding the future overall dynamics in a given operational environment.

Although the presented data might not seem to express this very clearly, I would like to suggest that, paradoxically, the overall focus of the aid community in Nepal was biased towards obtaining 'real-time' information about the situation in their project areas, over informing themselves about possible futures directions of the country. For example security information was obtained by aid agencies in order to get an (retrospective) understanding of the targeted risks against them, or research was done into the causes of conflict. However, it is my impression that much less attention was paid by the collective of aid agencies to how the conflict might develop. In other words, the relatively easy, though not necessarily straightforward, task of informing aid agencies strategically was bypassed by the much more difficult, but less relevant task of obtaining tactical information from project areas. I am not implying that an aid strategist should only focus on obtaining information about how possible future developments in any given operational environment, but that a balance must be struck, since responding only to real-time information might generate a paradox whereby only small pieces of information become the whole story of what is going on.

To close this chapter, though not the discussion it generates, I would like to suggest that information received which is out of line with expectations might put an aid strategist and his agency off balance. The realisation suggested by Clausewitz that there is a distinction between planning and actual execution of an operation might be a key to dealing at least in part with this aspect of information-related friction.

To this end it might be helpful if the aid strategist accepts the possibility that the agency's intent, mandate and vision, which is embodied in the design of an aid operation, might not fit a given operational environment, since the intent, mandate and vision are most likely a reflection of the power balance in the institutional sphere of the agency, rather than a reflection of the power dynamics in the operational environment, and it is the latter that needs to be engaged with to make a positive difference in terms of poverty and conflict reduction. Conflicting information, therefore, should not be

measured against an agency's intent, mandate or corporate policy, but judged on the merits of the information available within the operational environment of the aid operation itself. This also means that an aid strategist should question the capability of an aid operation to make a significant difference or to operate without flaws. Therefore, information that challenges an aid operation should be trusted over information suggesting its success. The first attitude keeps things realistic and attainable, while the second paves the way for (excessive) optimism, which could eventually lead to recklessness. Negative though this may sound, it might also save the aid strategist from disillusion. In other words, he should consider the negative information he receives about aid operations to be more reliable than the positive, until the first are disproved and the latter proven.

Chapter 10 On Danger²¹⁴

10.1 Introduction

Clausewitz experienced danger throughout the course of his career during several campaigns. In a less than two page chapter, he makes the case for the importance of understanding what a soldier goes through when he experiences danger (H&P: 113-114).

For me the notion of danger points to three things. Firstly, the array of feelings of individual RNA soldiers and PLA fighters when confronting each other in battle. Equally importantly, Clausewitz's writing added to my own understanding of the feelings of the various aid workers, whom I knew personally, who ended up by sheer coincidence or pure naivety near or in the midst of these battles. I had colleagues based in district headquarters such as Ghorai, Jumla, Gamghadi, Beni, Nepalgunj and Tansen, who were actually present during attacks by the PLA on the SFs. Thirdly, as an extension of the second point, the concept of danger underlines the importance of understanding the perception of danger by aid workers, and perhaps more importantly by local communities during the evolving conflict and how that might affect their motivations to be involved in aid activities.

This chapter highlights the importance of understanding and incorporating into strategizing processes the implications of perceived and real danger from violent conflict in the operational environment on conflicting parties, local populations in general and aid workers in particular. Perceived and real danger can constitute a major source of friction in the course of an aid operation and as a consequence might contribute not only to misallocating valuable aid resources but to a prolongation of turbulence in the operational environment as well.

²¹⁴ The term danger here is closely connected to the term security. See also Van Brabant K. (2000) Operational Security Management in Violent Environments, Good Practice Review 8, Humanitarian Practice Network.

10.2 Clausewitz and Danger

For Clausewitz danger is part of the friction of war and therefore demands thorough understanding. Danger, he argues, might for those who have never experienced war appear attractive, rather than alarming. *"You charge the enemy, ignoring bullets and casualties, in a surge of excitement"*. So, Clausewitz points to a human nature as initially being drawn to or excited by danger (H&P: 113-114).

Then Clausewitz points to the realities of battle by describing the first experiences of a novice to the battlefield. *"...the rumble of guns grows louder and alternates with the whir of cannonballs, which begin to attract...attention. Shots begin to strike close around us. We hurry up the slope where the commanding general is stationed with his large staff. Here cannonballs and bursting shells are frequent, and life begins to seem more serious than the young man had imagined..."* (H&P: 113). Clausewitz points here to the harsh reality of battle, which is more alarming than exciting.

Clausewitz continues, suggesting that intensifying levels of danger influence rational thinking and *"...that the light of reason is refracted in a manner quite different from that which is normal in academic speculation"*. He continues stating that the exceptional man is he who *"...keeps his powers of quick decision intact if he has never been through this experience before"*. Furthermore, he argues that people can get used to danger and that *"...after half-an-hour we hardly notice our surrounding anymore"*. He suggests, *"...the ordinary man can never achieve a state of perfect unconcern in which his mind can work with normal flexibility"*. Therefore, he argues ordinary qualities are not enough to operate as needed. Moreover, *"...the greater the area of responsibility, the truer this assertion becomes"* (ibid: 113-114).

Clausewitz points to the possibility that when danger is present, a logic or rationale might come into play that is different than that which occurs in a more stable, less violent situation. At the same time, people can become used to danger and he puts forward that it is only extraordinary people who are able to see through what is happening and to act accordingly, and that this becomes more important where the responsibility of the individual increases.

10.3 Danger and Nepal's international aid community

Respondents across the board approached the issue of danger more from an organisational angle, i.e. in terms of the management of security risks, than from a psychological perspective, as Clausewitz appears to do. This rather organisational focus might reflect the way interview questions were phrased, or it might indicate a sub-optimal insight into the various psychological pressures on field staff generated by the conflict.

However, the focus on the organisational perspective might not be a surprise given the suggestions of one respondent that although “...agencies claimed to be concerned with the grass roots level...they were on the contrary at the same time hardly aware of the huge political transformation on the ground” (A5). If we take this line, that the management of an agency is hardly aware of the political transformation on the ground, then it is also not very likely that there was much awareness or sensitivity within an aid agency to the psychological issues of field and other staff generated by this rather rapid political transformation. Where this was the case, aid agency staff could have picked up ‘signals’ from field staff about the changing field realities. Consequently, this paragraph provides insights as to how security risks and their management by aid agencies add to the totality of friction in the operational environment of an aid operation.

In any case, in the context of violent transformation, aid workers are most likely not immune from the indirect or direct actions of conflicting parties during the course of a violent conflict. In Nepal’s context, one respondent described his personal position and that of his colleagues as being either ‘*tortured*’ by the Maoists or ‘*pressurized*’ by the Security Forces (A25).

Although this chapter does not aim to quantify and specify the number and type of security incidents and threats faced by aid workers, it is fair to say that aid workers experienced various real and perceived conflict related security risks, ranging from the continuous daily rumour of (possible) threats to staff by either side of the conflict to being actually enclosed in live battle situations for as long as the battles between Maoists and Security Forces lasted. This range of possibilities added to the levels of anxiety among staff. Box 10.1 below presents a list of ‘danger situations/ security-

related incidents` aid agency staff could face in the course of their work up to 2005/06, drawn from my own field experience, from running numerous security management sessions in different parts of the country, and from the interview responses.

Box 10.1: Selected overview of security incidents

- Bandhs, blockades and torching of vehicles (A45/ A35)
- Being caught up in crossfire or bombing (for example in Nepalgunj) (personal communication with various aid workers based in Nepalgunj)
- Damage to aid agency offices (for example, UMN office in Jumla and CARE office in Achham)
- Detention, abduction, kidnap or arrest (personal 'management' involvement)
- Demands and threats made by phone or face-to-face by fake or genuine Maoists (personal communication)
- Helicopter raids (personal communication, 2004/ A68)
- Hijacking of agency vehicles (personal communication, 2004/ 2005)
- Physical harm by drunken soldiers (personal communication, A17/ A62)
- Publicly announced death threats to field staff (A12)
- Killing of local staff (for example RCIW staff/ Kalikot, 2005)
- Landmine/IEDs incidents while on the road (or example, personal communication with drivers of project based in Ghorai/ Dang district, 2000. Also IED incident with UN marked vehicle ferrying five government forest rangers, personal communication with programme member, 2004 Parsa district)
- Regular and irregular road-blocks manned by either Security Forces or Maoists
- Resource diversions of aid agency assets by either Maoists or RNA (personal communication, A63/ A65)
- Threat of rape made to female aid worker by a soldier (personal communication, 2004)

It is reasonably fair to say that in a context where the Maoists were over time able to influence at least 70% of the countryside (A24/ A33), "*foreign aid workers were never attacked, except through being at the wrong place at the wrong time*" (A15). And, if in the wrong place at the wrong time, they were often treated with respect (by the Maoists) (A63).

Although, the list above might fit with Nepal's "*warrior culture*" (Van Houten 2009), the various perceived and real dangers, however, did not, according to my understanding, contribute to a conducive environment for the conduct of aid operations. In other words, it added to the process of friction. The following danger-related sources of friction emerged from the interviews.

To begin with, the deteriorating security situation influenced processes of trust within communities, between communities and aid agencies and amongst agency staff (A5/A8). One respondent took the view that due to deteriorating security situation, "*Nobody trusted anybody anymore*" (A63). This might be a quite unqualified position, however it makes clear the levels of trust were at least negatively affected by the conflict.

A second danger-related source of friction related to the understanding of danger faced by staff and agencies' capacity to manage it. Not only was the conflict itself acknowledged relatively late on within aid agencies, the fact that staff experienced danger because of the conflict was realised equally late on. A respondent from one of the leading agencies stated "*Our agency started around 2002 to realise that there was a security problem for staff*" (A22). Someone else observed that, "*most big organisations did not have dedicated staff who knew something about security*", while the same respondent admitted receiving "*...only a few hours of security training prior to departing to Nepal*" (A12). Overall, it was suggested that security management responses by aid agencies, for example in terms of security and risk assessments, were rather pragmatic (A1). It was also suggested that the deteriorating security situation in the country required a different leadership style in agencies and that, in addition, organisational mechanisms to improve security needed to be changed (A12/ A17). The latter, it was suggested, was hindered by administrative complications (A1), while those in conflict and security advisory roles were often ignored or not listened to (A47/ A59).

A third danger-related source of friction comprised differences in perception and responses vis-à-vis conflict-related danger. It was suggested that Nepali staff perceived

danger differently than foreigners in their agencies,²¹⁵ but that the latter introduced rules and regulations to deal with it, which were not perceived as appropriate by the former because these rules and procedures were generic and not context-specific (A6). This discrepancy was illustrated by a story of a respondent about a consultant of International Labour Organisation (ILO) on a field trip not being allowed to stay overnight in a certain hotel close to the project area, such that they needed to travel a total of 60 km for adequate accommodation. This, according to the respondent, did not make sense given the local security situation (A46). Moreover, it was argued that security messages (from for example the UN) often did not relate to the ground realities, subsequently causing *"a lot of psychological fear"* among Nepali staff, while *"...it is safer to be a foreigner than a Nepali, apart from random incidents"* (A46). Another respondent confirmed this view stating that, *"...Nepali staff faced more pressure than me, as it appeared that they were on somebody's side"* (A63).

Another difficulty contributing to danger-related friction were the dilemmas of balancing security risks with other considerations. Agencies faced a dilemma between staff security on one hand and programme continuation on the other hand (A17/ A62). These dilemmas were approached differently by different agencies. One respondent suggested that his organisation balanced personal field security and income security (A24). Another agency representative suggested approaching security management and subsequent risk-taking by balancing staff security against the interests of the poor (A40). Another agency, influenced by fears from his headquarters, appeared to balance staff security with the possibility of resource diversion to conflicting parties (A15).

Another respondent suggested that the intended introduction by the Nepali government of the Integrated Security Development Plan (ISDP) around 2003 posed a dilemma for agencies (A64). In this plan the Nepali army would provide protection for the development activities of aid agencies. Although the plan appeared initially attractive it was, after internal debate, resisted by the various aid agencies, because *"although in some conflicts sensible to do in this case development would be taken out of the middle space and put to one side; the corner of the government and the army"* (A64).

²¹⁵ To my understanding was the risk profile between and within Nepali nationals and expatriates different.

To close with, danger-related friction was also linked to perceived risk-averse behaviour by aid agencies (A33), with serious threats such as abductions being the prime reason to suspend or to close some aid activities (A24). The existence of danger was, for some, the prime factor in deciding to stop aid work (A61). Others used the security situation as an excuse to withdraw field offices to regional centres like Nepalgunj (A53). While others used the security situation to justify the wind-down of dysfunctional programmes (A12). One respondent suggested along similar lines, that in relation to the security management of aid activities it was often not necessarily about protecting programmes, but about the cutting of unsuitable programmes (A64). Now we turn to the reflective section of this chapter.

10.4 Reflection

The points raised above suggest that danger affects aid operations by its perceived or actual existence and by an aid agency's responses to it. In addition, real or perceived danger did not only affect local communities or conflicting parties, but it also hit a psychological point of gravity within aid agencies as it stifled the operations aid agencies were involved in and therefore their internal workings.²¹⁶ Moreover, real or perceived danger in the operational environment does not bring an aid operation closer to its ideal form, even if the ideal form of an aid operation has included the existence of danger.

Clausewitz argues that danger, like physical effort, is a source of friction. Therefore, an aid strategist should not take the existence of danger in a turbulent operational environment lightly. At the same time, to allow the existence of danger to overshadow all other considerations vital to getting an aid operation on track is not wise either. Considering all options of how conflict-related danger in the operational environment might threaten the success of an aid operation may further a strategy, which has the protection from danger as a core aim. In other words, an aid strategist who thinks that everything in the operational environment is dangerous becomes a victim of his own fear, and risks creating a space whereby security management could transform itself as the goal, whereby the aid operation is the means.

²¹⁶ Idea of the 'psychological point of gravity' borrowed with thanks from Kilcullen (2009).

The question remains as to how, within the context of the 'aid trinity', an aid strategist might strike a balance between keeping staff and aid operations free from the negative consequences of danger, without on the other hand hampering the aid operation they are involved in. In other words, how could aid operations successfully be pursued despite danger in the operational environment? The answer to this might vary according to context, but three issues stand out as requiring consideration in any context, namely the initial response to danger, the understanding of danger and the approach to danger.

Responding to danger To begin with, danger could be real but is an issue of perception as well. An aid strategist, assuming he is a foreigner with lots of overseas experiences, might have more experience of aid operations than the national staff in his agency, but, to borrow Clausewitz's expression, is more of a '*novice*', to danger in a given operational environment than national staff, who could be seen as the experts as they might have been confronted with the reality of danger from the beginning of a conflict.

From the perspective of being a '*novice*' it is not unlikely that an aid strategist will underestimate that which he has not himself experienced or cannot see. At the same time, he might overestimate what he clearly can 'see' and what actually happens close to him. In Nepal, decision-makers based in Kathmandu were not only far removed from actual danger, not necessarily able to 'see' what was actually happening in the operational environment, they were, as expatriates and partly due to high turnover rates within the aid agencies, also most often relatively new on the scene.²¹⁷ This process might have contributed to slow organisational responses to the existence of danger adding to processes of friction. However, what might be out of sight for an aid strategist and subsequently be underestimated and probably not responded to, might be vital for the functioning of an aid operation and its staff in particular, who may be directly and personally exposed to danger. A relaxed response to danger, for example by not taking staff concerns seriously, might influence morale negatively and therefore

²¹⁷ It was suggested that going on field-visits was a good antidote to the so-called 'Kathmandu bubble' (A64).

add to friction.²¹⁸ Ideally this should be avoided. In the case of Nepal, this was addressed by, at least in the case of some agencies, to visit staff in the field (A18) and making clear to staff that the country office could provide back up (A2). However, the data presented above equally suggests that an organisational response to danger, which does not fit the reality as perceived by (national) staff, might unnecessarily have a negative impact on actual operations, with a knock-on affect on staff morale, resulting in increased danger-related friction.

The data suggests that at least a few agencies improved their security capacity relatively late on. This does not mean that national staff had not developed their own mechanism to deal with conflict-related danger at a much earlier stage of the conflict.²¹⁹ In general, those new staff tasked with security emphasised merely managerial responses, to danger, which tended to be general in nature and de-contextualised. This heightened a situation whereby the initial reasons for aid operations could have been sidelined, as these aid operations tended to become rather restrictive in nature, hampering aid staff's efforts to reach out to communities beyond the reach of the government system. In the Nepal case, this process might have antagonised local communities and have played into the hands of the Maoists, as the implications of security restrictions added to sentiments of distrust towards aid agencies. Therefore, an aid strategist should be aware that security measures might fit the culture of the agency he works for, but might not necessarily fit with what is actually happening on the ground and the cultural context in which these measures have to be implemented. In this case they might have hampered poverty reduction efforts and processes of conflict de-escalation. In other words, a response to danger implies the need to understand danger in the context in which it occurs. This necessarily means that an aid strategist needs to move beyond the 'novice' stage as quickly as possible.

²¹⁸ Respondent A35 suggested that it was not uncommon that staff had to buy safety with money and project resources.

²¹⁹ I can recall a field visit in 2000 to Ghorai, The district headquarter of Dang district. During this visit and conversations with local staff, I became aware of the risk of 'explosives on the road'. I asked them what they were doing about it. The answer was approximately as follows: *"it is quite simple, if we go with a vehicle on field trip, we avoid being the first one or the second one that day making use of the road. We allow the police patrol to go first, as they are the targets of the Maoists, and then we let buses go afterwards. If nothing has happened we will use the road"*.

Understanding danger in the context In Nepal, danger within the operational environment of aid operations was mainly perceived by aid agency staff from a single epistemological perspective; namely a managerial one. This perspective focused on the existence of risks in the operational environment and their management.²²⁰ Without rejecting the practical importance of this approach, I would like to suggest that an aid strategist might gain a fuller understanding of danger if he adds two additional perspectives when thinking through danger within the context of the ‘aid trinity’.²²¹

The first additional perspective, is not focused on questions such as what are the dangers in the operational environment and what to do about it, but focuses on the relationship between danger and the various interactions between structures and processes of various local communities, institutional spheres and conflicting parties in which aid operations are embedded. This does not mean rejecting managerial approaches to danger, but invites the aid strategist to look into the way danger is produced and reproduced in these dynamic interactive processes within the ‘aid trinity’ and what that might mean for aid operations. This perspective invites the aid strategist to look beyond the direct dangers an aid operation is confronted with, and to get a feel for how danger is perceived, produced and reproduced by aid agency staff and other actors in the operational environment.²²²

The second additional perspective on danger focuses on the way danger is discussed by various actors in the operational environment and staff in particular, and what the overall responses to danger in the operational environment might be. In this case, an aid strategist is invited to look, within the framework of the ‘aid trinity’, into what aid staff of their own and other agencies understand to be a danger, how they discuss these and practise their responses to them. One might have ‘discovered’ biases among staff in how they perceived and acted upon danger and perhaps used the excuse of the ‘existence’ of danger to further the goals of those actors in the ‘aid trinity’ they had an affiliation with or were loyal to.

²²⁰ This is an approach promoted by for example RedR, a UK based security-training agency.

²²¹ Lupton (1999), *Risk*, Routledge, London, UK. Lupton refers to weak and strong constructivist positions towards risk, which are thankfully used in the discussion below.

²²² This approach is maybe reflected in an approach developed by Risk Management Office of DFID/GTZ, and is titled *Safe and Effective Development in Conflict (SEDC) (RMO 2005)*. SEDC combines Mary Anderson’s *Do No Harm* approach and RedR security framework approach. A respondent saw merging these two approaches as a “light-bulb moment” (A18).

In the case of Nepal, I would like to contend that this threefold approach could have been equally as fruitful if not more so than using the managerial approach to security in isolation. It would have encouraged the aid community to do some soul-searching about their own way of working, for example how they interacted with and were perceived by local communities and conflicting parties. By examining the way danger was produced and reproduced, aid agencies might have learned that by their very way of operating they could have created, despite all good intentions, resentment that might on occasion present itself as security problem. In addition, aid strategists might have realised that national staff perceived the existence of danger in the operational environment, exactly because of their position in the operational environment.

Overall, the managerial approach to danger practised in Nepal, for example by the UN, was mainly about getting the security measures right and ensuring their implementation, while an aid strategist should have been on the whole more concerned with the interaction between the various actors in the 'aid trinity' on one hand, and the aid operations he was responsible for on the other, in order to contribute to strategic modifications to lower the overall levels of danger in the operating environment. This sounds easy, but requires, alongside changes in the policy given by the institutional sphere of the aid strategist, changes to the way an aid agency wants to engage with actors in the operational environment, which, in turn, might influence the political dynamics. This, however, if not handled well, might provoke responses that may perhaps threaten an aid operation or the agency involved as well. Now we move to the issue of risk averse and risk taking behaviour in relation to aid operations.

Risk behaviour One respondent argued that: "*...if there is no willingness to take risk then you have to go home*" (A29). However, in general terms, the aid community in Nepal was seen as showing risk-averse behaviour. The approach to danger was part of this as well. This was partly reflected in the restrictive nature of the security measures implemented to deal with potential security risks. However, the data do not indicate if this was the aid community's default position or a clear choice. Despite the overall risk-averse nature of the aid community examples could be found whereby agencies or

(networks of) individuals within these agencies took a risk-taking approach (A25/ A63/ A29).²²³

Risk-averse behaviour by agencies and the notion of the ideal form of aid do not necessarily go hand in hand. The ideal form of aid more or less implies risk-taking, as the concept implies a positive aim: reaching out to local communities, despite possible danger. However, within the context of the 'aid trinity', a risk-taking approach is not necessarily better than a risk-averse approach or vice versa. Therefore, the art of a good aid strategist might include being able to grasp which approach might be appropriate and being able to realise it in the strategy and implementation of an aid operation.

An aid operation could be based on risk-taking, if alongside the willingness of staff to navigate danger,²²⁴ it is clear that potential violent actors within the operational environment do not respond directly with violence if their interests are threatened by presence of an aid operation. A risk-taking approach might become problematic if violence can be expected towards staff of an aid operation, if the operation is not well perceived by one or more of the conflicting parties and if the expected benefits of the aid operation are perceived as minimal by those responsible for implementing it and actors in the Institutional sphere supporting the operation.

If the operational environment does not favour a risk-taking approach and agency staff are not willing to navigate through dangerous situations and are not prepared to deal with the eventual consequences, a risk-averse approach might preferred.²²⁵ However, an aid strategist should be aware of the possibility that by allowing security measures to become too stringent he could cripple the modalities of aid operations which in fact could be acceptable to key actors in the operational environment, and by so doing deny local communities potentially the benefit from them. This might sometimes have

²²³ These risks did not necessarily related with risks related to violence produced by the conflict, but with the political and social dynamics of the conflict within the operational environment. Examples are expanding or initiating programmes or projects, or maintaining a physical presents in the field.

²²⁴ One respondent showed a willingness to take risks and by doing so reduced personal risk: "*I realised that I would end up in danger, if would not leave the district headquarter and work in the villages, as I will be perceived by anybody else doing nothing*" (A63).

²²⁵ The Basic Operation Guidelines, emphasizing the reasons why aid agencies were present in Nepal, could be perceived as a collective and strategic attempt to rectify the risk-averse approach within the aid community.

occurred in Nepal out of fear of possible violent consequences of pushing the boundaries of the conflicting parties in order to obtain operational space for aid activities. In one such case a road project in Eastern Nepal was suspended for a considerable amount of time (A29/ A31).

Although much more could be said, I would like to close with one remark. Overall, it is more comfortable, but not necessarily more satisfactory, to be risk-averse vis-à-vis danger in a turbulent environment, than risk-taking. To counter this trend an aid strategist might, instead of asking how the effect of danger can be nullified or managed thoroughly, ask to what extent security measures within the agency can be applied, without compromising the ideal form of aid in the given operational environment. This said it is still possible that, by approaching the problem of how to deal in the process of strategizing with danger in the operational environment in this way, the description of what the ideal form of aid might be might tend to shift in favour of managerial measures to reduce the possibility of facing danger and its consequences. In other words, the responsibility for staff safety does not necessarily lead to a clear and creative assessment of how the ideal form of aid delivery in a given context might be furthered. Now we move to Part III and elaborate on the notion of strategy and some related aspects.

PART III

Chapter 11 On Strategy

11.1 Introduction

Clausewitz offers his perspectives on strategy in merely 8 pages in Book 3 Chapter 1. In retrospect, the notion of strategy was important to me during my time in Nepal in the sense that it helped me to reflect on the strategies of the international aid community as a whole and the agencies I worked for in particular, and how this related to the compounding conflict. At first sight one could gain the impression that the CPN-M in conjunction with the PLA operated on the basis of a war plan, with a well fleshed-out strategy, while the government and the army embarked on the conflict with a series of ill-prepared and disconnected campaign plans, and actors within the aid community in general strategized their activities within this context as they were only involved in and concerned with battles for the benefit of their own turf.

This chapter does not aim to elaborate on the strategies applied by the conflicting parties; neither will it suggest that aid agencies were solely focused on '*turf-battles*'. The chapter contends that, owing to friction, strategizing aid operations in a turbulent environment such as Nepal is a difficult process. The strategy of an aid operation is liable to fail if it does not allow for friction in general, and friction in the process of strategizing itself. This friction may give the impression that aid agencies are embroiled in turf-battles, while they actually may try to strategize and act accordingly.

11.2 Clausewitz and Strategy²²⁶

Clausewitz defines strategy as "*the use of an engagement for the purpose of the war*". Within this context the strategist shapes individual campaigns and decides during these campaigns on the individual engagements. The reason for this, according to Clausewitz, is that most of the assumptions on which the war plan is based might not be correct, and therefore "*...more detailed orders cannot be determined in advance at all, it follows that the strategist must go on campaign himself*".

²²⁶ H&P: 177-183.

Clausewitz states, *“Everything in strategy is very simple, but that does not mean that everything is very easy”*. On the one hand his task appears simple, bordering on continual repetition of action due to the means and forms employed. On the other hand, Clausewitz suggests, this is not the case due to the political conditions and questions around what *“a war is meant to achieve and what it can achieve... ”*. It is therefore *“in the highest realms of strategy that intellectual complications and extreme diversity of factors and relationships occur.”* Clausewitz implicitly ridicules those critics who exclude from strategic thinking *“...all moral qualities...and reduce everything to a few mathematical formulae of equilibrium and superiority, of time and space, limited by a few angles and lines”*.

Clausewitz suggests that in the case of strategy, in opposition to a tactical situation, *“...everything has to be guessed at and presumed. Conviction is therefore weaker. Consequently most generals, when they, ought to act, are paralyzed by unnecessary doubts”*.

Partly due to this guesswork and need for presumption on the level of strategy there is: *“...ample room for apprehensions, one's own and those of others: for objections and remonstrations and, in consequence, for premature regrets”*. It takes therefore according to Clausewitz *“...more strength of will to make an important decision in strategy than in tactics”*. As in the realm of tactics *“one is carried away by the pressures of the moment, caught up in a maelstrom where resistance would be fatal... ”*. Now, we move to how the term strategy resonated within the Nepal's aid community.

11.3 Strategy and Nepal's international aid community

The interview data appear to suggest that during the research period the role of strategy within Nepal's aid community vis-à-vis the efforts to reduce poverty and conflict were rather ambiguous. This does not mean that there were no strategies at all within the aid community; the opposite may even be true: *“There were many types of strategies”* (A39).²²⁷ From the data five interlinked themes emerged, which in general terms

²²⁷ Ghani and Lockart, in their book *Fixing Failed States*, argue in relation to the issue of strategy in comparable lines. They observe, after first referring to Clausewitz's military theories, that the term strategy adapted by development and humanitarian agencies are not using the term correctly, but

appear to suggest that the strategic behaviour of the international aid community as a whole and individual agencies in particular did not necessarily reduce friction in the process of aid delivery. Overall, it seems that strategic behaviour compounded friction already present in the process of addressing poverty and conflict.

The six themes identified relate to the definition of strategy, elements of strategy, the character of strategizing within the international aid community as a whole and within individual agencies, factors related to strategic changes, and factors related to friction on a collective and individual level within the aid community. These six themes are inter-related but will be presented separately. In addition, it must be made clear that the following overview might provide an incomplete and rather descriptive picture and does not necessarily touch on the inner workings of strategizing processes.

Definitions of strategy Overall the responses appear to suggest, with the usual exceptions, that the issue of strategy across the aid community in Kathmandu between 2000 and 2005/06 was not necessarily given a great deal of attention. This was partly reflected in responses related to the meaning of strategy. Four quotations are presented below, all taken from aid practitioners whom I greatly admire for the way in which, as far as my observation went, they sincerely struggled in the face of many challenges to keep development and humanitarian work going.

The first respondent is rather precise in his definition, while the other three respondents faced challenges pinning down the meaning of strategy in the context of an aid agency. According to the first respondent a strategy is “...*a deliberate and considered plan for achieving your goals and purposes. There are lots of steps in that process...*” (A17). The three other interviewees were less precise in their definitions. One responded to the idea of describing the notion of strategy with: “*Oh dear... it is a high level thing... it has to do with the way you work... you have your objectives or your purposes or your goal or how you want to call it... your vision perhaps and you have a strategy to get to that vision...it sets out what you want to achieve...*” (A26). Another reasoned as follows: “*I suppose...it is what you do in response to what the analysis says... it is the way forward... to get to where you want to get to. So, it is your approach...it is the set*

adopt multiple strategies instead violating the underlying principle of the notion of strategy, being unity of purpose and focus (2008: 170).

of things you do. There must be a nice way to say what strategy is" (A29). The last interviewee responded with: *"Strategy? ...I never thought about this. I guess...I would say that the mission that I remember from my agency was: reduce poverty and tackle social exclusion in order to lay a basis for any permanent and sustainable peace. The strategy should have been along the lines of...undertaking development"* (A35).

