

# Good News: Libya and the Danish Way of War

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'I have good news' – this is how a smiling Danish Minister of Foreign Affairs Espersen announced the decision to send F-16 fighter jets to Libya to the media.<sup>2</sup> No one batted an eyelid. The notion that it was good news that Denmark was going to war was almost universally shared. All parties in parliament, all major news outlets and 78% of the population applauded the decision. This level of public support was the highest polled among the nations participating in the initial phase of the air campaign.<sup>3</sup>

This appetite for war should come as no surprise. It had already been evident during the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation's (NATO) air war over Kosovo in 1999 when the Danes also topped the polls conducted among NATO member states, and news late in the campaign that Danish F-16s had dropped bombs on Serbian targets was greeted with pride and joy.<sup>4</sup> It is also visible in the fact that Danes remain the top supporters of NATO's mission in Afghanistan, even though Denmark, with 42 soldiers killed, has suffered the highest number of casualties per capita.<sup>5</sup> This was further underlined in early 2012 when Danes were the strongest supporters of launching a ground invasion in order to stop the Iranian nuclear program.<sup>6</sup>

This demonstrates Denmark's remarkable journey from Venus to Mars, as Kagan would have put it.<sup>7</sup> From the defeat to Prussia in 1864 till the end of the Cold War, Denmark resided on Venus with a defence and security policy that was characterized by a peacekeeping and mediation approach. Force was reserved for purposes of national defence, and only if it seemed feasible – which it did not when the Germans invaded in 1940. When the United States asked Denmark for combat troops during the Korean War they received a hospital ship. Use of force beyond self-defence was a red line that was never crossed during this period. The 34,100 Danish troops serving on United Nations (UN) peacekeeping missions during the Cold War were

only allowed to shoot in self-defence, and it was a source of national pride that Danish peacekeepers were regarded as better than most when it came to achieving their mission objectives without opening fire.<sup>8</sup>

Denmark's military engagements in Bosnia (tanks in Tuzla), Kosovo, Afghanistan, Iraq and most recently Libya took Denmark to Mars. The last twenty years have witnessed the reintroduction of medals for bravery, war heroes, homecoming parades, war monuments, an official remembrance day, military funerals and a proper support system for veterans and their families. TV documentaries and heroic accounts of Danish exploits in Afghanistan are selling like hot cakes, and 50,000 cars have bumper stickers expressing support for the troops.<sup>9</sup> Denmark has become a Martian celebrating its martial prowess, a warrior nation. It has come to view the use of force as a legitimate and useful tool of statecraft, and the military instrument has played a central role in its foreign policy in the past fifteen years. As a result, Denmark has become a member of the select club of 'strategic actors', which consist of the great powers and countries like Israel and Australia that share this view of the military instrument.<sup>10</sup>

In the process Denmark has developed its own distinct way of war, and it is our argument that it was this way of war that shaped the Danish approach to the Libya campaign. Our argument has three parts. First we introduce the components of the Danish Way of War. Then we demonstrate how the characteristics of the Libyan operation fitted the Danish Way of War perfectly. The concluding part discusses the war's implications for future Danish defence and security policy and predicts that Denmark is likely to remain a strategic actor.

## The Danish Way of War: Ends, Ways and Means

We think of this concept as an ideal type that captures its defining features and structure it by means of Yarger's Ends, Ways and Means framework.<sup>11</sup> This helps to make the concept clearer and more useful as an analytical tool, but it also demonstrates that Denmark's does have a grand strategy to guide its use of force, even if it is rarely articulated.<sup>12</sup> In Yarger's framework the *Ends* represent the objectives that Denmark goes to war to protect and promote. The *Ways* constitute the strategic concepts and guidelines that are employed

to accomplish these objectives. The *Means* represent the resources that Denmark employs in the field, such as diplomats, military units, humanitarian assistance and development aid. The means are left out of the analysis below for two reasons. The choice of means will depend upon their availability, the nature of the conflict, allied requests and domestic politics. Secondly, there is nothing at this level that sets Denmark apart from other countries, except that it has very limited means in comparison to many of its allies and that it usually will be unable to make decisive contributions to the military effort. What really sets Denmark apart is its willingness to let its principal allies decide where, when and how force will be used. Therefore, our principal focus in analysing the Danish Way of War is not military doctrine (how), as is usually the case when the concept is applied to the United States and other great powers,<sup>13</sup> but why (ends) and with whom. The name of the game for Denmark is not to win wars or even battles but to support the right cause and the right allies in order to gain goodwill, prestige, security and influence.

