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Summary

The Danish land forces had to adapt to the real requirements and “fashions” of NATO from the early 1950s. In some periods the solution favoured by the Alliance could not be sustained within the framework and constraints of the Danish society and political system, and a compromise solution had to be worked out. The Alliance always favoured standing, high readiness forces. It was always dominated by the maritime great powers. During the Cold War, front-line states like Denmark then could justify the maintenance of an army where mobilised trained conscripts manned the main part. However, with the changing role of NATO and the need to have deployable forces, the structure and manning of the Danish land forces had to develop. The solution became a “two-tier” system with reaction forces of the army manned by a combination of regular contract personnel and reserve contract personnel. The main part of both types of contract soldiers is recruited among the relatively limited number of conscripts that are called up for training.

THE DANISH TWO-TIER FORMAT: A SOLUTION FOR A SMALL STATE ARMY IN THE CONTEMPORARY ENVIRONMENT?¹

1. Introduction

Denmark has never had a pure “professional” army. Since the Vikings the land forces have had a considerable number of soldiers who did not see soldiering as a career. On the other hand, the country only implemented *universal* military training and service for the male population during two periods: during World War I to have a robust defence of Danish neutrality and the first 25 years of the Cold War to have a sufficiently strong land force for the initial defence. In all other situations the manning choice has been a pragmatic mix of cadre with lifetime career service, contract soldiers, drafted citizens and volunteer militia.

This article will only cover developments in the manning of the Danish *land* forces, not the navy and air force, and it will limit itself to the Post World War II experience. It is the author’s interpretation, based on studies of developments during the first 15 years of the Cold War and on his own experience, observations and analysis during service thereafter². It does not in any way represent the official point of view of the Danish Army.

¹ Based on the presentation to the 5 December 2002 Vilnius Conference “New Threats and Security: Prospects for Professionalisation and New Missions of Armed Forces”.

² The development of Danish defence policy and doctrine has been analysed by the author in:

- ”Udviklingen i Danmarks forsvarsdoktrin fra 1945 til 1969” in *Militärhistorisk Tidskrift* 1987, Stockholm 1987.
- ”Den massive gengældelses lille ekko. De taktiske atomvåbens rolle i dansk forsvarsplanlægning i 1950’erne” in *Danmark, Norden og NATO 1948-1962*, Copenhagen 1991.
- ”The Politics of Danish Defence 1967-1993” in *Adaptation & Activism. The Foreign Policy of Denmark 1967-1993*, Copenhagen 1995.

1.1 A theoretical platform

I will not use the terms “professional” unit or soldier. The term is simply not precise enough. An Israeli mobilised reserve conscription trained tank company is probably a good deal more “professional” and combat ready than a Danish contract based regular tank company normally only training within civilian working hours. The term is simply not sufficiently precise to describe the development in Denmark and the future options of the Danish Army³. To gain clarity the article will use the following terms:

- *Long or short term contract employment* < > *long or short conscription training*;
- *Regular* (=standing) < > *reserve* (based on reserve contract or on mobilisation)

It is also essential to understand that the human element in unit quality and combat readiness does not depend on one factor only, but on a combination of:

- *Cadre quality* (average intelligence, physical strength, motivation, education level, experience and realistic training, cohesion as a group, professional attitude – in both regular and reserve units)
- *Manpower quality* (average intelligence, physical strength, motivation, education level – in both regular and reserve units)
- *Unit training quality* (intensity and realism – in both regular and reserve units)

It should also be understood that the manning requirement depends on the main future army mission – and the resulting focus. No one solution fits all requirements:

- If the main immediate mission is the *defence of the state territory against major invasion*, the chosen solution must give high priority to creating a sufficiently large force.
- If the main immediate mission is *internal security*, the solution must emphasize the maintenance of robust discipline and unit cohesion.
- If, on the other hand, the main mission, as now in NATO, is the maintenance of a flexible expeditionary force, the highest priority must be given to high combat readiness, unit cohesion and sustainability on extended missions.