This thesis is not concerned with the correctness of the responses given, but rather with the fact that there is not really a common idea of what strategy might mean in the context of an aid agency operating in a turbulent environment. For interviewee A26 a strategy relates to *"what you want to achieve..."*. In case of respondent A29 the notion of strategy relates merely to *"...the set of things you do..."* and respondent A35 appears to relate strategy to an undefined set of parameters activities need to fulfil: *"...assistance that provides the optimum output and optimum improvement of people's lives in the short and medium term..."*. Only interviewee A17 seems to suggest that strategy relates –not necessarily primarily- to the ‘how’ of achieving goals and purposes, which in turn is reflected in a plan.

Such diverse responses could indicate at least two things. Firstly, they might reflect the watering down of strategy’s original meaning.²²⁸ Secondly, they might reflect an underestimation of the importance of strategy and strategy formulation within aid agencies and the communities they are part of. Whatever may be the case, I would suggest that the lack of a clear, common idea of what strategy is compounded the processes of friction. Now, we turn to how insiders and close observers of the international community spoke about the elements applied within the process of strategizing.

Elements of strategizing Respondents pointed to several elements important to consider in the process of strategizing. Firstly, it was suggested that the aid agency itself is a key element, in terms of the overall and long-term vision of the agency (A49), the agency’s mandate and capacity (A29), and organisational strength (A17). Then, respondents pointed to the potential target groups of aid agencies, which were

²²⁸ See as well Strachan H. (2008) *The lost meaning of Strategy*, in: *The Strategy Reader*, Mahnken T.G. and J. A. Maiolo (eds.), Routledge, UK.

defined in terms of needs of local communities within target areas, or communities or the country as a whole (A29, A49), and subsequent priority areas (A17).²²⁹

Next, actors and their actions were highlighted in terms of *“Government in all forms, legitimate or not the official government structures and unofficial de-facto authorities, other aid organisations and local groups”* (A26). The same respondent said that especially considering the other aid agencies is essential in strategizing processes, because *“...nowadays it is very rare that you are the only agency in the area and the way these agencies are operating provides expectations and sets precedents”* (A26). Furthermore, one respondent suggested that the agency headquarter should be considered in the process of analysing and strategizing as well. He acknowledged however that as head of agency *“...you are not a free agent. You have to take your headquarters with you, you have a position which is actually defined by your agency. But you are able to influence that”* (A64). The same respondent argued that strategy comes to a certain extent from shared analysis. But that this shared analysis could be a battleground of *“...of departmental views and conflicts or differences of views about the situation and what is going on and what should be done about it”* (A64).

In addition, it was argued that global developments in relation to international development aid in general (A12) and events with global ramifications like 9/11 and the War on Terror (A31) should be included as well as they could influence agency headquarters' position. Moreover, a theory of change was also seen as an element of strategy formulation (A29). Another element suggested in the process of strategizing related to the time dimension related to the interactions between an aid agency and needs within the operational environment (A49/ A29), this included as well the experiences of a given agency in addressing particular needs in the past (A49), how the situation in the operational environment might develop (A29), and this subsequently could influence emerging needs and how much experience the agency has with these new needs (A49). To finalise, two respondents elaborated on some of the processes by which aid agencies gained understanding of their operational environment in relation to

²²⁹ However it was suggested that these local communities should not be seen as homogeneous or stable. The notion of community is *“...misleading as there is not a community, there is a whole bunch of interactive communities and groups, which change and shift over time”* (A26).

analysis and its use in strategy formulation. The first respondent explored the need for experience in the operational environment: *"it is absolutely essential to have some 'modicum of experience' and that cannot be gotten...from reading background material and briefings and stuff like that. You have to go out and that see it actually yourself. Should every aid worker have a two-week intensive immersion experience in a village? Maybe. I think that learning takes place in a embodied manner, there are different environments which cannot be understood without actually living in them"* (A5). Another respondent focused primarily the importance of local knowledge and knowing how this local knowledge is actually produced (A4). Now, we move to a storyline related to the character of strategy within the international community.

Strategy within the international aid community Despite the somewhat heterogeneous nature of the aid community in Kathmandu, a rather consistent view emerged about the overall character of the strategy employed by the international aid community as a whole vis-à-vis poverty and conflict reduction. These views ranged from a lack of coherence, to a situation whereby strategy was replaced by a form of tactics. This range of views is presented below.

Firstly, In relation to the issue of coherence one respondent saw a lack of a coherent strategy among donors. *"If you talk about donors, the donors do not have a coherent strategy in Nepal. There are donors who think that growth and equality are complementary and there are donors who think that growth and equality are contradictory"* (A15).

Secondly, the perceived lack of coherence was also reflected in the strategy of the aid community regarding the compounding conflict in Nepal. One insider was quite open regarding the absence of strategizing within the donor community and what they could do as group to help prevent a further escalation of the situation: *"There was not much strategizing going on. There was a lot of discussion (as to) whether Nepal was in a humanitarian crisis in some parts, but there was not a lot strategy about what should be done to prevent things from getting worse...It was more of what has Nepal said in terms of development plan for this year and what are we going to do to support it...what money have we got, how are we going to use this and how does this fit in with whatever they say...No, I would not say that there was a lot of strategizing..."* (A28).

Next, another equally well-informed interviewee argued regarding the presence of strategy and strategizing along similar lines: “... *in general they did not [strategize], and of course there were exceptions, but it was an issue that was avoided. If you look at the ideas of working around conflict, working in conflict and working on conflict, most of the agencies worked up to 2003 or 2004 with a working around conflict strategy...they were avoiding the conflict*” (A34). Another, equally well-informed respondent argued that the international community did not apply so much a ‘working around conflict’ strategy but an avoidance strategy resulting in a conflict-blind approach by the aid agencies (A1).

A similar well-informed respondent offered a (slightly) more positive view, arguing that the agencies did not apply so much an avoidance or ‘working around’ conflict strategy, but that most of them applied a ‘working in conflict’ strategy. A respondent suggested “*We were working with an in conflict mode, as only a few donors realized that they should work on conflict addressing hierarchical power needs, working on the issue of social injustice* (A15).

It is doubtful if this focus on a working around or working in conflict strategy was a clear and conscious choice. One respondent argued in relation to this matter, “*For a start, my overall impression is that there was a very long delay until most of the aid agencies...governmental or non-governmental started to recognize the nature and severity of the conflict and the fact that it meant that they could not carry on with their business as normal*” (A44). Another view suggested that most of the aid agencies did not have so much a strategy on their own, but that the government drove this. “*As an overall observation it could be said that most development aid organisations were more directed by the government than by their concerted strategy as change agents*” (A67). However, the problem of this was not so much that the government of Nepal drove strategies, but that the government of Nepal was in denial of the conflict and “*pursuing the conflict*” (A5).

This line of thought was echoed and expanded by a respondent who suggested that the aid agencies not only followed the government line on strategy, but that this strategy actually became a form of survival tactics, with a consequent growing inattention to communities at grass roots level: “... *in pursuing a strategy the international*

development agencies used only tactics...they had only tactics in other words...appease, agree and endorse the government and do not engage with them on core issues, otherwise they might chase you out...by doing so the groups on the ground were ignored..." (A34).

One might expect that, after the official end of the conflict in 2006, the aid industry would have adjusted its strategy in order to address the causes of Nepal's conflict. According to one well-informed insider, this has not been the case: "*if you look at the current three-year plan, recently produced by the government and agreed by most of the donors, you don't see a real clear cut strategy to address the structural causes of the conflict*" (A15). This might imply that the Nepali government, in conjunction with the majority of donors, are reasonably well equipped to adapt slowly to the reality of civil war and its aftermath.

Having explored issues relating to strategy in the international aid community, where we have seen terms such as "*lack of coherence*", "*absence of strategy*", "*avoidance strategy*" and "*survival tactics*", we will move on to elaborate on strategy in relation to individual agencies.

Strategy within individual agencies The above section suggests that the overall strategy of the aid community in Kathmandu was perceived as being at best not formulated in a timely fashion nor optimally addressing the compounding situation in the country. This view is echoed in the 'strategic' responses of individual aid agencies. While a full overview of strategic responses of individual agencies cannot be given, four different responses are presented below to give an idea of the strategic responses of the various individual agencies. The four identified strategic responses could be labelled as: 1) reactive and inattentive, 2) formally non-reactive, but informally adaptive, 3) gradual, and in step with the conflict, and 4) taken by surprise, but swiftly adapting.

The first type of strategic response to the compounding situation in the country could be described as rather reactive and inattentive to local needs and consequences. One respondent suggested that his agency, instead of responding to the changing situation in the operational environment and in particular to communities at grass-roots level,

shifted its attention to the needs of intermediary organisations, subsequently relinquishing its role as a change agent. *“My agency became basically reactive. They responded basically to the needs of the Nepal government and the local intermediary organisations...rather than that they knew why certain requests had evolved, nor what the effect would be of the interventions. Before their separation from the development ministry (around 1998-1999) most projects were based on a specific development policy for an equally specific target population, and had a detectable course of development. With the introduction of the agency’s new mission statement the strategy analysis was not needed any more as they were driven by the demands of their new clients: the local intermediary organisations and government ministries”* (A67). The respondent continued arguing that his agency, by not having its *“...own strategy anymore”* lost its function as a change agent and basically followed other aid organisations with a *“...wait and see attitude”* (A67).²³⁰

The second type of agency response could be described as non-reactive, but informally adaptive to the changing situation in the country. One respondent argued that the agency he was heading up felt, like other agencies, sandwiched between the government and its unofficial equivalent and subsequently felt the need to make a strategic choice between a continuation of activities as usual or a cessation of operations. The agency decided to continue, but in the words of the respondent to *“stay back”* at the same time and to educate and sensitize the Maoists about the importance of development aid as means *“to keep the people happy...”*. It was suggested that this strategy worked very well (A40). However, the respondent acknowledged that real adjustment of the agency’s strategy was slower than it could have been. While the People’s War started in 1996; the respondent said *“In 2005/06 we renewed our strategy...what we actually did was reviewing our strategy and tried to contextualise it in a way, so that it can address all the social and political problems we were seeing in the country”* (A40).

A third type of aid agency response could be labelled as gradual, but in step with the conflict. One respondent seemed to imply that his agency moved from working around to working on conflict almost in parallel with the growing intensity of the conflict,

²³⁰ See as well the Nepali Times number 235 (18-25 January 2005), Interview with SNV Director Jan de Witte, <http://www.nepalitimes.com.np/issue/235/interview/1205> accessed on 06/03/2009.

stating that: *"We started to feel the heat in 2000 and...worked first around conflict, but slowly moved to working on conflict"* (A43).

A fourth type of strategic response could be described as taken by surprise, but swiftly adapting. One respondent, reflecting on the period around 2001, when he started to lead the agency concerned, observed on arrival a connection between the absence of corporate strategy and level of awareness of conflict-related dynamics in the operational environment: *"In those days you need to remember that this organization was split into several departments...there was no corporate strategy...there was no corporate anything here...there were delineated departments and each was run by a director or a coordinator. So, I think it was a total ignorance of what was really happening in this country and what the implications might be..."* (A12). The respondent suggested that from the moment this unpreparedness was realised a change process started, gearing the agency up to the conflict and the needs generated by it (A12). It is not clear however, when the agency realised their unpreparedness and when organisational measures were put in motion to counter it.

The material presented above suggests at least that a small proportion of aid agencies did not employ proactive strategies vis-à-vis the compounding conflict. In that sense the presented data are in agreement with the views presented about the role of strategy within the international community. Having said this, agencies did change strategies. In the section below factors related to strategic changes will be presented.

Strategy and factors for change Although respondents were generally not impressed by the way the international community responded to the growing turbulence in a strategic way, the interview data appear also to suggest that strategic changes took place at either a collective level or at the level of individual agencies. Without elaborating on the changes themselves, I would like to provide an overview of factors leading to these changes. According to the observations of one insider, these factors had neither to do with *"...new strategic insights or learning from tactical successes"* (A59). Factors contributing to strategic changes could be divided into two groups. The first group related to pressures from the institutional sphere of the aid agencies, the second to developments or events in the operational environment.

The pressures from the institutional sphere were perceived as rather top-down and the overriding factor in the operational environment when it came to changing agency modalities strategically. One respondent reflecting on the possibility of strategizing in the course of his work said, *“the whole strategy, which was the overarching principle, came from the headquarters and of course the nitty-gritty and the details of all of this were formulated here. But the main and overarching principle came from the headquarters”*. (A45) This statement does leave room for the inclusion of needs or dynamics in the operational environment in the strategy formulated by the institutional sphere of a given agency. It was suggested, however, that these specifics in the operational environment were not always considered. According to one insider, strategy and changes in strategy within the aid community of Kathmandu were mostly driven by top-down policy changes in the institutional sphere of the agencies concerned. He argued that strategic changes were *“...usually top-down...the policy will often be informed by a form of needs analysis or...this year it will be this type of excluded person, while another type of excluded person is forgotten. It is open to fads, if you see what I mean...trends and fashions...or policy changes at the centre. This year we concentrate on women only... or women’s education...etcetera”* (A18). This view was strongly echoed by another respondent arguing that in the case of the agency he worked for, the headquarters did not take Nepal’s situation into account. The respondent stated: *“In the case of my aid agency, strategic changes in Nepal were driven by policy changes on a corporate level, without considering Nepal’s dynamics”* (A67).

Despite the view that strategy and strategy changes within the international aid community of Kathmandu were mostly formulated through a top-down process, some respondents suggested that this was not necessarily always the case. Dynamics in the operational environment could make managers aware that (substantial) changes in agency programme strategies were needed. The actual reasons for these changes were phrased in rather general terms, were legally oriented or related to clearly identifiable conflict events subsequently affecting the political-military dynamics, in some cases substantially.

Examples of factors for strategic changes being phrased in such general and ambiguous terms were *“the situation in Nepal”* and the slowly deteriorating *“security situation”*

(A12). One example of a legal-oriented factor was a new law regarding the functioning of international aid agencies, the so-called '*Social Development Organization Act*', which during the time of the fieldwork had not been passed officially by the Nepal parliament, but was in the process of being implemented, hindering INGOs running their own projects (A12).

Strategic change within an agency or programme could equally arise from acute, high profile events taking place in the operational environment affecting the political-military dynamics of the conflict, and presumably intensifying the existing pressures and generating new pressures on existing and new programmes; an example follows below.

Shortly after the failure of the first ceasefire and subsequent series of peace negotiations between the representatives of the government and the Maoists, the PLA overran the barracks of the RNA in Ghorai, Dang district. By doing so, they not only took the RNA but the Nepali establishment by surprise as well and supplied themselves with substantial amounts of weaponry and ammunition. Which in turn forced the RNA to become actively engaged in the conflict as well, significantly changing the dynamics of the conflict. One respondent referring to this event in the context of strategy changes said, "*...in 2002, just after the Ghorai attack, we realized that we needed much more tangible benefits, things up front, as long term programmes as ours are not going to win the 'hearts and minds'. As the community needed quick impact, tangible benefits, so in 2002, we designed that...as the changes were very much grounded on what happened in the districts*" (A2). According to the interviewee this led to substantial changes to programme implementation and which programme elements got prioritised. The programme focus shifted from forestry to livelihoods and introduced a geographical cluster approach "*...so that people could see what was happening, the idea was then to engage where we could, ...to see what was possible and that was to a certain extent impacted by the army, letting us in, or the Maoists allowing us there*" (A2).

One case was identified whereby a respondent recalled balancing the possible political dynamics in the institutional sphere with dramatic changes in the dynamics of the operational environment in Nepal at the time of the Royal Coup of 1st February 2005.

Just after the Royal Coup, the respondent, as a key agency's representative, made a strategic choice to propose the closure of a programme of particular significance in terms of district coverage and potential impact on local level. The proposed closure was not primarily based on an assessment of the political-military dynamics of the operational environment in Nepal, although perceived as strongly negative, but rather on a political analysis of his agency's institutional sphere and the possible consequences for the agency's presence in Nepal as a whole (withdrawal), if no action was taken (for example the closure of a development programme). The agency representative speculated that by proposing the closure of a programme quickly, even before his superiors could respond to the events in Nepal by demanding total withdrawal, such a withdrawal could be avoided. This turned out well (A70).

These responses might suggest that there are not necessarily clear-cut reasons why agencies change their operational strategies. However, it appears that strategic changes took place primarily reactively rather than pro-actively. In addition, it seems that most often external factors precipitate change, either in the institutional sphere or in the domain of conflicting parties.

Strategy and friction within the international aid community This section tries to present, in relation to strategy various sources of friction within the international aid community as whole. The following section presents various sources of friction within individual agencies. These sources of friction are not presented in order of importance, and it should be noted that in reality the various sources of friction could be interlinked and strengthen each other. Taken together these sources of friction highlight the difficulties of strategy formulation by aid agencies in times of compounding turbulence.

The first source of friction related to strategizing within the international aid community as a whole is connected to the development policies applied by the government and subsequently backed by donors. One respondent stated that "*the neo-liberal strategies of the government were matched by World Bank and IMF strategies in most of the period between 1992 and 2000, and as a result National Plans prepared during this period did not really address the structural causes of poverty*" (A15). This might have added indirectly to the initiation and growth of the People's War.

Secondly, processes of denial within the Nepali establishment and among expatriates on management level in various aid agencies appear to have been a source of friction affecting strategy formulation. It was suggested that the Nepali elite mainly denied the existence of the Maoists, while at least some of the foreign aid managers largely denied the consequences of the conflict on their programmes.

One respondent referring to the issue of denial among the Nepali establishment stated: *"The biggest problem here...was that people within the establishment and actually the Nepali establishment were more guilty of this than the foreign establishment in my view, because it was the Nepali elite who shaped the perspectives of the development donors..."* (A5). According to this respondent, the Nepali establishment, suffered from a *"distancing strategy"* and made the fundamental mistake of denying the Maoists at an ideological level, not taking them seriously and perceiving them as *"a bunch of crooks out for power or money or something like that and not as a legitimate or genuine movement"* (A5). According to the same respondent, in the beginning – and even to my knowledge half way through the People's War- a myth was created and maintained that the Maoists were outsiders, not even appearing Nepalese, without a national perspective and trying only to disturb the peace (A5). In other words, *"the Nepali elite simply did not want to acknowledge that there might be such a serious problem"* (A5).

Another respondent presented an alternative view of friction caused by denial which did not focus so much on a Nepali establishment denial of the Maoists, rather on expatriate management levels within the aid agencies denying the conflict and its consequences. The respondent argued, *"...there was a lot of denial, not among those working on conflict, but amongst management and embassies that things were going to get worse or that anything could go wrong. There was always a thought and up to this day there still is this idea that this cannot happen to Nepal...that kind of language...within donors as a group"* (A28).

The process of denial of the conflict by expatriate managers might have been influenced by perceptions of risk within the international aid community. According to one respondent: *"They feel a high risk because of their orientation and sensitivity and all these instructions from their headquarters. They compared standards with*

standards within their own countries and if they do start comparing West-European standards, then obviously Nepal is a risky country." Thus processes of denial within the international aid community coincided with "*an avoidance strategy*" (A1).

Thirdly, another respondent argued that sources of friction affecting strategizing lay mainly in the expatriate part of the aid community, where unclear decision-making processes and personality issues played a role, and in turn led to risk aversion and survival behaviour. The respondent recalls: "*The whole point is that we had individuals who could have made a difference, but here the collective was less than the individuals, normally it is the other way around, the collective is greater. But here...we had a situation in the international community... whereby the collective was less...because the collective was not able to do anything...decision-making was terrible and a process was not there. There were hierarchies...there were individual personalities. So what individuals think is sometimes better than what the collective thinks. Here, the collective became the lowest common denominator and it is clear that the lowest common denominator is about aversion and survival, the blame game... All of those things were going on here...*" (A34).

Fourthly, the above mentioned factors might also have coincided with the historical and political dynamics between donor countries themselves: "*I think the terrible thing here is that the international community is still divided on its headquarters and political lines...and those distinctions could have been blurred here...because this was so unnecessary here...*" (A34). In addition, this process might have been compounded, as one respondent suggested, by the political dynamics generated by the Global War on Terror and reluctance of some donor countries to be associated with it (A31).

Fifthly, friction in the process of strategizing and finding an appropriate strategy for the compounding situation in Nepal could, according to one participant, be related to a lack of perspectives within the international aid community on the process of analysing and subsequently strategizing. For example, according to the respondent, expatriates with deep insights into the workings of Nepal and its development were sidelined: "*Analysis is about negotiating on different perspectives... if you do not have that (breadth) of perspectives and you negotiate on some small kind of understanding your implementation runs into problems...and that is where...the donors really were weak...*

I don't think that the donors actually embraced a wide enough perspective. There was a group of us in Kathmandu around 2002 to 2004 and 2005 who had been in Nepal for many years...with good Nepal experiences, good development experiences, but the donors did not want to know it... I felt at times that I was seen as a threat... ” (A4).

In the view of one participant, the war itself was a source of friction, which explains why the agencies as a rule did not immediately focus on addressing the conflict, since at least for some their own survival was perceived as more important: “...*Some donors started to work on conflict, but other donors were still working with an in conflict mentality: focusing on positioning themselves in order to secure safe operations in the conflict environments...* ” (A15).

One respondent suggested that turnover of key staff within aid agencies augmented friction in the strategizing processes, assuming that the international aid community could have identified an appropriate strategy to address the compounding situation in the country, but was not able to stick to it. Regarding the various heads of mission and their key advisors and the attempts to formulate strategy and to keep it on course, it was said: “*This is not a one man army, this is an alliance of people and if you replace the generals along the way, then you end up with a different strategy*” (A59). Assumed there was one in the first place.

Strategy and friction within individual aid agencies Thus far we have showed sources of friction in relation to strategizing within the international aid community as a whole. We will now focus on points of friction related to strategizing within individual aid agencies, while acknowledging that there may well be some areas where the two levels overlap and even reinforce each other.

The first source of friction prevalent at agency level was the depth and organisational requirement for analysis of the operational environment by agencies. One respondent implied that from his observations that this was insufficient, stating that: “*There needs to be much more political analysis about the area you are going into and obtaining as much information as possible and investigating what the potential projections might be...* ” (A3). Another respondent clearly stated that in his agency in depth analysis was perceived as no longer necessary due to corporate policy and the introduction of a new

mission statement: *“With the new mission statement of the agency a strategic analysis was not needed any more as the agency was driven by the demands of its new clients...”* as a consequence the agency, *“...became a free milking cow for technical assistance, training courses, travel and institution building”* (A67).

A (perceived) lack of leadership within the aid agencies was a further source of friction regarding the at best sub-optimally perceived presence of strategy within the international aid community. One respondent reflected: *“they were looking more over their shoulders, what is the US doing...what is DFID doing...”* (A34). It can be problematic for smaller agencies to wait for strategic analysis and direction from the larger donors, because there is no guarantee that the larger donors have a correct analysis quickly available, assuming that they want to share it. One respondent argued that it was not so much denial of the Maoists as a political movement or the increasing turmoil in the country that hampered strategizing processes within agencies, rather it was the time required to understand fully the nature of the Maoist movement, in terms of its origin, goals, modes of operation and strategy (A64).

The last source of friction regarding strategizing within agencies was the discouragement by senior management of strategic thinking on the part of individual staff members. One respondent argued that positive change required development workers with critical, analytical and strategic mindsets to translate the global agenda of an agency into a local perspective. However, *“this is not easy, because you will not be liked by your senior management...even seen as troublemaker and you risk losing your job...”* (A6). The above presentation of the various sources of friction affecting strategy formulation within the aid community as a whole and within individual agencies suggests that strategising aid operations in a turbulent environment is by no means a straightforward process and that progress is impeded at every stage along the way.

11.4 Reflection²³¹

The above overview presents a rather sombre picture of the character and appropriateness of the strategizing processes within Nepal’s aid community and their outcomes regarding poverty and conflict reduction during the research period.

²³¹ In this section use is made of Gray’s views on the difficulty of strategizing (2006: 74-80).

However, this does not automatically mean that development-related activities were not happening. The overview portrays elements of the strategic culture present within the aid community of Nepal,²³² and at the same time indicates that the chances of formulating successful aid operation strategies are slim, because strategizing aid in turbulent environments like Nepal is for at best very difficult and should therefore receive close attention.

Definition of strategy Clausewitz is clear what strategy is, namely the connection between engagements for the purpose of war. Those interviewed were less clear on the subject with views ranging from “*what you want to do*” (A26), via “*the sets of things you do*” (A29) to “*undertake development*” (A35) and “*a plan for how you want to achieve your purpose*” (A17). I would like to contend, in line with Clausewitz, that for the aid strategist a strategy is the connection between aid operation(s) (as a form of actual engagement) for the purpose of reducing poverty and conflict.

The aid strategist should consider which logic he primarily follows in the process of formulating strategy. Is it the logic of the given policy and how poverty and conflict reduction should look according to that policy and the aims behind it, or is it the logic of the reality on the ground in the operational environment?

The interview data appear to suggest that interventions were at least equally driven by the logic of policies dictated by headquarters as by that emerging from field realities. According to my understanding, efforts to strategize based on the logic of policies handed down from headquarters were more likely to lead to attempts to understand what to do with the policies as representatives of the international community, than to attempts to understand the actual structure of the problems in Nepal and to work from there. This process might be compounded by the fact that each of the aid agencies involved operated on the basis of policies initiated by their own headquarters, subsequently hindering the process of gaining a collective and deep understanding of the issues at hand. Due to these processes, there was a tendency within aid agencies to circumvent or play down the importance of thinking through future scenarios and their

²³² The term ‘strategic culture’ is gratefully borrowed from Gray (2006).

potential implications for aid operations, but more importantly the consequences for poverty and conflict.²³³

In this context an aid strategist might want to ask what his or her agency's definition or understanding of the term strategy is, how this term is internally practised and what that means for the perception of the nature of problems identified? If the institutional sphere of an aid agency tends to prefer implementing aid operations on the basis of policy, thinking about strategy might become focused on what to do with the given policy, while, according to Brodie, strategy is precisely the art of the how. (Brodie in: Gray 2006: 5).

An aid strategist could balance the above-described process by focusing initially on gaining an understanding of the dynamics of the operational environment and what an ideal aid operation might be given the context. This might help to direct the focus of the aid operation away from being fulfilling policy demands towards contextualising poverty and conflict reduction efforts. Of course how this might look like varies from context to context and depends on the individual aid strategist and his abilities to create the required organisational space.

Elements of strategy While Clausewitz has a rather comprehensive idea of elements to be included in strategizing war, the individual respondents were far less comprehensive than one might expect from people involved in strategizing aid operations. The elements highlighted by each individual might indicate what they really perceived as being essential elements, but it might equally indicate their personal preference and what they might have overlooked while strategizing their activities. If the latter were true then it might be argued that aid agencies in Nepal appear to have strategized their operations on the basis of a rather limited range of elements, most likely adding to the already existing processes of friction.

²³³ I clearly recall four occasions on which I tabled the importance of discussing future developments in Nepal, its possible consequences for the work we were doing in terms of relevance and appropriateness given the context and how we eventually could address these consequences. In each case, superiors or colleagues found the issue hardly worth discussing. (INF/ 2000 and 2001 Management board meetings in Pokhara and Surkhet, SNV-N/ Autumn 2002 and 2004, Planning meetings with sector managers and advisors).

The aid strategist might ask himself how he could avoid reducing strategizing processes to a limited or unbalanced set of elements and by doing so unnecessarily contributing to the processes friction. A first worthwhile realisation could be that there might be a natural tendency to simplify reality in order to get to grips with it (Dörner 1986). In addition, aid strategists might have tendencies to give preference to certain elements or to downplay the importance of others, or simply to ignore what is inconvenient.²³⁴ This is not desirable, but it seems unavoidable, given the pressure the aid strategist faces in the course of his work. The aid strategist could try to strike a balance between his ability to deal with a number of elements and their interrelationships on the one hand, and the key elements important for a proper strategizing process on the other. The first requires understanding of his own intellectual capabilities and the second entails understanding of what might be important, but might be beyond his comprehension.²³⁵ The aid strategist should however not be deceived by assuming that strategizing on the basis of a small set of elements, while being able to comprehend them all, including their interrelationships, is a safe way to go. Not only might important elements be excluded, but also data relating to the elements used might be unsatisfactory.²³⁶

Since none of the respondents came up with a broad view of elements to be included in strategizing, as stated earlier it could be argued that respondents had their own personal bias or preferences. An aid strategist could mitigate these preferences and biases with the help of 'aid trinity'. As the 'aid trinity' implies a 360-degree approach to the process of strategizing, it helps to identify those elements, which could be important in a given operational environment. The suggestions made by respondents A4 and A5 about the need for a "*modicum of experience*" and an understanding of how local

²³⁴ I recall a discussion with the operational manager of the second agency I worked for about the importance of including the aspect of conflict in the programming of the agency's activities. The operational manager asked something along the lines of: "okay, if I include the aspect of conflict in the plan for 2005, what do I have to change?" to which I replied: "quite a lot; basically we have to do it all over again". The operational manager responded in the line of: "We do not have time for that so we will stick with what we have". Autumn 2004, Kathmandu/ Nepal.

²³⁵ It might be worth noting that the number of elements and interrelationships which the aid strategist reasonably could digest might vary over time, depending for example on his growing knowledge of the operational environment or the duration and levels of stress he might have been under. Improved understanding of the operational environment might be beneficial, while excessive stress might be disadvantageous.

²³⁶ To use an example from Nepal, statistical data about poverty was too much aggregated to provide an adequate picture of the various levels of poverty at district level, subsequently leading to inappropriate allocation of aid resources on village and ward levels (A34).

knowledge is produced might be helpful in this respect, as these contribute to grounded ideas on how an operational strategy might look like. It is not unlikely that in this process the gap between the aid strategist's understandings of what is appropriate in the operational environment and what representatives at headquarters understand of the operational environment will widen. Thus the aid strategist must alongside identifying elements for strategizing aid, also bridge the gap of understanding between himself and HQ representatives. Not addressing this gap, or being totally absorbed in closing it will add to friction.²³⁷ Next, we will address move the issue of strategizing within the international community.

