

Professional De-learning:

The Dry Rot of Brain and Soul of the Danish Army 1998–2017

by Michael Hesselholt Clemmesen

Resumé

En fredstids- og krisefri periode skaber altid en risiko for tab af professionelt fokus i en militær organisation. Dette også, fordi det omgivende samfund ønsker at se den gunstige situation som starten på den evige fred. Det, der adskilte udviklingen i Danmark fra denne normalsituation, var, at den professionelle ledelse af Forsvaret godt ti år efter afslutningen af Den Kolde Krig selv tog initiativet til at afvikle muligheden for at genopbygge generelt anvendelige danske militære styrker. Forfaldselementer eksisterede dengang allerede efter den reform af uddannelses- og ansættelsessystemet, der fra 1983 havde gjort alle unge officerer til minimalt uddannede, timelønnede funktionærer. Afviklingen af hærens mobiliseringsstyrker og dermed aktiviteterne i deres stabe og enheder betød samtidig, at en stadig mindre del af de faste officerer huskede, at officersrollen var andet end fredstidsadministration. Derefter fulgte "Newspeak"-afprofessionaliseringspresset fra "New Public Management" og skiftende amerikanske "buzzword"-doktriner. For femten år siden tog en lille gruppe ambitiøse stabsofficerer initiativet til at nedbygge Forsvaret til kun hurtigt og ukritisk at kunne levere småstyrker til amerikanske operationer. Derefter blev evnen til selvstændig dansk professionel analyse endeligt afviklet med afløsningen af stabsofficersuddannelse med politologisk eksegese. Den nu eneste højt prioriterede rolle for hæren er at være vagtpulje for grænsen og mulige terrormål.

„Achten Sie vor allem auf die richtige Rhetorik. Mit Wörtern wie „dynamisch“, „komplex“, „global“ und „unvorhersehbar“ veredeln Sie jeden Vortrag. „Krieg“ oder „kämpfen“ sollten Sie vermeiden, das klingt vorgestrig. Unbedenklich ist hingegen alles, was „Hybrid“ oder „Cyber“ enthält. Denn der häufige Gebrauch dieser Begriffe weist Sie nahezu automatisch als Experten aus. (...) Auch der tiefe Griff in das Schatzkästlein der Diplomatenrhetorik ist erlaubt. „Sicherheit ist nicht gegen, sondern nur mit Russland möglich“ wird nach wie vor gerne gehört – wenngleich vermutlich nicht von Ukrainern. Inhalte sind nicht zwingend, häufig sogar kontraproduktiv. Prangern Sie die Verschwendung innerhalb Europas an. Warum braucht Europa sechs verschiedene Panzertypen? Weisen Sie auf „Synergien“ hin, die sich durch „rationalisierte“ und „effektivere“ europäische Zusammenarbeit ergeben könnten. Wie das in der Praxis funktionieren soll, müssen nicht Sie erklären. Ihre Sphäre ist die hohe Strategie, nicht die niedere Taktik. (...) Sie brauchen sich für diese Schaustellerei übrigens nicht zu schämen. Jeder zweite Thinktank arbeitet schließlich genauso.“¹

THE AUTHOR OF the above comment, the veteran NATO sage Michael Rühle, notes how strategic and professional military knowledge and insight has been replaced with

empty hot air phrases meant to camouflage ignorance.

In Denmark the situation is even less related to practical military matters and ex-

perience than what Rühle outlines. Here there are no alternative “think tanks” and the focus in all institutes and centres is deliberately made purely theoretical with an emphasis on conceptual and other exegesis rather than on learning by planning and gaming followed by critical discussion and analysis. This is because the now responsible academics are incapable of the latter and consider it irrelevant.

The core of any practical profession, such as the military or medical, is a deep insight into its various fields of knowledge coupled with a practical ability to act within that profession. Such professionalism is based on continuous studies in interaction with developing personal experience. Only consolidated insight can provide the basis for responsible advice on the likely consequences of various decisions and actions, and only such insight can provide a basis for managing the implementation of any decided action.

Both professions demand that each professional constantly is alert to new developments and tools, and both professions must add overall management skills upon promotion.

Both the military and medical professions are practical in the sense that they develop through constant application. Medical staff most often use and expand their professionalism by daily use on real-life cases. The military in peace-time cannot learn by actually doing. It is limited to developing expertise by exercising as realistically as possible.

In both professions the substance and form of responsible counselling and implementation management depends on the level; if you are:

- serving in a battalion or as a young hospital doctor,
- Chief of Staff of a brigade or division, or respectively, chief of a university hospital or district medical officer,

- Chief of Defence or the State’s Primary Health Advisor, or
- Chairman of NATO’s Military Committee, or respectively, Head of the WHO.

Regardless of the fact that complexity and thus demands for broader academic insight and social/political empathy increase at higher levels, the basic requirements for responsible and best possible counselling are similar for officers and doctors at all levels. Also, officers and doctors at the highest levels have to stay well-informed about the conditions and requirement at the lowest levels of their profession, and to some extent even be personally capable of acting at the lower levels as well.

It is this view of professionalism that informs the article, which summarises an extended analytic discussion of the Denmark’s armed forces’ development since the end of the Cold War.² It focuses on my own armed service, the army, and follows the rapid de-learning of military professionalism above the company level in Denmark.³

This essay article is the synthesis of forty years of observations and experience inside and outside the Danish Armed Forces. As any interested Danish reader will know, it follows several dozens of contributions in Danish language from the 1970s onwards until now. My work included articles in professional journals and the latest years also via blogs and other web media. It included a constant participation in the general security policy debate via Op-ed articles for newspapers and analytic articles in journals and books.⁴ All the articles were written in a vain attempt to influence the development.

