



ROYAL DANISH DEFENCE COLLEGE

BRIEF

Danish Special Operations - Comprehensive Reorganization and Innovation are Necessary

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Danish Special Operations - Comprehensive Reorganization and Innovation are Necessary

Danish special operations forces are deadlocked due to a system error. This fourth brief in the Royal Danish Defence College's series on special operations discusses this situation, solutions to the problem and specific development potentials.

The previous briefs have discussed and debunked myths that may impede the use of special operations, they have discussed the central role of air capabilities in special operations, and, finally, they have described possible strategic effects for Denmark by using special operations as a foreign policy instrument on par with the state's other foreign policy instruments.

In connection with the impending defence cutbacks in the billions, a recent report from the Centre for Military Studies (CMS) at the University of Copenhagen points out that *a comprehensive reorganization of the defence and innovative thinking are necessary* to implement the cutbacks without lowering Danish foreign policy ambitions considerably.¹ However, the report from CMS does not explain the specific nature of this reorganization and innovation.

The previous brief explained two crucial preconditions for crisis management, namely exhaustive information and appropriate and credible effects. It explained that special operations are about detecting and influencing an adversary's strategic centres of gravity and vulnerabilities. Once an adversary's strategic centres of gravity are detected and his critical vulnerabilities are hit, he cannot reach his strategic objectives. Should a large, armed conflict break out, special operations can contribute to limiting and terminating the conflict.²

This requires a special operations capability that can operate independently and does so under the best conditions. This brief demonstrates that the conditions for full performance of the special operations capability are absent in Denmark due to a system error. The brief then presents two models for creating the best conditions for the special operations capability. The two models also exist in states comparable to Denmark. Regardless of which model Denmark might choose, the choice of model will certainly require a concrete, strategic decision at the political level.

When it comes to individual soldiers, the Danish special operations forces are among the best in NATO, but the forces are among the least developed in terms

(1) Centre for Military Studies, University of Copenhagen (2012), *An Analysis of Conditions for Danish Defence Policy – Strategic Choices 2012*. http://cms.polsci.ku.dk/cms/enanalyseafvilkaarfordanskforsvarspolitik/Danish_Defence_english.pdf

(2) The problem with detecting and identifying targets is discussed in an Air Force report following the Libya operation. The Air Force is very critical of the existing capabilities in terms of detecting such targets. The second brief in the series demonstrated that precisely special operations and air power are an ideal combination to avoid collateral damage. <http://politiken.dk/inland/ECE1778803/flyvevaabnet-ved-ikke-hvor-mange-man-har-draebt-i-libyen/> (in Danish).

of strategy, doctrine and organization compared to our NATO allies. In terms of development, they lag far behind new NATO members such as Lithuania and Poland. Other comparable states such as Canada, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden are far ahead of Denmark as they have already established special operations commands or are in the process of doing so.

To find an explanation for this phenomenon, we embark on a brief historical overview.

The system error

The Navy Special Forces were established in 1957 and the Army Special Forces in 1961. The Navy and the Army have both considered the special forces units as 'their' units, established to support their respective operations. This fact explains, to a large extent, the weak development of Danish special operations forces. In other words, the development of Danish special operations capabilities has been deadlocked due a 50-year-old *system error*.

The system error consists in the fact that Denmark so far has developed special operations units based on the two services' focus on their tactical tasks: land military operations in the Army and maritime operations in the Navy. However, special operations do not focus on land or sea. They target the enemy's strategic centre of gravity and critical vulnerabilities wherever they may appear. Special operations are thus, by nature, joint. Precisely this difference means that neither the Army nor the Navy is particularly interested in special operations. The three services generally operate independently, and there is no tradition of joint thinking in the Armed Forces. Combined, these two conditions create a system error that blocks the development of special operations capabilities in Denmark. The system error has obstructed the development of the joint capability that special operations forces de facto constitute. The necessary strategic information from and about the joint special operations forces at the bottom of the system cannot pass through the system to the top, where they should form the basis for strategic decisions.

The fact that the conventional services are charged with developing a special operations capability that is supposed to operate outside the services' areas of responsibility is just as inexpedient as if the Air Force were to be put in charge of developing the Navy. The latter would never come up, but in practice this is how the system works for the special operations forces.

Due to the system error, crucial politico-strategic considerations about organizational placement and level have never taken place. The political decision-makers have never been presented with up-to-date and exhaustive information about modern special operations and how they should be organized and conducted in modern armed forces.