Strategy within the international community The interview data offers a rather dim view of the general character of the overall strategy employed by Nepal's somewhat heterogeneous aid community. Respondents suggested a lack of coherence (in the field of poverty reduction) (A15), absence of strategizing in relation to addressing the conflict (A28), resulting often in a conflict-blind approach (A1) and strategy regressively moving towards a form of survival tactics (A34).

The meaning of strategy and its application in processes of managing of aid resources could have played a role in avoiding such a downbeat impression of the strategic culture present within the aid community in Nepal. Clausewitz offers a psychological insight, which may help us understand the difficult position aid managers were in with relation to strategy formulation. Clausewitz argues that in strategy "*...everything has to be guessed at and presumed. Conviction is therefore weaker. Consequently most generals, when they ought to act, are paralyzed by unnecessary doubts*". I do not wish to suggest that individual aid managers were necessarily paralyzed, they might have been even the opposite: being over-active and focused within their own organisations on the question of what to do with the immediate problems at hand. However, a collective strategy was to my knowledge difficult to reach and never agreed upon, due to a form of collective paralysis within the aid community. At least two interlinked factors contributed to this process. To begin with, the institutional spheres of the involved aid agencies hampered the making of a collective strategy, which was further

²³⁷ Respondent A2 told me that the conflict advisor in his agency, although intending to assist programmes in becoming conflict-sensitive, became almost fully absorbed with communicating with Headquarters, explaining what was going on in Nepal and what could be done about it.

compounded by the complex nature of the Nepali government structures. Then, despite the large group of actors with the international aid community, it appeared to me that attempts to strategize collectively rested on a minority of people within a limited group of aid agencies. At the same time the outcome of the collective of this rather small group became less than the product of individuals. So despite efforts to strategize collectively a collective strategy never materialised. In other words it seems that in general terms, individual agency representatives were more focused on trying to 'safeguard' the programmes of their own agencies, than attempting as a collective to transform a regressive situation in the country towards a more positive one, despite collective actions such as the introduction of the BOGs.

The above might suggest that communities of international aid agencies operating in turbulent environments like Nepal risk creating a strategic culture of paralysis reflected in forms of survival tactics. How might the aid strategist respond? It might be helpful for the strategist to realise two things. First, although he might feel highly responsible, he has little real power, despite the large size of his agency or its good standing, as he does not only have to relate to his superiors (as indicated by respondent A64), but a wide variety of other actors as well. Secondly, it is not very likely that a single individual is in the position to counter the paralyzing processes within an aid community. It is more likely that a collective of well-placed and personally secure individuals could make a difference, such as the informal group who plotted the introduction of the OCHCR in Nepal (A55).

Therefore, I would like to argue that the usual call for more or better coordination between aid agencies is not necessarily very helpful. It is more helpful to try to counter processes of strategic paralysis and survival tactics within a collective of aid agencies by investing in the creation of a framework for common understanding of the overall structure of the problem.²³⁸ The first suggestion might augment fellow feeling among those agencies that join these coordination structures, but it does not necessarily take away the structural feelings of insecurity by individual aid agency representatives due to insufficient understanding of the operational environment, thus adding to the process

²³⁸ In retrospect, I am rather surprised that although agency representatives came together regularly, for example at the BOG meetings, they came, to my knowledge never together in a more informal setting to discuss with Nepal specialists the country's underlying historical and structural dynamics.

of friction. The latter might assist aid strategists to see events and developments in a wider perspective, accordingly reducing the feeling of insecurity due to better understanding of the dynamics in their operational environment and being able to grasp the unexpected.²³⁹ As consequence they might gain understanding of where, how and why friction in the process of aid operations might occur and could be mitigated. Next we will look at the topic of strategy and individual agencies.

Strategy and individual agencies The strategic culture of the international aid community appeared to be close to paralysis and embracing forms of survival tactics. The Strategizing processes of individual agencies were shaped by this context, which made individual agency responses not wholly alike, but comparable. The interviewees indicated that strategic responses ranged from being reactive and inattentive (A67), to formally non-reactive, but informally adaptive (A40), to gradual, but in sequence with the conflict (A43) to taken by surprise, but swiftly adapting (A12).

All these responses could be placed on the reactive side of strategic behaviour. This is understandable for at least two reasons. Firstly, strategy development is about the future (Grey 2006): to think through the future, which is unknown, as it has not happened yet (*ibid*), is intrinsically difficult and requires a certain level of organisational capacity.

Turning to the four different organisational responses, it is easy to see that each individual organisational response created a certain level of friction in the process of implementing aid operations, which in turn required a response from each individual agency. For example, it is easy to imagine that the agency which was formally non-reactive (till 2006), but informally adaptive, had to struggle with the need to handle a double discourse, being on the one hand the illusion of Nepal as peaceful state with a functioning state apparatus (A47) and on the other hand the reality of a country facing an intensifying civil war where two equally incapable governments tried to gain and maintain control (A18). I wonder if the organisational capacity spent on dealing with this friction could have been better used if the organisational strategy had been adjusted much earlier on in the conflict and had been in line with the reality of conflict? We cannot be sure but I suspect this to be the case.

²³⁹ See also Dörner about the mental advantage of expecting the unexpected (1986).

There might be many reasons why this adjustment did not happen. It appears to me that it is much easier for an aid strategist to tolerate friction which is caused by a known and appreciated way of working, than to face friction caused by (forced) adaptation, while not knowing if this adaptation actually fits with what might happen in the future. In the case of the agency which was taken by surprise, but adapting swiftly, I speculate, however, that the friction caused by adaptation in the context of an unknown future was preferable to the severe risk of not surviving as an agency (A12).

Overall, the responses of the four individual agencies imply that responses to the compounding conflict were rather reactive. It is possible to argue that this was unhelpful as it compounded friction by pursuing counter-productive interventions. However, the aid strategist should be aware that that misguided, pro-active strategies could be equally counter-productive.

The notion of the ideal form of aid implies that, in theory, aid operations should be strategized in a pro-active manner. On a practical level, the aid strategist could ask if in turbulent environments such as Nepal pro-active strategies are actually possible. This depends not only on his ability to initiate organisational change, but equally importantly on his ability to understand how the dynamics within the 'aid trinity' might develop.²⁴⁰ From these two considerations he has to gauge if the cost of strategic change is affordable or too high. I speculate here, that in the case of the four agencies and their re-active strategic responses to the conflict, the cost of developing pro-active strategies was for whatever reason perceived as being too high for the individual agencies concerned, despite the possible counter-productive effects of the various aid operations on the dynamics in the operational environment.

Strategy and factors for change The interview data suggested the strategic changes within aid agencies were at least equally driven by policy directives from higher up in the aid chain (A18/ A45/ A67) than by bottom-up initiatives grounded in the processes of the operational environment (A2/ A12). I am not arguing that aid agency strategies were always pre-cooked by the institutional sphere of the agencies concerned, but

²⁴⁰ Dörner argues that, with regard to time, humans tend to focus on the status of a particular moment, instead of the characteristics of a particular development, while the latter is more important than the former (1986: 115).

owing to the prescriptive nature of the policies, operational strategies were more often guided by a top-down approach, than grounded in the realities of the operational environment.

Assuming that these top-down and bottom-up approaches were in various complex ways competing with each other within the aid community, it was my impression that the aid agencies found themselves (un) consciously facing a double and interwoven dilemma.

The overarching dilemma might have been as follows. While subconsciously recognising the need to do the practice of development in Nepal differently, aid agencies could hardly do so due to pressures from their institutional spheres and key sections in the bureaucratic elite of the Nepali government. The latter may not have been happy with donor practices in general, but at least their support legitimized them to a certain extent. However, by doing so local communities could hardly be assisted on the basis of what was actually needed, nor perhaps could the underpinning causes and dynamic of the conflict be appropriately addressed the latter outcome being probably even more serious than the former.

Within this context the position of the aid strategist does not become easier. The top-down and bottom-up pressures, which represented themselves differently, could confront the individual aid strategist with a further dilemma.

On the one hand, the organisational policies handed down from above, might not necessarily correspond with the realities in the operational environment, and turning these policies in actual engagements might in turn contribute to compounding conflict and further impeding poverty reduction. As a consequence, the aid agency of the strategist concerned risks being evaluated as under-performing, which in turn, could have consequences for the career of the aid strategist concerned. On the other hand, if the aid strategist pursues strategic changes in the manner the aid agency wants to operate on the basis of (a good understanding of) the ground realities in the operational environment, while going against the overall policy of his agency, he might be seen as

unmanageable or disobedient by his oversees superiors,²⁴¹ which is not favourable for the career of the aid strategist either, while the attempt to strategize aid resources on the basis of the ideal form of aid, could contribute more likely to the reduction of poverty and conflict, than a top-down approach.

In turbulent contexts like Nepal it is not easy for the aid strategist to reconcile this double and interwoven dilemma. Responses among agencies appear to vary. At one end of the spectrum, one aid agency dealt with this complex dilemma by following HQ policy as close to the letter on the one hand while on the other hand trying to avoid negative evaluations, by keeping these evaluation teams away from the project areas and away from people with possible counterproductive views (A67). At the other end of the spectrum an agency adapted a different approach, which came close to Clausewitz suggestion that a strategist should “...*go on campaign himself*”. This agency regularly invited staff from headquarters into the field, so that they could observe for themselves the local field realities (A52). By doing so, this aid agency was able to change HQ policy, subsequently providing the agency with more political clout vis-à-vis the key people in the Nepali bureaucracy and by doing so enhancing the agency’s operational space to work on the reduction of poverty and conflict.

However, the latter approach –preferable from the perspective of the ideal form of aid– depends not only on the position of the aid strategist in his agency, his willingness to face (career-oriented) risks, or his creativity. It also depends on the willingness of those within the institutional sphere of the agency to allow a more contextualised policy. Notwithstanding, even if such an approach can be followed, success is not guaranteed. As there might be other unexpected sources of friction standing in the way of a proper strategy.

The interview data appear to suggest that strategic changes within the aid community were not only driven by top-down processes, but driven by changes in the operational environment as well. However, these changes seemed to be, across the board, equally re-active in nature.

²⁴¹ Several respondents (A4/ A33) indicated a head of mission who was replaced by his headquarter exactly for this reason.

Other than the process of denial, what might have played a role in this process? Without an exhaustive discussion I would like to speculate that at least two interlinked factors played a role in this process. The first was the rather ‘invisible’ nature of the conflict²⁴² and, suggested by Dörner, our preference to think in terms of moments or events instead of processes (1989). A second reason might be our inability to describe precisely what we think that we observe. One example might be the ambiguous terms used by respondent A12, such as “*the situation in Nepal*” or the deteriorating “*security situation*”. An aid strategist should be aware that the invisible nature of a conflict and a weak ability to describe what is happening in the operational environment does not help to negotiate with actors in his institutional sphere for the organisational space for pro-active strategic changes. However, an aid strategist who waits till the moment a conflict becomes visible (in the international community) by for example an escalatory act of violence, could of course use that act of violence to argue space for strategic changes in a programme (as respondent A2 did after the attack on the PLA on the Army barracks in Ghorai after the breakdown of the first ceasefire), but he still remains in a reactive mode of strategizing. So, this implies that an aid strategist aiming to strategize aid operations pro-actively has to make the invisible visible and has to articulate the unarticulated. But again even if the institutional sphere of his agency allows pro-active changes success is not guaranteed, as the chosen course of action might not fit with the direction a conflict takes.

Strategy and friction In relation to strategizing processes, interviewees mentioned several sources of friction. Sources of friction associated with the international aid community as whole included the neo-liberal development policies introduced by the government and supported by donors (A15), processes of denial within the Nepali establishment (A5) and expatriate management levels (A28) and their perceptions of risk (A1). In addition, it was suggested that the way in which decision-making processes were structured and personality clashes added to friction in processes of strategy making within the international community (A34). These were compounded by the historical-political dynamics between donor countries (A34), and the limited range of perspectives within the aid community (A4). Ambiguous approaches vis-à-vis

²⁴² I recall a conversation with a Pokhara-based expatriate aid worker in around 2003 who told something along the following lines: “you can cut a tree in many ways, with an axe or with sandpaper. In this case, the various political forces are not felling the tree with an axe, but with sandpaper. You can hardly see it, but the tree will finally fall” (Spring 2003/ Kathmandu).

the conflict itself added to strategy-related friction, and individual agencies faced a relatively high turnover key of personnel (A59).

On aid agency level, interviewees pointed to the numerous sources of friction in relation to strategizing processes: a lack of requirement for in-depth analysis (A3), a leadership vacuum within individual agencies (A34), institutional discouragement within aid agencies to allow individual staff to think strategically (A6), and the time required to understand the nature of the Maoist movement (A64).

The existence of so many forms of friction in relation to strategizing processes within the international community as a whole, and the lack of encouragement to think strategically, together with other sources of friction at individual agency level, did not offer the ideal circumstances for generating firm strategies within the international aid community in Nepal to address either poverty or the compounding conflict or both.

Based on the above it might be possible to argue that the processes of strategy-making were not necessarily processes to disentangle the aid agencies from the reality of friction present in the operational environment, rather, the processes of strategy-making either on the collective or individual level of aid agencies were in themselves sources of friction. This is in line with Gray's argument that military strategy, is difficult, not only because of its very nature, but due to the sheer variety of sources of friction (Gray 2006: 75). This seems to echo in the processes of strategizing aid operations in turbulent contexts such as Nepal.

What might the strategist's options for dealing with friction in the process of strategizing aid operations be? At one end of the spectrum the aid strategist might decide to ignore the existence of strategy-related friction, while at the other end of the spectrum he could choose to include the existence of friction fully. The first option is according to the psychologist Dörner "*...a trap that experts are particularly apt to fall into*", which has sheer, but false, advantages. In other words, according to Dörner, ignoring friction makes strategy simple. (1986: 168) However, Clausewitz suggests, "*Everything in strategy is very simple, but that does not mean that everything is very easy*". In other words, the false advantage of ignoring the reality of friction in strategizing processes is that the products of these processes will most likely fail. This

is most likely equally true for aid operations in turbulent environments as for war. So, ignoring friction, although aid strategist might prefer it, will not help the actual implementation of aid operations. Does this mean that an aid strategist, in order to avoid producing flawed plans, should work from the opposite position? Taking all sources of friction into account during the strategizing process might be far too complex and will lead, according to Clausewitz, to intellectual complications.

So where does this leave us? In the context of friction-related strategy making it might be helpful to bear in mind that it is all about engagement, which, from the perspective of the ideal form of aid, should be focused on addressing poverty and conflict. As not all friction can be dealt with at once, the aid strategist could start by addressing those sources of friction which can be dealt with easily and/or which are key barriers to furthering poverty and conflict reduction.

What these sources of friction related to strategy-making are, depends from context to context and agency to agency. Examples from the Nepali context to deal with this type of friction could be to move beyond the historical dynamics between donor headquarters vis-à-vis Nepal (A34) and making use of people with an extensive and rich experience about the workings of development activities in Nepal (A4).

Another aspect I wish to highlight here relates not to the amount of friction an aid strategist needs to take into consideration in the process of strategy-making, but which of these frictions he should initially focus on: that related to his own agency or to the aid community as a whole. An aid strategist might prefer to focus his or her own agency and its intended operations first. However, if this strategy is not set within the collective of aid agencies, then the strategist's own success – in terms of being able to formulate a strategy which compensates for or absorbs sources of friction- might not be very significant vis-à-vis the overall attempts to address poverty and conflict. Alternatively the strategist might decide to focus time and effort on improving the overall strategy within the community of international aid agencies. This might however, not be appreciated by his own headquarters, even though it might be preferable given the potential positive overall effect of a collective effort, which moves strategically in the same direction. In the case of Nepal, it were the heads of missions of agencies like DFID and SDC spearheading attempts to stimulate and harness an

overall strategy within the international community for the reduction of poverty and conflict.

To close this chapter I want to make one final comment. Of course the various aid agencies were at least partly involved in defending their own organisational '*turf*'. However, to argue that the aid agencies in general were mainly involved in turf battles is too simple, as there might be multiple inter-connecting sources of friction, as mentioned earlier, compounding the difficulties of strategizing aid operations in turbulent environments. Therefore, it might be helpful to realise that for those involved in strategizing aid operations, advising on strategy is probably easier than actually implementing an aid strategy and taking responsibility for it.²⁴³ Clausewitz argues that it requires "*...more strength of will to make an important decision in strategy than in tactics*". What in Nepal's case appeared as turf battles may in fact have been the actions of over-active aid staff "*...carried away by the pressures of the moment*" (to use Clausewitz words), not necessarily realising that the lack of (a collective) strategy could not be compensated with hyper-activity on the part of individual aid agencies, subsequently adding to friction in the process of attempting to reduce poverty and conflict.

²⁴³ Idea is taken from Gray (2006), who argues this line in relation to the conduct of war.

Chapter 12 On Superiority of Resources²⁴⁴

12.1 Introduction

Clausewitz argues in a four-page chapter (H&P: 194-197) that in the process of strategizing a war, superiority of numbers is one of three crucial factors along with time and location,²⁴⁵ in reaching a successful outcome in battle (ibid: 194). He argues, with the usual caveats, that "*...as many troops as possible should be brought into the engagement at the decisive point*".

The idea of superiority of resources resonated during my time in Nepal in two quite different ways. Firstly, it enabled me to understand in part the dynamic of violent confrontations between the SF and the PLA. The SF were in terms of numbers significantly the stronger, as they were able to field more soldiers than the PLA. However, the need for the SF to be present in all 75 districts of Nepal meant that they were spread thinly, unable effectively to defend all facilities of military value let alone the facilities valuable to the administrative government. So, in actual attacks on government facilities and the SFs, the PLA was probably the stronger force in terms of numbers as they were in the position to mobilise and channel more resources to the specific points they wanted to attack.

Secondly, after adapting the idea of superiority of numbers into the idea of superiority of resources,²⁴⁶ I became aware of the possible discrepancy between the levels and dynamics of poverty and conflict and the amount of resources available to aid agencies operating in Nepal to address them. Clearly the application of the concept is not straightforward and has its drawbacks. For example, it could be inferred from the concept that only sufficient money could solve the problem of poverty. Or, as one respondent suggested it might strengthen the idea that only programmes and projects

²⁴⁴ Clausewitz actually titles his chapter On Superiority of Numbers. In order to transmute his ideas to aid and development I titled the chapter on Superiority of Resources.

²⁴⁵ The dimensions time and location are not explicitly discussed in this thesis.

²⁴⁶ Which by definition is broader than Clausewitz's idea of superiority of numbers. In the interviews I did not use the notion of superiority of numbers but the idea of superiority of resources.

with “*high financial burn rates*” are successful (A34).²⁴⁷ However, despite these drawbacks, I contend that, as various respondents implied, the concept of superiority of resources is a useful device to think through the relationship between objectives, resources realistically needed for success and the resources realistically available to a given aid operation. In the remainder of this chapter the established structure is applied.

12.2 Clausewitz and the concept of Superiority of Numbers²⁴⁸

Clausewitz argues that the most common element in a victorious outcome is the superiority of numbers. He advises therefore, with some caveats, to bring as many forces as possible to the battlefield. Why? Because “*Whether these forces prove adequate or not, we will at least have done everything in our power*”. Superiority of forces should ideally be created at a strategic as well as a tactical level. However, in reality Clausewitz suggests that it is most likely the commander’s government or other factors that decide the size of the forces at his disposal, potentially undermining superiority on the battlefield. Here, Clausewitz reasons, the commander’s skill is paramount. He must turn likely absence of absolute superiority into relative superiority. For Clausewitz, relative superiority relates to “*the skilful concentration of superior strength at the decisive point...and on the resolution needed to sacrifice non-essentials for the sake of essentials...*”. Although, Clausewitz stresses the importance of superiority of forces he does suggest that, “*...depending on the circumstances*”, it is not a guarantee of success and may only make a slight difference. The real reasons behind victorious engagements, he argues, are not necessarily to do with superiority of forces, but with “*...the possession of strength at the really vital point*”, and “*...willingness to risk facing them for a time with inferior forces, energy for rapid movement, boldness for quick attacks, and the increased activity which danger generates in great men...*”. Numerical superiority is important for victory in battle, but it should not be confused with the idea that it is always necessary: Clausewitz “*...merely wished to stress the relative importance*” of the concept.

²⁴⁷ Respondent A7 referred to a women’s income generation project located in the eastern Terai, which although successful among local women groups was stopped by its funder (USAID), because it did not spend ‘enough’ financial resources (and therefore could not be good).

²⁴⁸ H&P: 194-197.

12.3 Superiority of Resources and Nepal's international aid community

Responses to the notion of superiority of resources varied, with three different but inter-related storylines emerging. The first relates to the meaning of the concept, the second to the nexus between the level of superiority of resources and the poverty and conflict dynamics in Nepal, and the third to the impact of the (mis-) match of the aid provided to Nepal. This last generates an overview of inhibiting factors in the process of trying to deploy resources in a superior way. Overall, with the usual exceptions, the interview data appear to suggest that there was a mismatch between resources offered and the level and complexity of poverty and conflict.

The meaning of the idea of superiority of resources Respondents generated six interpretations of the notion of superiority of resources, which move beyond Clausewitz's rather narrow focus on numerical superiority. Firstly, one interviewee linked the concept to the availability of and access to sufficient additional finances to run projects or programmes (A39). Respondents referred to the quality of staff (A35/ A39) and their ability to respond to new circumstances and information and to work flexibly and opportunistically (A2). Connected to this, it was suggested that the organisational ability to call in additional expertise from inside or outside the country was a form of having superior resources (A67). Fourthly, the superiority of a programme or project could be bolstered by its duration (A2) and if an agency could develop a long-term view (A26). A fifth dimension related to the level of patience among donors (A2) together with the channels in the aid delivery process and the ability to implement activities (A29/ A2). Lastly, the ability of an aid agency to allocate resources well was seen as a means of achieving superiority of resources (A8). The above suggests that the idea of superiority of resources translates into the realm of aid and development as a rather broad concept, encompassing elements which moves from staff numbers to the ability of an agency to target its financial and human resources to maximum effect. The section below elaborates on how the notion of superiority of the resources deployed by aid agencies was perceived in connection with dynamics of poverty and conflict in Nepal.

Superiority of resources vis-à-vis the dynamics of poverty and conflict A rather complex spectrum emerged when looking at the specific relationship between

superiority of resources and the levels of poverty and dynamics of conflict in Nepal. At one end of the spectrum responses appeared to suggest that as a rule insufficient resources were allocated to deal with both the poverty and the conflict dynamics in Nepal, while at the other end responses indicated that there were individual aid agencies that felt that they did in the main have sufficient resources to operate.

The more negative responses were expressed in a variety of ways. One respondent suggested that there was an overall mismatch between what was offered, its prioritization and what was perceived as being needed in Nepal. *"No...in various directions this was not the case, the reality of poverty and conflict, on one side and allocations of resources or prioritisation of the development agencies to respond to was not matching..."* (A1). Another respondent, with an equally rich working experience in Nepal, while reflecting on the projects he was involved in, came to a similar conclusion suggesting a mismatch between (financial) resources, issues at hand, and objectives set. He stated: *"In the projects I worked the money that was at hand was not sufficient and the objectives were too unrealistic and could never be achieved. They were grand plans which had not been thought out...So, if I look at projects where I was involved in any period of time, the money involved was too small to have enormous impact...which made them rather like a sticking plaster..."* (A3). Another respondent argued that although the aid provided by his and other like-minded agencies was not satisfactory, as it focused mainly on stabilising the situation, improving aid allocations in terms of strengthening transformation processes instead would not have been an option given the risks involved. He said; *"...yes probably what we delivered was probably not very good...sure it was not very good...Half of what we were about was about mitigating...and actually mitigation by its nature is not transformative, we spend a lot of effort in mitigation, because a focus on transformation would have been far far riskier...then you are into the drastic medicine...so to say..."* (A29).

The above quotations appear to suggest that the aid resources provided were not always perceived as superior relative to the situation at hand, in terms of size of allocations and prioritization, and the focus of the allocations, and that the focus was on mitigation of the consequences of poverty and conflict rather than on transforming a society to deal constructively with both poverty and conflict.

Other respondents referred to practical points indicating that aid agencies were not always delivering good quality resources to deal adequately with the situation at hand. References were made to the quality of the food delivered in food-for-work programme's implemented by the World Food Programme and the quality of development staff. What development programmes or projects delivered to villages was not necessarily always of good quality. One very well informed respondent commented on the rice delivered by the WFP and the quality of development staff. He stated *"In terms of resources...I know the WFP rice was always a real problem, they were always accused of getting inferior rice. WFP said: 'we buy the rice locally and want to help the local market' Yet, but what they got was very bad rice...I do not know why that was really... Maybe it was just a lack of quality control"* (A35).²⁴⁹

This respondent, referring to the quality of staff, recalled an example of poor recruiting practises within one of the agencies he was connected with: *"I remember one programme that was sent a lady who must have been around 62. She could hardly walk. She was extremely nice and very committed but utterly useless in terms of working in Nepal as a programme manager. There were many many better Nepalis who could have done half the job for half the costs with far greater effect and been able to meet beneficiaries and get to understand what was happening in the field at the same time, so from that perspective I do not think that the quality was there with occasional great success..."* (A35). He continued: *"I do not want to point to any particular agency...but I do not think that superior people came to Nepal as some of them were actually not particularly high standard..."* (A35). Now we turn to the relatively positive views expressed with regard to the idea of superiority of resources and their application by the aid industry in Nepal.

Several slightly more upbeat views of the balance between the (financial) contribution of the aid community in Nepal on one hand and the challenges generated by the poverty and conflict in Nepal on the other could be identified. At the same time, these same respondents raised questions about the extent to which the available resources were useful and well targeted.

²⁴⁹ I recall a meeting with an RCIW technical advisor in the second half of 2004, who had just returned from a field trip to the Karnali. He showed me several samples of rice handed out by WFP to local user-groups, as payment for their work. It was clear that none of the samples were fit for human consumption even if very low standards were applied, the samples being largely rotten.

One respondent, while reflecting on his programme, stated that in relation to the notion of superiority of resources the programme was more than able in financial terms to address both poverty- and conflict- related challenges. *“Yes, my programme was by default, as it was a ten-year 18.6 million pound-programme, which is substantial, nearly 2 million pounds a year. Partly because of the conflict, and partly as a result of slightly slower start in both the Terai and the Midwest, the programme had savings. So, we had additional funds anyway. We used them where we needed to. So, we were actually negotiating with the donor for additional funding. At the end we could get an additional 200,000 pounds out of them, for quick impact-type activities. That was available to us to make the programme more effective in the Mid-West”* (A2). This example suggests that due to its financial size, the possibility of saving money at times when it could not be spent, the possibilities of additional funding for new activities when they became necessary and acceptable, the programme could maintain some form of superiority given the situation.

Another respondent argued in a similar vein in relation to finance, but points to the problematic nature of implementation: *“Money is not so much the problem. I am not sure if more money makes a difference, it is really the implementation...we don't get the things out, the people are not there to implement it, the quality of the work is maybe not good enough, the relevance of the work is maybe not there, so it is much more an implementation problem. It is not the resource side. Of course you can always use more resources, but at the end of today the implementation is the big challenge for us...”* (A52).

Another respondent suggested that overall sufficient money was spent in Nepal, however insufficient attention was given to the area of conflict resolution, which in turn was at least partly caused by the political considerations of the various conflicting parties: *“A lot of money was spent here, but I think the big deficit was in conflict resolution stuff, but the Nepali politicians made that very difficult, while the Maoists were interested in it in the first place trying to get the UN involved...”* (A33). Thus high levels of financial input do not necessarily mean that agreement or acceptance could be gained about the implementation of relevant interventions.

An example follows of a programme that was initially perceived by its manager as being more than sufficient to meet the poverty-related challenges in the programme areas, but this perception altered as the programme had to change its objectives due to conflict-related tensions in the original areas of work. *"I never felt that the programme was lacking resources...they were not really a problem. We were very well resourced in our donors, who were very patient and understanding of our situation. We had plenty of staff...however, certainly not working full-time because they had no access to the field for probably six to nine months...and yet our donors were satisfied enough to keep us supporting through that period...In addition, we could get assistance from our headquarter if needed to help us. However, the thing I remember is that I was dissatisfied with the last two years of the programme. I do not think that we did a really good job in those last two years of the programme cycle (2002-2004). Because of the conflict we modified the program, and withdrew from the conflict-ridden areas and started to work in different areas with a different approach, but I am not sure if we did that really well..."* (A17). This view might suggest that despite having enough resources and support from headquarters and donors, a forced change in objectives, approach and work areas can substantially reduce the capabilities or superiority of a programme relative to the poverty-related challenges at hand. In other words, being able to adapt to the changing circumstances is not a guarantee that the perceived quality of an aid activity can be maintained.

To sum up, the above might suggest that the resources deployed during aid operations were in general terms not superior or necessarily inferior (with the exception of the example of some of WFP's rice deliveries) but at best sub-optimal relative to the challenges at hand in relation to the processes generated by poverty and conflict. Now we turn to factors inhibiting the delivery of superior resources to Nepal.

Inhibiting factors leading to sub-optimal resources Respondents provided several contributory factors to the sub-optimal quality of the aid activities delivered. They highlighted the significance not only of the lack of resources but of the reasons for why resources were not superior. It was suggested that the way in which the resources were applied lessened their value. It seems that the overarching factor in this process was related to the analysis of power and how this was subsequently dealt with within the context of programmes and projects. One respondent suggested that *"...it is about*

power sharing, about real power sharing, and we have to support this process throughout our interventions, and not contradict it, at least we should acknowledge the context and its realities instead of applying our simplistic ways of dealing with realities... so our tools are simplistic and impose them this is hypocrisy, it is a form of hypocrisy and lack of analyses” (A52). Another respondent who points to the instrumentality of policymaking echoes this point. He argues that the mismatch between needs and resources in Nepal was partly to do with the “...primarily instrumental type of thinking of the policy maker...” (A1).

