

## DENMARK AT WAR: PATTERNS AND DEVELOPMENTS IN DENMARK'S MILITARY ENGAGEMENT

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Danish foreign policy is characterized by a strong and diversified military engagement. Danish decision-makers need to closely examine the consequences of this development with a focus on the balances between a) the EU and the US; b) ambitions and resources; c) the effects of the individual operation on a particular conflict and the effects of multiple operations on international society; and d) effectiveness and quality assurance.<sup>1</sup>

### Key findings

- Since the end of the Cold War, the active use of military force has become an integral part of Danish foreign policy.
- The number of military operations with Danish participation has risen markedly and the institutional embeddedness and goals of these operations have been diversified.
- Military engagement has increased access to US decision-makers, but created new challenges in terms of responding to a changing threat environment, balancing resources and ambitions and securing diplomatic expert advice before commitments to engage militarily.

### Executive summary

Denmark – a small country with a Nordic security identity – has increased its military engagement significantly since the end of the Cold War. The goal of Danish contributions to international military operations is no longer exclusively peacekeeping, but also making peace, and Danish military operations are no longer exclusively under the auspices of the UN, which has been replaced by NATO as the primary institution for Danish military operations and supplemented by participation in international coalitions. This development has enhanced Denmark's status as an ally of the United States and increased Danish access to US policy-makers, but it also creates new challenges for Denmark's national security, international standing and foreign policy process.



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## Analysis

The use of military force has become an integral part of Danish foreign policy. From 1990 until the end of 2017, Denmark contributed to 68 international military operations under the auspices of the UN, NATO, the OSCE and international coalitions. In comparison, Denmark only contributed to 13 international military operations from 1945 to 1989.<sup>2</sup> All of these operations were under the auspices of the UN except for the Danish contribution to the British occupation zone in Germany after World War II. From 1991 to the end of 2017, the Danish Defence contributed 70,000 troops to international military operations,<sup>3</sup> more the double number of the 34,100 troops posted to UN missions during the Cold War.<sup>4</sup>