### **Ends: Security, Human Rights, Democracy and Prestige**

The defence white papers and foreign policy strategies published in the post-Cold War era identify two principal objectives for Danish foreign and security policy. Unsurprisingly the first is to protect Denmark's territorial integrity and economic prosperity from external threats. The second is to promote and protect the values on which Danish society is based, namely freedom, democracy, human rights, the market economy, sustainable development and an international society based on respect for the rule of law.<sup>14</sup> These objectives figure prominently in the arguments and decisions that Danish decision-makers have made concerning the use of force since 1990, when the deployment of a small frigate in the Persian Gulf put Denmark on the road to Mars.<sup>15</sup> The strategic narrative that Denmark employs to legitimate its use of force combines the need to protect Denmark and its citizens from external attacks with the need to promote democracy, human rights, the rule of law and development in order to prevent such threats from arising in the first place. In this narrative, national defence equals the promotion of democracy, human rights, peace and stability abroad with all means necessary, including the use of force.<sup>16</sup> The following quote from Foreign Minister Ellemann-Jensen justifying the deployment of Danish troops to Croatia in 1992 represents a typical example:

*The war in the Balkans is not a distant war. It is our values, our way of life and, in the final instance, our freedom that are being challenged in former Yugoslavia.*

*If we are not ready actively to defend these values, we undermine our own security in the long run. War and peace are no longer a question of defending Denmark's borders. If stability in Europe is to be made secure – and that goes without saying – we have to do our part.*<sup>17</sup>

To 'do our part' and build a reputation as a trustworthy ally and partner in NATO, the European Union (EU), the UN and the United States, which underpin Denmark's security and values, has been a third objective driving Denmark's use of force. Although formally speaking prestige and reputation can be seen as a way to achieve the two first objectives, it has served as an objective in its own right in Danish defence and security policy. The priority attached to improving Denmark's prestige in NATO and establishing a 'special relationship' with the United States has been so high that it is hardly an exaggeration to say that during the last fifteen years Denmark has competed with the United Kingdom for the position of its staunchest ally.<sup>18</sup>

### **Ways: Comprehensive, Multilateral, United, Mean and Clean**

The Danish Way of War is shaped by five guiding principles. First, Denmark fights to support and demonstrate relevance and trustworthiness to its great power allies in NATO, especially the United States, in order to preserve the security guarantee that they provide. The German invasion of 1940 shattered the illusion that a policy of neutrality could keep Denmark out of war, and national defence has since been conceived as a matter of seeking alliances. Lacking the capacity to take the lead in any major operation, Denmark generally leaves decisions concerning how, where and when to use force to its great power allies and fights under their command without questioning their strategic or operational choices.<sup>19</sup> This has been the case in all the operations mandated to use force beyond self-defence that Denmark has taken part in since the end of the Cold War. The important thing for Denmark is not how or where the war is fought, nor is it essential to win. The key is to make 'a real contribution and to make a difference' as Minister of Defence Gade once put it.<sup>20</sup> Since 9/11 Denmark has therefore adopted a 'plug and play' principle, made its armed forces available to its allies with very few national restrictions (caveats) and accepted their use in combat operations involving a high risk of casualties. The orders given to Danish commanders serving in Helmand province since 2006 essentially boil down to: respect the laws of war and cooperate closely with your British commander.<sup>21</sup>

Secondly, Denmark fights to promote and protect UN norms and principles. A mandate from the United Nations is considered fundamental, and

a decision to use force without one will always be a topic of heated debate. That said, the Kosovo experience, when Russia prevented NATO from obtaining a UN mandate for its air campaign, has meant that a 'mandate' from a united NATO (or EU) is perceived as an acceptable second-best solution.<sup>22</sup> In 2001 the formal requirement for a mandate from the UN or the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe was therefore removed from the act regulating the tasks of the armed forces.<sup>23</sup> A Danish use of force without such mandates is highly unlikely. It is not inconceivable, as Danish participation in the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 demonstrates, but this was an exception. The decision to go to war was highly controversial and only passed through parliament with a slim majority of eleven votes. A new principle introduced by the Thorning-Schmidt government in the autumn of 2011 requiring a two-thirds majority in parliament before Danish forces can be deployed on operations abroad will prevent this from happening again.<sup>24</sup>

The Iraq war also ran counter to the third principle shaping the Danish Way of War, the need for broad parliamentary support. All Danish military deployments abroad since World War Two have enjoyed such support. Iraq was the only exception to this rule, and the lack of broad support ended up becoming a political liability for the Fogh Rasmussen government, which in the end was forced to withdraw from Iraq sooner than it would have liked to prevent the war from becoming an issue in the 2007 general election. The collective lesson learned by Danish politicians from the Iraq war is therefore that going to war without broad support is something to be avoided because it is politically risky domestically and because premature withdrawals may irritate the allies that Denmark is concerned to support.