What happened in Denmark was not unique, even if some of its expressions are. The intellectual fashions of “Post-modernism” suggesting that all is new, and nothing can be

learnt from the past, a degree of shallowness within “social science”, and “End of History” and “New Wars” notions have all made their impact, and in particular as military officers searching for civilian acceptance have opted for irrelevant academic degrees, and have let such ideals challenge professional ideals everywhere in the West.

The situation in the Danish armed forces highlights the permanence of Thomas Aquinas’ understanding of the seven permanent human weaknesses (to him “deadly sins”), and of the modern relevance of Hans Christian Andersen’s tale of “The Emperor’s New Clothes”, which happily dominates in large organisations, which remains unchallenged.

The starting point at the late 1970s

Military professional de-learning is always a risk in peace-time. In Denmark it accelerated during the last decade of the Cold War. Still, the intense East-West confrontation in the early 1980s had anchored a solid military professional perspective with most Danish officers. The army was still dominated at its upper rungs by a generation of officers who had experienced the Occupation 1940–45 and had rebuilt and modernized the service from the 1950s to the 1970s. They had also improved the basic officer training and included officers of the Navy and Air Force in a common advanced staff officer education. The prominent officers of this early post WW2-generation usually understood what made a good officer and how he should act professionally. They knew from experience that the foundation of their profession was versatile skill and insight gained through practical experience from an increasingly demanding service with units and staffs.

The learning and selection process at that time started even before Military Academy as service as proven quality as conscripted junior NCO or reserve officer was an entry requirement at the Academy, and the ability in practical service continued to be a requirement for the officer until retirement. The formal education at the Military Academy, and the later education at the General Staff Course or as Civil Engineer at the Technical University should only provide added depth and supplementary skills, which would combine with those already gained and new more demanding practical experience.

The ideal of professional development was clearly described by Michael Howard on 3 October 1973 in the answer to a question after his Chesney Memorial Gold Medal Lecture “Military Science in an Age of Peace”:

... I indicated ... that military science is the business of practising soldiers at every level; that military learning and military doctrine is drawn together from every aspect of military activity. The need for a constant interplay between experience and thought is almost self-evident.⁵

To those who controlled and dominated the army then all the professional learning structure so self-evident that they imagined no alternative and did not explain why it was so to those who joined as regular officers in the 1970s and 1980s.

When young officers became time paid functionaries

In 1983, a 60-year gradual process was completed to finally close the remaining “class gap” between officers and regular warrant officers. However, this logical and necessary step was given the worst possible form. The reform combined the former “A-line” and “B-line” officer careers into one “unified” officer corps. The resulting Military Academy

education should remain at 2½ years, which was in line with both the tradition of most of the last 75 years and with situation in other armies comparable to the Danish. As earlier, the officer candidates had to prove their abilities in practice as junior leaders before being accepted as academy cadets. However, the formal civilian education requirements in the basic officer's course were lowered, and this was soon to be felt in loss of ability to work in other formal languages than English.

The now lower level of education at the Academy meant that the required qualifications of the teachers of the core subject of tactics were dropped dramatically.⁶ The tactics teachers used to be general staff educated majors with highly successful service as subunit commanders, which cleared them for promotion to lieutenant-colonel. After the 1983 reform, professional teaching positions were no longer an attractive and visible path to one's career, and in many cases, captains took over that role. The cadets were thus no longer given a proven professional as role model as their main teacher in the core military subject, and as coordinator of all other military inputs to the teaching.

The negative effects of these changes in the formal basic officer education came slowly. The crucial problem with the new 1983-officer system was its fundamental transformation of the expectations to a Danish army officer.

Previously, regular "line" officers had been expected to be motivated and to work as if in project employment without any working hours ceiling. They could not get paid for overtime and were expected to solve the tasks that the position and their units required. In addition, regular officers were expected to stay professionally updated by personal professional studies in their free

time, and to contribute to the professional discussion in their branch journals.

Those who merely acted as "0700 to 1600" officers were not considered qualified for further education or promotion, because being an army officer was a profession, and no professional would remain so with an only limited commitment.

All this changed after the 1983 reform. In their new "functionary" type of employment all officers now had set working hours. Overtime would be paid (if the budget allowed) or be compensated by time off. After some years it was seen almost insulting and unfair to colleagues and problematic for one's superior and an unwanted challenge to work planning if one did not "take working time seriously" and worked or studied in excess of the regular 40 then 37 weekly working hours without economic compensation.⁷

Also, the reform established that officers were expected mainly to learn from and only be professionally updated through formal education. The previous professional learning paradigm, where a combination of professional experience, mentoring, individual maturing processes, individual studies, and participation in the professional discourse was discarded. A demonstrated personal commitment to professional development was thus no longer expected or formally required for promotion.

The new system, which would be unsustainable, counter-productive and lethal in other professions such as the medical, which is also shaped by the constant development of new technology, methods and demands, was unthinkingly expected to function in the armed forces. However, the idea that the system, not the individual officer, is responsible for individual professional development is as unworkable there as in other professions.

Previously, basic Military Academy education was meant to form the basis for the entire career for the majority of regular officers. After that, the majority of the officer corps was given only short specialist courses as learning was expected to be a life-long individual commitment lasting throughout the career. Yet, since 1983 young Danish officers are, as a principle, only prepared for the immediate foreseen function, typically as platoon leaders. To be usable at next level officers since then must pass through an extended formal education that added what was needed for a captain in his branch.