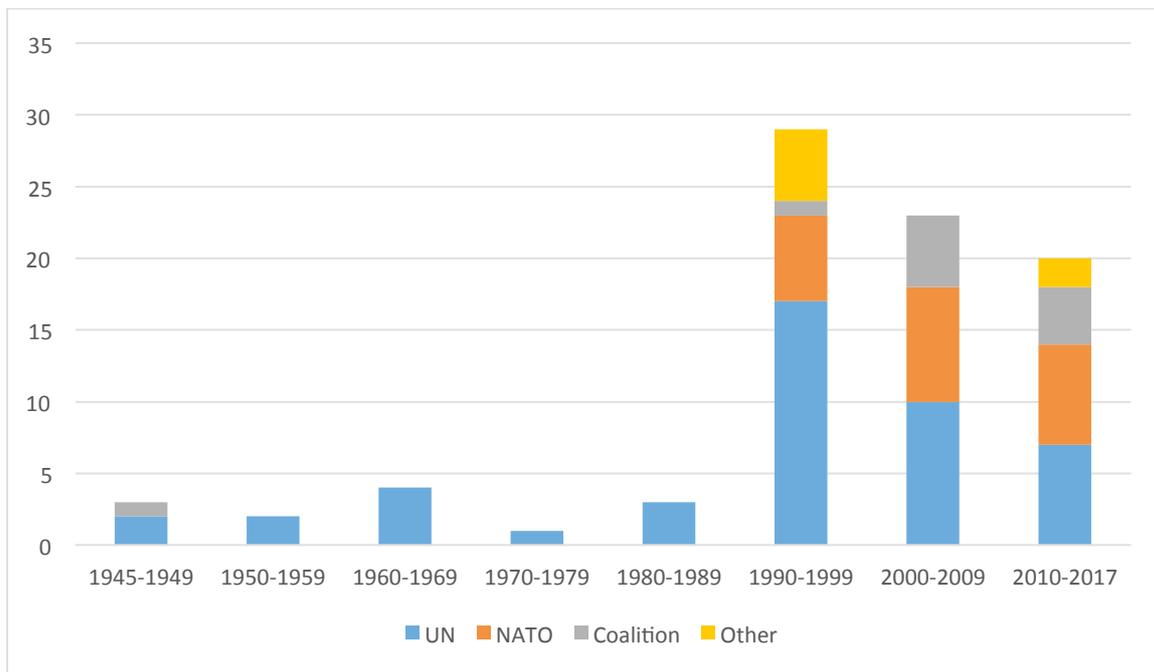


Figure 1: Number of Danish contributions to international military operations 1945-2017.<sup>5</sup>

The institutional embeddedness of Danish military operations became increasingly diversified over the post-Cold War period. From 1990 to 2017, 33 out of 68 military operations with Danish participation took place under the auspices of the UN. NATO constituted the institutional framework in 21 out the 68 operations, and coalitions not embedded in a permanent institution constituted 10 out the 68 operations.<sup>6</sup> Each new decade after the Cold War, the share of UN embedded operations fell (from more than half in the 1990s to little over a third in the 2010s).



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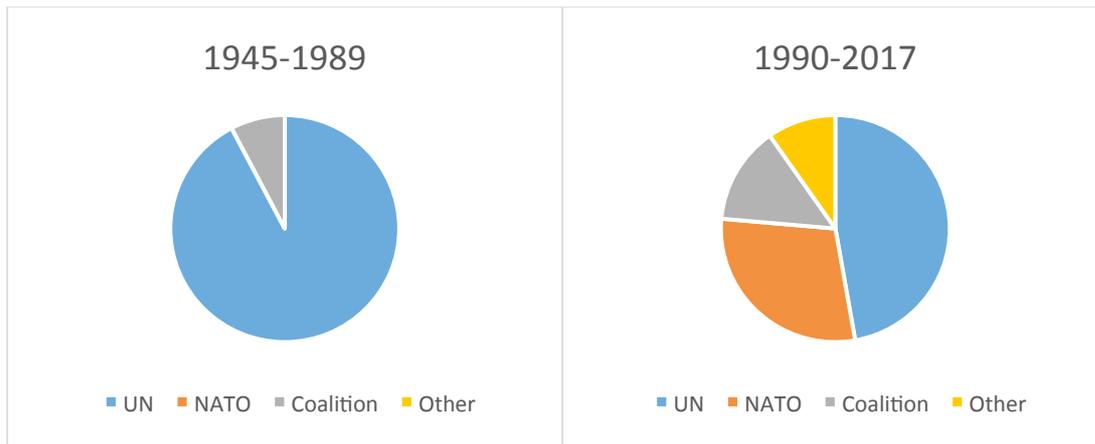


Figure 2 Institutional embeddedness of Danish military operations 1945-2017

The change in institutional embeddedness also signalled a change in the goals of the military operations with Danish contributions. During the Cold War, Danish troops focused exclusively on peacekeeping, always with a direct UN mandate. After the Cold War, Danish troops participate actively in making peace and stabilizing societies, often, but not always, with a direct UN mandate.

The development in Denmark's military engagement has been driven by a change in the international demand for small states to contribute actively to international security, the willingness of Danish political decision-makers to meet this demand, and the ability of the Danish defence forces to implement the policy choices of the decision makers. The early 1990s saw a steep increase in the demand for international military operations to stabilize the post-Cold War security environment, primarily under the auspices of the UN. From the late 1990s, drawing on the somewhat problematic experiences in terms of managing the security of troops and meeting the goals of the operations, NATO and international coalitions came to play a bigger role in military operations, internationally and for Denmark.

