"Arctic-vism" in Practice:

The Challenges Facing Denmark's Political-Military Strategy in the High North

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With the Afghanistan war winding down, the Arctic, already a hot button issue among Copenhagen policymakers, has become one of the main issues on the Danish foreign policy agenda. This article examines the challenges facing the Danish political-military planning in the Arctic. Danish Arctic policy reflects a wider Danish grand strategy that sees Greenland as a bargaining chip vis-à-vis the US. Danish political strategy emphasizes the region's well-functioning cooperative order, while standing its ground in disputes with other nations. Denmark is thus willing to enhance its military deterrent in the Arctic. Military strategy focuses on handling traffic patterns in Greenlandic waters, where the Danish Armed Forces are responsible for both military defense of the realm and coast guard tasks. Danish defense planning aims to maximize regional cooperation and to diminish tensions between Denmark and Greenland.

This article examines the specific challenges facing Danish political-military planning in the Arctic. It specifically explores how grand strategy, political strategy, and military strategy interact with one another. It argues that Danish political-military planning is shaped by the changing geo-economics of the Arctic region, by Denmark's grand strategic role as a close ally of the United States and a member of NATO, by the geopolitics of the Arctic, and by the relationship between Denmark and Greenland. Handling low politics defense planning and supporting peaceful cooperation between the Arctic states are seen as ways of reproducing Danish sovereignty over Greenland. The Danish presence in the Arctic helps Copenhagen solidify the relationship to Washington that makes up the central axis of Danish grand strategy.

The article progresses through four stages. It begins by presenting Denmark's interests in the Arctic and how they fit within a wider grand strategy. It then proceeds to describe Denmark's foreign policy strategy in the Arctic. The third section examines how Copenhagen views the

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other states and institutions that operate in the Arctic. The final section describes how these strategic considerations shape Danish defense planning.

Denmark's Presence and Interests in Greenland

Denmark's status as an Arctic costal state is in constant risk of being challenged. It hinges on Greenland's continued membership of the Commonwealth of Denmark (*Rigsfællesskabet*), a complex constitutional union between Greenland, the Faroe Islands, and Denmark proper that gives the latter authority over foreign and security policy. Danish sovereignty over Greenland has been challenged by various sources in the past. Greenland, hitherto a Norwegian territory, came under Copenhagen's influence in 1380, when Denmark established a personal union, a constitutional arrangement where several states share the same monarch, with Norway. However, continuous Danish presence in Greenland only began in 1721. Greenland remained under the Danish crown even after the Danish-Norwegian dual-monarchy was dissolved in 1814. Danish sovereignty over Greenland was finally established in 1933, when the Permanent Court of International Justice rejected a Norwegian claim to Eastern Greenland (Danish Institute for International Studies, 2007: 10–17; Petersen, 2006).

Today, Danish sovereignty is not challenged by external powers, but rather by the possibility of Greenlandic independence. Greenland replaced Home Rule with Self Rule in 2009 – a constitutional arrangement that gave Nuuk more autonomy and a road map towards independence (Government of Denmark, 2009). The independence question is symbolically important in Greenlandic politics as a long-term goal and as a way for Greenlandic elites to shore up political support from the population (Gad, 2009, 2014). However, the Greenlandic economy cannot sustain itself even with significant subsidies from Denmark. Recent analyses have shown that Greenlandic independence depends on exploiting hitherto unfound oil and gas deposits. Other industrial opportunities – fishing industry, mining, and hydro-electric powered industry – cannot sustain an independent state (Rosing, 2014). Actual independence will not be a reality within the coming decades and even then it depends on rich oil and gas finds that may or may not be out there.

Greenland serves a political, not an economic, purpose for Denmark. Greenland has been bad business in strictly fiscal terms for the entire modern era. Copenhagen supports Greenland with an annual direct and indirect bursary of DKK 4.4 billion (USD 800 million) – a grant that roughly generates 40 percent of Greenland's GDP (Greenlandic-Danish Independence Commission, 2008: 450; Rosing, 2014: 10). This pattern is unlikely to change in the future. The current Self Rule Agreement makes it almost impossible for Denmark to generate a profit from its presence in Greenland, even if bountiful resources were to be found (Greenlandic-Danish Independence Commission, 2008).