The fourth principle guiding the Danish Way of War is the insistence on the comprehensive approach, that is, the belief that force must be used with an eye to creating the conditions for the liberal peace characterized by democracy and human rights that Denmark seeks to promote. This requires the use of civilian and military instruments in a coordinated and concerted manner. Denmark has made an effort to push this idea within the EU, the UN and NATO,<sup>25</sup> and the comprehensive approach has also shaped its attitude to operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as its anti-piracy activities off the coast of Somalia.<sup>26</sup> Although the comprehensive approach concept was coined and introduced in 2004, its logic has shaped the Danish Way of War since the early 1990s. Denmark's military deployments in the Balkans were supplemented with humanitarian assistance delivered by Danish NGOs, support for diplomatic initiatives in the relevant international organisations, economic support for development and reconstruction, ef-

forts to enhance civil-military coordination, and the deployment of civilian experts and police officers.<sup>27</sup> What the comprehensive approach principle did was to emphasize the need for joint civil-military analysis and planning at the strategic level and better coordination of the resources and the civilian and military personnel employed in a specific operation. The comprehensive approach principle means that deployment of military forces always will be supplemented with non-military means. These instruments and resources will typically be channelled through the EU and the UN, the Red Cross and (Danish) NGOs.

The final and most recent guiding principle is the 'the clean hands' approach, entailing a need to stay clear of tasks that may bring Denmark into conflict with its obligations under international law.<sup>28</sup> Reports that prisoners captured by Danish forces in Afghanistan and Iraq have been subjected to torture and maltreatment by allies and the local authorities have led to the adoption of procedures that leave the apprehension, interrogation and detention of prisoners to allies and the local authorities. To avoid legal responsibility for questionable practises undertaken by the private security firms guarding Danish camps and civilian personnel, Denmark also leaves the hiring of such firms to its allies.

## The Danish Way of War in Libya: The News Gets Better and Better

From the Danish Way of War perspective, the Libyan war became even better news than the Danish Minister of Foreign Affairs Espersen probably anticipated when she announced the decision to go to war. It not only served the three ends that Denmark fights for, it also proved possible to conduct it in a way that met the Danish Way of War's five guiding principles.

### Interests, Values and Profile Go Hand in Hand

Libya was the perfect war from a Danish perspective as it met the three principal objectives that Denmark fights to achieve. The principal justification for war provided by Danish decision-makers was the need for swift action to prevent genocide and to facilitate the provision of humanitarian assistance to the people of Libya. The longer term objective was to establish a stable, peaceful and democratic Libya that could serve as a force for stability and in-

spiration in the region.<sup>29</sup> As the Danish Minister of Foreign Affairs Espersen pointed out, Denmark had an interest in enhancing stability in northern Africa in order to increase trade, but also to avoid the negative effects of disorder such as economic breakdown, refugee flows, terrorism and the spread of armed conflict to neighbouring countries, interests that were also reiterated and elaborated upon in the Danish Libya strategy agreed to by all the political parties supporting the war. According to Espersen and the Danish Libya strategy, Danish interests and values went hand in hand in Libya. Danish interests in trade and stability were best served by promoting the Danish values of democracy and human rights and by exploiting the opportunity created by the Arab Spring to this end.<sup>30</sup> Prime Minister Løkke Rasmussen agreed, underlining the importance of preventing Qaddafi's brutal behaviour towards his own population from strangling the Arab Spring at birth.<sup>31</sup>

Libya also provided Denmark with a perfect opportunity to 'do its part' and signal its reliability and trustworthiness to its principal partners. Prime Minister Løkke Rasmussen highlighted Denmark's 'obligation to take on an international responsibility' and did not view it as a problem that the war was initiated by small great power trio consisting of France, the United Kingdom and the United States. In his view it was not the number of countries that mattered but the fact that it was 'the right ones'.<sup>32</sup> This made it much easier for Denmark to increase its profile and demonstrate its relevance and reliability to them. Being visible and in the lead was an objective in its own right for the government, and since only nine countries volunteered for the bombing missions, Denmark was able to bomb way above its weight, even though it only contributed four fighters (two were held in reserve) to the air campaign (see Table 1). It was Denmark's luck that the Libyan war took the form of an air campaign and that the Danish air force was not engaged in international operations elsewhere. If the Libyan war had been fought on the ground Denmark would not have been able to play a key role, since it would have been incapable of providing more than a limited number of Special Forces or a light reconnaissance squadron at such short notice. As it turned out, the Danish contribution became highly visible and was highly praised.<sup>33</sup>

Table 1. *Precision-guided munitions by nation during Operations Odyssey Dawn and Unified Protector*

States	No. of precision-guided munitions
USA	-
France	-
United Kingdom	1420/234*
Denmark	923
Italy	710
Canada	696
Norway	588
Belgium	472
United Arab Emirates	-
NATO Unified Protector Total	7642

\*Typhoon contribution until 23 September 2011 only.

