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The crucible of war: Dutch and British military learning processes in and beyond southern Afghanistan

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A close-up photograph of a ladle pouring molten metal. The stream of bright orange and yellow liquid metal flows from the spout of a dark, textured ladle into a rectangular mold. The background is dark, with some faint sparks and light reflecting off the metal surfaces.

**The Crucible of War:
Dutch and British military
learning processes
in and beyond
southern Afghanistan**

Martijn van der Vorm

How armed forces adapt to operational challenges has been a salient subject in War Studies in recent years. However, the process of institutionalization of such lessons post-conflict has received less attention. This study seeks to examine military learning processes during missions and beyond. By synthesizing organizational learning theories with the literature on military innovation, it argues that there are distinct but related forms of learning during and after operations that are subject to peculiar dynamics. Specifically, this research analyzes Dutch and British learning processes during operations in southern Afghanistan and their enduring impact on the respective military organizations. The Dutch and British experiences and institutionalization efforts are reconstructed based on archival records, policy documents, official evaluations and over one-hundred interviews with service members, civil servants and scholars with direct involvement in the Uruzgan and Helmand campaigns during the most volatile years in the Afghanistan war and their aftermath.

Martijn van der Vorm is an officer in the Royal Netherlands Army and a historian