Previously a young regular officer was prepared with some knowledge of the brigade level, but with the focus on the company and battalion levels and he was foreseen to spend his first 3-5 years as company second-in-command. He was thus prepared – if casualties and the situation required this – to be effective one or even two levels up. Only conscript reserve officer training was limited to one level.

The guiding principle even for regular officers now became “just enough, just in time”, a principle which – it is said – may work well at car factories but may be costly for military professionals and their subordinates and masters.

The 1983 reform has established a mechanistic understanding of learning and development, which is far removed from the learning by experience and maturing, which traditionally developed and consolidated professional leaders. It simply ignored the fact that in the military profession (as in the medical), practical service experience is at least as important as general formal education.

In theory the “just enough, just in time” saved money, but in reality, it is an administratively demanding, centralised and inflexible system that required very costly long-term

absence from the units for courses meant to rubber-stamp officers for promotion. It has been so ineffective and costly that the defence leadership since then has constantly been reducing courses and education requirements. However, it never occurred to the post-1983 top defence leadership that it was the paradigm shift towards a professionally unsustainable model for basic officer’s education, and the mechanistic linear links between education, rank and employment which caused and accelerated the problems.

The Armed Forces as a manufacturing company

... the complex problem of running an army at all is liable to occupy his (the future commander’s) mind and skill so completely that it is very easy to forget what it is being run for. The difficulties encountered in the administration, discipline, maintenance, and supply of an organization the size of a fair-sized town are enough to occupy the senior officer to the exclusion of any thinking about his real business: the conduct of war.⁸

When the Chief of Defence, Admiral Hans Garde, was killed in 1996 in an air-crash in the Faroe Islands after only four months in the position, it resulted in a crucial break with the still mainly professional focus in the Armed Forces. Garde’s replacement, the air force General Christian Hvidt, and Hvidt’s second Chief of Defence Staff and later replacement, artillery General Jesper Helsø, both saw the Armed Forces as “a manufacturing company.” This was no coincidence. Air force and artillery officers are inclined towards rationalistic ideals and linear logic, where most activities can be expressed in scientific and engineering terms and conducted centralized and standardized as in a simple manufacturing company. Such

ideals have since 1918 ideologically been considered to be at the core of air force and artillery professionalism and required for organizational effectiveness. It was therefore natural for Hvidt and Helsø to be responsive to and reinforce the wishes that came from the Finance Ministry's "New Public Management" reforms from the 1990s.

Many senior officers concentrate – as the Michael Howard quote emphasizes – on managing from behind their desks and at meetings. That is far easier than to be the constantly visiting, questioning, intrusive, curious and pro-active leader, which is essential for the development and effectiveness of a military organisation, and to expand one's own professional horizon in preparation for even higher command and leadership positions. This office-centric behaviour resulting from mental laziness is older than New Public Management, which systematises and reinforces the ideal that leaders should focus on office-bound activities and ideals. For any military, the peacetime pressures for an ever more centralised and over-bureaucratized structure and culture is a constant, add the distant and theoretical requirements of some hypothetical war can safely be ignored – most of the time.

However, two post-Cold War changes added to the excuses to ignore the traditional requirements of the profession. Before the early 1990s almost all officers in purely peace-time management positions still had to spend several weeks annually preparing for their war-time position as commanders of reserve units or in war-time expanded HQs. Thus, officers were forced to occasionally remember that the uniform meant that they were not merely civilian administrators, and their war-time superior had insight into their professionalism and a say in their careers.

Another significant change happened in Western Post-Cold War military theory.

Future warfare was increasingly expected to be one-sided punishment and disarmament of inferior opponent using superior Western "situation awareness" of his weaknesses plus precision weapons. Warfare within the framework of a supposed "Revolution in Military Affairs" with "Net-Centric Warfare" and later "Effects Based Operations" was seen as reduced to be simple mechanistic management of fire-power. The enemy could not, it was assumed, influence the game; he was just an inter-active network of targets that should be analysed and taken out to achieve the inevitable "shock and awe" collapse of his coordination, capabilities and will.

Such positivist beliefs in both warfare and military peace-time management had dominated first Robert McNamara's Vietnam era and then Donald Rumsfeld's Iraq War Pentagon. It has survived in spite of being discredited because it is far too inconvenient to confront the fact that significant parts of the military profession require professional military understanding, which is fundamentally different from good civilian resource planning and management because any military opponent, even those in sandals, adapt and act rather than being a passive target set.

Since the 1990s the Western public management ideals have required all public activities to be guided exclusively by contracts, output measurement, and remote management and streamlining; all efforts that are alien to the robustness, flexibility, and professionalism required by military organisations. The required anti-professional tunnel vision brought by these ideals has been encouraged by promotion of compatible loyalists and reinforced by personal financial awards to those who perform loyally in accordance with the measurable standards. Led by the Danish Chief of Defence all parts of the armed forces were expected to develop into

specialised branches of a large manufacturing company. The forces were still led by uniformed leaders, but they quickly and eagerly embraced civilian titles. Now the focus was more on processes and costs and less on military balance and likely effect in combat. As the changes might provoke dissent the leadership demanded unquestioning loyalty from all employees and made clear that it would sanction open expression of disagreement as it expected would be the case in a private enterprise.

Since the late 1990s all military decisions have been assessed with a narrowly pseudo-economistic focus (in fact, real companies that behave like this quickly go out of business) by using the "business cases" format and "budget analyses" as steering instruments, leaving out any military professional dimensions and experience. The "company" is still expected to be motivated and synchronised through "visions", "missions" and "values" so that all efforts remain loyally directed – without public discussion, without discussion at all – towards a brilliant future.