A country cannot choose freely. The national economy (state finances, employment options for young people) influences the manning options, as does the character of its society. Low average health of the average youth limits the options. There may be constraints on recruiting (no or low public acceptance of the burden of conscription, no acceptance of recruiting foreigners, no acceptance of recruiting females). Maintenance of high quality manning may be constrained by the civilian labour market framework (no acceptance of training and operational losses, short working hours, high retirement age).

• “De danske væbnede styrker i fremtiden – en skitse fra sidelinien” in *Militært Tidsskrift* 2/2003, Copenhagen 2003.

³ Unfortunately there is no academic work on the development and use of conscripts and contract employed soldiers in the Danish Army in the post World War II period. This is a first attempt of a short analytic sketch.

Much of the debate assumes that there are only two types of units: “professional” and “conscript (training) units”. However, to have a useful discussion of the options, it is necessary to keep all the following types in mind when choosing the army manning architecture⁴:

- Regular contract units recruited abroad (the French Foreign Legion, British and Indian Army Ghurkhas, etc.)
- Regular contract units recruited at home (as the US and UK)
- Regular (long service) conscript units (as Israel)
- Short training conscript units (as Finland)
- Reserve contract units (can have been trained initially in different ways)
- Mobilised conscript units (from Israeli to Swiss)
- Mobilised volunteer units (from British Territorial to Danish Home Guard)

2. The original Danish choice 1945-1953

When Denmark developed its army after the end of the 1940-45 German occupation, the main mission quickly and clearly became territorial defence against another strategic coup attempt or massive invasion – this time from the Soviet Union. Many of the key army officers had been inspired by what they had experienced in Sweden, where they had served and trained in the “Danish Brigade”, a formation manned by Danish refugees. It was intended by the Danish politicians to become a tool in avoiding chaos, when the German occupation forces collapsed. It was therefore in many ways a Gendarmerie, but it had been trained by the Swedish Army and had developed into a robust and well trained force by the end of the war.

The Danish Army felt humiliated by not having been allowed to defend the country against the 1940 German invasion. Such a situation should never happen again. An army based on universal military training of all suitable males should be created to deter and meet any future invader. It had to be massive in size, as it was considered impossible to foresee the place and method of a future invasion as the enemy was expected to control the sea around Denmark and airspace above the country in the way the Germans had done during their invasion. Only a total mobilisation could combine an effective defence of the key areas that included the capital and the main sea- and airports with a territorial defence of the rest of the country.

The manning architecture chosen by the army in 1948-1953 was:

- 12 months conscript service for all. The role of the force included countering any Communist coup attempts with the combat ready parts. The army also manned the Danish force that participated in the occupation of Northern Germany – the first Danish international operation since 1815.
- *Plus* mobilised conscripts. They should man a dense network of territorial defence covering all parts of the country.
- *Plus* locally mobilised volunteers of the Home Guard who should guard key objectives of local importance against any Communist attempts and supplement the territorial defence.

⁴ The terminology used is deliberately in line with common professional language. It has not been copied from any theoretical work.

The realisation of the plan was severely hampered by the very limited equipment level that the weak Danish economy could support. The army had very little chance of developing from being a lightly armed infantry force. During this early period, the fact that Denmark became a founding member of NATO in 1949 meant very little. The focus and situation of the re-established army mirrored the similarly difficult situation in the Baltic states during the first years of renewed independence.

3. Conscription under increasing pressure 1953-1973

Danish freedom of action to choose an army manning architecture that mirrored the internal military-political consensus was quickly brought to an end by alliance pressure. In 1953 the NATO military leadership pressed for larger forces, and it did not accept that the 12 months service time for conscript soldiers made it possible to maintain a standing “Covering Force” with a sufficient level of combat readiness.

As a small and exposed member state, Denmark did not think it could reject the demand for change. It caved-in to the pressure and extended the service time to the required minimum of 18 months. That this happened overnight, adding six additional months of service to conscript soldiers just before their release after training made some mutiny and walkout from an infantry regiment in South Jutland, the traditionally most patriotic part of the country. This marked that there was a limit to what the soldiers and population would accept, and during the next 20 years the length of conscript service time was one of the key issues in the defence policy debate in the country.