Danish policy makers adapted to this demand by adopting parliamentary resolutions - typically with a large majority and sometimes unanimously - stipulating the content, form and durability of the Danish contributions. The policy of actively contributing to international military operations was supported by a majority of parties constituting the centre-right and centre-left in Danish politics and including the two major Danish parties – the Social Democrats and the Liberals - which have competed for the prime ministership for most of Denmark's parliamentary history. Only in one case – the decision on Denmark's participation in the coalition invading Iraq in March 2003 - was parliament split between the right (including the Liberals and constituting a majority and supporting Danish membership of the coalition) and the left (including the Social Democrats). Successive Danish defence agreements stipulating the aims, structure and budget of the Danish defence supported the development of Denmark's military engagement. Most notably the 2004 defence agreement fundamentally restructured Danish defence by abandoning territorial defence in favour of a smaller, more flexible deployable force aimed at out-of-area operations.

However, increased military engagement did not lead to an increase in defence budgets. While Cold War defence budgets constituted 2-3 percent of GDP, post-Cold War defence budgets

constituted 1-2 percent of GDP. From 2013 to 2017, Danish defence expenditures have varied between 1.1 and 1.2 percent of GDP.<sup>7</sup> Although, the 2018-2023 defence agreement promises a substantial increase in the defence budget for the first time since the end of the Cold War, Danish defence expenditure will still remain below 1.5 percent of GDP, and thus well below 2 percent threshold agreed among NATO member states.

### **The challenges and opportunities of Denmark's military engagement**

The active use of military force in small state foreign policy is a relatively recent phenomenon. Small states have traditionally sought either to 'hide' from great power politics by pursuing non-provocative neutralist policies or by seeking shelter in bilateral or multilateral alliances with the great powers. Both strategies are defensive and aimed at securing the territorial integrity of the state. In contrast, Danish military activism since the end of the Cold War is an offensive strategy aimed at promoting Danish interests and values by military engagement. This seems to challenge Denmark's Nordic security identity, which has traditionally been expressed in policies of peacebuilding, development aid and supporting diplomatic and institutional developments of international society. However, to Danish policy makers military engagement is a natural extension of Danish contributions to UN peacekeeping and Danish institutional and diplomatic activism during and after the Cold War. The active use of military means has become another tool in the toolbox of Danish foreign policy, whether aimed at promoting Danish interests and values or maintaining and developing international order.<sup>8</sup>

While Danish policy makers rarely see an inherent contradiction in this policy, it entails both opportunities and challenges. On the one hand, Danish foreign policy makers, diplomats and defence staff regularly mention increased access to key US decision makers and information on US policy positions as an important benefit of Denmark's increased status and link this to Denmark's willingness to contribute to military operations.<sup>9</sup> It is difficult to discern to which extent access translates into influence, but Denmark's status as an ally of the United States, Denmark's most important security provider, has been improved.

On the other hand, there are a number of challenges following from Denmark's military engagement. First, by giving up territorial defence and focusing on Danish expeditionary forces, Denmark is vulnerable to changes in the threat environment. A more assertive Russia and a less safe salient environment in the Baltic Sea is already prompting a change in Danish security priorities. Second, by focusing on forging a special relationship with the United States, Denmark is vulnerable to changes in US foreign policy. Facing a less stable – and potentially less dependable – US security policy after the election of Donald Trump as US president is a challenge to Denmark. Third, by maintaining a modest defence budget while branding itself as a champion of security output – always willing and able to contribute to military operations – Denmark has been vulnerable to the recent debate over allies' input to the alliance, i.e. whether or not alliance members use 2 percent of GDP for defence.

In addition, at least two challenges for the foreign policy decision-making process follow from Denmark's military engagement. First, preparing military operations is a complicated process involving multiple national and international actors and multiple deadlines from informal inquiries to the formal decision to contribute. After a contribution is made the goals of the operation may change. For a small state with limited administrative, diplomatic and military resources and little influence on exactly when and how the military operation will take place, this involves challenges



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regarding: a) When a commitment is made?; b) How to handle changing goals of the operation?; c) When to pull out? How these challenges are handled is likely to affect relations with close allies as well as Denmark's standing in international society. Second, a strong military element in a country's foreign policy is likely to change the balance of power between authorities inside the state. The Ministry of Defence and the Prime Minister's Office are likely to gain influence at the expense of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, traditionally the hub for advising the government on foreign policy. In the long run this may affect decision-making processes as well as the diplomatic culture of a country.