Not all those in policy decision-making position were instrumental thinkers applying simple tools for analysis. The case below suggests that some aid staff applied advanced analysis and a willingness to address the dynamic nexus between poverty and conflict. However, their efforts were overtaken by the risk-averse culture within the agency concerned and expanding Maoist activities. *“Within my agency we looked with a few to caste exclusion, ethnic exclusion, the lack of facilities, identified the conflict-affected and impoverished areas accidentally by using our data, which is about the worst affected areas with the most vulnerable minorities and areas with the highest food insecurity and poverty. We had captured the Maoist strongholds, if we had done work there, then the Maoists would not have been able to control those areas. It was parts of Rukum. It was parts of the Karnali. However my agency dropped the idea of working there. Why? Because they had to find workers, who had to walk two hours or two days...to a place that would not do...to monitor it...how could these people monitor? You see, my agency was an agency of development ease, not an agency of development at all costs, they were looking to places they could travel to easily by plane or by vehicle...” (A34).*

Another view indicating a friction factor related to the application of sector-wide approaches, which were largely seen as unhelpful during the compounding political crisis (A2), especially where the designs of these approaches did not acknowledge the realities of the context in which they had to operate (A52). This pattern could subsequently reinforce the existing centre-periphery model (A8).²⁵⁰ Compounding this were *“the lack of coordination, the lack of monitoring and the lack of proper*

²⁵⁰ It appears to me that the application of the sector approach in Nepal meant that actually a few government officials in a given sector in Kathmandu were involved in decision-making.

evaluation...” (A1). As a consequence the mismatch between the levels and dynamics of poverty and conflict and the necessary superiority of resources continued adding to friction. This gap between the challenges in terms of poverty and conflict and the quality of resources augmented existing friction and generated consequences will be discussed in the next section.

Consequences of sub-optimal resourcing Several respondents pointed to the consequences of the various levels of inferiority of the aid resources deployed. These consequences ranged from having no impact on poverty reduction to having negative or positive impacts on the conflict dynamics.

One respondent was very clear about the largely suboptimal quantity and quality of aid activities by the aid agencies at a local level, acknowledging the noble intentions of the aid agencies while arguing that: “...*Insufficient and misplaced allocation of resources means no impact*” (A3). Another respondent suggested that in financial terms Nepal received sufficient resources at a national level, but that the combination of too much money with the imposed sector-wide approach in many areas overburdened the state (A52).

Another respondent suggested that development assistance to Nepal –and the government in particular- fuelled the conflict; “*It is not impossible to argue that there was too much aid, because by giving all of the aid to the government you are freeing up money for the military budget and prolonging the war, you have to realise that the RNA more than doubled in size between 2002 and 2004/05 which must be costly...*” (A33).

The respondent above suggests that the continuing aid to Nepal, mostly via the government, probably contributed to a prolongation of the war, as the government was in a position to expand its military. Another respondent suggested two other possible effects of the continuation of aid, one negative and one positive almost to the point of contradicting the suggestion made by respondent A33. The negative consequence was: “...*undoubtedly that the continuous support to the government enabled the government to continue to do what the government always has done, which is being grabbing and*

being destructive towards the people and not delivering very much..." (A29). This process helped maintaining the underlying causes of the conflict.

It was argued that continuous support to the government, however imperfect the result was in relation to addressing Nepal's poverty, did have its advantages in terms of locking in government resources. Respondent A29 argued that channelling resources via the government: *"...did to some extent, but undoubtedly, locked in government resources...even if the figures might not be 100 percent correct...they were good enough to say that the government was putting in more money in development year on year, which was really interesting and that easily could have been reversed. We could have easily had a situation where the government would have said: 'it is useless to spend money on health and education. Let's spend in this situation all our money to an increased military effort...'. The fact is that this did not happen"* (A29). So here, assuming that the figures are correct, it is suggested that although the quality and quantity of the aid resources provided to Nepal, and particularly to the government, were not optimal, there was a wider effect in terms of restraining the military and by doing so influencing the political dynamics enabling a de-escalation of the conflict. Now, we turn to the reflective part of this chapter to elaborate on the meaning and application of superiority of resources in a turbulent environment like Nepal.

12.4 Reflection

In the light of the above I would like to contend that the notion of superiority of resources is a worthwhile concept to consider when strategizing aid operations in turbulent environments; overlooking the concept, as suggested by interviewees in the Nepal case, could lead to friction in the processes of addressing the nexus of poverty and conflict. Clausewitz argued that superiority of numbers in battle is of relative importance in the course of planning and conducting battles. Based on the interviewee data, it might be argued that the notion of superiority of resources is crucial in the course of strategizing and implementing aid operations. Why? If resources are not 'superior' or of very high standard compared to the situation at hand, they might cause adverse affects on the dynamics within a given operational environment.

While the Maoists were fighting an asymmetric form of warfare against the RNA, the interview data appear to suggest that, from the perspective of superiority of resources, the aid agencies were also involved in an asymmetric engagement, inasmuch as that they could hardly mobilise and allocate, individually and collectively, sufficient resources to further reduce the processes of poverty and conflict, with perceived results ranging from no impact (A3), overburdening of the state (A58), maintaining (A29) or fuelling the conflict (A33).

The reflection is structured as follows. A short summary of the concept is given, a key dilemma is highlighted, and some suggestions for dealing constructively with this dilemma are presented. In addition, the idea of relative superiority and a possible resolve are discussed.

The interview responses generate a wide range of meanings for the notion of superiority of resources, including access to finance (H7) and quality staff (A35/ A39), the organisational ability to call in additional expertise (A67), an extensive project duration (A2) and long-term view within involved agencies (A26), aid channels (A29/ A2) and donor patience (A2) and finally an agency's ability to allocate resources well (A8).

When we look to the respondent perceptions it might be possible to argue that overall Nepal did not receive sufficient resources to address either poverty or the conflict. Having said that, on agency level it was indicated that operations could be relatively well resourced to deal with aims and objectives of aid operations concerned. The perception of being well resourced did not only relate to having large financial resources available, but having for example flexible donors and headquarter support as well. However, the interview data appear also to indicate that policies and approaches contributed to a sub-optimal use of the resources available, for example the sector-wide approach (A2) introduced by the institutional sphere of the aid agencies and the way these policies and approaches were implemented by the aid agencies, for example for not addressing existing power structures (A52). In short, a limited view within aid agencies of what superior resources in the context might be, the lack thereof and the consequences for dynamics within the operational environment might have been sources of friction in the course of strategizing implementing aid operations in Nepal.

As a consequence, aid operations, although well intentioned, did not necessarily live up to their potential or what they intended to do, risking not only the goals of aid agencies but possibly creating counter-productive effects on either poverty or conflict reduction as well.

Key-dilemma The following quotation illustrates the aid strategist's dilemma, in a turbulent environment like Nepal, when applying the concept of superiority of resources to the process of strategizing and implementing aid operations: "*So, in a conflict environment you probably need more resources to spend and you need more resources for overhead cost as well...*" (A26).

Although this perspective focuses on the need for increased financial resources in turbulent environments, I would like to contend, based on what respondents seem to associate with the idea of superiority of resources, that superiority of resources is about more than money. High quality staff and a contextualised intervention approach have great value in themselves, but it might be reasonable to argue that even if all elements are in place to make resources superior to the challenges at hand, a little luck would not go amiss. Luck aside, it is quite reasonable to argue that the resources an aid strategist has available are at best sub-optimal.

Dealing with sub-optimal resources There are three basic options when dealing with the reality of sub-optimal resources. First, the aid strategist could attempt to boost the resources available such that they are superior to the situation at hand. This might be achieved by gaining access to more funds, obtaining more suitable staff, or gaining more room for manoeuvre to bring the operation more in line with the ideal form of aid, thereby reducing friction in the process. Alternatively the strategist could focus on addressing the various forms of friction, which are by default a part of having sub-optimal resources available. Or the strategist might try to combine these approaches. Each option creates its own dynamics of friction.

However, from the perspective of the 'aid trinity', the choice between these options must depend on how the strategist perceives the multi-dimensional relationships between the various actors within the trinity in relation to the strategist's own agency. Without suggesting a set order of importance, it appears to me that the key actors here

are those within the institutional sphere, as it might be easier for the aid strategist to ask for additional resources from his headquarters than to struggle against the friction generated due to inappropriate resources.

However, in the case of Nepal, the interview data suggests that overall most aid agencies were rather reactive and operated in line with option two (dealing with the friction caused by inappropriate resources). An example of this approach is the Dutch development agency SNV. Its management was reluctant to engage in discussions with its headquarters about its new corporate policy and the need to contextualise its mandate and operational modalities.²⁵¹ There may be a psychological explanation for this in that the management of these agencies felt insecure and were therefore not willing to engage in discussions with their headquarters regarding for example the recruitment of additional staff (national and international) better equipped to deal with the turbulence in the country.²⁵²

However, there were aid agencies following option three, being reactive in dealing with the consequences of the sub-optimal resources while trying to put more appropriate resources in place. An example of this might be DFID, who acquired more financial resources, got additional expertise (for example the Risk Management Office) and initiated new programmes like the Community Support Program (Segal 2007).

Relative superiority? As suggested earlier, Clausewitz advises that where absolute priority cannot be established, the focus must be on establishing relative superiority of resources via *“the skilful concentration of superior strength at the decisive point... based on the correct appraisal of this decisive point, on suitable planning from the start; which leads to appropriate disposition of the forces, and on the resolution needed to sacrifice non-essentials for the sake of essentials...”*. The interview data suggest that aid agencies were in some cases able to generate situations of relative superiority, such as through the establishment of the Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Nepal (A55). The key difficulty here was with defining decisive points for intervention. Moreover, high-quality assessments of the contextual dynamics were not

²⁵¹ My own observations during the period September 2002 and February 2005.

²⁵² This was suggested by Prof. Britt-Marie Drottz-Sjoberg, 30 May 2009, Trondheim.

always in place or shared among aid agencies.²⁵³ In addition, it was felt that planning processes of aid operations were not necessarily sensitive to the context in which the aid agencies had to operate²⁵⁴ while the disposition of resources, it was argued, strengthened a centre-periphery model (A8), basically implying that the non-essentials appeared to be prioritized at the expense of the essentials.

Superiority of numbers is an important factor to achieving victory, according to Clausewitz, but “...*the correct appraisal of the opposing generals...the willingness to risk facing them for a time with inferior forces, energy for rapid movement, boldness for quick attacks, and the increased activity which danger generates in great men...are at least of equal importance to success*”. In the case of Nepal one might argue along similar lines: it is not necessarily the superior quality of the resources, but an understanding of elites, the willingness to take risks, even if an aid agency has a relatively weak position within the operational environment, bold actions and the willingness to face physical risks to reach out to target groups. As indicated throughout the thesis these features were not necessarily present within the aid community. The data appear to suggest that in general terms aid agencies had an insufficient understanding of the political-bureaucratic elites of the country,²⁵⁵ were mostly rather risk-averse²⁵⁶ and were not necessarily keen to employ boldness at an individual or collective level.²⁵⁷ In general terms, it might not difficult to imagine that these processes combined did not facilitate the creation of relative superiority, but added to the processes of friction in the processes of addressing poverty and conflict instead.

Resolving the strategist’s dilemma? So how might the aid strategist deal with the issue of the lack of superiority of resources in a given context? Allowing for the strategist’s own personality and the organisational and institutional context in which he works, it may still be possible to offer some suggestions.

To begin with the notion of superiority of resources assumes that it is possible for aid agencies, individually or collectively to accumulate an amount of resources that are

²⁵³ See Chapter 9 On Information.

²⁵⁴ See Chapters 11 On Strategy.

²⁵⁵ See Chapter 14 On Cunning.

²⁵⁶ See Chapter 10 On Danger.

²⁵⁷ See Chapter 13 On Boldness.

asymmetrical to the benefit of real poverty and conflict reduction. However, the Nepal case might indicate that this is very difficult to achieve in reality. So, for turbulent environments like Nepal it is worth realising that it is most likely that the resources an aid agency has available will be inadequate, but that the ingenuity of the aid strategist is key to reducing this gap. Tempting though it may be to rely solely on the policies and procedures of the agency, the strategist must exploit the position of his agency for this purpose. Similarly, while it may be tempting to ignore the friction caused by sub-optimal resourcing, this too must be avoided; as to do so may do more harm than good.

The Nepal case might suggest that superiority of resources in turbulent environments is easier to realise on paper than in practice. Since strategizing is largely a paper exercise this could make an aid strategist unconsciously overconfident, however the notions of both superiority of resources and relative superiority of resources should keep the aid strategist modest and curb ambition, as superiority of resources on either an organisational level or a collective level seldom realises, due to friction in its many forms.

Lastly, it should not be overlooked that in line with the 'aid trinity', the notion of superior resources is a context-specific notion. What is sub-optimal in one operational environment might be more than appropriate in another and vice versa. Falling back on experiences gained in other contexts is helpful, but one should be aware that the appropriateness of available resources should not be compared with these other contexts. In addition, and in line with the point made above, what might be superior in terms of resources at one moment in time might become inferior or even counter-productive later on.

Taking into account all the available data and my own experiences, it is my impression that the sub-optimal level of resources available to address poverty and conflict was not primarily caused by the specific circumstances of Nepal, but induced by the nexus of the institutional sphere and the aid agencies themselves, which was reflected in a bureaucratisation of the aid delivery process. The notion of the ideal form of aid should therefore encourage the aid strategist to address the dilemma of superiority of resources, not via modernizing and professionalising aid operations, but by contextualising operations on the basis of the context-specific ideal form of aid, while

at the same paradoxically avoiding becoming too contextual and losing the ability to make a constructive difference.

Chapter 13 On Boldness

13.1 Introduction

Boldness, Clausewitz stresses in a three-page chapter, is of key importance in the process of designing and applying strategy in the course of war. Boldness in design and action can deliver victory if the enemy shows signs of timidity (H&P: 191-192).

When studying the dynamic interaction between the conflicting parties in Nepal during the period under review, the concept of boldness might enhance speculation about the possible moves conflicting parties could make towards each other and towards aid agencies. Furthermore, the concept could shed light on what the approaches of aid agencies might have been while creating and grasping opportunities in the process of strategising aid operations and implementing them within the operational environment of the simmering civil war.

Transferring the concept of boldness from the realm of military theory into the sphere of aid and development has its drawbacks, for example the implication that aid agencies should act with boldness, which is not necessarily always the case. The interview data appear to suggest that bold initiatives did take place, but that in general terms aid agencies could have been bolder in their operations in order to further the allocation of aid resources more effectively.

13.2 Clausewitz and Boldness²⁵⁸

Clausewitz initially discusses the notion of boldness from the perspective of those in command, however he made inroads into other levels of the army as well. Boldness, according to Clausewitz, "*...does not consist in defying the natural order of things and in crudely offending the laws of probability; it is rather a matter of energetically supporting that higher form of analysis... conscious weighing of the possibilities*". So

²⁵⁸ H&P: 190-192.

boldness is not so much doing the impossible, but doing the possible in an unfavourable context.

When Clausewitz states that “...*in what fields of human activity is boldness more at home than in war*”, he suggests that boldness is central in the conduct of war. He suggests that boldness should be an intrinsic part of an army on all its levels when he states “*A soldier, whether drummer boy or general, can possess no nobler quality...*”. Boldness is a quality that goes beyond the ability to make a “...*successful calculation involving space, time, and magnitude of forces...*”, as it is focused on taking advantage “...*of its opponent's weakness*”. Clausewitz sees boldness as having the upper hand over those who are timid. He suggests that boldness should be balanced with reflection; the higher up in the chain of command, in order to avoid “...*purposeless bursts of blind passion*”, as not only the common purpose, but also the safety of the men under his command should be taken into consideration. However, even unsuccessful acts might be considered laudable in Clausewitz view, as long as they are bold. He admires boldness especially found in the higher ranks of the army, but recognises as well that more can be achieved with soldiers who are “...*known for their boldness, an army in which a daring spirit has always been nurtured, than with an army that lacks this quality*”. In addition he argues that it is better if victories are won due to boldness on the side of the soldiers than because of leadership commanding with them. Because, the first is driven by internal motivation, while the second is imposed from the outside. Next we will describe the role of boldness in relation to the international aid community in Nepal.

13.3 Boldness and Nepal's international aid community

Mentioning the notion of boldness to respondents provided a wide range of insights relating to strategic behaviour of the aid community in Nepal. Boldness within the aid community was perceived as essential: as one respondent suggested, “...*how important is it to be bold? You have to be willing to take risks...or you might as well go home...*” (A29). Indeed, to my knowledge, none of the development agencies –except a few

humanitarian-oriented agencies arriving after 2000- left Nepal, despite the compounding crisis.²⁵⁹

Bold (strategic) behaviour was seen as important because, as one respondent described it: “...if you are not bold and strong nothing moves here, the mindset is pathetic...” (A37). This bold behaviour was perhaps not to be expected from Nepalis within the aid community but more from the foreigners, since owing to the resources they bring, they have “...more space to be bold” (A46). Another respondent suggested that the resources an aid agency brought were less important in the process of being bold than the position of the aid agency concerned (A29). In this process, analysis and the views of other actors, namely whether support could be expected, were seen as important (A64). Moreover, boldness should be based on personal confidence, a good understanding of the local situation and being able to “...say what would work and what not” (A49). However, boldness reaches its limit when the risks involved would cost lives (A54).

Within this context several aspects of boldness emerged from that interview data. The first dimension relates to the overall character of the aid agencies in relation to bold behaviour. Then two overlapping domains are presented which are low-level bold behaviour by individual agencies and major bold behaviour by individuals subsequently supported by a wider range of aid agencies. The fourth dimension relates to the enabling and constraining factors affecting bold behaviour in turbulent environments.

The overall character of boldness To begin with, the general impression of the overall character of boldness employed within the aid community vis-à-vis the compounding crisis in Nepal was not very positive. In other words, not everybody thought that the aid agencies were in general risk-takers, or bold or both. One respondent replied to the notion of boldness as follows: “...*(loud laughter)*... *boldness is not the keyword to describe the international aid community here, self-servingly cautious is a much better phrase and probably a much more accurate description...*, *they stayed far behind the perimeters to stay safe and walked only the*

²⁵⁹ Ockenden International for example had to leave due to financial reasons on a corporate level, Personal communication, Country Director Ockenden International/ Nepal.

walked paths... ” (A30). Another respondent expressed himself along comparable lines. He argued that: “...the aid agencies held themselves at safe distance from those people in most need of help...” (A54). In addition, according to the same source, “...serious efforts should have taken place here in the centre to allow agencies to work in conflict-affected areas. Of course diplomatically this is difficult as you do not want to stand on the toes of a government, but that is where courage, charisma and boldness should have come in, that type of bold effort or leadership, I have not seen it...” (A54).

Two areas were identified where boldness on the side of the aid agencies could have made a difference in relation to poverty reduction, and subsequently could have had a mitigating effect on the conflict. The first area related to the issue of hierarchical power structures (A15), and the second was linked to, “...the history of implementation problems” (A4). The lack of boldness was regretted in these two areas, as the Maoists used the existence of hierarchical power relations as one of their arguments to rally support for the insurgency, while the history of implementation problems allowed the Maoists to be critical towards the aid agencies. So, the absence of boldness among aid agencies in the process of addressing structural implementation problems was an enabling factor for the Maoists to start the People’s War and an opportunity to criticize the aid agencies.

The idea of the ‘*theatre of outcomes*’ was introduced and suggested that aid projects and programmes portrayed themselves as producing better development results than before the conflict started in 1996. One respondent said “*Then, we found ourselves in a crazy situation. We were standing on our head trying to look to the conflict differently and then you have projects and programmes reporting that they are doing fantastic stuff out there in an environment that is almost impossible to work in, when at the same time they [programmes and projects LvD] had never done this kind of stuff before when they were not in a violent environment to negotiate themselves through...I think that is another example of the theatre of outcomes...*” (A4). This might be a case of boldness bordering on self-deception, perhaps precipitated by the above-mentioned fear among aid workers of job loss. Having presented a general view of boldness within the aid community in Nepal, which was perceived as not that impressive. Now, we move to bold behaviour by individual agencies.

Boldness by individual agencies Overall, aid agencies tended not to be bold in pursuing their aid operations. However, to argue that boldness on the side of individual aid agencies was totally absent is not correct. Respondents provided examples of situations whereby aid agencies were encouraged to take bold decisions or steps. Examples given included denying the warring parties use of agency assets (A49), the expansion or start-up of programmes (A18) or indeed the closure of programmes (A37). One example of an expanded programme was the TBBP implemented by Helvetas (A51); an example of a start up might be DFID's CSP, and an example of a closure might be DANIDA's Forestry Programme, which was stopped after the Coup d'état of the King on the first of February 2005.

Boldness by individuals The overall picture above suggests a general lack of boldness among the collective of agencies. However, this does not mean that next to individual agencies, individuals could not act boldly. The interview data appear to suggest that boldness tended to be initiated by individuals rather than by the agencies they represented, although it was the agencies they worked for which provided the platform or the scope for bold behaviour (A44). Three examples will be given describing the dynamics between the nexus of organisational and personal boldness within the aid community and the compounding situation in the country.

The first example relates to the attempt to turn around "*...the ship of contracting development activities*", via the introduction of the Basic Operating Guidelines (BOGs) by 10 donor agencies at the end of 2003 in order "*...to keep development operating in a very difficult environment*" (A4).²⁶⁰ This happened not on the instruction of headquarters in one of the donor countries, but on the initiative of the head of DFID/N, with the help of representatives of various agencies.²⁶¹ The adoption of the BOGs was a bold and necessary move to maintain and regain space for development (A4) and to reclaim the middle ground in the conflict (A64). The introduction of the BOGs was bold for four reasons. Firstly, it encouraged a large segment of the international aid community to acknowledge the conflict openly, while

²⁶⁰ Which was initiated by the Head of DFID/ Nepal (David Wood), but suggested by Tony Vaux during a consultancy, and in 2001 suggested by Jonathan Goodhand in country conflict assessment.

²⁶¹ Personal involvement, second half 2003. In 2000, Goodhand makes the suggestion to introduce ground rules for development agencies operating in Nepal. Tony Vaux, during a consultancy for DFID/N suggests the same in spring-summer 2003 (Personal communication).

forms of denial were still present within that same community. Secondly, the process of drafting the BOGs enabled a rather fragmented international aid community to agree on a common, if minimal, denominator. Thirdly, those involved in the drafting process were able to withstand pressure from USAID to influence the character of the content.²⁶² Fourth, as the document implied the existence of conflict, the undersigning agencies were willing to defy a host government in denial of the conflict. A respondent reflecting on the period in which the BOGs were drafted said: *"...they were in complete denial about the conflict...in the ministry I worked you could not talk about it...it was erased from every document"* (A4). In other words, the introduction of the BOGs was a wake-up call for those in the government rejecting the idea of conflict in the country.

The second example relates to bold behaviour by a group of individuals, working in various agencies, playing a significant role in the process of initiating the deployment of Human Rights Monitors in Nepal, which was decided in Geneva in April 2005 (A55). This was bold because there was not only resistance from actors within Nepal (for example actors within the government) but disbelief of political actors outside Nepal that it could work as well. One respondent stated: *"It was an activist group of individuals of which some worked within the embassies and some within the development agencies. They came together and said that there was a need to get international monitors on the ground, as a means of curtailing potentially huge human rights abuses and putting pressure on the government and the Maoists and to move towards peace. They had to be activists, in the sense that there was a real disbelief in capitals"* (A29).

The last example relates to bold behaviour by a single individual, which without backing from headquarters turned out rather successfully; being a contribution to the avoidance of massive bloodshed in Kathmandu, during the end stage of Andolan II (during spring 2006). In that period, after 3 weeks of large-scale protests in Kathmandu, tension on the streets was so high that devastating bloodshed was

²⁶² One criticism of the BOGs was that they appeared to place the Maoists on an equal footing with the Nepali Government (A56), and USAID did not sign them because of this. Based on my own involvement in the drafting process, the document was first and foremost an attempt to deal with the realities faced by aid agency staff in the field and the challenges they faced to get access from both the government and the Maoists.

expected. A full and lengthy quotation follows, since it provides insight into the dynamics of a crucial moment in Nepal's contemporary history, the stepping down of King Gyanendra, and since it shows the decisive role played by a representative of the international aid community in a volatile situation.²⁶³ The respondent stated: *"...sometimes it may be better not to consult; a big case here, in which I did not consult with my headquarters was successful, which led to the King's second statement...during the end of the People's Movement when he gave up. I was deeply involved in discussions between the army and the political parties, which led to the text of what the King said. I decided to trust the chief of the Army staff and that he was not playing games with me, there was a grave risk on Sunday...of huge demonstrations...which might have led to large number of deaths...possibly ransacking the palace...I was being asked to do something by people I knew personally and I thought if it works...it would be useful for Nepal. It was Sunday morning at 10.00 am. If I had asked my headquarter, then they would have told me not to do it, so I decided not to consult, but I did tell headquarters afterwards, and they told me that I should not have done it and that they would throw me out if I would decide to repeat it... and that always rankled with me, that my headquarter did not come around and say that was a hell of risk man, frankly you should not have done it...but it worked well-done...They could never say that word well-done".* (Respondent's code withheld). This incident not only reflects individual boldness, but also shows that individual boldness, the joy of satisfaction, in the sense of contributing to the avoidance of bloodshed, and personal disappointment due to a lack of understanding and support from the aid practitioner's own organisation, can be tragically close together. Now, we move to an overview of enabling and constraining factors contributing to the perceived general lack of boldness within the international aid community.

Enabling and constraining factors The fourth domain emerging from the data relates to enabling and constraining factors affecting the ability to act boldly as an aid agency. Respondents mentioned explicitly one enabling factor, namely the backing of superiors in the institutional sphere of an aid agency. This factor was referred to in the context of a comparison between the agencies USAID and DFID/N.

²⁶³ In addition, showing the rather lengthy quote is an expression of credit to the person concerned.

USAID's position vis-à-vis the War on Terror influenced aid agencies in their position towards the Maoists, forcing them not to speak to or recognise them. DFID/N was to a certain extent able to free itself from this influence and by doing so DFID/N was perceived as acting more boldly than USAID (A44).²⁶⁴ There are two probable reasons for this, namely the position of an aid agency within a government structure and the superiors' position regarding bold behaviour. Firstly, it was suggested that by comparison with USAID, DFID/N had a much more autonomous position within the British government. Since USAID is incorporated with the State Department and obliged to follow State Department policy, while DFID/N is part of a separate ministry with a cabinet ranking minister (A44). Secondly, it was suggested that boldness is possible when the chain of superiors within a given organisation is willing to give political backing. *"If you have ministerial backing you can become very bold...if your minister is not prepared to be brave, then you cannot put forward a bold point of view..."* (A64). According to one respondent, ministerial backing enabled DFID/N to become quite bold in terms of internal policy discussions between various government departments, resulting in several clashes between DFID, the Foreign Office (FO) and Ministry of Defence (MoD), both in Kathmandu and in London (A44). In addition, it was suggested that bold behaviour by an aid agency can be enhanced if the leadership within that agency has a certain amount of genius, such as was perceived as being present within the leadership of DFID/N (A34). This brings us to the role of individuals in agencies, which is discussed in the section below.

Next to enabling factors (or the lack thereof) several constraining factors were identified as hampering boldness within the international aid community. Various issues were suggested, some of which interconnect.

Firstly, it was argued that "Noble causes of the aid agencies themselves" could constrain possible bold behaviour (A37). Another possible reason was the lack of social imagination on the side of the expatriates within aid agencies regarding the interplay between the dominant and historical elements of Nepali society and what they were trying to do while in Nepal (A45).

²⁶⁴ I am not suggesting that DFID/N approached the Maoists directly, merely that DFID/N was seen as bolder than USAID, in terms of the initiatives employed to address constructively the conflict and its conflicting parties, in particular the Maoist leadership.

Then, it was suggested, that Nepali staff within aid agencies were, for reasons of group interest, obstructing possible bold behaviour (A46). *“There was no boldness within the agencies, because high-level decision-making staff and implementing staff are from the dominant castes. These people had also an attitude that they were not interested to serve the people. So, they blocked the development process as much as possible...”* (A53). A slightly more nuanced comment suggests the same, but adds the possibility that expatriates in decision-making positions could have been misinformed about the situation in the country *“...what we sometimes seem to forget is that much local staff employed in aid agencies, particularly in the country offices were interested in preserving the impression that business-as-usual should carry on, and often how unrepresentative these people were, ethnically, caste-wise and class-wise, region-wise, and the influence that might have had on the perceptions...in the top of these agencies and in how they saw the situation in the country”* (A44). This might imply that bold aid activities could have made a difference to marginalised communities if properly implemented.

Another constraining factor related to the organisational cultures and agendas within aid agencies. These seem to have played out in two different ways. Firstly, it was suggested that at least some NGOs were overwhelmed by donors, perceiving them as *“complex emergencies”* (A26) due to their bureaucratic complexity at one hand, and obsession for simplicity at the other, resulting in NGO representatives not having *“...the guts to stand up to their donors and say ‘this is ridiculous’...because you do not bite the hand that feeds you...”* (A26). This process hampered information flows, the acquisition of a good appreciation of local realities, and any consideration of possible bold strategic behaviour. Secondly, boldness might be obstructed by how expatriate staff felt themselves in their organisations. In relation to this, one respondent described his rather liberal American friends working in USAID as having lost their boldness within that institution, resulting *“...in not asking too many questions any more”* (A30).

It was further suggested that US position vis-à-vis the War on Terror made other players within the international community timid about contacting the Maoists (A44), with the probable result that aid agencies would have set up communication with the Maoists earlier if the Maoists had not been put on the US terror list. To close this section, it was suggested that boldness or bold strategic behaviour among aid agencies

could also be impeded by a lack of coordination among the aid agencies (A6). This might suggest that boldness in strategic behaviour could have been possible had there been greater cooperation on certain commonly agreed issues.