This meant that professionalism, military professionalism, like the professionalism of other parts of the public sector, was and is under severe pressure, as it cannot be standardised, measured and computed in a spreadsheet, and thus remains invisible to CEO and his fellow executive officers of the armed forces top management.

The professional debate that was already harmed by the 1983 reform was further damaged by the Chief of Defence, General Hvidt, who – although probably without realising the implication of his keynote speech on the subject – fathered the concept of "a commanded success".⁹ Such came to mean that no project defined from the top, no matter its effects, could be criticized. All internal and especially all public statement should praise and support the idea or project

with complete and unquestioning loyalty echoing the management's "New-speak". It seems overlooked by those involved that the much coveted "creativity" and "innovation capability" require both deep and wide professionalism based on experience and requires the free and frank expression of ideas and criticism.

The 2003 "K-memorandum" – Denmark drops jointness as war in Europe has become unthinkable

In 2003, a small group of capable and dynamic career staff officers¹⁰ of the Defence Staff and Ministry of Defence agreed that they knew enough to draft a complete vision for the future of the Danish Armed Forces. The small team concluded as self-evident that the entire Cold War legacy, its structure, missions and activities, was irrelevant as the all risks of inter-state war in Europe had ended. The vision was given its written form in the "K-memorandum" ("K" for capacity).

The process was deliberately explained and justified to the Danish public in spring 2004 in the form of a TV-documentary named after the memo. The movie follows the Chief of Defence, General Jesper Helsø, during a crucial phase in the development of the idea into a concrete plan to be adopted in the next political Defence Agreement.

Their revolutionary vision had decisive influence on the 2005–2009 Defence Agreement. The unclear strategic situation that Denmark and her armed forces faced after 2001 enabled this handful of mid-level staff officers to define Danish defence policy and shape the forces for now more than a decade. Their simplified view of the future reinforced and thrived on the American "War on Terror" and the fashion for small high-

tech forces. There seemed to be a need for a “rebooting” of the organization and its activities, and the authors of the K-memo offered a clear and elegantly served vision unburdened by the nuances and uncertainties that a more mature and historically informed professionalism typically would suggest.

The forces would then – as always – have benefitted from a more cautious, historically connected approach and the acceptance of the inherent ambiguity of the international situation even in 2003, and thus the need to maintain a fair degree of professional and structural flexibility. Yet, the leading politicians of that time had little patience, and welcomed this clear break with unwanted parts of Danish history. They wanted determination, innovation, and dramatic reforms in all parts of the public sector. Asking for flexibility as a consequence of a perceived ambiguity would then probably have been seen as an unmanly weakness of mind and body.

During a discussion in the “Society for the Sciences of War” (Krigsvidenskabeligt Selskab) in spring 2003, the Defence Staff Planning Chief presented his conclusions: There would never again be inter-state threats and wars in Europe, and thus the armed forces (still anachronistically called “Defence Forces”) should simply be developed into a high-tech, fully manned “toolbox” with a number of unrelated army, navy and air force “capabilities”. The Danish ability for joint operational cooperation which had been developed with great effort and much difficulty during the Cold War was hereafter irrelevant.¹¹

This new military and strategic framework, which was meant to deliver military capabilities as tools for others to use was adopted without much debate or thought. Since then Denmark’s strategic security has hinged on our ability to seek popularity in Washington,

London and Paris by being present early and uncritically in the conflicts and wars of our Allies and paying whatever the human and other costs may result. Independent professional analysis of options and risks were deemed irrelevant.

The military “toolbox” concept sounded efficient and flexible, but in reality the group of reformers almost emptied the box of capabilities to finance the three armed services’ traditional prestige projects and dropped everything else. The Air Force wanted to concentrate completely on airplanes and especially on fighters. All ground deployed air defence weapons would be scrapped. The navy focused on large blue-water ships that could place the Danish naval flag among those of the big nations. The army wanted to finalise its macho project, a heavy armoured brigade that it had eagerly wanted ever since the 1960s.

In a debate at the “Danish Institute of International Studies” (DIIS) in February 2004, the chief of the Defence Staff Planning Department described the perceptions and priorities behind the K-memorandum.¹² He emphasised that the goal was to create capabilities that could join the Americans “first in and first out” of any mission, leaving the rebuilding and stabilisation efforts to second-rate forces and organisations. In order to be able to participate in any such role, the Army’s 1st Brigade would be developed, he underlined, into a fully manned armoured brigade, and trained and equipped for offensive operations.

Many years earlier Erik Seidenfaden, the straight-thinking Editor-in-Chief of the daily *Information*, had famously observed that the Danish Defence Forces’ main mission was to function as “a brass band on the White House lawn.”¹³ He thereby meant that the Danish military should concentrate on whatever the current U.S. Administration

considered to be important, and thus make Denmark and Danish Interests visible by symbolic loyalty. By 2004 the defence staff and Ministry of Defence took his view to heart and recommended that Denmark should contribute immediately to any American project without any independent analysis of the situation, options, or outcomes, and thus without strategy. We should join Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld's warfare "first in" in spite of clear warnings of its lack of realism and "first out" following the assured victory.¹⁴ As in Afghanistan after the quick 2002 rout of the Taleban and the 2003 collapse of Saddam Hussein's rule in Iraq, the post-war effort should be left to others such as NATO and the UN.