During that period the army operational plan quickly changed away from a relatively even distribution of units over the Danish territory towards a still clearer emphasis on “forward defence”. In the Jutland Peninsula this meant that the mobile field army formation, the “Jutland Division”, prepared to deploy first its main part and later the full division on mobilisation to Schleswig-Holstein to participate in the common defence of North Germany. On the main island of Zealand it meant that the army gradually moved its main effort forward to the coast to prevent an invading force from establishing a bridgehead.

The gradual forward concentration of forces was logical, especially as the quick build-up and NATO-integration of the “Bundeswehr”, the armed forces of the Federal Republic of Germany, enhanced the defence possibilities along the Inner German Border as well as in the Western part of the Baltic Sea and the airspace above. There was no longer a need to maintain a robust territorial defence, covering all parts of Denmark. The main direction of an enemy invasion attempt was now easier to predict.

The increasing political weight of Germany in the Alliance also limited its operational freedom. From the mid-1960s NATO defence plans had to emphasise deterrence and direct defence of all German territory.

The debate and the developing solutions during those 20 years were influenced by the following factors:

- Firstly the increasingly negative attitude among the serving conscripts. During this period Denmark changed from a predominantly agricultural country to a modern industrial state, and the expanding economy was able to create full employment, even

among the very large generation of young men born in the 1940s. It became less and less acceptable for young men to lose 1-2 years of income and career chances. They found that they were wasting their youth in the months after the initial intensive basic training period of initially 6, then 4 and finally 3 months. Even if the “Covering Force” field exercise activity level was far higher than it would later become, the soldiers were unhappy. Contributing factors were a pedagogic and leadership style that was out of touch with developments in the surrounding society and the increasingly hostile attitude to the U.S., NATO and defence amongst the youth of this post 1968 “Vietnam Generation. Especially at the top end of the conscripts (those traditionally selected for NCO training and who volunteered for reserve officer training) the number of conscientious objectors increased dramatically.

- Secondly the demanding and costly training requirements for the most demanding functions such as members of tank crews and communications personnel. With an 18 months conscript training period it was still feasible to train tank crews, but it was not cost effective, and with the reduction of conscript training to first 16, then 14 and finally 12 months, it became obvious that these positions should be filled with regulars on contract. From 1956 onwards, contributions to UN Peacekeeping became a (secondary) Danish Army mission. It was quickly realised that the Danish contingents should be manned with regulars on contract.
- Thirdly the policy of NATO during the first part of the period: any war in Europe would be nuclear and so short that only the regular, combat ready elements would be able to influence the outcome of the initial phase of the war. During the final years of the period, the Alliance strategy had changed to “Flexible Response”. However, this did not change the NATO emphasis on the regulars, as it was expected that a crisis could erupt with little warning, requiring regular forces for crisis management.

The architecture chosen by the army in 1953-1973 was:

- Initially 18, then 16, then 14 and finally 12 months conscript service for all private personnel (24 months for conscript NCOs and reserve officers) *plus* contract personnel in UN Peacekeeping operations *plus* increasing manning with regular contract soldiers in demanding units (e.g. in tank units) during the second half of the period.
- *Plus* mobilised conscripts supplementing the mobile field army units and manning local defence forces.
- *Plus* locally mobilised volunteers of the Home Guard who should guard key objectives of local importance and hamper and delay enemy operations outside the main effort area.

4. The failed attempt to build a regular force core 1973-1979

During the early 1970s both the political leadership and the leaders of the Danish Armed Forces realised that the existing army manning architecture could not be sustained. The unhappiness of the conscripts created a situation where the leading political parties demanded dramatic changes.

However, the army mission and operational concept had not changed. Neither had the Alliance in its emphasis on regular, combat ready forces. NATO had de facto accepted the reduction to 12 months conscript service in other small member states (e.g.

in Norway and the Netherlands), but a reduction below that level would not be compatible with the maintenance of a combat ready “Covering Force”.