This problem exists in other countries as well. Actually, there are no examples from other countries where joint special operations forces have been able to conquer *the institutional resistance* unless the political level has ordered a change or a powerful

political sponsor has supported them.³ The conventional military system's attempts at internal improvements will never be anything but bureaucratic adjustments within the politically given framework.⁴

The regular considerations to combine the Navy and Army Special Forces are examples of such adjustments, which aim at cutbacks alone but do not improve the special operations capability or increase the strategic options – rather, the contrary.

Besides an anonymous and slow development during the Cold War, only very few important changes have been made to the Danish special operations capability. In the early 1990s, there was even talk about abolishing the Army Special Forces. They were saved, however, by prioritizing the task *special assistance to the police* and by dedicating three patrols to NATO's direct reaction forces – which can only be seen as a symbolic contribution. Due to its applications in connection with the Navy's national tasks (searches, assistance to the police, etc.), the Navy Special Forces apparently have not been the object of similar considerations. It is worth noting that many other countries precisely in the 1990s launched a targeted strategic development of their special operations capabilities. Sweden, Norway, Canada, the Netherlands and Germany are examples thereof.

After 9/11, the Ministry of Defence formed a committee that was tasked to analyse Danish defence capabilities.⁵ The committee's report reflected the perplexity over the new situation. Special operations were seen as a possible answer to the new threats. Special operations forces were mentioned multiple times in the report, which recommended expanding the two forces with three patrols each. This limited, numerical, organizational expansion was not followed by any type of doctrinal or technological development, and the system error was once again preserved. After a few years, one patrol was added to each force.

After the special operations forces were deployed in Afghanistan in 2001-02, the defence agreement included an investment of DKK 350 million over four years starting 2005 in vehicles, maritime equipment and general technological modernization of Danish special operations forces.⁶ Today, seven years later, a significant share of these investments has yet to be implemented.

(3) Bernd Horn (2004), *Special Men, Special Missions: The Utility of Special Operations Forces – A Summation*, in *Force of Choice, Perspectives on Special Operations*, edited by Bernd Horn, J. Paul de B. Taillon, and David Last, McGill-Queen's University Press, Kingston, page 12.

(4) See *NATO SOF Study* (2008), page 19. http://www.nshq.nato.int/NSHQ/GetFile/?File_ID=29.

(5) 'The Committee Regarding Defence Capabilities' (2002). *Rapport fra udvalget vedrørende forswarets kapaciteter* (in Danish). The author has not been able to find the report in the Armed Forces' archives or library. The information is therefore based on the author's memories from working on actions directed by the report during service in the Army Special Forces at the time.

(6) It is remarkable that parliamentary document 145 1/6 2005 does not even use the correct designation for the units that received the equipment. Even the nomenclature had not made it past the system error.

Despite the sizeable investment, the agreement only included a purely technological investment. The system error was preserved and the investments did not create the necessary fundamental changes. It is important to understand that *military capability consists of three variables: doctrine, organization and technology* (doctrine is a military technical term for the theoretical methods applied). A change in one variable should normally lead to adjustment of the others.

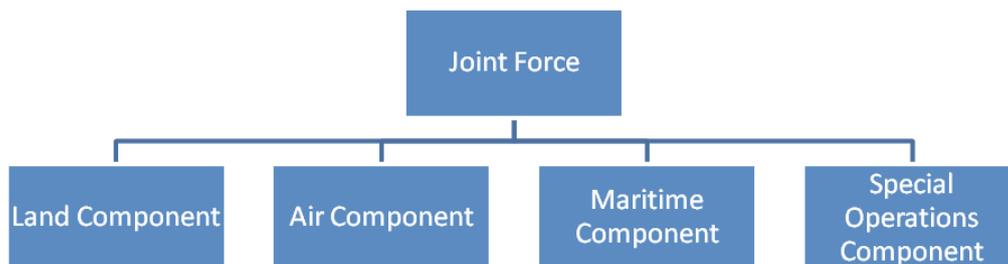
The investment in technology was not followed by the necessary changes in doctrine and organization that could have abolished the system error. The National Audit Office of Denmark has stated that 'it is unclear which results the Armed Forces expect to achieve with the appropriations.'⁷

In 2010, the Chief of Defence **prompted the so-called special operations element (SOE)** after the scandal caused by the so-called 'Jaeger Book'.⁸ The SOE is only a staff element, which is part of the Defence Staff, with no capacity for operational deployment of special operations forces.