However, as demonstrated in Iraq after 2004 and in Afghanistan since 2006, the quick purely military victories were hollow, and it was significantly easier to get forces "in" than "out". Among the tragic consequences of the Danish symbolic and un-reflected participation in U.S. operations, which was the strategic choice behind the revolutionary K-memorandum, were a significant number of Danish soldiers to be killed, maimed, hurt by PTSD, and harassed by Humanitarian Law cases. Much of this was due to the lack of basic professional foresight, and unwillingness to face the reality of counter-insurgency and state-building efforts. When the shallow logic of the memorandum met reality, the same officers – now promoted into the positions of responsibility they kept until now – orchestrated the reaction of the increasingly alarmed Danish politicians.

From 2013 they led the armed forces implementation of a new set of radical reforms, which seeking further integration of civilian models of leadership and education in effect removed the army's remaining ability to do anything militarily beyond symbolic presence, and ended the officer corps' ability to analyse,

plan and implement anything professionally above reinforced platoon-level.

One might conclude that the Danish Defence leaders adopted the second verse of Alfred Lord Tennyson poem "The Charge of the Light Brigade"¹⁵ and its disregard for critical professional thinking in strategic decision-making irrespective of potential costs:

"Forward, the Light Brigade!"
Was there a man dismay'd?
Not tho' the soldier knew
Some one had blunder'd:
Theirs not to make reply,
Theirs not to reason why,
Theirs but to do and die:
Into the valley of Death
Rode the six hundred."

The demilitarization of war studies by the Danish Institute for Military Studies

People often of masterful intelligence, trained usually in law or economics or perhaps in political science, (...) have led their governments into disastrous decisions and miscalculations because they have no awareness whatever of the historical background, the cultural universe, of the foreign societies with which they have to deal.¹⁶

Since the 1970s, Danish politicians have sought to create a centre for alternative and innovative defence thinking, which could prepare proposals for a different, meaning cheaper, organization of the Danish Defence forces than what their responsible advisors, the generals and admirals proposed.

The first such attempt was the "Long-Term Planning Group" of the new Defence Staff established in 1970. Fifteen years later came the "Advisory and Analysis Group" under the Director of the Defence Research

Establishment. This new element was directly subordinated to the Ministry of Defence, but failed, as its predecessor had, to produce coherent and responsible advice that was considered meaningful by the politicians.

At the end of the Cold War period, defence development took place within the framework of the political-military "Defence Commission of 1988", with the full involvement of the professional military leaders. The direct and effective dialogue in the Commission between the key politicians and the responsible military professional leaders made alternative advice irrelevant.¹⁷

The emerging perception of the irrelevance of military professional expertise was made clear when the "Danish Institute for International Studies" (DIIS) prepared the official history of Denmark during the Cold War. The massive work published in 2005¹⁸ did not consider the military dimension of the Danish part of the Cold War because the editors saw it as irrelevant for Denmark.¹⁹ Without involvement of professional military expertise, based on a superficial reading of a limited set of sources the report concluded that Denmark had been sufficiently well defended during the confrontation.

The view that military professionalism is inferior and irrelevant in international and political history writing was now openly adopted in the creation of another new research group created within the framework of the 2004 political defence agreement inspired by the "K-memorandum". With this a new purely political science study object named "Military Studies" arose, and Mikkel Vedby Rasmussen from the theory focused Copenhagen Political Science School as the first leader, this "Danish Institute for Military Studies" (DIMS) was established and initially hosted by, but independent of, the Royal Danish Defence College, the Danish Staff and War College. However, from 2010, the

institute was moved to Vedby Rasmussen's de facto parent institution, the "Department of Political Science" at the University of Copenhagen as the "Center for Military Studies" (CMS).

Ideally and logically, the 2004 decision could have created a Danish activity that corresponded to the broad study of war and strategy, "War Studies", which Sir Michael Howard had created at King's College, London fifty years earlier. The studies in London created a dynamic framework where war and conflict were studied across all scientific disciplines and with always wide and open understanding of the subject. The Danish Armed Forces had been inspired from the start with the education in both military history at the Academy and the advanced introduction to strategy in the Defence College being deeply and directly influenced by Michael Howard's insight and suggestions.²⁰

However, in 2004 with the 1968 Generation in power and with European history finally ending in eternal peace, it was evidently seen as both irrelevant and political incorrect and inopportune to call an academic activity in Denmark "war studies". Even "conflict studies" or "defence studies" must have seemed too narrow. Therefore, the empty and non-binding term "military studies" was chosen without any presentation and discussion of alternatives.²¹

However, the name itself was not the main problem in Mikkel Vedby Rasmussen's provision of "hot air" guidance for the Danish armed forces. It was that he limited the study of his institute in a way that was a clear and manipulative break with the open and empirical British scientific tradition, which did not rule out the possibility of and professional relevance of future large scale international wars.

The K-memorandum had ruled-out the possibility that the Danish armed forces might also have to consider the issues and problems of major wars and their deterrence again. The focus of DIMS followed suit and ensured that systematic analysis of war experiences for responsible counselling and planning did not occur, activities that neither of the two predecessors, the *Long-Term Planning Group* and the *Advisory and Analysis Group* could ignore in their time. Instead we got a group of Danish non-military "military analysts" which advised without any notion of personal responsibility and without the experience and understanding of complexity that may arise with personal and historical military experience and insight. The emperor's new clothes had become the only national fashion.

Accreditation of non-military education as a "Commanded Success"

As mentioned, the implementation of the 1983 officer education and employment reform meant that army officer cadets were no longer influenced by an experienced professional mentor and role model during their initial academy education. This increased the risk of what may be called professional dementia; the loss of knowledge and understanding of what officers are, and a pride in their profession. Without military focus and force-fed with management and political science theories officers were now reduced to just being desk-bound activity managers in uniform without independent basis for self-confidence or any self-esteem.