Sources: Canadian Department of National Defense 2011, Forsvaret.no 2011, Forsvarsministeriet 2011; Kington 2011; La Libre.be 2011; Luff 2011; UN doc. 2012, para 605.

### Plug and play with France, the United Kingdom and the United States

In keeping with its plug and play principle, Denmark left all the strategic decisions concerning ‘where, when and how’ to its great power allies. Denmark supported virtually all the actions and proposals made by its great power allies without question. Once President Obama had made it clear that Qaddafi had lost all legitimacy in late February, this line was immediately adopted in Copenhagen;<sup>34</sup> when Obama questioned the notion of a no-fly zone, Danish Prime Minister Løkke Rasmussen questioned it too;<sup>35</sup> when the United States made it clear on 17 March that it wanted to go beyond a no-fly zone, this immediately became government policy in Denmark;<sup>36</sup> on March 29, when the great powers suggested that Qaddafi might be allowed to go into exile, the Danish government immediately supported this idea;<sup>37</sup> the Danish Libya strategy published on 27 April simply expressed its support for the activities being pursued by the Arab League, the UN, the EU and NATO;<sup>38</sup> and when the mandate for the Danish military contribution was renewed in parliament in August, the new mandate was aligned with NATO’s so that a possible renewal could reflect whatever NATO decided to do.<sup>39</sup> The government carefully shied away from formulating national objectives, exit dates or benchmarks that might collide with the policies formulated by the great powers.<sup>40</sup> As Prime Minister Løkke Rasmussen responded, when pressed by journalists to formulate a more proactive Danish policy, ‘Although I want



Denmark out in front, we have to take our size into account, and that does not permit us to take the lead'.<sup>41</sup>

In accordance with its plug and play principle, the Danish priority was to make a 'real' military contribution to the allied campaign. The Danish government wanted to be ready to fight the moment the decision to go to war was taken. Speed and flexibility were seen as of the essence, and the armed forces were told to initiate contingency planning for possible land, sea and air contributions on March 3. Five days later the air force was told to prepare a deployment of six F-16s. On 18 March the F-16s were put on twelve-hour alert,<sup>42</sup> and they took off for Italy the following morning before the command and control arrangements were in place and before the government had any idea about what they might be tasked to do.<sup>43</sup> The Danish planes were operational in Italy just 57 hours after the UN Security Council had authorized the implementation of the no-fly zone, and the first to arrive and join the three great powers that initiated the campaign. This feat triggered a phone call from a surprised chief of the Norwegian Air Force, who wanted to know from his Danish counterpart 'how on earth the planes could deploy so fast?'.<sup>44</sup>

The F-16s were made available to the coalition without any caveats, and the Air Force decided to deploy with all available weapon systems to make the planes as useful and flexible as possible. The latter decision was questioned by the Defence Command, who failed to see the need for all these weapons in an operation mandated to police a no-fly zone. The Air Force insistence on flexibility paid off as the F-16s soon were employing all the precision-guided munitions in their inventory. Major-General Margaret H. Woodward, the Joint Force Air Component Commander of Operation Odyssey Dawn, the initial US-led operation (19-31 March 2011), became so impressed by the versatility of Danish F-16s that she nicknamed them the 'rock stars of the campaign'. When they arrived on March 19, the allies were not sure what to expect from the Danes. The Danish pilots were consequently not allowed to carry out bombing missions until they had demonstrated what they were capable of.<sup>44</sup> Once they had accomplished their first bombing mission on March 23, they quickly moved to the centre of the action. By March 31, when the United States handed over command to NATO, the Danish F-16s had dropped more bombs (102) than any other nation except the United States.<sup>45</sup> The Danish F-16s maintained their high profile during NATO's Operation Unified Protector, dropping another 821 bombs, 11% of the NATO total (see Table 1).

## Supporting the UN and the Responsibility to Protect

The no-fly zone mandate provided by the UN Security Council enjoyed pride of place in the Danish justification to go to war.<sup>46</sup> Prime Minister Løkke Rasmussen hailed the decision in the UN Security Council as ‘historical’ and stressed that in this ‘unique’ situation Denmark had a ‘historical obligation’ to support it.<sup>47</sup> He also stressed the importance of the UN’s *Responsibility to Protect* principle, which gives the international community an ‘obligation to intervene to prevent genocide.’<sup>48</sup> The importance of the UN mandate and the support of the Arab League, which made it difficult to portray the air campaign as yet another Western crusade against a Muslim country, were also echoed in the justifications provided by the Danish Ministers of Defence and Foreign Affairs and by members of the opposition parties supporting the decision.