Above we have discussed briefly four dimensions which emerged from the interviews and related to boldness within the international aid community in Nepal: the overall character of the aid agencies in relation to boldness, low-level expressions of bold behaviour by individual agencies, major expressions of bold behaviour in the nexus of individuals within agencies, and enabling and constraining factors affecting bold behaviour by aid agencies in the Nepali context. Now, we move to a reflection on the place of boldness in the process of strategizing aid operations in turbulent environments.

13.4 Reflection

The above paragraphs show that at least some interviewees did not have a good opinion of the degree of bold behaviour by Nepal's international aid community regarding the reduction of poverty and conflict. At the same time one respondent indicated that bold behaviour was (sometimes) necessary to get things moving (A37). Notwithstanding, several cases were identified where bold behaviour was displayed, by individual agencies, groups of agencies, and networks of individuals or single individuals. Therefore, it is possible to argue that boldness plays a role within processes of strategizing and implementing aid operations and that this role is, depending on the context, an important one.

It is not necessarily wise for the aid strategist to turn its back on bold behaviour, either at an individual or organisational; refraining from bold behaviour might hamper furthering the ideal form of aid. In the case of Nepal however, it was argued that the aid agencies preferred, "*...to stagger in a swamp than rocking the boat to move forward and avoid sinking*" (A56).

What might be the place of boldness in the context of strategizing and implementing aid operations? Boldness is an attempt by the aid strategist to take responsibility for a situation in the sense of actively aiming for and engaging in contributions for positive

change. A strategy might be considered bold where it goes beyond what is accepted as possible or the norm in a given operational environment. In other words, a bold strategy is one, which uses the presence of an agency and its aid operation(s) as a means to change the situation between conflicting parties in ways they would not necessarily have chosen, but in general terms accept, to the benefit of local communities in terms of poverty and conflict reduction.²⁶⁵

By not being bold an aid strategist might miss opportunities to improve situations. Two respondents indicated that a lack of boldness regarding hierarchical power relations (A15) and the history of implementation problems (A4), contributed to the misallocation of aid resources and the initiation of the conflict. So, just as being bold might have consequences, so being timid, although it may be more comfortable for an individual or organisation.

At the same time, it is not very likely that unflinching boldness by an aid strategist will guarantee success. The agency concerned might face, for example, too much resistance from antagonistic actors in the operating environment. In other words, it is the correct understanding of when, where, how and with what consequences bold behaviour can be applied in the process of strategizing and implementing aid operations that is necessary for success.

Implicit in the interview data is the fact that windows of opportunity for bold behaviour in contexts of compounding conflict are more likely to become limited than increased. Therefore, the likely opportunities to apply bold behaviour should ideally be considered before and during the course of an aid operation, not after the opportunities have passed. Within the framework of the 'aid trinity', the remainder of this section reflects on a few aspects an aid strategist might wish to consider if he wants to have a balanced approach to the application of boldness in the process of strategizing and

²⁶⁵ Two types of boldness might be identified. The first type of bold behaviour is courageous behaviour, but will not necessarily lead to detrimental antagonistic responses from actors who can threaten an aid agency and its operations. This form of boldness could be characterised as courageous, sophisticated, measured and strategic. The second type of behaviour is that which appears to be daring, but is in fact, given the expected antagonistic responses, more likely lead to organisational collapse at the expense of the people the agency aims to serve. This type of behaviour might be characterised as naïve, amateur, simplistic and reckless. In other words, boldness should not be confused with blunt, arrogant or irritant behaviour on the side of an aid agency and its staff.

implementing aid operations in turbulent environments. Although low-level forms of boldness might have real (negative or positive) impact on particular groups within a local population, the focus of the discussion will primarily be on the production of major acts of boldness and the introduction of the BOGs in particular.

One of the first tasks for the aid strategist in this respect to assess what I want to call the “history and culture of boldness”: when and where were agencies bold, and to what benefit and costs, and when and where were agencies timid, to what benefit and costs? This addresses the line between what constitutes bold, but acceptable, organisational behaviour, and what is perceived as rather brusque organisational behaviour that is not acceptable to actors in the operational environment. This is vital if a negative perception of an agency’s bold behaviour is to be avoided (A4); as such negative responses are to be avoided wherever possible.²⁶⁶

Next, the notion of the ideal form of aid implies that aid agencies work with the local population to improve their circumstances. Therefore, boldness in the development or application of a strategy should primarily be focused on improving the position of local communities, and should not work to their disadvantage. However, if an aid strategist acts boldly regarding conflicting parties, for example by suspending a programme, there may most likely be a short-term negative impact on the local population. This negative impact is then the unintended result of bold behaviour but not its aim. Therefore, the aid strategist must weigh the benefits of bold behaviour against anticipated negative consequences for the local population.

The above suggests that boldness in strategizing and implementation aid operations should not be aimed at the local population in the operational environment. In this respect it might be helpful to refer to Clausewitz’s suggestion that bold acts should focus on the enemy’s weak spots (H&P: 190-191). The implication for the aid

²⁶⁶It should be noted that the “culture of boldness” is dynamic, so what might be acceptable at a particular stage of a conflict, might be unacceptable or impossible at another stage. This implies that boldness should be contextualised rather than being based on the aid practitioner’s own culture. This requires in turn the unlearning of the home culture of bold behaviour and trying to understand the meaning of boldness within the operational environment. Various respondents suggested that in the Nepali context bold behaviour should take a gradual form (A45) and be balanced with politeness (A49) in order to work well.

strategist is that he has to identify those weaknesses of the various conflict parties, which need to be addressed in order to change their positions regarding an aid operation to the benefit of the local population.

The BOGs achieved this to a certain extent. Neither the Nepali government nor the CPN-M wanted to be perceived by the international aid community as violators of a series of guiding principles, which explained how international actors aimed to address the poverty in the given circumstances of the country. Continued violation of the rules by the government could mean a reduction of support. Continued violations of the BOGs by the CPN-M would not help their attempts to be accepted within the international aid community in Nepal and beyond. In the case of the deployment of the OCHCR, those initiating the process betted on the assumption that the Nepal government wanted to avoid at all costs being seen as a pariah within the international community and being placed in the same category as countries like Somalia (A29).

Clausewitz argues that boldness is central to the conduct of war. While this is not necessarily the case with respect to aid operations in turbulent environments, it is worth realising that in a turbulent environment, there might be a lot of agencies and individuals willing to see the application of bold (strategic) behaviour to change the dynamics within a particular operational environment. However, in spite of such willingness, the data from Nepal appear to suggest that individuals and agencies are, for several reasons, often too timid to contribute initially to the development and application of bold responses.

So how, against such timidity, might the aid strategist contribute to the development of a significant bold response? To this end there are three inter-related issues to consider: his own position, the position of his agency, including the backing of its institutional sphere, and the position of representatives of other aid agencies and their willingness and capability to employ boldness. An aid strategist might personally expect to operate on the basis of altruism and be willing to risk the possibility of personal or organisational repercussions. This should not, however, be assumed from others. In other words, a bold response should offer a benefit for those who contribute, which has to be seen as more significant than the risks of being involved. This can vary from context to context. While formulating and maintaining this response, it should be

realised that not only might the willingness and capability of each additional actor vary over time, but the incentives to join as well.

Regarding the issue of institutional backing, the data suggest that this is particularly helpful in the process of applying bold behaviour as an aid agency in a given context. This backing cannot be assumed: there may not be automatic support from superiors for bold behaviour. However, an aid strategist should be aware that he can stimulate such support, for example, by encouraging representatives from headquarters to visit the country on a regular basis (A52). Equally, bold behaviour initiated by the institutional sphere of an aid agency and imposed upon the aid strategist might be doomed to fail if the aid strategist is not able to rally support among a substantial group of like-minded actors in the operational environment. One such example might be the attempts by representatives of humanitarian agencies active in Nepal to present Nepal as a humanitarian crisis in need of humanitarian interventions.²⁶⁷

The next point relates to staff. They can in themselves be enabling or constraining factors in the process of implementing a bold response as individual or collective of aid agencies. Clausewitz argues that boldness should ideally be embedded in every part of an army and that boldness is one of the noblest features of a soldier. From this angle an aid strategist could explore to what extent the staff within his agency are prepared to be bold and how it could be encouraged. Plans to work in under-serviced, Maoist-controlled areas might indeed be bold. However, if staff cannot be found who are willing to enter these areas, for fear of having to engage with Maoists about issues such as access, then a bold idea becomes unrealistic.

The interview data seem to suggest that boldness was not necessarily a key asset of the national aid staff, perhaps as a combined result of Nepal's hierarchical culture and the bureaucratic nature of the aid agencies. An aid strategist could therefore explore what, apart from training, he could do to enable boldness to flourish among staff at an organisational level if necessary. However, he must also assess whether the dynamics within the operational environment are favourable, since focusing attention solely on ingraining a culture of boldness in aid staff, while losing sight of opportunities to act

²⁶⁷ See for example, Action Contra la Faim, Food Security Report, (2005) Kathmandu/ Nepal.

boldly, will not necessarily directly further the reduction of poverty and turbulence in an operational environment.²⁶⁸

Clausewitz points to one further factor in the role of boldness: passion. He warns that bold behaviour should not spring from wild bursts of passion (*ibid*). Was passion involved for example in the formulation and implementation of the BOGs? Based on observations I would contend that emotions were not absent from decision-making concerning the BOGs. However, it was my impression that this passion was most often balanced by considerate reflection by those involved. This said, it appeared to me that in cases of low-level boldness (for example the closure of a programme), agencies were less reflective, simply because their time for reflection was less as decisions were made relatively quickly, while the latter generated more direct consequences for beneficiaries, than the former.

One last aspect of boldness is that of time and duration in relation to the formation and implementation of a bold move. In Clausewitz's context the application of boldness in a strategy was aimed at enabling a short, sharp decisive manoeuvre on the battlefield. This does not necessarily apply in the domain of aid delivery. For example, while Quick Impact Projects may appear bold due to their de-coupling from government structures, and intensive and short duration. They are, in the case of Nepal, not necessarily so if they uphold and reinforce processes of social exclusion or the status quo between conflicting parties. Ideally, bold strategies should be applied if they further the ideal form of aid in given context, for example by changing the status quo between conflicting parties to the benefit of local populations.

To close this reflection, Clausewitz esteems bold acts in the theatre of war even if they produce adverse outcomes. Aid strategists with an idealistic or romantic bent might be tempted to apply this idea to the actions of aid agencies as well. The risk however, is that aid operations which fail strategically or operationally or both might be labelled as

²⁶⁸ In addition, it took the ten signatories of the Basic Operating Guidelines some time to realise that publishing the BOGs only in the English or Nepali Dailies was insufficient, that their staff needed proper explanation and training on how to use the BOGs in the field and that some aid agency practices needed to change according to the BOGs. CIDA contributed to an extensive effort to get the message of the BOGs disseminated in the field (own observations).

bold behaviour and therefore hailed as success. An aid strategist should try to avoid cancelling out managerial blunders with bold behaviour.

Chapter 14 On Cunning

14.1 Introduction

Clausewitz argues in a short chapter on the issue of cunning that warring parties might employ cunning or cunning behaviour towards each other in order to further their own objectives (H&P: 202-203). Personally, I found the concept of cunning not only useful in grasping the military and political interactions between the conflicting parties in Nepal, but in giving a twofold warning as well. Firstly, if conflicting parties can behave with cunning towards each other in war, it is imaginable that they might not only be cunning towards each other but to aid agencies who work in the same operational context as well. Secondly, while the conflict deepened and interests of agencies and people in these agencies were threatened, the concept of cunning made me aware of the possibility of cunning behaviour on the part of aid agencies and of individuals within these aid agencies. Both facilitating misguided strategies and misallocation of valuable aid resources and supporting not necessarily the most suitable policies.

The application of Clausewitz's concept of cunning to the sphere of aid and development is not straightforward and has some drawbacks. I contend however, as responses of various respondents to a certain degree show, that the use of the concept of cunning by an operational aid strategist is to be recommended, regardless of the personal willingness or capability to be cunning.

14.2 Clausewitz's view on Cunning²⁶⁹

Cunning is, according to Clausewitz a form of deceit. Cunning is an action that allows the enemy to make his own mistake to the advantage of the misleaders. He continues to argue that 'no human characteristic appears so suited to the task of directing and inspiring strategy as the gift of cunning'. The use of cunning in strategy as a default option is therefore attractive. Clausewitz provides three warnings in relation to the use of cunning in the process of strategizing. Firstly, the application of cunning consumes

²⁶⁹ H&P: 202-203.

resources, which might not be available in case they are necessary. Secondly, the application of cunning might not generate necessarily the intended effect. In other words, deception might not always work as planned. Thirdly, the ideal circumstances to be cunning on the battlefield, in terms of the room to manoeuvre, might not be available. Therefore, Clausewitz concludes that: *“an accurate and penetrating understanding is a more useful and essential asset for the commander than any gift for cunning...”*. However, he continues, to argue that cunning will not do harm, as long as it is only sparsely used. On top of that he shows an understanding for commanders in weak positions and with bleak prospects for the future, who are using cunning as their only hope of success.

14.3 Cunning and Nepal's international aid community

Mentioning the concept of cunning to members of Nepal's aid community generated various responses and insights regarding its meaning in relation to the management of aid and its operational environment. Responses varied from antipathy, as well as recognition and even the perception of cunning as a normal practice within aid agencies.

One respondent raised eyebrows after referring to the idea of cunning. The term was related to persons who are nasty, backhanded, not transparent, telling lies, and backstabbing if they could, implying that cunning should not have any place in the context of aid and development. At the same time it was acknowledged that there was sometimes the need for aid agencies to be manipulative at a strategic level, whereby the use of cunning was sometimes necessary as part of appropriate and flexible strategizing (A12). Another respondent recognised the cunning behaviour of the aid agencies in Nepal during the conflict. For example in *“chasing opportunities generated by the conflict, beating their own drum or getting new or additional sources of funding, expanding areas of operation and making themselves look important”* (A44). However, the significance of this behaviour was downplayed and implicitly seen as normal within the global aid community. Because, *“that is something that happens...even in non-conflict situations, where organisations seek to carry on working or find new opportunities of work”* (A44). My interpretation of the above ranges of views is that there are various opinions on the idea of cunning and its

application. It is recognised as a common practise, but only with limited acceptability within the aid community.

Purposes of cunning Respondents appeared to suggest cunning behaviour for various purposes among aid agencies active in Nepal. One respondent indicated that cunning could play a part in the way in which programs or projects are actually designed and presented. *"You get substantial amounts of funding, despite the fact that maybe the targets set in the proposal are not achievable"*. The same respondent suggests that a requirement for this type of cunning is *"...someone who is quite prepared to be dishonest and wheel-over donors faces and is prepared to use the available resources for another agenda, knowing that the donor will not strictly monitor"* (A3).

Another respondent implied another form of cunning behaviour, this time related to maintaining operational space of aid activities in the midst of the conflict. *"You could not officially say that you were negotiating with Maoists or whatever, but in practice they needed to keep their programs going. This probably required a combination of attributes being cunning, and bravery, dogginess and termination alongside that"* (A44).

The above responses appear to suggest that the application can have negative or positive purposes. Negative cunning behaviour seems to be primarily focused on benefiting the cunning agency, for example financially. This type of behaviour can, for example, be invited if the cunning agency expects that the deception will not be discovered by the funding agency. So, negative cunning behaviour appears to be rather ego- or agency-centric in orientation. Cunning behaviour with a positive purpose appears to move beyond an ego- or agency-centric orientation of those who employ it. An example might be the maintenance or creation of the operational space of a project or a program. If an agency succeeds in this, it will not only benefit the agency concerned, but opens the possibility to provide assistance of communities as well. This type of behaviour seems to occur when agencies feel themselves obliged to do it for reasons which go beyond their own organisational needs.

Levels of cunning and a strategic example Not only could different purposes for cunning behaviour be identified, but cunning can take place on different levels as well.

A respondent suggested that cunning behaviour is not only an activity, which takes place in the capital as part of a process to obtain donor funding, it can also be expected at field level. *“On the local level a lot of the implementers of development projects, and some employees of large agencies, or partner organizations must have used a lot of cunning to be able to balance the tricky situation they were in”* (A44).

One respondent suggested that cunning behaviour couldn't only be found on field level, but on a strategic level within a donor agency as well. This respondent is extensively quoted to show how this cunning behaviour worked on a strategic level, how tying up of development and political objectives interacted with each other and how the result was perceived. *“What disturbed people in my capital was the apparent difference in position of my donor agency and the other government departments in relation to Nepal, in principal our Office of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Defence. These two departments suggested the idea of combining budgets, to have joint funding, to deal with conflicts in particular countries. It is a way of bringing sides together as you have to agree a joint strategy and you work on it. The contributions to the budget are pooled; there is one strategy and three departments implementing it. In this respect, my agency was pressurized to join up to this and in a way we developed cunning, persuading them to do things, because the other two departments had hardly any money. In effect we became the largest shareholder, and then we started raising difficulties for the joint strategy in relation to what the other departments wanted. It was a cunning response...it was a way to get the strategy of my agency adopted by the other departments rather than the other way around. So, as a result we came to a common minimal agreement really. However, in fact it became a nightmare, because we constantly argued about these little bits of money under the common pool, while in the mean time we went our own way with our own budget. At the end it was cunning but not successful”* (A64).

The above highlights various facets of cunning as a concept. First, cunning is not only an activity practised by the higher echelons of an organisation, but can take place on various levels. Secondly, cunning might be a result of being under pressure. Due to their perceived need to keep aid activities going, field level staff applied cunning to achieve that goal. On a strategic level within aid agencies cunning might be applied to ‘influence’ players within their own institutional sphere. Thirdly, the focus on cunning

varies with the level at which it takes place. At field level cunning appears to relate to practical issues like maintaining access to areas, while at a higher level, cunning might relate to the less practical, but not less important issues of policy and strategy formulation.

Cunning by players in the operational environment One respondent elaborated extensively about cunning behaviour in the operational environment of aid agencies working in Nepal. The respondent suggested that *"the masters of cunning are the bureaucracy of Nepal"*, and that although, *"...donors may play some games, however they will never be able to out-manoeuvre the Nepali establishment with cunning. Historically the establishment has survived on cunning"* (A4).

It was further suggested that the reason why the donor community might not be able to out-manoeuvre the Nepali establishment, relates to Brahmanistic behaviour by the Nepali ruling elite. Bista (1994) describes Brahmanistic behaviour as fatalistic; this Brahmanistic behaviour also contains, according to the respondent, elements of cunning. These elements are described as follows, *"...It is a Brahmin tradition of working behind people's backs, nothing is ever in front of you, it is always behind you, the wheeling and dealing. So, you are never quite sure where you are..."* (A4).²⁷⁰

In addition, the respondent suggested that the way cunning is perceived by westerners is coloured by the religious tradition they are part of and the overall culture they have to operate in. *"I think it is something which relates with the religious tradition of the place...you know that there are certain rules, but you manoeuvre them to suit what you're doing in that point of time, which I think differs from a Western positivist, some kind of Christian tradition where you have certain rules, rights and wrongs, some kind of 10 commandments...tablets of stone...Where I think in the Hindu tradition...it is more tablets of sand that are movable"* (A4). Moreover, the same respondent linked a possible misreading of the conflict in Nepal by western players arising from cunning behaviour on the part of who might have initiated and backed the People's War. *"All the analyses made and assumptions are based on the fact that the Maoist's insurgency in Nepal was a home grown insurgency. The more I look back, the more I am*

²⁷⁰ The same respondent referred to the existence of a Gallic saying: *"as cunning as the Brahmin"* (A4). I have not checked its actual existence.

convinced that that is not the case. Taking a wider picture it was the boldness and possible the cunning of other players which allowed the Maoist insurgency to develop” (A4).

The above appears to suggest a few things about the concept of cunning.²⁷¹ Firstly, the concept of cunning implies that certain behaviour might lead to a situation whereby those on whom cunning behaviour is practised are not clear of what is in front or of what might change what is in front of them. Therefore, the comment on the gap between a Christian-positivist tradition and a Hindu tradition is particularly worthwhile. It suggests that religious cultural frameworks could be a source of friction in the sense that they are barriers to seeing and understanding what is happening in other settings, which use other religious and cultural frameworks, which in turn might lead to unexpected outcomes. Lastly, the comment made that the Maoist insurgency might not be a home-grown insurgency but supported by outsiders, points us to the possibility of outside players operating in secret, which in turn only can be seen in retrospect after the deception by these players have already taken place.

Having presented thoughts on cunning based on its interpretation by a few respondents in the Nepali context, we move to the last part of this chapter in which Clausewitz’s thoughts and the interview responses related to cunning will be brought together. From the perspective of an aid strategist some practical points for consideration will be offered, and subsequently the negative and positive implications of these points will be discussed.

14.4 Reflection

The above strands of data appear to suggest that cunning existed in a turbulent environment like Nepal. Therefore it might be argued that an aid strategist is naïve if he assumes that in conflict situations cunning behaviour is totally absent. It might be the easiest route to engage in processes of strategizing aid and development. However, as a consequence it will most probably invite unwelcome surprises, as various players might manipulate the allocated aid resources in ways, which at best perpetuate and at

²⁷¹ A caveat is justified. There is no attempt here to stigmatize or downgrade individuals with a Brahmin background. Cunning behaviour is not a trait, which should be applied to individual Brahmins. In addition, it is not suggested that the Christian-positivist tradition is better than the Hindu tradition.

worst increase the turbulence in the operational environment. In other words, understanding modes of cunning in the process of strategizing aid is a necessity for success; it is not a luxury after-thought while evaluating a finished aid activity.

However, assuming the opposite and taking for granted that all players in the operational environment of an aid operation employ cunning all the time, is foolish and will most likely result in a de-facto absence of a strategy for the aid operation concerned. Speculating about all uses of cunning, might induce confusion and will hinder clear thinking about who might produce cunning behaviour, when, where, why and how, with what consequences and what can be done to mitigate the consequences. Accepting the concept of cunning as though everyone is always using cunning makes the concept as analytical tool to strategize an aid operation in a turbulent context impractical. In other words, an aid strategist who perceives every player to be employing cunning becomes, like an over-alert intelligence analyst, a casualty of his own suspicion, subsequently adding to processes of friction (Handel in: Betts and Mahnken 2003: 9).

This leaves the question of how, within the context of the 'aid trinity', an aid strategist might best strike a balance between the two ends of the spectrum of how the issue of cunning can be dealt with in order to further understanding of the possible impacts of this behaviour on the successfulness of aid activities? To answer this question we look first to the presented interview data, move then to Clausewitz's ideas on cunning. The focus of attention is on cunning for negative purposes by players within the domain of conflicting parties.

The interview data seem to imply that conflicting parties primarily employed negative forms of cunning behaviour. The data seem also to suggest that it is not unfair to assume that various aid agencies employed negative forms of cunning as well. However, it is equally reasonable to assume that the majority of agencies applied cunning for positive purposes, for example to hamper negatively perceived policies initiated by players in their institutional sphere or to support local communities. Although it might have happened, the data do not suggest positive or negative cunning behaviour on the part of local communities towards aid agencies. The implications of the above might allow an aid strategist to consider two issues. Firstly, the possibility of

cunning behaviour by key players as a means to an end, and the subsequent possibility of misallocation of aid resources, due to that behaviour, subsequently creating friction in the course of an aid operation. Secondly, an aid strategist might tend to focus attention on negative forms of cunning behaviour on the part of conflict parties, however he could consider as well the possibility of cunning behaviour applied by players within the domain of the institutional sphere.

When focusing attention on negative forms of cunning behaviour by conflicting parties, it might be good to refer to Clausewitz's empathy for commanders in weak positions use need cunning as their only chance of success (H&P: 202-203). The implications for the practice of an aid strategist are that he must identify the weaker parties in a conflict as they are more likely to employ cunning behaviour to increase their chances of success assumed, in line with Clausewitz's thinking, that they have the means, the room to manoeuvre and a reasonable chance of success (ibid: 202-203). After an exploration of the weaker players in the domain of conflict parties, it might be sensible for the aid strategist to analyse the intent and capabilities to employ cunning behaviour of the weaker actor and the need for the weaker party to direct aid allocations in their favour.²⁷² In addition, it might be equally helpful if the aid strategist gains a historical understanding of cunning behaviour by weaker players and their preferred modes of cunning behaviour as well.

Attention can then be given to the stronger players among the domain of conflicting parties and the two other domains of the 'aid trinity' i.e. institutional sphere domain and the domain of local people. Based on the above, an analysis could be carried out on how the impact of misallocation of aid resources arising from the use of cunning can be avoided, detected or dealt with. At this point it is essential to bear in mind that in a turbulent situation, players might become stronger or weaker, perhaps as a result of the application of negative modes of cunning behaviour. This in itself might bring about changes in their intentions, capabilities and need for cunning behaviour in relation to the strategic allocation of aid resources of aid agencies. Therefore the analysis of how cunning behaviour could affect misallocation of aid resources should be revisited on a regular basis.

²⁷² Idea inspired by Handel in: Betts and Mahnken 2003: 13.

How does the above relate to the case of Nepal? Based on the data available, including my own practice and observations, the following pattern seems to appear. The western-oriented aid community, responding allergic-ally to the spreading of Maoism (A37), spent more effort in gaining an understanding of the Maoist movement, then on trying to unravel the political dynamics of the political-bureaucratic elite most threatened by the People's War and its impact on the direction of aid allocations. In attempting to gain an understanding of the conflict, the focus of studies was primarily on the Maoists, then on gaining a deep understanding of the causes of conflict and the role the government and the agencies themselves played in this process.

The Maoists were perceived by the aid community as an 'unknown' threat, which should be understood in order to take appropriate measures. For example, training of development staff in personal security or the use of conflict-sensitive approaches towards development. This focus is understandable because the Maoists appeared to be the biggest threat to the operational space of aid agencies; however these efforts took resources away from aid agencies' attempts at understanding those who had a history of surviving by cunning and needed to be understood most, precisely because of the history of cunning in Nepal suggested by one of the respondents.

This process allowed a possible paradox to develop with the aid community. On one hand, the intent, capabilities and need of the Maoists to apply cunning behaviour was relatively well understood, and therefore their actions did not generate much amazement when their cunning actions in relation to aid allocations unfolded to the disadvantage of local communities.²⁷³ On the other hand, deceptive behaviour on the side of the political-bureaucratic establishment was met with surprise, as the aid community did not know what to expect from them. For example the royal take-over on the 1st February 2005 triggered the realisation within the aid community that the political-bureaucratic elite was not willing to address constructively the conflict in the country and willing to change, implying at least some misallocation of resources in favour of the government (A29).

²⁷³ The aid community did not appreciate these actions, but that is another story.

In the above, it is suggested that the aid community in Nepal focused its attention mainly on the origins, growth, internal functioning and aims of the Maoists and impact of the escalating conflict: despite being the relatively stronger player in the conflict in terms of having least to lose and most to gain. It is suggested as well that this singling out was not fully productive for the simple reason that it hampered deepening understanding of the Nepali political-bureaucratic establishment –relatively the weakest player as they had, within the domain of conflicting parties, most to lose from the spiralling conflict- and how this hampered proper allocation of aid resources during that period.

The above observation draws our attention to an opposite question: is an aid strategist sensible if he solely focuses on the weaker player(s) in a turbulent situation to avoid misallocation of aid resources arising from cunning behaviour –in the case of Nepal the political-bureaucratic establishment? I would argue that this is not balanced either. Although strong players are not necessarily forced to it, they are equally capable of using cunning behaviour to divert aid allocations in their direction. They might even be in a better position to do so, because they might have more capacity to do so owing to the strength of their position in the conflict. So, focusing only on weaker players and how they can contribute to the misallocation of resources by cunning behaviour does not negate the possibility that stronger players might use cunning behaviour for that same purpose.

So, what might be a sensible position for the aid strategist in a turbulent environment? In a partial echo of Clausewitz, I would like to suggest that a clear 360-degree understanding of the ‘aid trinity’ and how cunning behaviour might result in misallocation of aid resources is more relevant for the process of strategizing aid operations than a thorough understanding of capabilities for cunning of specific players within the ‘aid trinity’. Thus, there is more value in gaining an understanding of the ‘atmosphere of cunning’ which might prevail among players in a particular turbulent context than a ‘nitty-gritty’ understanding of specific uses of cunning behaviour by a few players, like for example the technicalities of corruption, in that same operational environment. However, if they are key to the success to your aid activity, then it might be worthwhile to analyse the culture of cunning of that particular (set of) player in more detail. Acknowledging that considerations regarding cunning with positive

purposes employed by the aid strategist himself or his organisation are not reflected upon here. I would like to conclude with a caveat: the 'atmosphere of cunning' should be understood by the aid strategist within the context in which it occurs and not on the basis of pre-conceived ideas and assumptions by the aid strategist himself; otherwise he might be victim of self-induced deception, threatening the success of aid agency's objectives.

Chapter 15 On Tension and Rest

15.1 Introduction

Clausewitz tables the concept of Tension and Rest in Chapter 18 of his book on Strategy. Here he argues that every war has its periods of action and inaction (H&P: 221). He advises that it is essential for a commander to recognize the rhythm of tension and rest within a war and “... *act in concert with their spirit*”.

This chapter shows that aid agencies and their operations were influenced by the rhythm of the conflict dynamics between Maoists and Nepali Government and its army. It also shows that aid agencies were not necessarily acting according to the spirit of this conflict rhythm, subsequently increasing friction in the course of strategizing and implementing aid operations.

By way of introduction to the remainder of this chapter I would like to recall a presentation given in a meeting held by the Association of International NGOs in Nepal (AIN) in Kathmandu during the second ceasefire –during which the conflicting parties were militarily at ‘rest’. The presentation addressed the issue of whether the agencies were ‘prepared for peace,’ and was given to a large group of aid agency representatives. The paper put forward the message that aid agencies were not prepared for the possibility that the ceasefire could become a peace agreement and urged attendees of the meeting to do exactly this and to start preparing for peace.²⁷⁴ The chairmen of AIN underscored the message of the presentation.