Without professional military foundation or anchoring, the officer corps increasingly just sought privileges, cover, and security by copying civilian norms and frameworks. The excuse, which has never been supported

by evidence, was that dressing military education up in civilian terminology, diploma, and façade would promote recruitment to the officer corps and improve retention. No one tried to get suitable people to seek and stay in the corps by making and maintaining high demands. It had apparently become un-Danish to demand quality.

The development was reinforced in the context of the "New Public Management" standardization offensive. Officer programs had to be forced into the same templates that now apply to all civil education, which also has been standardized. The "European Credit Transfer System" (ECTS) points, initially a tool for facilitating easy student exchange across universities and countries, were gradually used in the civil education to standardize the education in modules so that universities could provide cheap mass education. The ECTS system was then introduced into the armed forces, although this system was logically irrelevant for military education because of its fundamentally national and single-employer character. Thereafter the civilian requirement for academic accreditation was adopted uncritically without attempting to combine it with the maintenance of military professional substance and quality. Peer assessment of the adjusted Danish military education took place under the direction and control of civilian academics without military interest or insight, and with one or two managers in uniform of medium rank to rubber-stamp the commanded success.

A proper military-academic peer review would have brought in true peers from the leading military educational institutions abroad, but that, and the ensuing embarrassment, justified rejection and was avoided. Thereafter an ever-increasing number of non-peers from theoretical academic programmes without even academic *military* insight, experience or interest were brought into the

Danish military education programmes to reform and shape the Royal Danish Defence College, actually removing its character as a Staff and War College and to dress its graduates in the new "Master of Military Studies" fashion.

The effect of this regime of amateurs was that the Danish Defence Force from early 2010 first reduced and then abolished the education in professional analysis of military tasks and problems. Instead officers receive a shallow political science and management theory course that cannot generate professional understanding and leaves the Masters unable to advise on and lead military operations. For reasons obscure the already diluted joint staff education was also completely removed.

It had taken 150 years of hard and difficult work to achieve a level that not had only mirrored the international standards in officers' education of Allied and potential enemy armed forces, but in some respects had succeeded to achieve a uniquely high level of strategic and joint operations analysis.²² All this was lost in no time.

Mirroring the dominance of theory at the Political Science Studies at the University of Copenhagen, all education at the Defence College and the now subordinate armed services academies were demilitarized. The multidisciplinary focus on subjects and methodology from the international War Studies tradition was deliberately rejected and replaced with fragmented civilian management theorising and foreign policy studies. Studies of military subjects in depth and context were probably seen as irrelevant if the art was known at all by the civilian academic heads of the key institutes of the Defence Academy. Such military core subjects now only survive in a few short elective courses.

When read in isolation, Danish "military studies" products are now often of reason-

able quality and nice to have but limited to technical-economic elements. They are not placed in an overall framework based on understanding of military context and options. Furthermore, often these military studies reports are merely banal reflections about international developments, wrapped up in theoretical-scientific verbosity. Neither the Armed Forces nor the Defence Ministry, which finances the theoretical spider web with the tax payer's money, nor the officer corps or the critical souls from media feel obliged to act as the little boy in the Emperor's New Clothes fairy-tale.

For journalists it is generally too much trouble to challenge the prevailing perceptions of our time. Let me quote a voice from a distant past, representative of the civilian expectations of the time, which illustrates why practically no-one now questions or challenges the decline of Danish military professionalism:

People no more believed in the possibility of barbaric relapses, such as wars between the nations of Europe, than they believed in ghosts and witches. [...] They honestly thought that divergences between nations and religious faiths would gradually flow into a sense of common humanity, so that peace and security, the greatest of goods, would come to all mankind.

Today, now that the word 'security' has long been struck out of our vocabulary as a phantom, it is easy for us to smile at the optimistic delusion of that idealistically dazzled generation, which thought that the technical progress of mankind must inevitably result in an equally rapid moral rise.²³

With the loss of the advanced military professional education and the gradual fading-out of military professional studies and dis-course, Danish officers' ability to provide

responsible advice and implement focused organizational development of a military organization have disappeared. In addition, for more than twenty years no Danish officer has gained the practical experience and professional self-confidence they routinely gained up to 25 years ago; in planning and exercising major conventional defence operations involving all armed forces' and civilian total defence elements. The remaining higher military headquarters have succumbed to inertia and mental laziness. The rare and brief exercises they do carry out are scripted paper exercises with non-existent forces in a generic scenario unbound by real terrain and logistics or potential opponents.²⁴

Management by organizational paralysis and chaos

From 2005 to 2013 the Danish Armed Forces focused on up to unit level participation in international operations. At the same time, the framework of the organisation's "production" activities was the certain assumption that it would never again be asked to conduct operations in a large-scale – "symmetric" – war.

Working conditions at the Armed Forces' garrisons, bases and training centres were increasingly influenced by the "New Public Management" ideology's firm belief that efficiency was promoted by constant changes of organisation, tasks and responsibilities. These constant "reforms" should, it was believed, create a fertile environment for "innovation" (meaning further slimming of structure and the addition of new technology saving manpower in the units and operational elements).

What really happened just illustrated that any reorganisation is followed by a period of

reduced efficiency. That it must be so is common sense. It is also common sense that constant reorganisation quickly and drastically undermines effectiveness as it prevents the necessary consolidation of a new distribution of responsibilities and disrupts cooperation procedures and routines in problem-solving and administration.

Since 2014 the reform through chaos-method was consolidated by removing the Danish Chief of Defence's overall authority to lead and co-ordinate the armed forces' activities. Today the Chief of Defence is just one of eight equally placed, civilian heads of functional departments managing the armed forces' personnel, materiel, infrastructure, finances, and so on.