At the same time, it is also clear that the government and a large majority in parliament would have supported a decision to go war without a UN mandate if the resolution had been vetoed by China and Russia because of the perceived need to act quickly to prevent genocide. In keeping with the principle that was adopted in response to the lessons learned in Kosovo, this course of action was justified with reference to humanitarian necessity and the fact that it enjoyed strong support from most EU and NATO governments, the United States and the Arab League.<sup>49</sup> The Socialist People’s Party, which opposed the Danish participation in NATO’s air campaign over Kosovo in 1999 under similar circumstances, was this time in favour of acting without a UN mandate. The chairman of the Socialist People’s Party Søvndal justified this change of heart by referring to the need ‘to protect a civilian population against a complete lunatic like Qaddafi’.<sup>50</sup>

## War by Domestic Consensus (Almost)

The decision to go to war enjoyed unprecedented support. It was the first time ever that all the parties in parliament had voted in favour of going to war. Although the four members of the Red-Green Alliance withdrew their support after twelve days on the grounds that the coalition had violated the UN mandate and sided with the rebels in their fight against the Qaddafi regime,<sup>51</sup> the level of parliamentary support remained the highest ever throughout the campaign, as no other party defected. This high level of support was also reflected in the media, among commentators and by the public at large. While critical voices could be found and several Danish experts criticized the government for lacking a clear end state,<sup>52</sup> the media coverage was predominantly positive.

The historical level of support in parliament did not simply fall from the sky: it resulted from a process of continuous consultation with all parties in parliament that began when it became apparent that force might be used. The government bill that provided the basis for going to war was carefully drafted so as to take the concerns of all parties into account. The explicit rejection of ground troops in the bill and in the subsequent Danish Libya strategy was a reflection of this process, as this was a red line for several parties, including the Danish Peoples Party and the Red-Green Alliance.<sup>53</sup> The same was true of the government's rejection of American and British proposals to arm the rebels, which were opposed by all parties and 50% of the population.<sup>54</sup>

The government usually waited to propose policy changes it knew would be controversial domestically until they had been adopted by Denmark's allies in the EU and NATO. Once the allies moved ahead, the political parties in Denmark usually followed. Thus the government waited until the end of April to say explicitly that it wanted to remove Qaddafi.<sup>55</sup> By then it had tacitly been pursuing this policy for over a month by allowing the Danish F-16s to provide close air support for advancing rebel forces. Similarly, the Danish recognition of the rebel National Transition Council as the 'only legitimate representative of the Libyan people' had to wait until late June. It was only then that it was possible for the government to persuade all the parties behind the war to support this move.<sup>56</sup>

The Danish Libya strategy published on 27 April and its renewal in August also reflected this consensus approach. It was a compromise document resulting from a process of consultation involving all the parties supporting the war.<sup>57</sup> Since the strategy was written in order to make everybody happy, it was not an operational document. It did not set clear and precise goals, identify and prioritize resources or establish clear links between ends and means. Instead, it listed all the positive things that Denmark (i.e. the political parties, ministries and humanitarian organisations involved) wanted to achieve in Libya in cooperation with all relevant countries and organizations. Rather than provide operational guidance, the strategy served the unstated dual purpose of creating and maintaining domestic support in parliament and in the public at large, and to provide the practitioners in the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Defence with ample room to manoeuvre.

#### Four Paths to Peace

The logic of the comprehensive approach – that civilian and military instruments should be used in a concerted and coordinated manner in order to

create the conditions for lasting peace – ran like a common thread through official statements, the parliamentary bill authorizing the F-16 deployment and the Danish Libya strategy. In the latter the comprehensive approach was translated into four paths: political, military, humanitarian, and support for development and reconstruction, which were pursued simultaneously. The overall objective was to make the use of military force and humanitarian assistance superfluous as quickly as possible so that the process of creating a new form of democratic governance, good governance and jobs could be initiated. Peace was to be won through cooperation and dialogue with the new emerging Libyan leadership. The strategy envisaged a demand-driven process with the new Libyan leadership in the driver's seat. The role of Denmark and the international community was to act in support and guide the new Libya on the path towards democracy, human rights and economic growth.<sup>58</sup>

In practical terms, Denmark's F-16 contribution to the air campaign was accompanied by efforts to influence the political process in the international Contact Group on Libya, which was set up in March 2011 in order to coordinate international policy and be a forum for the discussion of humanitarian and post-conflict support. Moreover, Denmark also became a member of the Friends of Libya Group, which replaced the contact group in September 2011. Danish members of parliament visited the Libyan Transition National Council in June 2011 in order to signal their support and acquire a sense of their political objectives and aspirations.