Special operations' organizational place in a modern defence

Modern military forces, which are organized according to NATO principles, are normally organized in a so-called Joint Force structure.⁹ Some countries either have already organized or are about to organize their forces according to these principles.

A Combined Joint Task Force is organized in the following components:¹⁰



The land, air and maritime components are defined as *force components*, whereas the special operations component is defined as a *functional component, which functions on a joint basis*.

(7) Rigsrevisionen (2010), *Beretning til Statsrevisorerne om Forsvarets indkøb af større materiel*, side 32. <http://www.ft.dk/statsrevisor/20091/beretning/SB6/964975.PDF> (in Danish).

(8) The 'Jaeger Book' was written by a former member of the Jaeger Corps. As the author revealed sensitive information, the book triggered an avalanche of political-military disputes and finally forced the Danish Chief of Defence to resign.

(9) This is called a Combined Joint Task Force.

(10) NATO AJP-3(B), *Allied Joint Doctrine for the Conduct of Operations*, section 0128-0140 and section 0222.

In practice, the individual special operations units are organized in special operations components in three types of units, each of which specializes in land, air and maritime environments. One purpose of this organization is to ensure short chains of command from the joint chiefs to the special operations forces when they are deployed in strategic operations, which always have the chief's direct attention.

Many countries, though not Denmark, have organized their special operations forces in similar national structures. The designation Special Operations Command (SOCOM or SOFCOM) typically describes such a structure, for example the Canadian CANSOFCOM.¹¹ Canada is a remarkable example of a joint modernization of the defence. After the most recent defence reform in 2012, Canada only has two superior military commands: the Canadian Joint Operations Command and CANSOFCOM.

In Sweden, special operations forces are seen as a national strategic resource and are led by the highest level in the Armed Forces.¹² Norway¹³ and the Netherlands also seem to be heading towards a special operations command.

The development of national command structures for special operations worldwide was triggered especially by experiences from the failed American hostage release operation in Iran in 1980.¹⁴ The most important lessons from the operation were that the services are not organized or trained to lead special operations and that the strategic command cannot accept that control disappears in complex bureaucratic chains of command. The crucial secrecy *before* an operation is launched is difficult or impossible to secure with long chains of command that involve a lot of people in the 'nice-to-know' rather than the 'need-to-know' category. For that reason, the political leadership in the USA ordered the Armed Forces to establish a special operations command, USSOCOM, in 1986.¹⁵

Effective exploitation of Denmark's special operations capabilities in the country's activist foreign policy requires a similar structure, organizationally anchored close to the strategic decision-makers. Experiences from other countries show that special operations cannot be used in cases concerning the state's dynamic strategic

(11) For example Canada, France, Poland, Great Britain and USA have these structures. See e.g. the NATO SOF Study (2008). http://www.nshq.nato.int/NSHQ/GetFile/?File_ID=29.

(12) <http://www.forsvarsmakten.se/sv/Forband-och-formagor/Specialforband/> (In Swedish).

(13) See Kjetil Melingen (2010), *Strategic Utilization of Norwegian Special Operations Forces*, Master's study from Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, California, <http://www.dtic.mil/cgi-bin/GetTRDoc?AD=ADA524701> p. 116-122 (In Norwegian). Melingen analyses Norwegian strategic aspects and concludes that a special operations command is the best solution in terms of Norwegian policy and strategy. The analysis can be transferred to Danish conditions with few reservations.

(14) See e.g. Charlie A. Beckwith & Donald Fox (1983), *Delta Force, The Inside Story of America's Super-secret Counterterrorist Unit*, Glasgow, Arms & Armour Press, Lionel Levanthal Ltd. Charlie Beckwith was the officer who formed the Delta Force unit, planned the operation and led the liberation force in 1980.

(15) The so-called Goldwater-Nichols Act legislated on a reorganization of the American defence, mainly to stop rivalry among the services. USSOCOM was established as a joint services component in the American defence.

matters, e.g. a case that has the prime minister's attention, if the operation is anchored at the bottom of the military chain of command.¹⁶

Models for modernization of Denmark's special operation forces

If Denmark wants a capability that can be deployed in a crisis situation that includes inherent uncertainty and time pressure, the special operations capabilities, regardless of organizational model, must be placed directly under the top military command. The system error must be corrected and special operations must be put under political control with a very short chain of command. Besides leading the deployment of their respective services, the chiefs advise the top national leadership about organization, equipment, training and deployment of the forces. Special operations forces have an identical need, because, due to the system error, the commanders have little interest in furthering the cause of these forces.

