

**Report to the Federal Parliament:**  
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**'Lessons learned' from foreign military operations**

**In its report to the Federal Parliament, the Court examined whether the Defence department learned lessons from the evaluations of foreign military operations for it to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of its future operations.**

The Defence department's current core mission is to take part in peace and security operations abroad. The Parliamentary Commission on Rwanda (1998) stressed the need for the Defence department to carry out a thorough assessment of foreign operations and implement this assessment's results into operational directives in the perspective of its future operations. The Court examined whether the Defence department effectively learned lessons from the assessment of foreign operations for it to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of its future operations. To this end the Court based its audit on the following audit questions:

- Does the Defence department get reliable information on the foreign operations' preparation and execution?
- Has the Defence department adapted its organisation to take advantage of the learning process based on lessons drawn from foreign missions?
- Does the Defence department really make use of the lessons learned in its subsequent foreign operations?

The Court's examination led to the following findings:

The Defence department is only one among various parties involved in international operations. It has therefore a limited impact on the definition of objectives, the way international military operations are carried out and the assessment of whether international military operations reach their goals. All this falls under the remit of international organisations (the NATO, the EU or the UN).

The Defence department has no coordinating and integrated evaluation system in place and is therefore dependent on fragmented information flows to help it manage and assess foreign military operations.

Admittedly, the Defence department has designed a reliable (lessons learned) system potentially able to gather, analyse and spread information on issues encountered during the missions abroad. The system's organisation and steering capacity, however, has not yet been fully developed. As a result, the Defence department has insufficient insight into the use made of assessments' results and the risk is that the lessons learned are insufficiently used:

- The "lessons learned" system is confined to the mere execution of foreign operations.
- The lessons analysis, follow-up and implementation systems lack consistency.
- The Evaluation & Lessons learned Unit hardly steers the learning process. It just attends to the course of the process with the result that the evaluations' quality is intrinsically not adequately ensured.
- The two information channels, i.e. the "lessons learned" data bank and the "global evaluation concept", are heterogeneous and incompatible, thereby creating overlaps and gaps in the follow-up process. This ends up in an efficiency loss.

Although the Defence department learned from these operations, the evaluations' results of the operations carried-out are not always put to use. Structural shortcomings are not sufficiently monitored and lessons are insufficiently implemented into policies. This can partly

be explained by the broader context of staff occupancy (ageing staff members, etc.) and the available budget limits.

The Court advised the Defence department to monitor the evaluation process in a more integrated and coordinative way. A transparent accountability framework with respect to foreign military operations can streamline the way the Defence minister reports to Parliament.

The Court is of the opinion that the “lessons learned” system should be extended with other available information sources, so as to provide the Defence department with a more comprehensive insight into the issues at stake. Relevant information can be put to use through a better cooperation and compatibility between the assessment units in the Land and Air Forces, the Navy and the Medical section.

The Court suggested the following recommendations:

- The Defence department should merge the reporting channels and store all lessons learned into one single system available to all stakeholders. This would avoid overlaps in briefings, coordination meetings, directives and procedures.
- The lessons data entered should be validated in the light of the NATO criteria. This would make the lessons learned system more effective.
- The entire process should be followed up and monitored within a consistent and transparent system.
- The use of the “lessons learned” system by hierarchy should be more conspicuous.
- If the Defence department wants to learn lessons in matters of management and policy the Court finds it appropriate that it carries out in-depth analyses of the information collected on several operations so as to help identify patterns (such as recurring shortcomings).

In his reply to the Court’s draft report, the Defence minister said he did not agree that any improvement could be made in the information provided to Parliament. He did not broach the issue of the Court’s recommendations.