In support of its humanitarian objectives, Denmark spent €3.7 million on humanitarian assistance (including mine clearance) and €269,000 to support the UN's peace-making efforts during the war. In support of post-conflict stabilization Denmark donated close to €1 million to projects run by Danish NGOs to support human rights activities, the rehabilitation of torture victims, media development and business development. Denmark also donated €201,756 to the UN's electoral support mission. To support post-conflict development and strengthen bilateral trade, Denmark opened a diplomatic representation in Tripoli in late February 2012.<sup>59</sup>

### **When in Doubt do not Attack**

In keeping with its 'clean hands' principle, the Danish government did not support the calls for 'more aggressive bombings' that were made by France and others at various points during the campaign.<sup>60</sup> Instead, it repeatedly reiterated the need to take great care not to harm the civilians that the bombing campaign was aimed to protect. According to Danish Minister of Defence Beck, Denmark 'was among the nations that gave priority to avoiding

civilian losses. When in doubt do not attack. That is the motto our pilots deployed with'.<sup>61</sup>

Since Denmark followed the US rules of engagement (ROE) during Operation Odyssey Dawn and NATO ROE during Operation Unified Protector, the claim that Denmark gave greater priority to avoiding civilian casualties than other nations is open to question. Denmark followed these ROE without caveats, and there is nothing to suggest that Danish legal advisors were more restrictive than their colleagues from other nations.<sup>62</sup> They did not need to be because the ROE were very restrictive. Great care was taken to avoid civilian casualties because they could undermine the humanitarian rationale of the campaign. The targeting process was guided by the principle of a 'zero expectation of civilian death or injury'. Targets had to provide a definite military advantage, they were selected on the basis of multiple intelligence sources, strikes were timed to minimize the risk of civilian casualties, all aerial munitions employed were precision-guided and of minimum size, and strikes were often called off, sometimes at the last moment, because the risks to civilians were deemed too high.<sup>63</sup> Danish legal advisors and pilots also aborted strikes on a number of occasions when civilians were too close to the target.<sup>64</sup>

Reports that Danish planes had dropped the bombs that killed Qaddafi's youngest son and three of his grandchildren in an attack on May 1 led to demands from the Danish People's Party, the Socialist People's Party and the Red-Green Alliance for greater openness, because as a matter of policy the Danish Air Force refused to confirm or deny whether Danish planes had participated in this or any other specific attacks.<sup>65</sup> The government refused to do so, citing operational security and NATO procedures, and this was also the line adopted when NATO refused to disclose details on a small number of strikes that were identified as problematic in a report by the UN Human Rights Commission in early 2012.<sup>66</sup> This line of argument was accepted by all parties except the Red-Green Alliance and the Liberal Alliance, and it never became an issue for the public at large.<sup>67</sup> The efforts by the government to convince its critics and the general public that it had conducted a 'clean' war was facilitated by the fact that Denmark's degree of openness concerning its strike missions was on a par with most NATO allies, that NATO kept the level of civilian losses to a historic low and avoided mistakes like the bombing of the Chinese embassy in Kosovo in 1999, and that the Libyan rebels treated its defeated enemies better than many feared. It was strengthened further by the conclusion drawn by the UN Human Rights Commission in its analysis of the war:

*The Commission recognises the large numbers of sorties and the proportionally low number of civilian casualties in comparison to other campaigns figures show the campaign conducted by NATO was conducted with precision weapons and a demonstrated concern to avoid civilian casualties. The vast majority of airstrikes hit military targets outside of population centres and did not endanger civilians. For the few targets struck within population centres, NATO took extensive precautions to ensure civilians were not killed.*<sup>68</sup>

## Implications for the Future: Not Whether but Where and How

From the Danish Way of War perspective the war in Libya was very good news indeed. It enabled the Danish government to fight for its principal objectives (national security, democracy, human rights, international law and prestige) in a high-profile way that made a military difference in coalition with its principal allies in NATO, with UN support and in a comprehensive and clean manner. Denmark received high marks for its disproportionate bombing contribution from its allies, the war enjoyed unprecedented domestic support, the military commitment was short, the price was affordable, even cheap (€43 million) in comparison to Iraq and Afghanistan, no casualties were suffered, and no controversies erupted concerning Denmark's adherence to international (humanitarian) law.