The commander of the special operations forces should, in terms of rank, match the current operational commands as the special operations forces will continue to depend on support from the conventional forces. During deployment of forces, the commander of the special operations forces will have priority to apply parts of the joint commanders' capabilities without communicating explanations due to the security of the operations. Experiences from other countries show that a lower ranking commander does not have the necessary formal authority and therefore encounters reluctance, which does not further the on-going operation.

The commander of the special operations forces should at least have the rank of two-star general or admiral. Offhand, this may seem excessive for a commander of a relatively small organization, but that is not the case. This commander is not only commander of a few hundred troops but also of a capability of strategic importance for the state under application of capabilities from all services and probably also from other ministries. In case of, for example, release of Danish hostages or evacuation of Danish citizens from a failed state, the strategic commander would be the prime minister. Therefore, the commander should be seen as *commander of all of Denmark's capabilities* which are deployed in the overall strategic effort, and this requires a commander with broad experience, training and formal importance.

Regardless of which model is chosen, the Defence Staff needs a special operations element, regardless of the staff's future organization.¹⁷ The Defence Chief will have a continued need for special operations expertise in his staff in terms of general

(16) See *NATO SOF Study* (2008), page 19-30. http://www.nshq.nato.int/NSHQ/GetFile/?File_ID=29

(17) A merger of the Chief of Defence Denmark and the Ministry of Defence has been decided with the Defence Agreement of 10 April 2014. The concrete structure is not clear yet. This brief has no comments, except that the future organization should include a special operations element, which can offer general staff work and advise the strategic decision-makers in relation to long-term defence planning of the special operations capability and execution of special operations.

policy issues and advice to the political level in connection with deployment of forces. The special operations element will advise the Defence Chief and the political level. It will handle contacts with foreign partners. It will handle cooperation between the three services and the new special operations structure and initiate joint exercises. In other words, this element will keep the joint special operations system together when conflicts of interest arise.

Two models for a modern organization of special operations forces serve to correct the system error¹⁸: establishment of a fourth service, which comprises all normal tasks, functions and resources, and a so-called special operations command, which has limited resources compared to a service.

Both models have advantages and disadvantages, which points to a third option, namely a combination which can counter the disadvantages of the chosen model.

Below follows a discussion of the organizational models' most important advantages and disadvantages.

Special operations forces organized as a service

A service is a peacetime organization, primarily focused on production of forces and not organized for international deployment. If the special operations forces are organized as a service, it risks turning into an organization that is not suited for international deployment. In addition, the organization would be submitted to the bureaucracy that comes with peacetime administration. This produces risks of parallel systems in the Armed Forces, and it diverts the special operations service commander's focus from the operational core tasks: production of forces and deployment of forces. In the service model, the service has full responsibility in all aspects of, for example, definition of policy and doctrine, training, resource administration, procurement of equipment, personnel administration and logistics.

Establishing a new service requires deep and comprehensive changes in the overall defence. The CMS report does not recommend reorganizing the Armed Forces into a joint organization, like Canada's for example, even though it might be a concrete response to the report's recommendations¹⁹. Such a change is hardly realistic without discussions in a defence commission. Even though the model of organizing the special operations forces as a service has some advantages, it would certainly encounter great institutional resistance. So great that it is unrealistic in

(18) NATO SOF Study (2008), http://www.nshq.nato.int/NSHQ/GetFile/?File_ID=29 page 24 ff. NATO also points out that one national staff element corresponding to the current Danish SOE is sufficient, but this represents such a low ambition – and status quo – that it falls outside the framework of this brief. Moreover, a national staff element does not, in itself, correct the system error.

(19) Centre for Military Studies, University of Copenhagen (2012), An Analysis of Conditions for Danish Defence Policy - Strategic Choices 2012

this brief to analyse the model in depth, especially considering the time frame for the impending cutbacks.

The service model has one crucial advantage for special operations: during force production, the service has all units and resources under it. This enables a very high level of secrecy and operational security before deployment of forces. This means that it is not necessary to contact the rest of the Armed Forces to ask for units and resources – a procedure which, based on experience, is very difficult to keep secret. The fact alone that you take resources from the services on short notice and without explanation always means that information is spilled to staff and civilians outside the ‘need to know’ category.