The latest "reform" – the parting salvo of the K-memorandum fathers on their retirement – was the 2018 political decision to save money by closing all the armed service's specialist training schools and centres, and place all NCO training under the Defence College, joining the three service academies placed there four years four years earlier. This will remove the last element of practical professional training from the direct dependence of practice and subordinate the education and training of Danish NCO's to the direction of the civilian academically led institutes with practically no knowledge of or interest in the substance and experience of the military profession.

As already mentioned, the traditional mission of the Danish Armed Forces has been to seek visibility in Washington (DC) that would give "brownie points" in peace-time, support the country's security in time of crisis, and guarantee national survival in the unlikely case of another great power war (that would, of course, be won easily and painlessly by the West). This anchor of Danish defence thinking and priorities

has now been loosened (if not yet lost) by Trump's hostility to non-Russian Europe. This, and the post-Afghanistan after-chock, has placed the remaining Danish thinking about security and defence matters in a flux. As the "professional brains" in the form of a joint staff analytical and advisory body has been abandoned as irrelevant, the ability to develop an alternative has been lost. However, as the premise of all this is the myth of NATO's massive superiority (in spite of the Alliance's total lack of balanced, exercised, and supported forces in Europe), this is not seen as a problem.

As nobody with formal responsibility sees any meaningful mission for the Danish Armed Forces, the Navy and Air Force continue to develop their preferred "toolbox" tools. The army has now been tasked to build one brigade, however this time not for any "first in" mission. Most likely underfunded, logistically unbalanced, and severely undertrained it will remain a Potemkin-type formation, which in reality only exist as a pool of personnel, of which the younger soldiers are to be used as an over-armed auxiliary police force for anti-terrorism and border guard duties, which are the only missions that the Danish public and political leaders see as real and relevant for the Danish army. There is no perceived threat against Denmark, and if there is a threat against others such as the Balts (which Danes cannot believe), Denmark will demonstrate our solidarity symbolically by sending small untrained force elements. Beyond that Denmark cannot imagine any new role for her armed forces, and even if an old-time threat against Denmark became reality, that would be for the Allies to address.

In 1971, the perceptive Danish military historian Morten Vesterdal analyzed the situation and role of the Danish Army in the mid-19th Century: "The army (...) was

not so much an instrument for combat as a mix of schools that gave good training to soldiers and junior NCOs and a tool for internal security."²⁵ The only change from then to the present situation is that the "good training" ambition has been dropped.

As the professional military discourse was left owner-less in the post-1983 officer corps, the majority of the Danish officers do not see these problems as being their responsibility to fix. Some of the best officers simply leave in disgust; the more flexible happily adapt to the lingo of New Public Management, and those aligned with the political scientists are promoted for their ability to overlook the emperor's nudity.

Generally relevant?

As already noted at the start of the article, some of problems monitored and described thereafter are general: all Western military structures have been affected by professional arrogance, opportunism and laziness and the accompanying lapse of professional focus and pride. Thomas Aquina's insight into human frailty was and is general. However, at the same time it is important to understand that the Danish national military DNA was formed by the combination of the humiliating quick military defeat in 1864 to Prussia and nearly unresisted German occupation of 9 April 1940.

The combined lesson learned is that any Danish military effort is useless and that either we let allies save us or appease any devil. 15 years ago, the Danish Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen attempted to break with this double curse by his activist engagement of Denmark in Iraq and the Afghan Helmand province. Both were like a headless cavalry charge into the unknown, neither preceded by a professional analysis of op-

tions, nor with proper staffing of the legal dilemmas, an awkward proof of the loss of professional ethos and insight by the Defence leadership of 2002–2006 in this respect as well. The UK shared the 2002–2006 follies and frustrations with Denmark, but here the new experience interacted with the historical Danish “military DNA” and created the professional collapse charted in the second half of this article.

It has created a situation that differs from what Stefan Zweig noted about 1914. Then the military did not share the light-hearted optimism of the general public. Then both army and naval officers still shared the necessary pessimism that formed the awkward core of their professionalism.

In Denmark, nearly all elements of military professionalism have been abandoned as irrelevant. The end-phase lasted less than 15 years, but in the previous years the professional planning and exercise activities had slowly come to a halt, and the activities that did take place were scripted for procedural learning and programmed responses to standard incidents. They touched an ever-smaller part of the officer corps with practical experience of a narrow character.

During the concluding phase, first the ability to analyse and advise was infected by the dry rot of New Public Management, NATO buzzwords, and the notion that analysis of a problem could be reduced to learning how to use a standard planning format as a checklist. Finally, the remaining elements that had formed 150 years of advanced professional military education was dropped and replaced with superficial teaching of civilian theories than cannot guide military planning or responsible advice. The emperor’s fashion was fully adopted.

The Danish military professional brain-damage and coma can only be reversed starting with thorough public confirmation hearings

of all officer positions at general’s or flag rank and for equivalent civilian positions in and under the Ministry of Defence. The framework should be the Parliamentary Defence Committee, and the politicians should be assisted by a supporting expert panel of respected senior allied and other retired officers selected and seconded by their own military for their professional level, independence of mind and frankness. Such hearings and supporting written contributions should focus on clarifying the candidate’s military professional insight and potential, character, and moral courage, as well as key ideas for the position. The eventual decision to employ the candidate would still be that of the Government, but few ministers would choose to appoint an obvious incompetent or an irresponsible opportunist.