The war was 'good value for money', Danish Minister of Defence Hækkerup asserted when journalists confronted him with the price tag for the war, and he declared himself ready to commit Danish forces to similar wars again in the future.<sup>69</sup> In their presentation of the Thorning-Schmidt government's 'new security policy', the Ministers of Defence, Development and Foreign Affairs also used the Libya war to argue that Denmark must continue its activist approach: 'Whether we should engage ourselves [internationally] is not the question, it is where and how'.<sup>70</sup>

The contrast between the expensive long ground wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and the cheap short one in Libya could hardly be greater, and this is a major reason why the Thorning-Schmidt government likes it so much. The government stated repeatedly before and after its election that Denmark will never again commit itself to long costly ground wars.<sup>71</sup> In making this argument the Danish government takes great comfort from the fact that

the strategic guidance issued by the Obama Administration in early 2012 is based on this premise as well.<sup>72</sup> Similarly, it is also ‘conventional wisdom’ in NATO these days that the alliance will not undertake new large ground operations after its withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2014. Taking their cue from the United States, NATO officials also envisage a future characterized by capacity-building, training and mentoring, partnerships, small-footprint approaches and ‘smart defence’,<sup>73</sup> that is, increased pooling and sharing of resources, allowing member states to reduce their defence budgets while retaining a combined collective alliance capability to counter future threats.

If this sounds too good to be true, it is because it is. It would be wildly optimistic to base future defence planning on such a best-case scenario. The defence planners, who predict that NATO and the United States will not undertake new protracted ground operations in the future, failed to predict the war over Libya. History is littered with wars that occurred out of the blue and completely changed the ‘conventional wisdom’ concerning force planning and mission types. Who predicted the Korean War, which forced the United States to rebuild its armed forces following the large draw-down that had occurred after the end of World War Two? Who predicted the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and the subsequent UN-mandated war to reverse it? Who predicted the September 11 attacks or that they would trigger the largest nation-building operations undertaken by the United States since World War Two – and this by a US president who had vowed not to use American troops for nation-building during his election campaign?

It is not difficult to envisage scenarios where protracted ground commitments by Western forces might be needed in the near future. Should Israel attack the Iranian nuclear program, a swift deployment of combat-capable troops will be required to protect the vital oil and gas installations in the Persian Gulf from possible Iranian revenge attacks. What if the turmoil produced by the Arab Spring creates the need for a ground deployment to prevent massive refugee flows and human rights violence somewhere in the Middle East or North Africa?

Although Denmark and its Western allies have fought so-called ‘wars of choice’ since the end of the Cold War, they have still found themselves in protracted land operations in the Balkans, Iraq, Lebanon and Afghanistan. Nothing suggests that this will change in an increasingly globalized world where conflicts in faraway places can quickly influence Western security interests, and emerging powers like China, Brazil, India, South Africa and Turkey show limited willingness and ability to accept a greater responsibility for managing international peace and security.

This begs the question whether a Danish government will say no to a future request from the UN, NATO or a US-led coalition for ground forces when (not if) the need arises. If the other characteristics of the Danish Way of War apply, such a request can be likened to a mafia-style offer that any Danish government will find it next to impossible to refuse. On their journey to Mars, Danish decision-makers have become accustomed to red carpet treatment in the White House and praise in NATO. Denmark's ability to 'make a difference' with its armed forces has become a source of national pride and has generated expectations at home and abroad that Denmark will 'do its part' when the United Nations, NATO and its major allies call upon it to do so. France, the United Kingdom and the United States have lost no opportunity in telling members of the Thorning-Schmidt government that they were very impressed with the Danish performance in Libya and that they count on them to keep up the good work.<sup>74</sup> Mars therefore has its attractions, and if the smart defence reforms that Denmark is about to embark on together with its NATO partners result in closer integration between the Danish armed forces and other members of the strategic actors' club such as France, the United Kingdom and the United States, then Denmark is there to stay.