Special operations forces organized as a special operations command

Special operations forces organized as a special operations command would solve more limited tasks than a service. A special operations command would also be fully responsible for definition of policy and doctrine, for example, but it would only analyse and define the needs for training, resource administration, procurement of equipment, personnel administration and logistics. Resource administration may remain an external function.

This makes it much easier and faster to establish a special operations command. All it takes is a political decision. It is important that a special operations command organizationally possesses the necessary professional expertise in its staff. In addition, it must be sufficiently robust and redundant to form a deployable headquarters that can lead a Danish special operation outside Denmark while the force production continues at home.

In terms of size, the organization should correspond to the current brigade staffs in the Army, but this obviously requires further analysis. The staff must be capable of covering the same staff functions, but in a joint strategic environment.

It is worth noting that the special operations command has a dual function: additional to its role as a force producer, the special operations command can deploy into operation with the majority of its staff – unlike the operational commands, where the majority of the staff has administrative functions.

Practical combinations

The optimal model for deployment of forces – the service model – is hardly realistic in the short term.

Unfortunately, the most unproblematic model – the special operations command – has a considerable built-in risk with regard to operational security. In each deployment, units placed organizationally under the services, e.g. vessels, aircraft and helicopters, must be transferred in terms of command to the special operations

command.²⁰ Having to ask for units and support from multiple barracks and stations makes it very difficult to keep an operation secret.²¹

The problem of operational security would also appear if a choice is made to let the special operation element in the Defence Staff lead deployments. The masses of personnel from the units who suddenly come and go in the Defence Staff in Copenhagen would disturb normalcy and compromise operational security. This indicates that it is appropriate to organize the most important units and capabilities under the special operations command, also during force production.

If this is not acceptable, the units should at a minimum be gathered in the same location to the extent that training needs can be accommodated. This would mean that preparations for force deployment would be a normal condition, and it would be possible to maintain the crucial operational security until the task has been solved. Overall, this would mean that the current special operations units should be placed together with special operations air and helicopter units, support functions and the staff of the special operations command. Based on years of experience, Great Britain has formed and placed a special operations support unit (Special Forces Support Group) together with the actual special operations units. This includes the so-called enablers, i.e. support functions from the services, which are not actual special operations forces.

Strategic special operations require short chains of command between the top political decision-making level and the executing units. Regardless of model, there will still be a need for a robust special operations element in the Defence Staff to ensure flexible command and control.

During force deployment, a special operations command could be organizationally structured as shown below, placed directly below the Defence Chief. The staff is jointly organized with sections which handle intelligence, operational planning, logistics, etc. The specific organization will, of course, need further analysis.

Summary

The development of a strategic Danish special operations capability has been deadlocked by a more than 50-year-old system error, which has obstructed this development to the extent that Danish special operations forces are among the least developed in NATO in terms of strategy, doctrine and organization.

(20) If the model is established as NATO SOF Study (2008) suggests.

(21) In 1995, a Danish Special Forces Task Group was put into high readiness for a possible pull-out operation of UNPROFOR from Bosnia-Herzegovina. Personnel and resources from across the entire Armed Forces were tasked with top priority. As a result, preparations were commonly known even among the local population despite great attempts to maintain secrecy. Many staff members, from military support personnel over cleaning personnel to civilian craftsmen, could not be told why they suddenly had to drop everything. Parts of an air base were sealed off, and gossip spread.

There are few – if any – international examples of modern and effective command elements for special operations being established without a political decision to form such organizations, because it is beyond the politically defined tasks and frameworks. Bringing Denmark’s special operations capabilities to the level of comparable countries requires a political decision.

In specific terms, establishing a special operations command under the command of a two-star general or admiral seems to be the type of organization which is quickest and most flexible to implement in the Armed Forces, since existing and new special operations capabilities should be placed at the same location to ensure the crucial operational security.

The CMS report indicates that an extensive reorganization of the Armed Forces and innovative thinking are required to make the multibillion-DKK spending cutback possible without lowering Denmark’s foreign policy ambitions significantly²². Establishing a joint special operations command is one example of reorganization and innovation.

(22) Centre for Military Studies, University of Copenhagen (2012), An Analysis of Conditions for Danish Defence Policy - Strategic Choices 2012