

How Afghanistan Influenced the Content of *Armed Forces & Society*: An Editor's Reflection on Trends in the Literature

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established 1974

Began Editing — Feb. 2001



Sept. 2001

Armed Forces & Society

Perspectives on the
Afghanistan War

Read more >>

Special Issue — Oct 2023

- Withdrawal -- response
- 13 commentary on Afghanistan war
- Paper part of this special issue

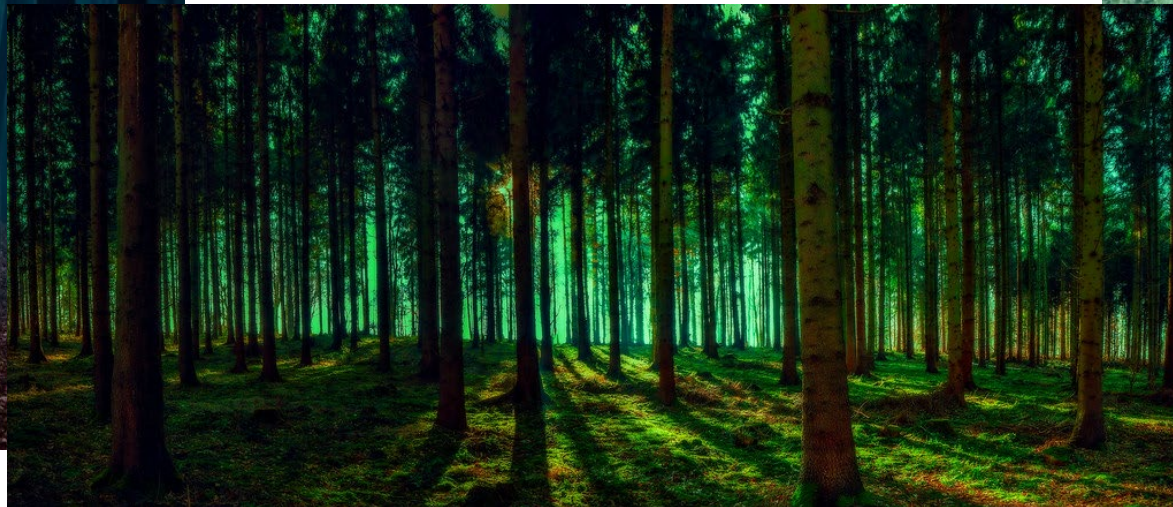
- How did the War influence the content of AF&S?
([open access](#))





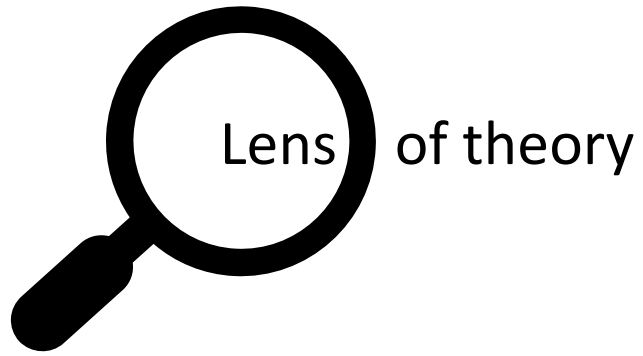
Journal like a forest

Editor Steward of forest



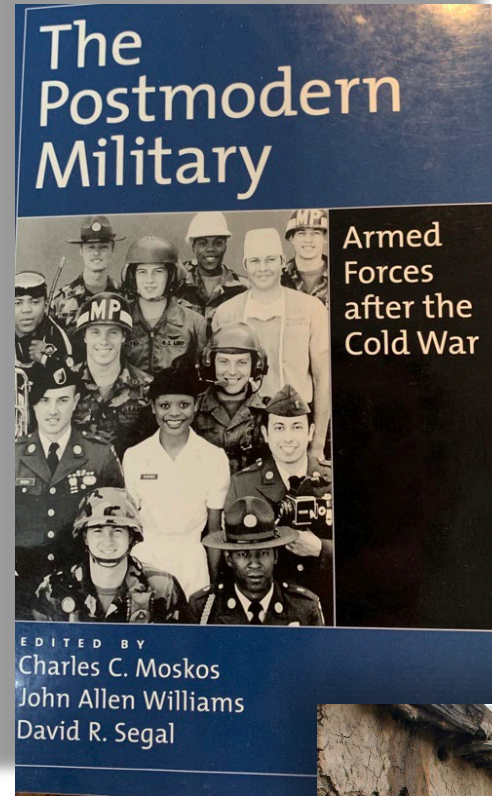
Afghanistan War

Event that could
change the forest



Postmodern Military

- Volunteer Force
- New missions – small wars
- Multinational divisions
- led international organizations



(2000)

Biggest Test



Afghanistan War Timetable

Important Dates	Influential Events
September 2001	Attack on US by terrorists
October 2001	US and British Air campaign in Afghanistan to root out al-Qaida Operation Enduring Freedom
December 2001	International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) begun (Multinational force) Mandated by UN
March 2003	Iraq war begins
August 2003	NATO takes over ISAF (51 NATO and Partner nations)
2006	ISAF expanded to cover the whole country. Nation building mission
2007 - 2008	Insurgency grows
2009	New counter insurgency launched 40,000 new troops
December 2011	Iraq war ends
December 2014	ISAF ended as did NATO's responsibility.
January 2015	NATO launched Resolute Support Mission - training the Afghan security forces
February 2020	US and Taliban sign agreement to withdraw international forces by May 2021
August 2021	Withdrawal of forces. Evacuation of 120,000 people airlifted from the Afghanistan airport.

How was this test reflected in the pages of Armed Forces & Society?



How did the forest change?