The chosen solution was to build army combat readiness on a substantially increased number of regular privates on contracts. The aim was to give the core units and elements of the five armoured infantry brigades as well as the division and army corps units a balanced regular manning that would make them capable of limited, independent combat. The aim became to man a large part the modern, armoured equipment that the army had received as donations during the previous two decades with a cadre of contract soldiers – actually to create a “New Look” first line force of the army.

From then onwards, conscript service time should be limited to the time necessary to give units the initial training for their mobilisation tasks. National service would no longer be universal. The number of conscripts trained would be reduced dramatically to what was necessary to maintain the reserve force strength and quality. In order to compensate the young men who were to be selected to serve by drawing lot, the conscripts thereafter received a payment approaching that of a young regular soldier (instead of the previous combination of free food and a symbolic weekly pay). The service conditions were eased. Soldiers could wear civilian clothes after training and choose to live outside the barracks.

The quality of the reserve units was to be maintained by a system of periodic call-up for refresher-training periods of from weekend to one week length. This applied both to reserve units of former regular contract soldiers and reserve units manned by trained conscripts.

The very deep reduction in the number of conscripts trained should not only free funds for the employment of the larger number of regular contract soldiers. It should also free resources for investment in new equipment. From the mid-1960 Denmark had to buy its own equipment for the Danish Armed Forces. The time where the equipment would be donated by the large and richer NATO partners had ended. Denmark was, rightly, considered wealthy enough to buy the tanks, trucks, armoured personnel carriers, aircraft and ships that it needed to replace or supplement those originally donated.

The architecture chosen by the Chief of Defence for the army in 1973-1979 was:

- Regular contract soldiers manning 60% of the five armoured infantry brigades plus division and army corps units (~ 5,000 privates (1/3 more than currently)). In order to recruit enough, the already existing possibility of recruiting 16 years old boys directly from school was expanded. The main “carrot” in the contracts besides the salary was that the soldier earned “civilian education” days. The army was committed to sponsor the soldier for a civilian education of his choice (at the same time as he formally served in the unit).
- *Plus* contract personnel in UN Peacekeeping operations.
- 9 months conscript training for all private personnel (21 months for conscript NCOs and reserve officers) manning the rest of the army (including the significant number of personnel needed to bring the brigades, etc. up to full war-time strength) plus the local defence units.
- *Plus* mobilised conscripts supplementing the mobile field army units and manning local defence forces.

- *Plus* locally mobilised volunteers of the Home Guard that should guard key objectives of local importance and hamper and delay enemy operations outside the main effort area.

In spite of an intensive recruiting effort that also had the benefit of recruiting among the conscripts undergoing training, the Danish Army failed to attract the necessary number and quality of regular soldiers, this in spite of the large generation of young people and in spite of a first attempt to open some positions to female soldiers. The situation was best in the technology dominated tank and signals units that also had a tradition using regular contract soldiers. The attempts to fill the planned - very limited - number of regular infantry units, on the other hand, failed. In nearly all places, it was not considered attractive by the right type of robust, high quality young men to sign-up as infantrymen.

The fact that the armed forces had underestimated the cost of the programme added additional pressure. The leadership also had to find funds for the investment in new tanks, fighter aircraft and ships for the navy within its budget.

5. The Cadre-Mobilisation Army 1979-1992

When the armed forces came to terms with its failure to recruit the soldiers for the 8.500 man strong “standing” army force, the situation had changed in two significant ways.

NATO had decided that any Warsaw Pact invasion should be contained for as long as possible without resorting to nuclear weapons. To make that feasible, the number and quality of the reserve army units of the front line continental members of the alliance should be enhanced, and all other members should improve their ability to deploy reinforcements to the “front” quickly. The speed of reinforcement could be increased by the dedication of a reinforcement formation to a specific region rather than the responsible headquarters waiting to make the decision about where it should be sent at a time when the situation had become clear. The Danish Army responded by assembling a very large part of the previously independent local defence battalion groups in “combat groups”. These light reserve formations were in reality light infantry brigades. They were either given specialist tasks like coastal defence or were to be used as mobile reserves in the army corps rear area.