To a certain extent the presenter made a correct and legitimate point, as there was indeed hope among some aid workers that the ceasefire could turn into a peace process (A61), and aid agencies were not preparing for the possibility of peace. However, I maintained two objections. To begin with, the presenter assumed that the ceasefire would indeed turn into a more stable process furthering steps resulting in peace. This was to my understanding a deeply questionable premise given contra-indications such

²⁷⁴ The presenter worked during that time for the Canadian aid agency CECI and moved later on to London-based international peace-building agency International Alert.

as win-lose attitudes within the negotiation teams, poor preparations for talks and increasing levels of threatening language between representatives of the conflicting parties. Secondly, and more importantly, since the presentation and the paper were aimed at the aid agencies, it was assumed that the aid agencies had fully accepted the existence of war in the country. According to my understanding this was generally not the case either. So, although, I confess, did not express my objections openly, I had two main reservations. Firstly, why encourage aid agency representatives to prepare for peace when the majority of these agencies were in some state of denial about the conflict and its impact on their work?²⁷⁵ I also wondered if it might not be better to draw attention to the reality of violent conflict, perceiving the existing ceasefire not only as a prelude to the resumption of conflict, but also as an opportunity to prepare for an (intensified) resumption. In other words, the presentation did not encourage the aid agencies to act in the spirit of the dynamic of tension and rest between the conflicting parties. Some weeks later the ceasefire broke down and the war resumed.

To me, Clausewitz's ideas on tension and rest were helpful in three ways. To begin with, they helped me understand the interaction between the conflicting actors in terms of periods of action, resulting in various degrees of tension, and periods of inaction, resulting in various levels of rest. By extension, the concept of tension and rest allowed me to realise that aid agencies relate to and are influenced by this dynamic. Most importantly, in order to strategise appropriately the aid resources at hand, either as a set of aid agencies or as an individual aid agency, I realised that keeping a watchful eye on the political/ military dynamics the conflicting parties were generating was essential: they were dictating the rhythm of turbulence in the operational environment and shaping to a large extent, but not exclusively, the available operational space for the aid agencies at a given time. In other words, the conflicting parties were driving the tension and rest dynamics in the operational environment, and it was up to the aid agencies to incorporate into the processes of strategizing and implementation this rhythm of tension and rest. If that rhythm was not understood and anticipated intelligently, the allocation of aid resources could at best only sub-optimally address poverty reduction and at worst fuel the turbulence of the conflict. As with other concepts generated by Clausewitz, employing the concept of tension and rest in the

²⁷⁵ See for example also Chapter 11 "On Strategy".

realm of aid and development is not straightforward. However, I contend, as I will show below, that employing the concept of tension and rest in terms of activity and non-activity can be recommended to the aid strategist.

15.2 Clausewitz's views on Tension and Rest²⁷⁶

Clausewitz argues that *"...periods of active warfare will always be interspersed with greater or smaller periods of rest"*. He recognised that there are various gradations of tension, and what these gradations have in common is that during those periods that at least one of the conflicting parties is trying to push the war to a decision in their favour. Subsequently, decisions in this state – in contrast to periods of rest- might have greater effect on the course of war, than decisions in times of rest. Periods of rest, Clausewitz argues, do not imply that conflicting parties are inactive, however the activities implemented might arise *"...from incidental causes, and not designed to lead to major changes. Significant engagements, even major battles, may take place; but these actions are still of a different nature and therefore usually, have different results."* The most significant lesson in relation to the notion of tension and rest is according to Clausewitz *"...that any move made in a state of tension will be more important, and will have more results, than it would have if made in a state of equilibrium"*. In addition, activities taking place during periods of rest by conflicting parties, are by Clausewitz *"...regarded and treated as a mere corollary"*, as the *"...the state of crisis is the real war; the equilibrium is nothing but its reflex"*. Clausewitz therefore advises that it is essential for a commander to recognize the rhythm of tension and rest within a war and *"... act in concert with their spirit"*.

15.3 Tension and Rest within Nepal's international aid community

Between 2000 and 2005 the conflict between the conflicting parties intensified. Overall, development activities, such as for example decentralisation programmes (A35) contracted as a response.²⁷⁷ However, this trend was dynamic and not necessarily progressively linear or uniform across the country varying with each sector.

²⁷⁶ H&P: 221-222.

²⁷⁷ At the time of finishing this research the Norwegian Ambassador to Nepal indicated in a presentation that not much progress was made in the decentralisation sector. (Trondheim, NTNU Gloschaugen, the 1st of September 2009).

Based on the interviewee data a story emerged around several topics. The story is not necessarily neat or consistent, but provides a general idea as to how the tension and rest dynamic among conflict parties influenced the rhythm of tension and rest within the aid industry. The topics are: the rhythms of the seasons and national festivals, the compounding conflict dynamic, sudden outbursts of violence, ceasefires and other periods of relaxation and finally the expansion of some aid activities.

Seasonal patterns and national festivals The patterns of season and national festivals did not only influence the operations of aid agencies, but the conflicting parties as well. Before the war started aid agencies had to deal with the seasonal rhythm of Nepal and the need to incorporate this in the planning of operations: “...you had this mad rush before monsoon time, as you cannot do much during the harvesting time or when it is really cold in the mountains, so there were times where things had to peak” (A4). Aid agencies’ activities were also shaped by the rhythm of national festivals, such as Dashai and Tihar (around September and October). During these festivals most government offices were closed and national aid agency staff took holiday to celebrate the festivals with families and friends. So, not much work could be done in these periods (own observation).

It could be argued that the rhythm of Nepal’s battlefield in terms of tension and rest was to a certain extent embedded in and influenced by the pattern of Nepal’s seasons and national festivals. This rhythm provided windows of opportunity for the violence to flare up, move geographically or to be constricted. With regard to the seasonal pattern, an example might be the winter periods in the Karnali (Nepal’s North-western development region). During the winter, the conflict in this region came almost to a standstill as most Maoist units relocated to the mid-hills or the Terai, severely constraining the Maoist military capability in the areas they left. At the same time the SF, based in the various district headquarters were not keen to engage in serious patrolling beyond the areas close to district headquarters, as the weather conditions were not favourable for either party (A68). In addition, the monsoon period made multi-faceted operations on the side of the Maoists a rather slippery affair, as moving large numbers of troops from various base areas over long distances along narrow mountain and hill trails to reach targets became a complex operation. At the same time, Maoists military operations were also enabled by the changing seasons and could

therefore relatively easy be foreseen. For example, the foggy January conditions in the Terai enabled the Maoists to attack Nepalgunj, the administrative centre of the mid-western development region, under cover of thick fog (A26).²⁷⁸

The political/ military dynamics of the conflict were also influenced by Nepal's festival seasons (Deshai and Tihar). Nepalis use these periods to return to their family in the rural areas. If politically or military expedient, the Maoists could eventually use these festivals as a gesture to announce a ceasefire allowing (or even encouraging) people to the places from where they originated. If people had the courage and resources to return, they most often did, leaving bigger centres like Kathmandu less populated.²⁷⁹ Maoist rank and file might also have used these opportunities to see their family again, or to travel to other areas of the country in preparation for other operations. The Maoists would probably not have feared that the areas they were under their 'influence', would be 're-taken' by government or aid agencies, as government officials and aid workers enjoyed the festivals as well.

The compounding conflict dynamic Next to the rhythm of seasons and festivals which conflicting parties and aid agencies had to live with, the compounding dynamic between conflicting parties in terms of tension and rest affected aid agencies and their activities as well. Interviewees touched on various aspects, which will be presented below.

To begin with, in general terms, the tension and rest dynamic, between the conflicting parties, being somewhat escalatory in nature, caused a process of contraction of development activities. The pressures for this contraction were not only generated by the Maoists, via donations demands, written permission to enter areas or the need for signed agreements, bandhs and blockades as one respondent suggested. *"Also the security forces were definitely guilty of slowing down development at the end of 2002 beginning 2003 to 2004 by just making it difficult for NGO staff to move... as they were trying to control them"* (A35). In addition, the coverage of government structures

²⁷⁸ Nepalgunj lies in the middle of a plain, scarcely providing cover for advancing or retreating forces. However, the annually returning mist provided the necessary cover for the military operation in 2005.

²⁷⁹ Own observation.

beyond district headquarters reduced over the years as well,²⁸⁰ subsequently reducing aid activities, which aid agencies implemented in collaboration with these structures. So, while the conflict intensified, the outreach of development activities contracted and its pace slowed down.

Several respondents provided examples of this process indicating that the projects and programmes they were involved in reduced in scope (A2) and moved towards some sort of 'rest-mode' (A12/ A17/ A49/ A26). This contraction of development activities did not imply that aid agencies were not involved in aid activities any more, but that activities took place at a much lower level than originally planned (A32). Nor did this process mean that development activities came to a complete stop if an aid agency had to reduce or stop its activities. It was feasible that aid activities originally supported by agencies were continued by local communities themselves, as two respondents suggested (A2/ A17). Within the context of an evolving conflict and intensifying dynamic of tension and rest, sudden increases of tension such as outbursts of violence between the conflicting parties could occur as well, which in turn affected the operations of aid agencies. This will be discussed in the next section.

Localised violence Outbursts of violence between the conflicting parties occurred, but not necessarily on a regular basis. Aid agencies responded in different ways to these violent episodes, as reflected in the interview data. In one case, Maoists attacked various government infrastructures in a district in the mid-western hills. Before 2000 the aid agency providing health services in the district decided almost immediately to relocate their staff by helicopter in response. However, the suspension of the project was relatively short, because local Maoist representatives informed the agency that the attacks were not aimed at them (A61). In another case, at a later stage in the conflict, the Maoists attacked another district headquarter, destroying most of the government infrastructure.²⁸¹ The aid agency providing health services in this particular district responded not by evacuating the field team, but by doing the opposite, sending in

²⁸⁰ This was due to a combination of Maoist pressure and pre-emptive decisions on the side of the government to withdraw. The rhythm of contraction, and partly self-imposed rest, varied from district to district and sector to sector. One respondent suggested that his programme reached most of the targets set; however in order to do this he suggested that he had to decrease the ambition level of his programme with approximately 90% (A68).

²⁸¹ INF/ NSMP/ SNV (2002) Jumla Joint Assessment Report, Kathmandu, Nepal.

additional staff to assist the local team to get the clinic up and running again (A68/ own involvement). The agency in the latter case had learned from the first how to interpret violent attacks by Maoists on district headquarters (own involvement).

Where areas became contested and tension increased aid agencies could decide to withdraw their presence or activities temporarily or permanently from a given area (A2/ A26). If it became clear who was in control over a given area, a decision to return could be made if permissible by both the Maoists and the Security Forces (A61).

One respondent suggested that the ability to maintain relationships in a contested area is of key importance to maintaining a presence in such an area. He stated "*when our Maoist contact person was killed by the army, we decided to move our activities to VDCs closer to the Bazaar*" (A49). This might suggest that having contact with the Maoists was perceived as essential to operate safely and if these were not existing (anymore) then activities of the agency were transferred to locations that were perceived as safer.

Being specifically targeted At times agencies were a specific target for either party, mostly, but not solely, for the Maoists. In such cases one or more of the following occurred: a series of warnings (own observation), damage to infrastructure (A12/ own observation), detention or abduction of staff (own observation), or physical or mental threats to individual staff (A12/ own observation). As a response it was not unusual to suspend or close down activities. Restarting projects was not always easy, and did not solely relate to the reduction of tension between the agency and (one of) the conflicting parties, as one interviewee indicated: "*We stopped in District X, we stopped in district Y and as far as District Z is concerned we suspended very quickly as our office was burned...we tried to get going again in a small way but this was not successful for various reasons; we had three project directors in a short time span. The five Nepali staff who went back, had a junior team leader and he did not do a good job informing the Maobadi, the staff were terrified and never attended meetings they were called to, pretending that they were not called, which they only told us afterwards of course*" (A12).²⁸²

²⁸² Names of districts are not given to protect the identity of the respondent and agency involved.

It was not only the Maoists who could become violent towards aid agency staff, but the army as well.²⁸³ One respondent recalled an event in a district in the western-development region, where one of his staff members, while returning from a field visit, was attacked and wounded for no obvious reason by an aggressive soldier with a Khukuri knife (A62). This event affected the programme in two ways. Firstly, the incident needed to be reported to the respective army commander, which was a sensitive issue as, *"...we could not protect ourselves from the army or the police, as they could raid our office in a minute"*. Secondly, fear among staff increased, reducing their willingness to conduct the already restricted number of field visits. *"So, the question for us became how do you justify your programme, while sitting in the district headquarters and do hardly anything"*(A62).

As mentioned earlier, the intensification of conflict and the overall contraction of development activities in combination with the various forms of pressure on individual aid agencies and their activities, did not necessarily lead to less activity within individual aid agencies. It was suggested that if the pressure on projects or programmes increased the 'tension' among staff within these projects or programmes could increase as well: *"...when development projects or programmes were under threat. Staff in these projects or programmes realised that their economic survival depended on keeping their projects and programmes moving, whether they were able to do very much or not...they were able to keep the show on the road..."* (A4).

Ceasefires The dynamic intensification of the conflict also created periods of relaxation, which could take several forms. Firstly, tension could reduce in an area when it became clear which of the conflicting parties was finally in control (A2/ A61). Then, tension could also reduce during the two ceasefires. One might expect that agencies tried to anticipate the eventuality of (these) ceasefires, as conflicts do most often have such relative periods of 'rest', in order to make use of possible windows of opportunities to 'regain' lost 'ground'. One might also reasonably expect that agencies

²⁸³ I recall a situation during the second half of 2004 where a female staff member of the agency I worked for, while on a field trip in a district in the eastern region, was physically threatened by two RNA soldiers in a hotel. She 'bluffed' herself out of the situation avoiding the severe possibility of rape. A few days later I was taken aside after a meeting in the UN compound by a national UN official and provided with a warning that if the staff member concerned continued to use her influential family contacts to defame the commander in charge of the RNA in the district were the incident took place, than he could not guarantee her security any more in Kathmandu.

would in times of ceasefire prepare for the possibility of a resumption of conflict. The interview data available does not strongly indicate this either, suggesting a situation whereby aid agencies almost operated in an autonomous field separated from real tension and rest dynamics in the country.

In this context, one well-informed insider suggested that during the periods of intensified conflict thinking within the aid community “...*about what to do during the eventuality of a ceasefire hardly took place*” (A34). So, at least before the first ceasefire some aid agencies did not think about how a ceasefire could be exploited to reverse the contraction of their activities or contribute to conflict reduction and eventually peace. One key respondent reflecting on his first weeks in his new agency just before the collapse of the second cease-fire in August 2003 said: “*I was aware of working in a crisis area, however I found my new office operating as if we were in a normal development situation, with a few security problems*” (A47). This thought is in line with the view of another leading figure in the aid community when referring to dynamics of tension and rest and ceasefires, during the period of research in particular: “*For the majority of aid agencies, while denying the conflict, the ceasefires did not make a big difference, the shock only came after the royal coup, as it revealed the nature of the regime, and how seriously helpless it was in relation to the Maoists*” (A11). The above appears to suggest that in the dynamic process of conflict intensification and contracting development, aid agencies operated as though circumstances were normal throughout or as in a situation in which a ceasefire is not necessarily an opportunity to be exploited, nor to be used as a period to prepare for resumption of conflict or a move towards a more peaceful situation.

Despite the above-described process there were programmes and projects making use of the ceasefire to design new activities. In one example during the second ceasefire preparations were made within the programme for a situation whereby the ceasefire would move towards peace: “*While designing the programme we thought that the ceasefire would turn into peace, and that accessibility would improve and decentralization would take place. While we were designing the programme the ceasefire collapsed, and we didn't know how long this could take... finally we constructed a design which could operate under all circumstances, that performed better in case decentralization took off, but could work as well in case decentralization*

didn't take place" (A60). So, in this case, the ceasefire, as a relative period of rest within the conflict, was used to plan new activities, though the underpinnings of the design were based hopes for peace, which were proved unrealistic. Later on, we will see that wishful thinking happened more than once.

Expansion instead of contraction In contrast to the overall process of contraction of development activities in response to the intensification of the conflict, whereby aid agencies were in a 'rest-mode' and trying 'to keep the show going,' there are examples of projects actually expanding despite the compounding conflict. Good examples of expansion might be the Trail Bridge Building Programme (TBBP) and a donor-funded Agricultural Programme. It was also possible for some programmes to start up with some success, such as the DFID funded Community Support Programme (CSP).²⁸⁴

TBBP expanded between 2000 and 2005 from a production of 100 to almost 200 suspension bridges a year. This happened somewhat accidentally rather than by design. According to the respondent involved three reasons contributed to this significant, but counter-intuitive, expansion. Firstly, the programme was community-driven and as much as possible separated from government structures, which allowed a significant control over activities by the local communities. Secondly, the programme was flexible in its approach. If Maoists or other groups, such as the army, blocked the building of a local bridge, then equally suitable alternative locations were found. Thirdly, donors, probably unable to spend money usefully in other sectors of work, were regularly asking if TBBP was interested in additional funds. As long as this additional money did not overstretch staff capacity, it was accepted by the implementing agency (A51). The above-mentioned Agricultural Programme was equally able to expand, because according to the respondent it was, after the collapse of the second ceasefire designed with the conflict in mind so that it could operate either in conflict or in peace (A60). So, by contrast with TBBP, the Agricultural Programme could expand not accidentally, but by design.

²⁸⁴ CSP, a DFID-funded initiative, was able to start up in 2002/ 2003 and work in more than nine districts. The programme worked completely independently from the government and was able to respond relatively quickly to local expressed needs via cash injections on the basis of project proposals formulated by local communities in collaboration with a CSP representative in the field (A35).

However, paradoxically, what the above-mentioned programmes have in common other than a continuation or even an expansion of activities is a reduction of output after the peace accord signed in November 2006. TBBP received less donor funding, as donors shifted their attention to other sectors, subsequently affecting production levels (A51). The Agricultural Programme became severely affected by a re-centralisation of the programme by the Ministry of Agriculture, slowing down the pace at which it could assist local communities (this was not anticipated) (A60). Now we will move on to the reflective section of this chapter.

15.4 Reflection²⁸⁵

The dynamic process of tension and rest at work among the conflicting parties in Nepal influenced in different ways the operations of the various aid agencies. In other words, the tension and rest dynamic between conflicting parties added to the turbulence in the agencies' operational environment. However, what the data appear to suggest overall is that the agencies on the one hand felt the consequences of the real tension and rest in the operational environment (although of low intensity), but on the other hand they did not necessarily (sufficiently) act upon this dynamic, subsequently not sufficiently preparing themselves either for a possible intensification or a de-escalation of conflict, adding between 2001 and 2005 to the continuous process of contraction of operations. In this way aid agencies contributed to the already multi-faceted processes of friction. To expand this point I will mainly, but not exclusively, focus on the ceasefire periods during the conflict.

Seasons and festivals Although the rhythm of seasons and festivals can be seen as a form of friction in the process of delivering aid, it appeared to me that, in general, the rhythm of seasons and festivals had a place within the operational rhythm of aid agencies. For example, staff of the Dutch development agency SNV formally positioned in the Karnali 'retreated' as planned during the winter season to the regional administrative headquarters at Nepalgunj.²⁸⁶ Equally during the festival season, government offices were closed and aid staff took their holidays as well. In effect the

²⁸⁵ I would like to thank Brigitte Piquard for making me aware of the distinction, between perceived, real and self-imposed tension and rest.

²⁸⁶ Own observations within SNV/ Nepal. This type of 'retreat' could be seen as a form of self-imposed rest.

periods less favourable to working were taken into consideration in the planning of aid activities. At the same time, the real tension and rest dynamic was less well-anticipated within aid agencies. One reason for this might be that the rhythm of seasons and festivals was, by comparison with the conflict dynamics, known and predictable. The dynamic process of tension and rest within the constellation of conflicting parties was to a certain extent less predictable and knowable and therefore more challenging to incorporate into processes of strategizing and implementation of aid operations than the rhythm of seasons and festivals. The mixture of political-military actions by the conflicting parties were to a certain degree an echo of the Nepal's rhythm of seasons and festivals as well, particularly the military actions, inasmuch as the conflicting parties could exploit them for their own ends. It might therefore be argued that the incorporation of periods of tension and rest in processes of strategizing and implementing aid operations could have been less problematic than initially assumed. I am not suggesting that it would have been easy, merely that paying attention to how the rhythm of seasons and festivals in a given context may not only have an impact on aid operations, but also on the tension and rest dynamic of conflicting parties, might pay dividends for the aid strategist operating in a turbulent environment.

Responding to tension and rest As already suggested above, the dynamic of tension and rest adds to processes of friction. The aid strategist, who in a given context does not understand this dynamic, will therefore most likely compound the existing friction. However, understanding this dynamic of tension and rest between conflicting parties and what the consequences and opportunities might be for aid operations does not necessarily substantially reduce friction between the dynamics of the operational environment and the aid operations concerned, as the aid strategist needs to have the personal willingness, and his agency the ability, to adapt according to this dynamic, neither of which can be assumed. Even where the aid strategist and agency are willing and able to adapt to the dynamics of a conflict, the aid strategist has to consider two questions. Firstly, how much effort should his agency spend on gaining an understanding of the real tension and rest dynamic? If he spends too little, the understanding of the operational environment in general and the conflict dynamic in particular might be insufficient to convince his headquarters that adaptation is necessary. Too much attention might detract from other issues needing attention, perhaps leading to complaints about the agency's performance. With both extremes

contributing to friction, the aid strategist must strike a balance in a given context. Secondly, assuming the strategist is willing, to what extent can he adjust the agency and its operations, and by doing so make his agency responsive to the real tension and rest dynamic? Again, not finding the right balance might compound friction, with the institutional sphere of the agency doubting the chosen course as it might go beyond the agency's corporate policy preferences (for example working solely with government structures). Alternatively, inappropriate adaptation might (continue to) hamper access to local communities, if one or more key actors in the operational environment is not willing to accept the actual changes within an aid operation, due to possible negative repercussions.

Realising Tension and Rest For the aid strategist, the above points to a problem related to the aid agency's official view. If an aid agency *de jure* does not recognise a conflict, or in other words if the agency's perception is not congruent with the real tension and rest dynamic, it might *de facto* also be difficult for that agency to deal with the dynamic of tension and rest in a given conflict operational environment. A key task for the aid strategist therefore might be to encourage a culture within the aid agency that accepts the reality of violent conflict, its dynamic and need for willingness to adapt accordingly.

The importance of responding during periods of tension In the period towards 2005, the reach of development activities diminished to a significant degree in the rural areas, in part because of the pressures generated by the conflict, in part because of decisions made by aid agencies themselves. Clausewitz makes his audience aware that conflicts have various gradations of tension and that during these periods at least one of the conflicting parties tries to steer the conflict towards a decision or situation in its favour. As a consequence, he argues, decisions in periods of tension, in contrast with the periods of rest, might have a greater effect on the conflict dynamics than decisions made by warring parties in times of rest. With a bit of imagination it might be possible to apply this line of logic to the aid agencies and the conflict dynamics they have to deal with.

The Maoists induced development agencies to curb their activities in rural areas, and this was in turn reinforced by decisions by aid agencies themselves (a form of self-

imposed rest), for example in the form of early withdrawal from peripheral areas and a refocus on urban areas (A49). It appeared to me that this process benefited the Maoist position more, whereas a potential regaining of ground by development agencies with aid activities during ceasefire periods could eventually benefit the government. If true, it might be argued that the retreat of development agencies from rural areas contributed to the Maoists gaining a strong enough position to engage into formal negotiations during the ceasefire periods with the government, as the position of the latter was in part weakened by the contraction of precisely the same aid activities. Not being systematically prepared to regain 'lost ground' as an aid community during the ceasefire periods strengthened the Maoists further at the expense of the government, subsequently adding to the real tension and rest dynamic. This process generates some questions for aid strategists operating in turbulent environments comparable with Nepal, assuming that they aim to support the legitimate government and have a reasonable understanding of the nature of the conflict dynamic.²⁸⁷ These questions are: what might the consequences of contraction be vis-à-vis the reduction of poverty and conflict and could these consequences eventually sufficiently be 'compensated' for during ceasefire periods? What might this mean for the agency's strategy in terms of support of its institutional sphere and its preparations for eventual future engagements? The answers to these questions vary from aid agency to aid agency and from context to context. Even with, eventually, a correct assessment of these questions, an aid strategist should realise that it is most likely that at best only sub-optimal results can be achieved, even if a series of aid agencies work together as a collective. There might be several reasons for this.

To begin with, the commencement, duration and end of a ceasefire are not necessarily easy to predict. In the case of Nepal, I can recall the existence of rumour and speculation around these issues within the aid community, but the exact beginning, the duration or the end of a ceasefire was at the end of the day uncertain. This is not necessarily a helpful basis for planning. Then, even if an aid strategist is able to predict correctly the time boundaries of a ceasefire, the staff of his agency might not necessarily mentally be prepared to re-engage directly with the activities they stopped doing during the period of armed confrontation. Moreover, due to the conflict, not only

²⁸⁷ I am not sure if all aid agencies in Nepal were necessarily sympathising with the government, while not necessarily being in favour of the Maoists either.

are aid activities contracted, but also the quality of information about the project areas and the local communities left behind will most likely deteriorate.²⁸⁸ Therefore, pre-planned intervention strategies might be unsuitable. Updating information about project areas takes time, which in turn delays the process of strategizing and implementing appropriate aid operations during the ceasefire period. Added to this is a potential attitude and expectation gap between local communities and aid agency staff, as both groups have experienced the same period of real tension and rest differently.

Lastly, a ceasefire, does not exclude the possibility that localised hostility between conflicting parties could flare up, or that a situation at a local level remains tense in reality. This might hamper the already fragile attempts to re-start aid operations. All of these reasons multiply, if we take into consideration that it is not one aid agency that has to deal with these issues, but each individual aid agency within the collective of agencies. In the case of Nepal, it is my impression that the above factors did not enhance a collaborative effort to counter the processes of contraction faced by aid agencies and their aid operations during the periods of violent conflict.

Ideal form of aid Now, I would like to present a somewhat speculative discussion on the nexus between the notion of the ideal form of aid and the dynamic of tension and rest. In the Nepal case it appears that aid operations in practice contracted overall. However, those aid programmes and projects, which included elements of the ideal form of aid in their operations, were better positioned to slow the pace of contraction than other operations, or were able to expand (for example TBBP), or to start up (for example CSP).

Although not explicitly researched, it appears to me that aid operations largely modelled on the ideal form of aid could exploit the ceasefires more easily than other aid programmes and projects, because they had higher levels of acceptance with the conflicting parties than other aid activities. If the above is true then one way to deal with the dynamic rhythm of tension and rest among conflicting parties in a given operational environment might be to put effort into strategizing and implementing aid operations in line with the ideal form of aid of a given context. As always the role of

²⁸⁸ See Chapter 9 On Information.

friction should not be ignored, such as opposition from the institutional sphere or from other agencies.

The data appear to suggest that aid activities which contained features of the ideal form of aid, were more conflict-robust than those, which did not. They were less affected by the tension and rest dynamic generated by the conflicting parties and subsequently faced less friction in their interactions with the operational environment. Assuming that this is reasonably accurate, then we could also assume that if an aid programme, is, at least in part, modelled on the ideal form of aid, the aid strategist should not be too concerned about the conflict dynamics. However, the Nepal case appears to suggest that aid agencies were more concerned with how the conflict dynamics could be adjusted to the aid activities they were offering, than to how aid operations could actually be contextualised.²⁸⁹ It appears to me that this last process actually reduced the aid agencies' ability to respond adequately to ceasefire periods. The conflict-robust or contextualised aid operations, however, faced less friction in the process of exploiting ceasefire periods. Those staff already with access to the field had a better understanding of the dynamics within local communities. Thanks to this their agencies could have better information and therefore were better positioned to gear intervention strategies to local circumstances.

One further point on this subject is that the aid strategist whose aid operations are strategized along the lines of the ideal form of aid, should be more worried about the tentative conclusion of a ceasefire, than the dynamic of the ceasefire itself, as the implications for an aid operation in a state of tension and a subsequent relaxation in the form of a ceasefire can to a large degree be 'understood', while the political-military consequences of a failed ceasefire might be more difficult to 'predict' and the subsequent friction this might generate.

Responses during ceasefires To conclude this chapter, I would like to refer to Clausewitz's statement that "...*the state of crisis is the real war, the equilibrium just its reflection*". Although Clausewitz is referring to warring parties, it points aid

²⁸⁹ Van Duijn L.F. (2010) Bergen vol Verspilde Ruimte: Twee Nederlandse Hulporganisaties op Zoek naar Bewegingsruimte in Nepal, in: Dijkzeul, D. and J. Herman (Red.) *Humanitaire Ruimte: tussen Politiek en Onpartijdigheid [Humanitarian Space: between Politics and Impartiality]*, Academia Press, Gent, Belgium.

agencies and their operations to the importance of the periods of tension, the non-ceasefire periods of a conflict. These phases are important, not only for the conflicting parties, but for aid agencies as well. If we follow Clausewitz's logic that the state of equilibrium is nothing but a reflex of the real war, then we could, in general terms, imaginatively argue that the lenient responses by the aid agencies to the ceasefire periods and the opportunities they offered to re-establish contracted aid activities to the benefit of local communities is a reflection of the rather lax and delayed response to the process of contraction of these same agencies during the non-ceasefire periods. What might this mean for aid strategists operating in comparable contexts? To my understanding it implies that the real 'battles' aid agencies have to engage in, in order to counter processes of contraction and to maximise expansion during ceasefire periods, do not take place during or shortly before a ceasefire, but during the periods of tension or intensified conflict between the conflicting parties. If so, then this might have consequences for aid strategists in settings comparable with Nepal. If the aid strategist aims to make best use of ceasefire periods (which will always be at best sub-optimal), measures to avoid losing ground or to regain lost ground should start during the period of tension and not in the period of rest. The first step in this process might be resisting contraction in the first place (while acknowledging that aid agencies' programmes are under pressure), either as individual aid agencies or a collective, without being too prescriptive about the best route to achieve this. To argue in line with Clausewitz's advice: the act of resisting contraction should ideally be informed by an understanding of the 'spirit' of the dynamic interaction between the conflicting parties. However, the aid strategist should be aware that even if this understanding exists and features of the ideal form of aid are incorporated in aid operations, positive impact on either poverty or conflict reduction is not guaranteed. To close, the best thing an aid strategist can do in relation to the concept of tension and rest, is to ensure that his perception of the tension and rest dynamic in the operational environment is congruent with the real tension and rest dynamic, and that he encourages his agency to respond accordingly. It is not unlikely that bringing his perception of the tension and rest dynamic in line with the real tension and rest dynamic is less challenging than aligning the agency's response with the real conflict dynamics. However, what an aid strategist should not forget, and what the Nepal case might suggest, is that the perception of the tension and rest dynamic in the operational environment is less

influenced by the real tension and rest dynamics, than by the rhythm of tension and rest imposed by aid agencies themselves.