# Notes

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- 2 Eskesen, 2011.
- 3 *Politiken*, 2011.
- 4 Jakobsen, 2000.
- 5 Jakobsen forthcoming.
- 6 The other nations polled were Germany, the other Nordic countries, the United Kingdom and the United States. YouGov-Cambridge, 2012.
- 7 Kagan, 2002.
- 8 Jakobsen, 2006: 101.
- 9 Jakobsen, forthcoming.
- 10 Rynning, 2003: 24.
- 11 Yarger, 2008: 136-146.
- 12 The lack of strategy has been a recurring criticism of the Danish use of force. See, for instance, Breitenbauch, 2008; Rasmussen, 2011a; Struwe, 2011.
- 13 See, for instance, Boot, 2003; Cohen, 2011; Weigley, 1973.
- 14 See, for instance, Act no. 122, 2001, § 2; Bruun, 2003; Danish Ministry of Defence, 2009; Redegørelse R14 2010 and Redegørelse R5 2011.
- 15 Jakobsen, 2009; Redegørelse R5 2011.
- 16 See Jakobsen, 2009; Ringsmose and Børgensen, 2011; Salquist, 2009.
- 17 Ellemann-Jensen, 1992.
- 18 Jakobsen, 2000; Mouritzen, 2007.
- 19 The only exception to this rule was a proposal for a military intervention to stabilize Albania in 1997 when Denmark held the chairmanship of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. The Danish proposal was rejected by Germany and the United Kingdom, who did not want the OSCE involved. Italy then put together a coalition of the willing and launched an intervention to which Denmark made a token contribution.
- 20 Cited in Jakobsen and Thruelsen, 2011: 78.
- 21 Jakobsen and Thruelsen, 2011. The first eight commanders wrote their own directives which were then approved by the Army Operational Command. Since then the commanders have been given a general directive by the Army Operational Command but they retain a relatively high degree of freedom concerning its implementation.
- 22 Denmark's EU opt-out on defence prevents participation in EU-led military operations, but a majority in parliament is in favour of removing it and supporting EU operations militarily as well. However, when the referendum that is required to overturn the opt-out will be held is anybody's guess.
- 23 Jakobsen, 2006: 90-91.
- 24 Regeringen, 2011: 40.
- 25 Jakobsen, 2008; Stepputat, 2009.

- 26 Regeringen, 2006; Udenrigsministeriet and Forsvarsministeriet, 2008; Udenrigsministeriet, Forsvarsministeriet, Justitsministeriet and Økonomi- og Erhvervsministeriet, 2011.
- 27 Jakobsen, 2006, Chapter 4.
- 28 Defence Minister Hækkerup (2012) insisted in his first major speech that it is possible to go to war without getting your hands dirty.
- 29 Udenrigsministeriet, 2011: 1.
- 30 Hansen, 2011; Udenrigsministeriet, 2011: 19-21.
- 31 Statsministeriet, 2011a.
- 32 Østergaard and Skærbæk, 2011.
- 33 Daalder and Stavridis, 2011; Gates, 2011; The White House, 2012.
- 34 Statsministeriet, 2011b.
- 35 Statsministeriet, 2011a.
- 36 Andresen, 2011.
- 37 Redaktionen, 2011; Statsministeriet, 2011c.
- 38 Udenrigsministeriet, 2011.
- 39 Christensen, 2011.
- 40 Statsministeriet, 2011a.
- 41 Østergaard and Skærbæk, 2011.
- 42 Briefings by the Commander of the Tactical Air Command and his Chief of Staff at HQ Tactical Air Command, 9 January 2012.
- 43 Statsministeriet, 2011a and 2011d.
- 44 Off-the-record conversations with Danish F-16 pilots.
- 45 As of 28 March, the United States had dropped 455 precision-guided munitions and the other participating nations 147. US Department of Defense 2011. The Danish contribution to this number was somewhere between 65 and 81. Flyvertaktisk Kommando, 2011a and 2011b.
- 46 Udenrigsministeriet, 2011.
- 47 Statsministeriet, 2011a.
- 48 Statsministeriet, 2011e.
- 49 Petersen, Christian Braad and Esben Agerlin Olsen, 2011.
- 50 Lehmann, 2011a.
- 51 Kristensen, 2011.
- 52 Klinken, 2011; Rasmussen, 2011b.
- 53 Beslutningsforslag B 89 2011.
- 54 Jensen, 2011; Jonshøj and Meyhoff, 2011.
- 55 *Ritzau*, 2011a.
- 56 Petersen, 2011.
- 57 Rottbøll, 2011; Stougaard, 2011.
- 58 Udenrigsministeriet, 2011.
- 59 Udenrigsministeriet, 2012.
- 60 *Ritzau*, 2011b.

- 61 *Ritzau*, 2011c.
- 62 Off-the-record interviews with Danish legal advisors involved in the targeting process during both operations.
- 63 UN doc. 2012, Annex II; interviews with Danish legal advisors.
- 64 Off-the-record interviews with Danish legal advisors and pilots participating in the campaign.
- 65 Crone, Klarskov, Brøndum and Tønner, 2011.
- 66 Lehmann, 2011b.
- 67 Aagaard, 2012.
- 68 UN doc. 2012, para. 649.
- 69 Hækkerup, 2012b.
- 70 Søvnal, Hækkerup and Bach, 2012.
- 71 Svendsen, 2011.
- 72 Panetta, 2012.
- 73 Fogh Rasmussen, 2011
- 74 *DR P1 Radioavisen*, 2012; conversations with Danish diplomats.

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