A rather unexpected result of the reforms and improvements in the conscript service conditions was that the attitude to national service among the conscripts and in the population generally improved dramatically. The number who actually drew lot to serve was limited. It was easier for the army to make the shorter service time meaningful for the conscript. The pay was attractive for a young man just out of school or just ending an apprenticeship as a craftsman. A final factor was that where the informal leaders of the conscripts often had been dominated by persons with a very critical leftist political orientation during the previous period, this was no longer the case.

These changes led to the development of an army, where the manning of any particular unit or post within the unit was to be guided narrowly by the required length of the training.

Some subunits, such as the tank squadrons of the brigades, were either fully manned with regular soldiers or had regulars in all key positions (e.g. headquarters companies of the brigades and their subordinate units).

Other units, e.g. infantry, were “produced” by training conscripts. The “freshly” trained units were used as the reserve parts of the mobile brigades and received refresher training regularly. After a few years they were transferred to lower priority parts of the army.

The length of the conscript training now varied even more than previously, depending of the complexity of the task that the unit was to perform in war. Infantry companies could receive 11 or even 12 months of initial training (increased from the 9 months of the previous period). Some fire support and service support units received considerably less.

Depending on the required combat readiness of the unit, it would have a smaller or larger core of regular or reserve contract personnel. One example: a reserve tank battalion would have regular officers, NCOs and soldiers manning all key functions in the staff and headquarters squadron. The personnel would have other peacetime functions, but train together around 30 days annually (during brigade exercises, war gaming, reconnaissance for war plans as well as and other cadre training). Other key functions in the battalion headquarters squadron would be manned with officers, NCOs and soldiers (either with a regular or conscript training background) with a reserve contract, where they received a considerable sum for being available on an agreed number of days and where they received regular payment during service. The total number of personnel of the battalion who were either regulars or on reserve contracts could add up to 15% of the wartime strength.

The architecture chosen by the army in 1979-1992 was thus:

- Regular contract soldiers manning the functions that were too demanding in training to be manned by conscripts or functions that had to be manned in peacetime to maintain the required unit combat readiness level.
- *Plus* contract personnel in UN Peacekeeping operations.
- *Plus* reserve contract personnel supplementing the regular personnel in all units, typically in the fields of command support and logistics.
- 8-12 months conscript training for all private personnel (20-24 months for conscript NCOs and reserve officers) manning the rest of the mobilised army.
- *Plus* locally mobilised volunteers of the Home Guard that should guard key objectives of local importance and hamper and delay enemy operations outside the main effort area.

6. The Two Tier System develops 1992-2003

During the last decade, the Danish Army has tried to balance the requirement to maintain a capability to maintain or rebuild its territorial defence, with the ability to participate in the collective defence of the alliance and to deliver a “peace dividend” to the politicians and the Ministry of Finance at the same time as the army’s capability to participate in and *sustain participation* in an increasing number of still more demanding international operations has been tested.

The service in international operations has been very demanding, involving at in periods up to 1,500. Until now the main burden has been to man the missions in Former Yugoslavia, from the UN-led operations in Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Macedonia

to NATO-led operations in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo and Macedonia. However, to this basic requirement came the missions in Albania, Kuwait, Eritrea, Afghanistan and Iraq. 1,500 is 20 percent of the total uniformed strength of the army, and even some personnel from the other armed services volunteer to serve on international operation, the main burden is carried by the army.

In order to be able to respond to the requirement to participate in international operations, the army concentrated an increasing amount of its resources in the “Danish Reaction Brigade” that became organised on the basis of one of the previous five, later four armoured infantry brigades.

The problems relating to meeting the new requirements can - to a significant extent – be understood on the basis of this table, showing the 2002 manning of the Danish armed forces⁵.

| | ARMY | NAVY | AIR FORCE | JOINT | TOTAL |
|---------------------------|--------|-------|-----------|-------|--------|
| Officers | 2,030 | 874 | 901 | | 3,805 |
| NCOs and Warrant Officers | 2,256 | 862 | 1,463 | | 4,581 |
| Regular Privates | 3,350 | 1,685 | 2.000 | | 7,035 |
| Civilians | 3,046 | 1,515 | 1,982 | 1,427 | 7,970 |
| Total | 10,682 | 4,936 | 6,346 | 1,427 | 23,392 |

This total of about ½% of the Danish population means that the country is above what other industrial states – like the UK – realize is the maximum domestic recruiting level under present modern peacetime conditions. To that number were added the 6,900 conscripts that received their initial training that year.