- Reviewed all titles every volume (2002 – 2021)
- Printed abstracts of Afghanistan related articles
- Sorted the abstracts into piles (topics that adhere)
- Labeled the piles
- Used labels to do search of website - find additional articles



My reflections as the decision-maker

Key themes



- Lives of service members.....
- How military organizations responded
- Public Opinion
- Civil Military Relations
- Dark Outliers

Lives of Service members

- Veterans
- Military Families
- Physical and Mental Health



overlap –
categories as useful distinctions

Veterans

- Definition of veteran International perspective
- **More** Traditional themes
Transition to civilian life, employment, education, family adjustment
- Different emphasis –
Identity
PTSD, Disabilities and Suicide (multiple deployments)
- Women veterans
Importance of considering gender in transition
comparison women/men



Journal of Veterans Studies (2016)

Institute for Veterans & Military Families (2011)

Military Families (highly cited)

Theme -stress associated with multiple deployments

- Challenges –
PTSD, domestic violence, depression, employment
- Protective factors –
childcare, relationship quality, effective leadership,
community & extended family support
- coping strategies



Health and Mental Health

- Prior to war, very few papers on health
 - Major shift (2015- 2021)
- Cross category complication
 - **veterans**, women, race/ethnicity, family members, National Guard,
- Issues that focus on Individuals:
 - combat exposure, disabilities, suicide, PTSD, returning adrenalin junkies
 - mental health stigma, barriers to care
- Policy issues
 - access to health insurance, digital inequality



Institutional Response (AVF)

Reserve forces (Citizen Soldiers)

- Significantly More Content --
Two special issues (2011/2021)
- Theory & International
 - Transmigrant – move between civilian/military world
 - Identity theme



Reserve forces (Citizen Soldiers)

- Topics began to mirror the force
 - Enlistment motivation, retention
 - Readiness, cohesion, relationships with active duty
 - Women reserves --sexual harassment
 - physical & mental health- Suicide
 - family stress around deployment

**Most significant change
in content**



Contractors – Private Security Firms

Global interest in use of Contractors

More depth and complexity

- civilian control, identity of soldiers, soldier attitudes about contractors
- Motivation to serve (police work)
- Care for contractors (new warrior, new veteran)
 - medical care
 - workplace transition issues
- Unique data – contractor deaths – find demographics (secret proprietary info)



Institutional Response

Small, Long,
Unconventional, Multilateral War



- Changing mindset (less warrior -)
- Soldiers' role, diplomat, peacekeeper...
- Relationships with host nationals – interpreters/linguists
- Management/training challenges

Public Opinion

- Public support or lack of support for war
- Returning veterans - media characterization
Hero
Victim
- Service members/Veterans' reaction to media characterization



Civil Military Relations

Janowitz – greater applicability

- Pragmatism (versus absolutism)
- Small war context
- Constabulary force



Dark Themes

- Green on blue murder
- ISAF caused civilian casualties
- Torture
- War traumatized offenders
 - Military Catch 22



How did the forest change?

AVF -- Multiple deployments

- Problems generated for Veterans/military family (Health+++)
- **reserve forces**/contractors

New missions – small wars

- Roles and identities changed
- New Management challenges/roles
- Multilateral cooperation
- Morris Janowitz perspective



Changes in content not clearly related to the Afghanistan War



Military Tabu seems to be gone.

Widespread publication of
military & society topics

Intersection of military and criminal justice

- Convergence of military and police functions
- Involvement of military in internal security
- Troop and Veteran crime
- Veterans employed in police and prisons
- Incarcerated Veterans (during and after)
- International – Africa, Latin America, Europe, Eastern Europe



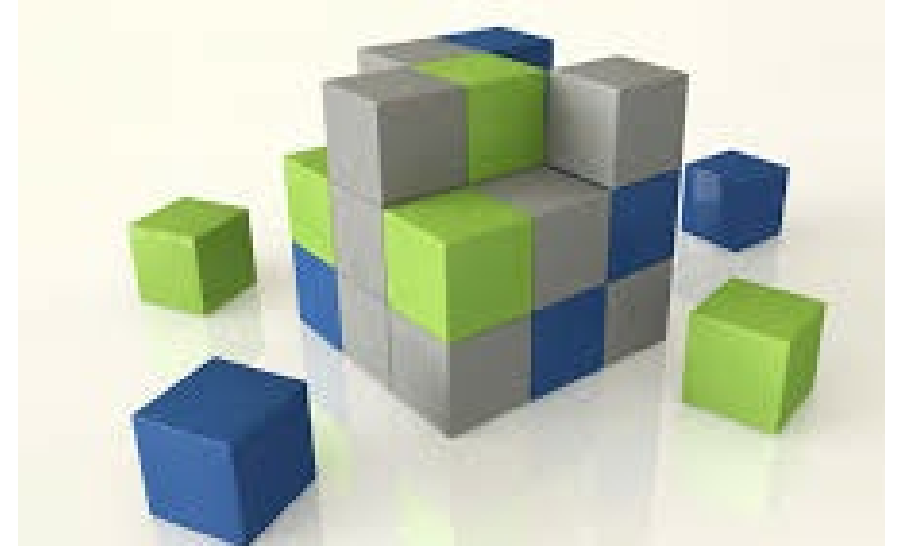
Role of military in natural disaster

- COVID Response
- Climate change related disasters
- Civil-military cooperation



Odds and Ends

- Changing notions of heroism
 - medals and statues -- Fraud
- Return of conscription
 - greater threat Europe
- Gender related issues
 - Sexual misconduct
 - LGBTQ+ issues, Post DADT, masculinity
- Greater international participation and sophistication
 - Eastern Europe, Africa, India, Latin America, Asia (China/South Korea)





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