PART IV

CHAPTER 16 The Aid Trinity, Friction, Strategy & The Aid Strategist

16.1 Introduction

This exploratory case study research offers a sobering account of the international aid community during a significant period of the Nepal conflict (1999 to 2005/06). Within the context of an intensifying conflict between Maoist insurgents and those holding official power in Nepal, the research suggests a gap between the ideal form of aid according to which the aid community in Nepal preferred to operate and the actual character of its aid operations during the period under study.

In describing the ideal form of aid in Nepal during the period 1999 to 2005/06, respondents used terms such as being contextualised, conflict-sensitive, addressing the drivers of poverty, being bottom-up, treating warring parties equally and being organisationally flexible. However, the actual character of the aid activities could be described in terms of being in denial of conflict and conflict-blind in terms of operational style, resource allocation procedures and methods. In addition, it was suggested that coordination was complicated and insufficient, leading to duplication of efforts and related partly to inappropriate donor practices. The result of this all was inertia within Nepal's international aid community leading to an inability to address the poverty and conflict dynamics in Nepal appropriately.

Friction could be understood as the hindering force between the perceived ideal form of conducting aid operations in Nepal and their actual character, resulting in the inability of the international aid community to address appropriately the dynamics of poverty and conflict during the years of intensified conflict. The process of friction in Nepal is summarized in Annex 16.1. Moreover, the reflective sections of the Chapters 6 to 15 suggest that it is not very likely that in other settings aid agencies and those

who take on the role of the aid strategist²⁹⁰ are able to avoid friction while working in similarly turbulent environments.

This exploratory research is not in the position to create a theory on aid operations in turbulent environments, but based on the material presented in Parts II and III of the thesis a few suggestions could be made which may inform the understanding and analysis of aid operations in turbulent environments and bring something to the fragile state debate.

The remainder of this concluding chapter is structured as follows. Firstly, three paragraphs below discuss separately the notions of the 'aid trinity', friction and strategy. These paragraphs are linked by the concept of friction. Then, a discussion follows about issues related to the aid strategist. This discussion is structured along the triad 'aid trinity', friction and strategy. Each of these four paragraphs suggests some possible implications for the current fragile state debate as well. Next, a paragraph follows elaborating on the hypothesis and research question of the thesis. After that the validity, reliability and limitations of the research are discussed. The chapter closes by raising some final reflections and offering some questions for further research.

16.2 The 'aid trinity'

The 'aid trinity' concept, fully described in Chapter Five, provides a framework to understand and analyse aid operations in turbulent environments and is constructed from three interconnected layers. The first layer is psychologically orientated, consisting of Passion/ irrationality, Reason/ rationality and Chance/ non-rationality. The second layer is social and consists of Local people, Conflicting parties and the Institutional sphere. The third layer is management-orientated and consists of the trinity of Policy, Strategy and Engagement. These three layers are able to interact dynamically with each other. Throughout the thesis reflections on aid activities in Nepal and aid operations in other turbulent environments are situated within this dynamically interacting triad of layers. This exploratory research demonstrates that the

²⁹⁰ Note that that the concept of the 'aid strategist' is not that of an individual staff member within an aid agency, but a role someone close to strategic decision-making processes could fulfil. See also the section in Annex 1.1 dealing with to the aid strategist.

trinity model is a useful, if imperfect, analytical tool in the process of understanding aid operations and the forceful processes of friction these operations might encounter.

This theoretical perspective allows us to argue that what happened with the aid operations conducted by the international aid community in Nepal during the years of growing turmoil between 1999 and 2005/06, however wearisome it might have been for policy makers, practitioners and observers, is, if not a normal situation, at least a non-exceptional one. However, the framework equally implies that this situation was not necessarily a predetermined or unavoidable one; the 'aid trinity' concept leaves scope for the possibility that actors in Nepal's aid industry could have been influenced to interact or respond differently, subsequently allowing operations, both individually and collectively, to follow less sobering trajectories. These possibilities are numerous, for example:

- The institutional spheres of the various aid agencies involved may have developed different views and policies on the situation in Nepal, had for example 9/11 and the War on Terror not happened.
- Local communities could have responded differently to the increasing turmoil in the country, for example by resisting violence head-on or fleeing *en masse*.
- The conflicting parties could have taken a different approach to each other, bringing about an earlier 'end' to the conflict, or extending and deepening the conflict, forcing the aid agencies to abandon their development(al) approaches.²⁹¹

In other words, from the theoretical perspective of the 'aid trinity' the trajectory followed by development efforts by the international aid community could have been influenced by many different factors and could have taken a different shape.

From a more positive angle one could argue that the way the aid community and their operations functioned in Nepal between 1999 and 2005/06 is not necessarily a precedent for the failure, poor or sub-optimal performance of future aid operations in other turbulent environments. It might indeed be possible that this rather positive view prevails, though it must appear unlikely. At first sight the exemplars presented in Chapter 11 to 15 might suggest that the aid community in Nepal as a whole and

²⁹¹ The Royal Massacre in 2001 could not have taken place, allowing space for an alternative response from the monarchy in dealing with the Maoists.

individual key personnel or aid agencies functioned inadequately, which may to an extent be accurate. However, in the defence of those individuals and agencies who worked towards contextualised forms of aid delivery, these individuals and agencies were to a large extent guided and constrained by their individual institutional spheres, their views on development problems and their solutions, such as for example regarding the issue of fragile states in general and Nepal in particular. In other words, in this dim presentation of the performance of Nepal's international aid community, all is not necessarily as it seems. Of course, the turbulence generated by the dynamics within the operational environment influenced the strategic behaviour of the aid agencies and their collective and individual performance, but this strategic behaviour is also, at least in part, a reflection of the 'functioning' of the individual and collective institutional spheres of the aid agencies involved. Soul searching, as suggested by Bonino and Donini (2009), happens within the aid community of Nepal around the question of what went wrong, but should not be limited to the aid actors based in the Kathmandu, and should ideally happen in other capitals were the headquarters of these agencies are based as well. A comprehensive evaluation exercise along the lines of Joint Rwanda evaluation might be a good starting point.

One underlying theme of the reflective sections of the various chapters is the suggestion that if aid operations are closer to what might be perceived as ideal in a given context, then the gap between the ideal and reality might be reduced, to the benefit of poverty and conflict reduction. So, although the 'aid trinity' allows for the possibility of better performance by aid communities and their operations in other, future turbulent environments, this is unlikely to materialise for as long as the individual and collective institutional spheres of aid agencies resist transformation to allow agencies to operate in accordance with the perceived ideal in a given operational environment. Not transforming themselves to operate in accordance with what is locally perceived as the ideal form of aid leads most likely to self-induced processes of friction, and processes of friction in turn perpetuate the gap between the actual and ideal forms of aid.

In relation to the fragile state debate the above suggests two points. Firstly, that the institutional spheres of aid agencies operating in turbulent or fragile environments, should ideally take as a starting point for 'intervention' the actors within the

operational environment and their views on the ideal way of operating, as this approach theoretically minimises friction. Secondly, the crucial roles, positions and modes of operation of the institutional spheres of aid agencies present in a given operational environment should not be excluded from the debate or downplayed, as they too are a source of friction and play a role in the processes of friction encountered by aid agencies and their operations. However, the 'aid trinity' implies that even if institutional reform of some sort takes place, there are no guarantees of better performance by aid operations in future turbulent environments, due to unavoidable friction. The next paragraph addresses the concept of friction.

16.3 The formidable force of friction!²⁹²

The interview data presented in the thesis provide a clear impression of how friction could become embedded in the practice of an aid community and their operations in a turbulent and deteriorating operational environment such as Nepal.

Chapters 7 to 10 demonstrated that friction of a more general nature originated in other parts of the 'aid trinity', namely the institutional sphere of the respective agencies, the domain of conflicting parties, or the internal dynamics of aid operations in terms of staffing, organisational, planning or partnership issues. The complex organisational set up of the aid industry in Kathmandu was also mentioned. Then, it was shown that the physical efforts of aid agencies to engage with the physical reality of the country were at least in some cases sub-optimal; danger and its (mis-) perception within the aid community stifled, at least among some sections of the aid community, outreach to local communities. Furthermore, it was demonstrated that the information processes present within the aid community did not necessarily match the need among aid agency representatives to get a good understanding of the dynamic in the operational environment.

Chapters 11 to 15 addressed the notion of strategy and related dimensions including superiority of resources, boldness, cunning and tension & rest. These chapters showed that friction was also present in these strategy-related dimensions. The aid agencies

²⁹² For an exposé of friction in the realm of war, I would like to refer to Cimballa S.J. (2001), Clausewitz and Chaos: Friction in War and Military Policy, Praeger, Westpoint, USA.

tended to follow the governmental development plans, without actually strategizing their interventions to pro-actively address the dynamic nexus between poverty and conflict. In addition, and with the usual exceptions, these chapters seem to show deficiencies in quality of resources available, a scarce use of boldness, insufficient understanding of the culture of cunning as exploited by the conflicting parties, unsatisfactory understanding and response to the tension and rest dynamic in the operational environment.

Nepal's aid community was, alongside their engagement in poverty and conflict reduction, engaged in, without necessarily realizing it, a battle against the process of friction, at the expense of the first, and tended, by a lack of progress, to make the existing conflict 'responsible' for it. What might this say about the notion of friction? The thesis shows that friction is a 'formidable force' and is able to manifest itself everywhere in the aid delivery process, with various levels of intensity and visibility and at any given time. In other words, friction is a multi-dimensional inescapable process obstructing the poverty reduction efforts of aid agencies. The thesis showed that not incorporating or underestimating processes of friction contributes to sub-optimal performance by aid agencies.

The notion of friction might therefore deserve a place in the fragile state debate, as there appears a tendency to assume that if we get the discourse, policy and related instruments right, then decision-making processes related to aid interventions could address, without becoming frustrated, the pertinent issues in countries currently labelled as fragile. In other words, understanding the concept of friction might enable practitioners and agencies to envisage possible unexpected hindrances and to be realistic about what aid agencies and their operations might be able to achieve in fragile states. The notion of friction denies the possibility that fragile states can be addressed with quick and technical fixes. The following paragraph explores whether strategy might be a means to counter friction.

16.4 Strategy: a counterforce to friction?

Chapters 11 to 15 provided not only a picture of the force of friction, but a sobering account of the strategic behaviour of the aid community in Nepal in the face of

growing instability during the period of research, and of how this was reflected in the conduct of aid operations attempting to respond to the existing poverty and conflict dynamics.

In general terms, and with the usual caveats, strategic thought was at best insufficient or lacked sufficient contextual understanding and sensitivity. In addition, the elements on which strategy was based appeared to be limited, despite a wide range of aspects or dimensions warranting inclusion, resources applied by the agencies appeared across the board to be insufficient in quality, bold behaviour, with exceptions, was seldom exhibited, the cunning behaviour of the Nepali elite was underestimated, and lastly, aid agencies and their operations tended to follow their own rhythms of operation or the rhythms in the operational environment they were used to, instead of pro-actively following and exploiting the dynamics of the conflict. These features all contributed to a form of strategic behaviour, which might have hampered the ability of collective and individual aid operations to address poverty and conflict reduction more constructively. In addition, the ideal form of aid as indicated by the interviewees was not necessarily brought closer.

From the perspective of the 'aid trinity' concept it is possible to argue that this form of strategic behaviour as exhibited by the international aid community in Nepal is not necessarily at odds with what might happen in comparable environments, given the presence of friction and the inherent difficulties of getting a (strategic) hold on friction in processes of strategizing, as implied in the reflective sections of the chapters in Parts II and III in particular.

However, eschewing strategy with the argument that the forces of friction are too strong to make a sensible strategy related to a given turbulent environment is not a realistic option as it is more than likely that an aid agency will have to explain to its institutional sphere how it wants to translate the set institutional policy into sensible engagements. On the other hand an over-reliance on strategy alone in the context of aid operations, even if the meaning and application of the term is not diluted too much, might not suffice to get the expected results. To take the case of Nepal as an example, there is no guarantee that the presence of strategy (ies) in the Clausewitzian sense, superior quality of resources, bold behaviour, a good understanding of cunning within

the culture, and a supple pro-active response to the tension and rest dynamic generated by the conflicting parties would have substantially improved the poverty and conflict reduction efforts of the various agencies involved. Why? Because, if the 'aid trinity' concept is taken into consideration, the operational environment is intrinsically dynamic, generating chance and uncertainty. Friction might occur at any time, affecting the strategies of the aid agencies. The best one can hope for is that, as well as applying a sufficient definition of strategy and including the appropriate elements for strategy in a given context, aid practitioners and agencies are able to include imaginatively the possibility of friction in the course of implementing these strategies. In other words, the strategy of an aid operation or a set of aid operations should ideally embrace the reality of friction. Perhaps then strategy might be able to counter friction, though given the force of friction, strategy may never be able to overcome it fully. What might this mean for the fragile state debate? The above stresses the importance of aid agencies in country having the 'freedom' and the resources to strategise their operations according to what is locally required and feasible, instead of what is prescribed by and acceptable to the institutional sphere, while the outcome stays unpredictable.

16.5 The aid strategist

The thesis implies that Nepal during the research period was perceived to be a complex conflict environment entailing a lot of uncertainty, various levels of danger and various other (un) expected obstacles to overcome. These factors not only hampered in various ways processes of strategizing and implementation of aid operations, but also individuals in key or influential positions within Nepal's international aid industry. This paragraph aims to synthesise in general terms the outlook of those individuals, exploring them in the context of the 'aid trinity', friction and strategy.

The 'aid trinity' From the perspective of the 'aid trinity' it seems that the data presented suggest that those close or central to key strategic decision making processes within aid agencies were management-centric or had a managerial orientation and were mainly focused on how aid policy as handed down by their institutional sphere could be 'rationally' realised. In others words, prime attention was given to achieving the goals of their agencies and their specific operations. As a consequence, over time, most

attention was given to defending the structures their agencies operated in and with. As a result, key aid agency staff might have felt overwhelmed and perceived the conflict as an 'extra-ordinary' deteriorating environment, in the sense that what was happening around them was difficult to capture with the conceptual lenses they were accustomed to. The perceived abnormality of the situation shocked at least those staff who could influence strategic decision making processes. The mismatch between the reality of the deteriorating conflict and actual fit of the aid activities pursued may have been spotted 'in time,' but due to 'choked' responses from the aid agencies strategic modifications to their approach were at best somewhat late.

For example the data presented in Chapters 8, 9 and 10 on physical efforts, danger and information, appear to suggest in general terms and with the usual exceptions, that key staff within aid agencies had insufficient understanding of the physical requirements to reach the most marginalised communities, of the psychological impact on staff of danger due to the conflict and of the various levels of reliability of formal and informal communication channels and the information it produced. Then, Chapters 13, 14 and 15 suggest the need for boldness on the side of aid agencies. In addition, the level of cunning present among Nepali actors, as well as the political-military dynamics between the conflicting parties was insufficiently understood and subsequently not proactively addressed. Such lack of understanding and awareness affected poverty and conflict reduction efforts.

In terms of the approach suggested by Steed (2009)²⁹³, the data presented appear to suggest as a general shortcoming among those who were in a position to influence the strategic decision-making processes concerning aid operations an insufficient process of introspection, empathetic appreciation and empathetic anticipation.

Introspection helps in understanding how other actors within the aid triangle might perceive the operations, agency and ultimately the agency staff member concerned. It might have been the case that that staff central or close to strategic decision making

²⁹³ Steed in his book "Piercing the Fog of War" studies aberrations in war and how commanders dealt with them to gain victory at the expense of their enemies (2009: 258-263). He suggests an approach to conflict situations which could be summarized as consisting of the triad of introspection, empathetic appreciation and empathetic anticipation. This approach is used to elaborate on the data from the perspective of the nexus 'aid trinity' and aid strategist.

processes did not make a sufficiently fair appraisal of themselves or the agency they worked for in terms of (personal) skills, abilities, attributes and capabilities. This in turn might have led to an unsatisfactory or limited understanding of the available room for manoeuvre for the individual, the agency and its aid operations.

Furthermore, the focus on pursuing organisational goals and defending the structures the respective aid agencies worked with and in, did not necessarily encourage empathetic appreciation of the actors aid agencies were dealing within the operational environment. This did not facilitate understanding of who the key actors within the 'aid trinity' were, how they perceived themselves and how they interacted with each other. Further, the primarily managerial approach of aid staff hampered empathetic anticipation. There was insufficient understanding of how the interactions between the various conflict parties and local groups would shape perceptions, attitudes and behaviour towards staff and the operations and aid agencies they were attached to. In other words, the psychological and sociological dimensions of the 'aid trinity', namely the processes within and between conflict parties and local communities as affecting aid agencies, their operations and their staff were not fully taken into consideration and prepared for. The partial, though not necessarily biased, view of those in key positions within aid agencies allowed additional space for friction to occur, as aid agencies were insufficiently prepared to anticipate possible set-backs.

Friction The thesis paints a grim picture of the poverty and conflict reduction efforts by the international aid community in Nepal. As argued in Chapters 7 to 15, this was in large part caused by the formidable force of friction in processes of strategizing and implementing aid operations. Friction frustrates, not only in terms of aid agencies reaching their goals or objectives, but psychologically as well. Almost across the board, the respondents tended to be somewhat pessimistic about the performance of the international aid industry in Nepal in general and the activities they were involved in or had closely observed in particular. This might be a reflection of a certain level of personal frustration due to the (extensive) exposure to (un-) expected difficulties and an understanding of some of the unintended consequences.

What the Nepal case appears to suggest is that aid agencies, and subsequently those influencing or deciding on key strategic decision-making processes within aid

agencies, tended to have unrealistic expectations of what was actually possible within the operational environment, ignoring or downplaying friction in terms of simplifying Nepal's complexity. There were unrealistic expectations that friction could be avoided with the means available, or unfounded optimism that friction could be overcome relatively easily. The opposite could also happen, with at least one key respondent suggesting that almost nothing was possible.

Frustration might induce stress, fantasising, stereotyping or showing aggression, apathy and depression (Ouweneel 1984). The psychological reactions to frustration induced by the force of friction might be a bigger issue for those involved in strategic decision-making processes than for an individual aid agency or staff member. Involvements in poverty and conflict reduction efforts take time to create success. The data appear to suggest that in relation to friction there is a twofold challenge for those involved in key decision-making processes within aid agencies. First, it is a challenge to be honest about expectations as to what an aid agency and its operations could realistically achieve. Second, within the context of this realism, it is a challenge to maintain a positive mindset or posture vis-à-vis dynamics within the operational environment, even if these do not appear hopeful. Such a mindset is vital if the pitfall of fatalism is to be avoided. Falling into fatalism may in turn affect the ability to persevere effectively at an individual and agency level with ongoing poverty and reduction efforts within the operational environment.

Strategy It was stated above that respondents suggested that the institutional spheres of the various aid agencies did not necessarily provide the most appropriate policies to address strategically the poverty-conflict dynamic in Nepal. In addition, strategic thought within the Nepal's international aid community was, with the usual exceptions, at best insufficient or lacking sufficient contextual understanding to address poverty and conflict reduction more constructively. It was also argued that the same aid community held the conflict in Nepal responsible for friction and inertia in the course of their operations, instead of their own institutional dynamics.

Although it is unfair to argue that Nepal's case showed an unlimited range of strategic possibilities, individuals able to influence or directly involved in strategic decision-making did not or were not necessarily able to exploit their positions. Given the data

available the overall tendency seems to be that the majority of those able to influence or decide on strategy favoured, for reasons which might include a lack of moral courage, aid policy over contextualised strategy, subsequently focusing their attention on strategizing and managing the implementation of the aid policy of their institutional spheres. By applying this management orientation, and being strongly orientated towards implementing the goals of the institutional sphere via the existing structures, the ideal form of aid as suggested by the interviewees became only further away.

A minority at best of those in a position to influence or decide on the strategic directions of aid operations judged the deteriorating situation in Nepal such that they preferred and attempted to follow an approach whereby aid strategy took priority over aid policy on the basis of what was actually relevant and accepted within the turbulent dynamic of Nepal, rather than the other way around. In these cases attempts were made to mould the strategy of an aid operation according to the ideal form of aid in the given context.

Thus a crude distinction might be made between two types of key aid agency staff. One type perceived their prime task to be understanding and rendering in operational form, which their institutional sphere wanted them to deliver to Nepal. The second, I guess a much smaller, group perceived one of their prime tasks to be gaining understanding of and judging which modes of operation could deliver the most results in attempts to reduce poverty and conflict. The first group appeared to have strategized according to a given set of policies; the second group attempted to strategize on the basis of the dynamic processes within the context and focussed on what is appropriate and acceptable. In terms of Easterly's distinction between 'planners' and 'searchers' (2006), among those who could influence or decide upon the strategies of aid operations, the 'planners' outnumbered and overruled the 'searchers'. Furthermore, the searchers not only lacked sufficient 'genius' to develop strategies on the basis of sound 'humanitarian' judgement, but they also lacked critical mass to provide leadership within Nepal's international aid community.

What might the above three points mean for the fragile state debate? The above highlights the importance of the human component within aid agencies operating in fragile states. Having provided aid agencies the 'freedom' to act on the basis of the

local context instead of policies designed by their institutional sphere, there can be no guarantee that they will act according to this freedom. Moreover, the presence of professional staff possessing the hard managerial skills does not guarantee that this freedom is taken. Aid staff involved in strategic decision-making processes should ideally possess in addition the more complicated but soft 'skill' of sensing the dynamics within an operational environment via the triad of (honest) introspection, empathetic appreciation and anticipation. They need to be resilient to the nature of friction and have a good sense of judgment to gauge what is locally appropriate and acceptable and, equally importantly, show the moral courage to take responsibility, thereby increasing the likelihood that aid operation strategies are sufficiently well-designed and implemented and could make a satisfactory contribution to a reduction of the poverty and conflict dynamics in a given context.

16.6 Hypothesis, research question and reflections on the research process

The study hypothesised firstly that the development industry operating in turbulent environments could benefit from ideas grounded in military theory and secondly that Clausewitz's theorising on the conduct of war as laid out in his book *On War*, when applied in a creative way, offers a fruitful basis to formulate a normative framework for (speculative) reflections on aid operations in turbulent operational environments such as Nepal.

The thesis proves the second hypothesis, demonstrating that on the basis of Clausewitz's ideas on war, i.e. the notions of the 'remarkable trinity,' friction and aspects related to strategy, it is possible to formulate a normative framework and to further speculative reflections on aid operations. The first hypothesis has been partly confirmed inasmuch as the thesis proves the relevance of the thinking of one military philosopher as a productive basis for reflections on aid operations in turbulent environments. However, other military thinkers might be of equal or even greater value in informing debate within and practices of the aid industry. One example might be the classical eastern war philosopher Sun Tzu.²⁹⁴

²⁹⁴ Slim H. (2004) *A Call to Alms*, Humanitarian Dialogue Center, Geneva, Switzerland.

In addition, the thesis in its current shape, and especially Chapters 5 to 15, form an answer to the study's research question, namely: "*How might reflections on aid operations in turbulent operational environments, such as Nepal during the period August 1999 to 2005/06, appear when inspired by Clausewitz's lines of thought and conceptualisations of war as laid out in his book On War?*"

Despite its narrow scope, this exploratory research expanded during the course of the study in three directions. To begin with, Clausewitz's theorising on war became, instead of a model, a source of inspiration to reflect upon aid practices in Nepal. These reflections were guided by a concept called the 'aid trinity', inspired by Clausewitz's key concept the remarkable trinity. This concept was instrumental in framing and focusing the various reflections on aid operations in turbulent environments. Secondly, instead of focusing on a wide range of topics and themes highlighted by Clausewitz, the research became increasingly concentrated on the various concepts related to the theme of strategy. Lastly, following on from the second point, while analysing and reflecting on the data, it became clear that aside from the idea of strategy, the notion of friction, as used by Clausewitz to explain (un) expected problems in the course of military operations, was not only more prominent in the delivery processes of the international aid and development community in Nepal than initially envisaged, but became a recurring theme throughout the reflective sections of the thesis.

16.7 The validity, reliability and limitations of the research

As stated in paragraph 4.7 the validity of the fieldwork is grounded firstly in the number of interviews conducted, which, at 70, is more than double the number required for exploratory research (Stebbins 2001). In addition, in Nepal, where the majority of the interviews took place, a presentation of initial findings was given among research participants and further comments were received. It is argued that the material presented on Nepal in this thesis is reliable. Research conducted by two renowned researchers connected with the Feinstein Centre, based at Tufts University and published in 2009, applies a comparable research methodology, focused on the perceptions of aid practices in Nepal by aid practitioners, observers and receivers of aid, and echoes the general mood of the presentation given (Bonino and Donini 2009).

However, establishing the validity of the reflective sections of the thesis, grounded as they are in selected parts of Clausewitz's work, my personal observations and the analysis of the collated interview material, is more challenging. These sections are not without their limitations. To begin with, the reflections use as a starting point the 'aid trinity' concept, a framework which is still being 'tested' for its usefulness and which might in itself be worth exploring and refining in greater detail, as it does not explicitly address issues such as politics, culture and history.²⁹⁵ Furthermore, the reflections use the device of the 'aid strategist' and are thus inevitably aid strategist-centric, which might not encourage the reader to empathize with the positions of other actors. This is mitigated however, by the 'aid trinity' concept, which underlines the need for a 360-degree perspective on the processes of strategizing and implementation of aid operations. Lastly, the series of reflections on the strategizing and implementation processes of aid operations in turbulent environments are not definitive, but open to further elaboration and absolutely do not constitute a prescriptive guide for operating in turbulent circumstances. Despite these limitations, the research draws attention to the potential of the 'aid trinity' framework to act as a 'normative foundation' for understanding aid interventions in turbulent environments, the value of the notion of friction and its potential effects on the practice of aid and development, and the importance of paying sufficient attention to strategy while conducting aid operations.

16.8 Conclusion and research areas remaining

The juxtaposition of Clausewitz's thinking on war and development practice in Nepal during the height of the Maoist insurgency has been fruitful. To begin with, the study seems to suggest that the 'aid trinity' is, despite its limitations, a suitable 'normative foundation' to analyse, and reflect upon strategizing processes of aid operations, in a non-prescriptive manner. Next, it brought to the fore a series of concepts related to the problematic theme of strategy, which allowed the assessment of the responses of the aid industry in Nepal from a new angle, shedding light on the strategic behaviour of the aid industry in the context of turbulence. Moreover, the juxtaposition allowed the concept of friction to emerge as a significant force in strategizing and implementing processes of aid operations in turbulent environments.

²⁹⁵ Clausewitz also omits such issues in his work (See also Chapter Three).

The study presents a rather depressing account of the character of the aid industry in Nepal during the years of intensified conflict between the Maoist rebels and Nepal's government. The aid industry suffered from inertia, resulting in the inability to address poverty and conflict dynamics appropriately. Subsequently, aid agencies and their operations were, with the usual exceptions, far removed from a localized ideal form of operating.

From the theoretical notion of the 'aid trinity' developed in this thesis it can be speculated that aid agencies operating in other contexts than Nepal are not necessarily, to use Terry's expression, 'Condemned to Repeat' comparable trajectories (2002). However, this exploratory study also suggests that the trajectories of strategizing and implementing aid operations in turbulent environments might vary, but that aid agencies will almost certainly continue to encounter the force of friction in their efforts to reduce poverty and conflict.

Former UN Under-Secretary for Humanitarian Affairs Egeland argues that to address the mix of poverty and conflict the will is needed to apply technology, resources and institutions (2008: xii). Assuming that it is unlikely in the foreseeable future that the overall approach to fragile states will change for the good and that it continues to be problematic to strategize aid operations in line with the locally ideal form, Egeland's call for more will power to address the mix of poverty and conflict is not sufficient, as will power alone is unlikely to be able to overcome the reality of friction.

Given the existence of friction faced by aid agencies in the course of operating in turbulent environments as shown in this thesis, Clausewitz himself might have advised the aid industry slightly differently. Instead of will power he might have suggested the application of "...genius overwhelmingly and at the decisive points in particular".²⁹⁶ However, the aid industry, not unlike military institutions, encounters some difficulty in 'producing' genius and in defining decisive points when it comes to addressing

²⁹⁶ I make use here of Creveld's caricatured interpretation of Clausewitz (2003: 203). Clausewitz links ideas such as (moral) courage, a quick recognition of truth and presence of mind, self-control, self-confidence, a degree of scepticism and imagination to the notion of genius (H&P: 100-112). He is aware that genius is only a partial answer to friction.

positively the poverty and conflict dynamic in a given turbulent environment.²⁹⁷ This compounds the difficulties of bridging the gap between what might be seen as the ideal form of aid and the actual character of aid activities in that given context.

These Clausewitz-inspired reflections on aid operations in turbulent Nepal bring to the fore the fact that those who are in the position to influence formally strategizing processes of aid operations in turbulent environments might optimise their efforts through the application of three character traits or personal skills. The first centres on the triad of introspection, empathetic appreciation and empathetic anticipation. This might help to understand, for example, the psychological and social dynamics of a given context and what might be expected at a managerial level. In addition, a personal resilience to friction is beneficial. This might help staff to deal positively with the reality of friction faced by aid operations. Lastly, those concerned need a clear judgement and moral courage to define and put into effect the most suitable aid strategy in a given turbulent environment. Overall, the juxtaposition of selected aspects of Clausewitz's theory on war has clearly been of use to a certain degree, and could be exploited in further research. This brings us to the conclusion and new areas of research arising.