### What should Denmark do?

Denmark should systematically analyse the consequences of becoming a military actor. As the European threat environment is changing and the US commitment to Europe is less stable than it used to be, Denmark needs to reassess the transatlantic as well as the military-diplomatic balances in its foreign policy.

- Denmark should assess whether the Danish opt-out from the European Union's defence policy serves Danish foreign policy interests in the current security environment characterized by a more offensive Russia and a less stable US commitment to Europe.
- Denmark should assess if consecutive contributions to military operations, sometimes without a clear UN mandate, risk undermining the long term Danish goal of a strong international society.
- Denmark should assess whether the ambitious goals to contribute consistently to military operations is matched by the resources allocated for this purpose.
- Denmark should assess what lessons may be learned from previous decisions on military engagement in terms of decision-making effectiveness, democratic control and expert diplomatic advice on how to respond to requests from military contributions.

### Conclusion

Since the end of the Cold War, the active use of military force has become an integral part of Danish foreign policy. The number of military operations with Danish participation has risen markedly, the institutional embeddedness of these operations has been diversified, and the goals of Danish military engagement are no longer confined to peacekeeping. Danish decision-makers need to closely examine the consequences of this development with a focus on the balances between a) the EU and the US, b) ambitions and resources, c) the effects of the individual operation on a particular conflict and the effects of multiple operations on international society, and d) effectiveness and quality assurance (including democratic control and diplomatic expert advice).

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<sup>1</sup> This policy brief is based on the authors' work for the *Independent Inquiry on Denmark's Military Engagement in Kosovo, Iraq and Afghanistan*. The brief disseminates some of the preliminary findings of the inquiry.

<sup>2</sup> Numbers, including those used in the illustrations, are from the inquiry unless otherwise stated. The number of operations is based on an inventory of Danish contributions to international military operations 1945-2017 conducted by the staff of the inquiry. Operations are counted the first year of the Danish contribution.

<sup>3</sup> Danish Ministry of Defence, Personalestyrelsen, "Udsendte: Tal for veteraner og udsendte fordelt på missioner", <http://forpers.dk/hr/Pages/Udsendte.aspx> (accessed May 17, 2018).



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<sup>4</sup>Jakobsen, P. V. (2011). Fredsbevarende operationer. In J. T. Lauridsen, R. Mariager, T. B. Olesen & P. Villaume (Eds.), *Den Kolde Krig og Danmark, Gads Leksikon*. Copenhagen: Gads Forlag.

<sup>5</sup> A small number of military operations are under the auspices of more than one institution. They are coded under both institutions.

<sup>6</sup> Some operations under the auspices of NATO and international coalitions were legitimized by a direct UN mandate.

<sup>7</sup> Danish Ministry of Defence, "Ministerområdets Økonomi", <http://www.fmn.dk/videnom/Pages/ministeromraadetsoekonomi.aspx> (accessed June 6, 2018).

<sup>8</sup> Wivel, A. (2005). Between paradise and power: Denmark's transatlantic dilemma. *Security Dialogue*, 36(3), 417-421; Wivel, A. (2013). From Peacemaker to Warmonger? Explaining Denmark's Great Power Politics. *Swiss Political Science Review*, 19(3), 298-321.

<sup>9</sup> Jakobsen, P. V. & Ringsmose, J. (2015). Size and reputation – why the USA has valued its 'special relationships' with Denmark and the UK differently since 9/11. *Journal of Transatlantic Studies* 13(2), 135-153; Jakobsen, P. V., Ringsmose, J. & Saxi, H. L. (2018). Prestige-seeking small states: Danish and Norwegian military contributions to US-led operations. *European Journal of International Security*, 3(2), 1-22; Henriksen, A. & Ringsmose, J. (2012). What did Denmark gain? Iraq, Afghanistan and the relationship with Washington. In N. Hvidt & H. Mouritzen (Eds.), *Danish Foreign Policy Yearbook 2012*. Copenhagen: Danish Institute of International Studies.



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