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

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The Crucible of War:

Dutch and British military learning processes in and beyond southern Afghanistan

1. Peace time considerations often trump operational necessity in implementing lessons during expeditionary operations.
2. The described learning processes during the Dutch and British operations in southern Afghanistan had limited impact on the war's dynamics.
3. The key difference in the Dutch and British approaches to learning from operational experience was that the British Army eventually centrally directed these efforts with Operation Entirety.
4. Most Dutch and British learning processes were internally focused and did not factor in interaction with the adversary apart from the counter-IED efforts.
5. Maintaining an ambidextrous stance between exploration and exploitation in an organization is a strategic function that should be central to its direction.
6. Understanding the dynamic of recalibration of military organizations after a specific mission is key to analyze institutionalization of lessons.
7. There is a recurring cycle in Western armed forces of learning and forgetting lessons in counterinsurgency. The dramatic overcorrections during and after missions lead to detrimental organizational upheaval.
8. In counterinsurgency operations, Western armed forces recognize that they require capabilities that are considered to be the natural remit of civilian agencies, yet due to the latter's absence, these are mimicked by the military.
9. Despite the attention awarded to operations, training and education, experiential learning is an under resourced process in most military organizations.
10. A fundamental problem in Western stabilization missions is that they are approached as discrete projects with little bearing on the specific problem and due to a lack of a clearly defined end state often end in failure.
11. The similarities between armed forces and other organizations are far more pertinent than their differences.
12. If a line can be stepped over habitually, the fault lies with the line drawer, not the habitual line stepper.