To begin with, Clausewitz' thinking might be further explored for other ideas which could inform a deeper understanding of aid operations, such as the notion of centre of gravity, or culminating point of victory. Other military thinkers might equally be researched for the same purpose.

Secondly, the conceptual and practical relevance of the 'aid trinity' for aid strategists in other turbulent environments in terms of potential and limitations for the analysis of and reflection on aid operations could be further explored. The three interconnected layers of the 'aid trinity' could also be further investigated and refined, along with its suitability for use in teaching.

²⁹⁷ See also Creveld who argues that Clausewitz's advice on the application of genius to address friction is theoretically sound, but is in reality insufficient seen the challenges of the military institutions to produce genius (2003:203).

Thirdly, the notion of friction in turbulent or fragile environments could be further explored, and cases exploring the dynamics of friction could be investigated and systematised in order to inform policy-makers (who are in many cases at least a few steps removed from the reality of friction) and those tasked with strategizing aid operations at country level.

Fourthly, the strategic behaviour of other aid communities in other turbulent environments could be investigated, together with the role of friction in the processes forming this strategic behaviour.

Lastly, there is scope for investigating how those represented in this thesis by the term aid strategist, and who are formally and informally in the position to influence or decide upon the operational strategy in turbulent environments, perceive their positions, and how they make use of their influence and actually do 'strategizing'.

Explorations of the points above could contribute to building up case material centred on the triad of the 'aid trinity', friction and strategy, and subsequently inform debate around the nexus of poverty, conflict and fragile states.

Annexes

Annexe 1.1: Key Terms

This annexe defines several terms central to the thesis, namely the concepts of turbulence, aid agencies, aid operations and aid strategists. Another key concept, the 'aid trinity,' is elaborated on in Chapter Five.

Turbulence and turbulent environments Several ideas are related to the notion of turbulence and the turbulent environment. Firstly, developments occur not in a '*smooth, linear, ordered and predictable*' manner, but as '*rapid, discontinuous and turbulent change*' (Roche, 1996).

Secondly, the notion of turbulence implies the existence of conflict and violent conflict. Conflict can be expressed as "*the relationship between two or more parties... who have, or think they, incompatible goals*" (Fisher 2000:4); it is the very actions are generated by these relationships that contribute to the dynamics of turbulence. At the same, the inclusion of conflict in the concept of turbulence, does not exclude the possibility of neutral or harmonious relationships between various actors. The idea of violence is also included in the concept of turbulence and turbulent environments, and can be expressed as: "*actions, words, attitudes, structures or systems that cause psychological, social, or environmental damage and/or prevent people from reaching their full human potential*" (ibid). This can be targeted against individuals or groups within a society, which might result in clear human rights abuses (ibid) and/ or systematic attempts to obstruct agencies operating in peripheral parts of Nepal.²⁹⁸

Thirdly, politics plays a role in the turbulent environment, generating or augmenting turbulence. In the case of Nepal, the constant political manoeuvring between the various political parties, Maoists and Monarchy is a good example of politically generated turbulence affecting the working environment of aid agencies (See Chapter Two).

²⁹⁸ One example might be the administrative red-tape imposed on INGOs by the Social Welfare Council (SWC) around 2003/04 (See Chapter Two).

Lastly, the interrelated notions of uncertainty and time pressure are also part of the concept of turbulence and turbulent environments. Uncertainty relates to what is known and unknown within an aid agency and the particular importance for the agency of what is not known. Time pressure, or sense of urgency, relates to the time required to decide on and implement an action in order to try to avoid an unwished-for situation or to try to establish an advantageous one.

Aid agencies In the course of this thesis the term aid agency is loosely applied, meaning a donor agency or development- or humanitarian-orientated International Non-Governmental Organisation (INGO). The term 'aid agency' does not—and this might indicate a western agency-centric perspective- refer to local Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) or Community-Based Organisations (CBOs) or groups such as Youth Clubs.

Aid operation Following on from this rather loose definition of the term aid agency the term aid operation also loosely applied, meaning variously a single project, series of projects sector-wide programme, of no fixed duration. The term aid operation does not solely focus on either development activities or humanitarian activities, but includes both. The flexible definitions applied are related to the aim of the thesis.

The aid strategist According to Gray, describing the role of the strategist in the context of military affairs, the strategist is 'both a person who 'does' strategy and a person who advises on the 'doing'' (1999: 54). Applied to the sphere of aid, aid strategists are those persons within aid agencies at country level who are involved in the process of strategizing the presence and aid efforts of their respective aid agency in a particular country or geographical area. For the purpose of this research the concept of aid strategist should be broadly understood. It might include several types of staff, such as key management and advisory staff, representatives of headquarters, high level consultants or combinations of these. It is unlikely that the above-mentioned groups of people are constantly involved in 'doing' or 'advising on the doing of' strategy within the aid agency. Therefore, it might be worth noting that the concept of aid strategist can also be a function, role or task, to be performed

alongside a range of functions or roles or tasks. Moreover, the aid strategist may be male or female, though to ease expression this thesis uses the masculine form.

Aid agencies thrive on success. Therefore, the role of the aid strategist within an agency is of vital importance. Distant from their international headquarters, country directors, heads of mission and their key advisory staff, they face a demanding task: confronted with the wide variety of challenges presented by the turbulent environment, they have to deliver outcomes that can be presented as success. This success can initially be described as by Court et al., according to lives saved, poverty reduced and quality of life improved (2005: 3).

The responsibility of an aid strategist goes further than establishing success in these terms. Other measures of success include being able to fulfil the aid agency headquarters' perception of what is important, such as punctual completion of administrative requirements (Suzuki 1998). An aid agency might be perceived as successful by government departments, local political parties, community groups and armed forces (illegal and legal), for as long as the aid agency is acting in their interests. If the agency is not able to act in these interests, or aid activity is perceived as being in competition with local interests, these protagonists may deliberately obstruct the aid agency and its activities.²⁹⁹ In other words a part of the aid strategist's role involves the positioning of his agency and operations in such a way that it is acceptable to the greatest possible number of interested parties.

To complicate matters for the aid strategist, success is a double-edged sword. Perceptions of an agency's operations, both internally and externally, are not static and change with time. What appears successful now may at some future point be deemed a failure. Despite good intentions and immense professional efforts, aid strategists cannot guarantee success either in terms of lives saved, poverty reduced and well being improved or in terms of the generation or reinforcement of favourable

²⁹⁹ It is recognised that the term aid operations has humanitarian connotations. However for the purpose of this thesis the term aid operation embraces humanitarian and development projects and programmes.

perceptions among all players within a turbulent environment. Lack of success may generate further turbulence, which may in turn harm the position of other players, including other aid agencies.

Annexe 2.1: The Indian-subcontinent and Nepal³⁰⁰



³⁰⁰ Source: www.worldatlas.com/webpagina/countrys/asia/indiansub.htm, accessed on 30/09/09.

Annexe 2.3: Timeline of the conflict from 1996 to 2006³⁰²

1996

- 13 February: initiation of the protracted People's War. First attacks take place in Ghorka, Rolpa and Rukum and Sindhuli Districts.³⁰³
- 19 February: Prachandra, the General Secretary of the Communist Party of Nepal, takes responsibility for the attacks in a public statement.
- June: Maoists initiate secondary plans focused on deliberately developing a guerrilla war.

1997

- January: Maoist attack on police post in Ramechape district.
- June: Maoists introduce third plan focused on revolutionizing the guerrilla war.

1998

- Throughout the year a series of smaller attacks are conducted by the Maoists in the districts of Rukum, Jajarkot, Kavre, Parsa and Dhanusha.
- May: Government initiates police operation Kilo Sierra Two.

1999

- Throughout the year a series of attacks on (sub-) police posts are conducted by the Maoists in the following districts: Latipur, Salyan, Kalikot, Baglung, Rolpa, Kalikot, Ghorkha, Jumla, Ramachap, Jajarkot, Kavre and Dolpa, Parsa and Dhanusha.

2000

- Throughout the year a series of attacks on (sub-) police posts are conducted by the Maoists in the following districts: Jumla, Nuwakot, Salyan, Rolpa, Pyauthan, Gulmi, Rukum, Ghorka, Nawalparasi, Jhapa, Morang, the district town Dunai in Dolpa, Lamjung and Ramachap.
- June: Maoists introduce a special "shock" programme.
- December: first People's Government formed in Rukum.

2001

- February: Maoists organise their second national congress.
- Throughout the year a series of attacks on (sub-) police posts and camps are conducted by the Maoists in the following districts: Rukum, Dailekh, Dolakha, Rolpa.

³⁰² This timeline is an abridged version of Hisila Yami or comrade Parvati's reading of events (2007) combined with material from other sources including the BBC timeline and my own observations. The timeline presented by Hisila Yami might be correct, however some 'details' e.g. amounts of weaponry taken or casualties inflicted or suffered might not be so. For example, in relation to the attack on Beni, the District headquarter of Beni, the information I received from observers who visited almost directly after the attack suggested to me that the RNA did not suffer 150 casualties or the PLA only 7 as suggested by Yami. According to one observer it was the town's population that initiated the violence, in part due to the RNA's behaviour in favour of the Maoists (Personal conversations with observers, March 2004).

³⁰³ Maoist attacks on police facilities and at a later stage on the military were partly aimed to at capturing weaponry and ammunition.

- 1 June: Crown Prince Dipendra kills King Birendra and close relatives in a shooting spree and fatally injures himself.
- 4 June: Prince Gyanendra crowned as King, after the death of Crown Prince Dipendra.
- August: first ceasefire.
- 21 November: breakdown of the first ceasefire.
- 23 November: Maoist attack on military bases in Ghorai, headquarters of the Rapti zone, Dang District and the military facilities in Syangja Bazar, allowing the Maoists to capture a very substantial amount of modern weaponry and ammunition.
- 25 November: Military facilities in the Solukhumbu district attacked.
- King Gyanendra declares a state of emergency and orders the army to crush the Maoists rebels, leading to escalation of violence.

2002

- Throughout the year the Maoists engage in a series of attacks on (sub-) police posts and military facilities and pitched battles in the following districts: Kavre, Sarlahi, Saylan, Dang, Rolpa, Rukum, Salyan, Sindhuli, Sandhikharka, Ockhaldunga, Ghorka, Jumla (headquarters of the Karnali zone), Sirahi and Dang.
- May: Parliament dissolved by PM Deuba in anticipation of elections, renews state of emergency and calls for elections in November.³⁰⁴
- July: PM Deuba dissolves all local elected bodies, resulting in not having any local elected representatives in place throughout the country.³⁰⁵
- October: King Gyanendra dismisses Deuba, installs Chand as new Prime Minister, and puts off elections indefinitely.

2003

- January: Maoists and government declare a ceasefire and start engaging in a series of peace talks.
- May-June: PM Chand resigns and King Gyanendra installs Thapa as new premier.
- 17 July: Royal Nepali Army kills 19 unarmed Maoists in Doramba, Ramachape district.
- August: 7 month-truce ends when Maoists pull out of peace talks.
- Beginning of autumn: Ten donors develop and undersign the Basic Operating Guidelines.
- Resumption of violence until the end of the year with (multiple) clashes in districts such as: Kailali, Doti, Saptari, Banke, Ghorka, Makwanphur, Morang, Mahottari, and Kapilvastu.

2004

- Throughout the year the Maoists engage in a series of attacks on (sub-) police posts and military facilities, pitched battles and ambushes in various districts including: Chitwan, Khotang, Morang, Dandeldhura, Dang, Bhojpur, Dhanusha, Dolakha, Doti, Parsa, Salyan, Sirahi, Mugu, Dhading, Kailali, Arghakanchi, Makwanphur, Bardia. A police post at the edge of Kathmandu was also attacked.

³⁰⁴ Gersony 2003: 41

³⁰⁵ Ibid.

- Throughout January: the Maoists declare eight autonomous regions: Magarant, Tamang, Bheri-Karnali, Madhesh, Seti Mahakali, Tharuwan, Tamuwan, and Kirat.
- May: His Majesty's Government of Nepal organises the Nepal Development Forum which barely acknowledges the existence of conflict.
- August: Maoists decide in their Central Committee Meeting to move militarily towards a strategic offensive.

2005

- Throughout the year the Maoists continue their attacks in districts such as: Dhankuta, Ilam, Sarlahi, Parbat, Kanchanpur, Dhanusha, Kailali, Morang, Okhaldhunga, Rukum, Dolakha, Siraha, Kavre, Bhojpur, Arghakanchi, Kalikot.
- 1 February: King Gyanandra dismisses PM Deuba and his government, reinstates the state of emergency and assumes direct power, citing the need to defeat the Maoists.
- 17 September: Maoists declare 3 month-long unilateral ceasefire.
- November: Maoist and main political parties agree on a programme to restore multi-party democracy.
- 3 December: Maoists decide to extend ceasefire by another month despite the killing of one of their commanders in a helicopter air raid.

2006

- 2 January: Ceasefire breaks down, after which violence resumes, with attacks for example on Nepalgunj and locations within the Kathmandu valley.
 - 1 February: Tansen district headquarters attacked.
 - April: Following weeks of street protests King Gyanandra agrees to reinstate the parliament, curtailing the King's powers from May.
 - November: the government and Maoists sign a peace accord, declaring a formal end of the 10 year-insurgency.
-

Annexe 3.1: Military Enlightenment & Romanticism compared

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Issues	Military Enlightenment	Military Romanticism
Type of war	Wars of Kings	Wars of People
Concept of war	Rational concept with formulaic rules and principles	War is a human phenomenon ruled by psychology and will
Appreciation of talent	Talent possessed by individuals able to work within the rules and principles of war	Talent is more broadly defined and plays a more crucial role in the conduct of war
Perception of rules	Rules promise timeless universality and govern predictable elements of war	Conduct of war is a historical phenomenon that differs from age to age and place to place; appreciation of chance
Perception of risk	Risk avoidance via routine practices	Accept high risks and therefore the possibility of a high level of casualties
Preferred way of waging war	Siege warfare	Battle in the open field
Focus	Operational principles related to tactics and campaigns	Strategy and the nature of war
The way in which war is described	Assumption of universal principles, but description transitory aspects of war	Description assumes change and avoids universality, but discusses themes that travel well
Conduct and study of War	War is a science	War is an art
Key to success in war	Mechanical rules	Human psychology and personality are key due to interactivity and unpredictability
Role of Genius	Role of genius is restricted by the rules	Genius is placed above and outside the rules. Individual knowledge, judgement and creativity are key
View of stability	Emphasis on predictable certainties in order to minimize casualties and financial costs	Chance is an unpredictable reality of war and as a consequence there is willingness to accept more losses
The importance of battle		Battle is key to war and needs to be decisive

Source: derived from Lynn (2004: 190-200)

³⁰⁶ This overview does not pretend to be complete, but it does indicate the clear differences of opinion regarding the conduct of war in Clausewitz's era.

Annexe 4.1: Overview of research participants, interview date & location

Research participants listed on alphabetical order	Date of Interview	Location
1. Anthony Titley	21/01/08	London, UK
2. Arend van Riesen	15/02/08	Kathmandu (KTM)
3. Dr. Arjuna Parakrama	11/03/08	KTM
4. Dr. Baburam Bhatteari	10/03/08	KTM
5. Barbara Adams	14/03/08	KTM
6. Bert Jan Bouman	06/01/08	Zwaagwesteinde, NL
7. Dr. Bishnu Pathak	07/02/08	KTM
8. Dr. Bishnu Upreti	20/02/08	KTM
9. Biswo Ulak	28/02/08	KTM
10. Dan Huntington	22/01/08	Oxford, UK
11. Prof. Dr. David Seddon	18/12/07	Norwich, UK
12. David Wood	09/03/08	KTM
13. Dr. Devendra Ray Panday	04/03/08	KTM
14. Dhaka Ram BM	05/03/08	KTM
15. Dil Bhr Malla	28/02/08	KTM
16. Dipendra Tamang	08/02/09	KTM
17. Dr. Don Messerschmidt	14/02/08	KTM
18. Dr. Frank van Schoubroeck	14/01/08	Oosterbeek, NL
19. Gael Robertson	23/02/08	KTM
20. Dr. Genevieve Federspiel	27/09/09	KTM
21. Gerrard Ferrie	18/02/08	KTM
22. Graham Chaplin	02/12/07	St Goran, UK
23. James Chinnery	07/03/08	KTM
24. Jan Morrenhof	05/03/08	KTM
25. Jan Roukema	25/02/08	KTM
26. Jean Bertrand Lebrun	21/02/08	KTM
27. Jennie Collins	26/02/08	KTM
28. Dr. Jit Gurung	03/03/08	KTM
29. Dr. Joerg Frieden	30/09/08	Bern, Switzerland
30. John Beevan	22/02/08	KTM
31. John Evans	23/02/08	KTM
32. John Tynnela	06/03/08	KTM
33. Kathrina Danielsen	15/01/08	Oosterbeek, NL
34. Dr. Kedhar Mattheema	12/03/08	KTM
35. Kirstie Kirjavaine	09/02/08	KTM
36. Kiyoko Ogura	15/02/08	KTM
37. Dr. Krishna B. Bhattachan	03/03/08	KTM
38. Kum Gurung	07/03/08	KTM
39. Leila Abu Gheida	14/03/08	KTM
40. Lucia de Vries	08/02/08	KTM

41. Marieke Schouten	14/01/08	Utrecht, The Netherlands
42. Dr. Mark Galpin	05/12/07	Eynesham, UK
43. Mark Segal	20/08/07	London, UK
44. Dr. Mark Turin	12/02/08	KTM
45. Martin Hermann	19/09/08	Copenhagen, Denmark
46. Matthew Kahane	17/02/08	KTM
47. Dr. Narayan Manandhra	21/02/08	KTM
48. Paul Handley	29/09/08	Geneva, Switzerland
49. Peter Neil	07/02/08	KTM
50. Phil Lindsay	24/02/08	KTM
51. Phillip De Clerc	27/02/08	KTM
52. Dr. Prabin Manandhra	04/03/08	KTM
53. Dr. Ram Rizal	11/03/08	KTM
54. Dr. Renato Libanora	09/02/08	KTM
55. Richard Ordell	12/03/08	KTM
56. Dr. Roderick Chalmers	10/03/08	KTM
57. Ruth Marsden	28/02/08	KTM
58. Sara Shneiderman	11/02/08	KTM
59. Dr. Sean Deely	19/02/08	KTM
60. Shaha Gurung	13/03/08	KTM
61. Dr. Shibesh Regmi	25/02/08	KTM
62. Shiva Hari Dahal	05/03/08	KTM
63. Sjoerd Nienhuis	16/01/08	Hilversum, NL
64. Stephen Noble	27/02/08	KTM
65. Stine Heiselberg	14/03/08	KTM
66. Susan Clapham	16/02/08	KTM
67. Thakur Dakhil	24/02/08	KTM
68. Dr. Thania Paffenholz	29/09/08	Geneva, Switzerland
69. Tim Holt	26/02/08	KTM
70. Tony Vaux	04/01/08	Penrith, UK

Annexe 4.2: list with interview prompts

Clausewitz inspired reflections on aid operations in turbulent environments: The case of Nepal (1999-2005)

Interviewee:.....

Date of interview:.....

Location:.....:

Recorded: yes/no

Recording code:....

List of prompts

Friction and strategy related:

- Characteristics of ideal way of aid delivery
- Sources of friction related to:
 - Danger
 - Physical efforts
 - Information
 - Friction in general
- Character of Strategy
 - Elements of strategic
 - Boldness
 - Perseverance
 - Superiority of resources
 - Cunning
 - Concentration of resources
 - Strategic reserve within aid agencies
 - Tension and rest
 - Character of aid in Nepal

Miscellaneous:

- Operational space
 - Maintenance of development space
 - Creation of humanitarian space
 - Engagement
 - Centre of gravity
-

Annexe 5.1: From remarkable trinity to 'aid trinity': summary of modifications

Triad or Layer Triad	Model Issue	'Remarkable trinity'		'Aid trinity'	Source
Psychological	Terms	Passion, Chance & Probability, Reason	→	Passion/irrationality, Chance & probability/ non-rationality, Reason/rationality	Field experience, Humanitarian literature
	Orientation	War-like/ passion primarily related to hate	→	Humanitarian/passion ranging from love to hate	
	Focus of psychological qualities	Each quality has a prime focus related to one element of the social trinity	→	No quality has a single focus	
	Status of psychological quality	Static	→	Dynamic/fluid	Field experiences
Social	Type of social groupings	People, army & commander, government	→	Local people, Conflicting parties, Institutional sphere	Field experiences
	Character of social groupings	Assumption: social group is single or homogenous	→	Assumption: social grouping has multiple actors	Actor-orientated approach
	Type of relationships	Primarily single relationships between clusters	→	Multiple relationships between clusters	
	Character of influence	Primarily uni-directional over time	→	Primarily multi-directional over time	
	Boundaries of social grouping	Social groupings mutually exclusive	→	Social groupings might overlap	Field experiences; Actor-oriented approach
	Role of social triad	Encompasses war	→	Aid operation is shaped and embedded in a social triad, but has an impact this triad as well	
Central activities	Terms	Fighting, policy and strategy		Engagement, policy and strategy	(Smith 2005)

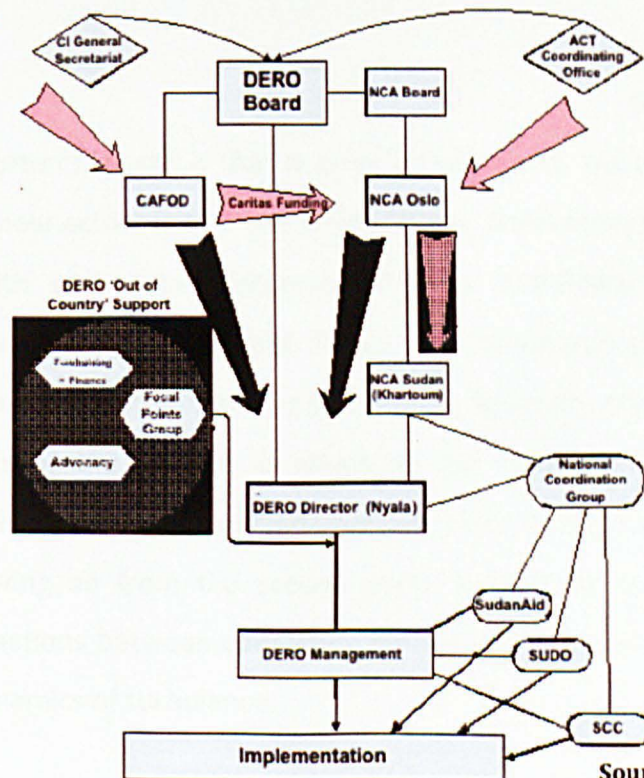
Annexe 5.2: Two alternative models to analyse aid operations

THE 'DERO STRUCTURE' AND THE 'IRON TRIANGLE'

This annexe presents two models. By showing their disadvantages, hopefully the advantages of the concept of 'aid trinity', will be thrown into relief. The first model is a scheme produced by Borton reflecting a series of relationships within a consortium of aid agencies operating together in Darfur (Borton: 2005). The second model is presented by Gould in his book 'New Conditionality' and called the 'Iron Triangle,' and is a conceptual frame to analyse public policy processes related to Poverty Reduction Strategy Plans (PRSPs) (Gould: 2005).

Borton's visualisation presents the relationships of the Darfur Emergency Response Operation (DERO) consortium operating in Darfur/ South Sudan. It represents the complex network of relationships within the DERO consortium, a network of relationships that the DERO director needed to manage, as shown in figure 5.2A.

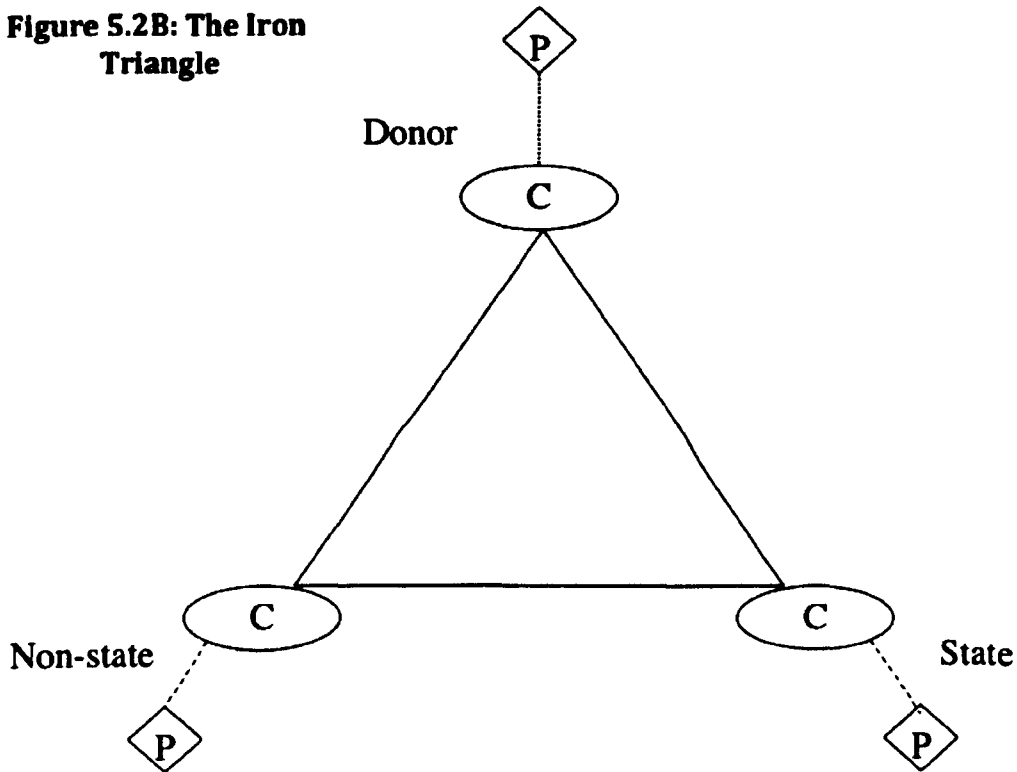
Figure 5.2A: The DERO Structure



Source: Borton 2005

The second model, presented below, is called the 'Iron Triangle'. This framework is designed by Gould to indicate the public policy arena in which PRSPs are designed (2005: 5). The 'Iron Triangle' is a visual representation of the relationships between civil society, government and donors for the purpose of organising sector-wide programmes and is presented in figure 5.2B.

Figure 5.2B: The Iron Triangle



Source: Gould 2006

The strength of Borton's model is that it gives a fairly good, aid operation-specific, representation of how actors within the relief system, from donors to beneficiaries, are connected with each other. However, from a turbulence perspective, the deficiencies of this model are threefold. Firstly, the model appears to represent a linear top-down approach, from donor to beneficiary. Secondly, crucial actors able to influence dynamics of the context in which an aid operation operates are not included, namely the various conflicting parties and the intended beneficiary groups. Thirdly, and following on from the second point, the model does not show the possibility of interactions between conflicting parties and the beneficiaries, which in turn affects the dynamics of turbulence.

The 'Iron Triangle' visually represents the relationships between civil society, government and donors for the purpose of organising sector (-wide) programmes. Again from a turbulence perspective the problems with this model are at least threefold. Firstly, the model seems to assume, perhaps partly because of its name, static relationships between the three groups constituting the triangle. This seems an unreasonable assumption even in a stable context. Secondly, the model assumes a government able and willing to deliver services to their citizens (who are not included in the model – a further problem). In the case of Nepal, the government may have been willing, but, in the turbulent context it had to operate in, was unable to deliver, in turn compounding the deteriorating dynamics in the country. Thirdly, the model does not allow for the option of the government being part of a conflict. Again, in the Nepali case, the government was, together with the Maoists, centre stage in the conflict and therefore wholly enmeshed in the turbulent environment (see Chapter Two). So, the 'Iron Triangle' model might serve a purpose when dealing with non-violent and stable circumstances, but in cases such as Nepal, the model is not helpful in thinking through poverty reduction strategies.

Borton's and Gould's models might share one further drawback. The two models seem to perceive relationships between actors as above all technocratic and rational, overlooking the potential role of emotional factors or the possibility of change and luck. While rationality is without doubt important and relevant, emotions, luck and change are nonetheless part and parcel of a turbulent environment. As we saw in Chapter 3, Clausewitz places this psychological trinity of reason, passion and chance centrally in his thinking about the conduct of war. This thesis postulates that this psychological dimension is a key advantage of the 'aid trinity' as presented above.

Annexe 16.1: Ideal and actual character of Aid operations in turbulent Nepal³⁰⁷

Ideal form of aid in turbulent Nepal	Actual character of collective aid operations in turbulent Nepal	Result
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contextualised • Conflict-sensitive • Addressing the drivers of poverty • Bottom-up • Treating warring parties equally • Organisational flexibility • etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conflict-blind in terms of operational style, resource allocation, procedures & methods • Denial of the conflict • Insufficient and complicated coordination and duplication of efforts • Inappropriate donor practices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inertia resulting in the inability to address poverty and conflict dynamics appropriately³⁰⁸

³⁰⁷ The ideal column in this table is constructed on the basis of Chapter 6 On ideal form of Aid. This chapter provides an overview of how respondents described the ideal way of intervening in Nepal during the study period.

³⁰⁸ One centrally placed respondent summarized the character of dynamics within the international community of Nepal as Inertia (A16). Inertia is not the same as inactivity. The aid community was, according to my observations, extremely busy, but rather like a group of people pushing a large rock from all sides at the same time, without necessarily having a clear idea as to what should be done with the rock and to what purpose. In addition, inertia does not imply that the aid community was not in the position to contribute to a peace deal between the various parties involved in Nepal's conflict.

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