This contribution described a Danish problem, and from anything but a disinterested perspective. Unfortunately, a roughly similar professional military decline has occurred in other Western countries, and I look forward to the analyses and contributions of this learned society of any similar developments in Sweden.

So far, I have seen next to nothing in my regular reading of our professional journal. There seems to exist a tacit peaceful co-existence where authors here ignore awkward dilemmas and just proceed with outlining and analysing future military-technical and total defence issues and options as if the developments of the last quarter century can be safely ignored. You seem to assume that all problems of conflicting security, management and academic paradigms will disappear in some happy consensus if not confronted.

The author is brigadier general and a fellow of the Royal Swedish Academy of War Sciences.

Notes

1. Rühle, Michael, former Head, Speechwriting, and Senior Political Advisor in the NATO Secretary General's Policy Planning Unit) about the present generation of "security experts": <https://zeitschrift-ip.dgap.org/delip-die-zeitschrift/archiv/jahrgang-2018/maerz-april-2018/wie-wird-man-sicherheitsexperte>. (2018-03-08)
2. <http://blog.clemmesen.org/2017/11/02/ungtyrkerprojektet-der-odelagde-den-danske-haer-og-militaere-profession/>. (2018-01-15). A short form appeared earlier this year in Danish language. Clemmesen, Michael H.: "Om hurtigavlæring av en profesjon: Den danske hær 1998–2017", *Norsk Militært Tidsskrift*, 2018.
3. Coming from a family dominated by members of the medical profession, the comparison is natural to the author.
4. See the selection in Poulsen, Niels Bo and Plenge Trautner, Jeppe (eds.): *Michael Hesselholt Clemmesen. For fede, for gamle og for dårligt uddannede? En tekstsamling I anledning af brigadegeneral Michael H. Clemmesens fratræden som seniorforsker ved Forsvarsakademiet*, Forsvarsakademiet, Copenhagen 2016.
5. Howard, Sir Michael Eliot: "Military Science in an Age of Peace", *The R.U.S.I. Journal*, Volume 119, 1974 – Issue 1., p. 10.
6. Thereafter no general staff trained officer was seconded as head and tactics teachers to the Academy classes. During the next years the tactics teacher was just another teacher among many, and a class might see a succession of captains on short appoint in the formerly main subject, co-ordinating teacher's role. Tactics and the supporting subjects such as artillery and engineer support lost the position as the key subject in the development of the profession.
7. Experienced by the author as early as the mid-1980 when tank squadron commander. The point was repeatedly made by his Head of Institute around 2010 after repeated pressure from his superior at the Royal Danish Defence College.
8. Howard, Sir Michael Eliot: "The use and abuse of military history", *The R.U.S.I. Journal*, Volume 107, 1962.
9. In the speech to the senior defence managers conference in Fredericia in summer 1999, "Forsvaret efter forsvarsaftalen af 25. maj 1999, forventninger og visioner" *Militært Tidsskrift*, June 2000, p. 198.
10. The leader then and during the next fifteen years of continuing "reforms" was Per Ludvigsen. He retired late 2017 from the position of Vice Chief of Defence with the rank of lieutenant-general to be employed by a private consultancy company that he has used during his final bout of weeding of what he saw as irrelevant. He was too young to gain experience in the demanding and varied exercise cycles during the 1980s. Ludvigsen never seems to have doubted his own brilliance and the 2003 premise that Denmark would and should never again be required to use military forces in self-defence or beyond symbolic level for deterrence or defence in Europe. Otherwise he believed that it was right and best to copy directly from the British Army that he had met during his staff course in Camberley.
11. The author participated to present a flexible alternative. The Defence Staff Planning Chief was Rear-Admiral Jørn Olesen, who had to toe the line in spite of being critical of the "K-memo".
12. The author participated in the meeting. The Chief of the Defence Staff Planning Department was Captain (N) – later Rear-Admiral – Torben Ørting Jørgensen.
13. <https://www.b.dk/din-mening/den-kolde-krig-i-radikal-optik>. (2018-03-20)
14. Underlined by Torben Ørting Jørgensen (see above) in the DIIS meeting and repeated to me in correspondence in autumn 2017.
15. Published 9th December 1854 in *The Examiner*.
16. Howard, Sir Michael Eliot: *The Lessons of History: The Lessons of History: An Inaugural Lecture Delivered Before the Vice-Chancellor and Fellows of the University of Oxford on Friday 6 March 1981*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1981.
17. The author worked in the Defence Staff "Long Term Planning Group" 1979–1982 and was a junior member of the "Defence Commission of 1988".
18. *Danmark under den kolde krig. Den sikkerhedspolitiske situation 1945–1991*, Dansk Institut for Internationale Studier, Copenhagen 2005.

19. Underlined by the report's Editor-in-Chief, Svend Aage Christensen, in a conversation with the author in winter 2004-05.
20. The author graduated from the Military Academy in 1968 and from the Defence College in 1979. He was military history lecturer at the Academy 1982-1984 and directed the education and study of strategy in the Defence College 1991-1994.
21. At least not from spring 2005, when the author worked as the Defence College desk officer for the hosting of DIMS.
22. See *Forsvarsakademiets Vejledningssamling*, Forsvarsakademiet, Copenhagen 1992.
23. Zweig, Stefan: *Die Welt von Gestern. Erinnerungen eines Europäers*, Bermann-Fischer Verlag AB, Stockholm 1942, on his memory of the time before 1914.
24. Based on own observations from the 1990s and conversations with participants in recent NATO exercises.
25. Vesterdal, Morten: "Betragtninger vedrørende hærens organisation 1842-64", *Militært Tidsskrift* 1971, author's translation from Danish.