The Danish Reaction Brigade’s total manning level is 5,400; however, only about 20% of that number is the regulars. The remaining 80% are personnel on reserve contracts. This latter group is planned “renewed” every four years by trained conscripts. Approximately 15% of the annual number is likely to choose a reserve contract.

The brigade is the main source of army units for international operations. It is, however, not the only one. Regular units and subunits as well as individuals and elements from other parts of the army are used when necessary. One such is the Army Special Force unit, the fully regular Jaeger Corps that had a tour of service in Afghanistan.

This constant flow of fresh personnel is what makes it possible for the Danish Army to sustain a constant international deployment of more than 1,000 (periodically up to 1,500) out of a total Danish Army uniformed strength of around 7,500.

The architecture chosen by the army in 1992-2003 was thus:

- *The “First Tier”* with regular contract soldiers manning the demanding units and functions and forming the majority of the first contingent on any new international operation. The regulars normally always dominate in the fields of command support and logistics.

⁵ The Danish Chief of Defence website: www.fko.dk

- *The “Second Tier”* with limited, well paid, conscription. The pool of conscripts is a source for the recruiting of the regulars and it sustains the expeditionary capability: Around 25% from the best half of the annual class is called-up (the majority “volunteers” in the sense that they choose place and time of service). The conscripts get 8-12 months training. Around 15% sign reserve contracts with the Reaction Brigade. The remaining 85% go to the reserve units after training (mainly in the Danish Division of three armoured infantry brigades). Most regular officers, NCOs and specialist privates are recruited among these conscripts.
- *Plus* reserve contract personnel from the “Second Tier” to supplement and sustain international operations mission participation.
- *Plus* locally mobilised volunteers of the Home Guard that should guard key objectives of local importance.

Conclusion: The Danish Army 2004 onwards

Any future Danish Army structure will have to take some account of the hard NATO-bureaucratic pressure to give a high priority to immediate response, deployable units and the continued need to sustain international operations. The large majority of the Danish political parties have also emphasised the need to move in that direction.

However, any development also has to take account of the limited recruiting possibilities in Denmark. Recruiting among men and women below the age of 18 is now ruled out, both by international agreement and because it must be considered politically unacceptable to risk losses among children.

The demographic development with considerably smaller generations means that the pool is smaller than three decades ago, when we failed. Simply to maintain the present number in the service will be a major challenge when the competition for high quality young people hardens in the next decade, when the large 1940s-generation leaves the labour market.

There is very little chance that the Danish Army will be allowed to recruit selected foreigners (as the French and British armies do). Immigration is presently a far too touchy political issue in the country to consider that option.

The only way to respond to the new demand seems to be to focus better the way the present norm of approximately 7,500 military personnel is used. Far too many are presently used in the non-reaction parts of the army. By a hard prioritisation of activities it should be possible to dedicate about 6,000 or so to the reaction force, enhancing the ability of the Danish Army to participate in demanding international operations. However, to sustain such operations, it would still be necessary to recruit via conscription and use reserve contract personnel to supplement the regulars.

An army architecture that mirrored the foreseen requirements could be as follows:

- *An enhanced “First Tier”* with regular military personnel manning the demanding units and functions and forming the majority of a small “Tool Box” organised Danish Division of around 6.000 regulars and 3.000 reserve contract personnel.
- *The “Second Tier”* with limited, well paid, short conscription training, whose main purpose now was to deliver candidates for a broad spectrum of regular or reserve contracts. Conscripts normally reach the peak in positive attitude at the end of the 3

months, intensive basic training. This indicates that this should be the length of the national service for those volunteering or selected by drawing lot.

- *Plus* locally mobilised volunteers for a Homeland Security force meant to guard key objectives and give other support to the police and other government agencies in emergencies.

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