Greenland is a strategic bargaining chip in Denmark's larger grand strategy. A significant part of Danish grand strategic thinking focuses the relationship to Washington. Copenhagen hopes to tie the United States closer to Europe by supporting American foreign policy objectives. Since the mid-1990s, this has primarily been done by following an activist foreign policy (Pedersen, 2012). Denmark was an active part of "the coalition of the willing" in Iraq, suffered the most fatalities per capita of any Western nation in Afghanistan, and was among the nations with most attack sorties in the recent Libya intervention (Atlantic Council, 2011; iCasualties, 2014; Rahbek-

Clemmensen, 2011). Greenland is part of this Atlantic dimension of Denmark's foreign policy. The island was a bargaining chip that the Danish government could use to buy its way into the Western alliance during the Second World War and the Cold War (Danish Foreign Policy Institute, 1997; Danish Institute for International Studies, 2005; Lidegaard, 1996: 333–51).

The Thule Air Base remains the most important American asset in Greenland. The base and the adjacent radar facilities were completed in the early 1950s and are integral, if not essential, parts of the US early warning system (Archer, 2003: 139; Danish Foreign Policy Institute, 1997; Danish Institute for International Studies, 2005: 70–80; Kristensen, 2005: 184–86; Tamnes & Holtsmark, 2014: 32). After lengthy negotiations, Washington got permission from Copenhagen and Nuuk to upgrade the radar to make it a much needed part of its missile defense system in 2004. These negotiations were remarkable, because they gave Nuuk a seat at the table and the final agreement included concessions to the Greenlandic government, including influence over future changes to the installations at Thule. Denmark had to walk a tightrope between possible domestic opposition and the Nuuk and Washington's demands. The final agreement allowed Denmark to reaffirm its strong bond with the US by providing a valuable asset to Washington (Archer, 2003; Kristensen, 2005; Wilkening, 2004: 31 & 34).

With the war in Afghanistan winding down, the Danish government has been looking for new ways to contribute to the Western alliance system. The Arctic is one of the theatres in which Denmark can show its dedication to the American-led world order. As one observer has noticed, Danish foreign policy thinking is moving from activism to "Arctic-vism" (Rasmussen, 2013). Tongue-in-cheek slogans aside, this Arctic focus does make sense in a grand strategic perspective. As an Arctic nation, Denmark has a privileged position at the table that far outweighs the country's meager size. By being seen as a state that facilitates peaceful cooperation in the High North, Denmark hopes to buy influence not only in Washington, but also Moscow, Beijing, and the capitals of the European Union. The Arctic is thus a valuable, yet precarious, asset in Danish grand strategy and Copenhagen has a clear interest in hanging on to it in the decades to come.

Danish Political Strategy

Danish strategic thinking about the Arctic reflects the wish to keep a presence in the region. Achieving that goal requires that Copenhagen continues providing services for the Greenlandic population and marking its military presence in the High North. The impact of climate change poses a new challenge for these practices and it has come to shape the Danish debate about the Arctic for the past decade.

The Arctic reemerged on the Danish political agenda during the final years of the 2000s. It soon became obvious that global warming would have an impact on the Arctic, opening the region to commercial opportunities that had so far been covered under a layer of ice: new shipping routes, exploitation of natural resources (oil, gas, minerals, hydroelectric power, and fishing stocks, among other thing), tourism, and a general easier access to Arctic settlements. The Russian planting of a titanium flag on the Arctic seabed in 2007 and a general renewed interest in Arctic matters in the international press also caught the attention of policymakers and analysts in Copenhagen.

The Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs was already aware that rising temperatures would have an impact on Greenland and the political relations between the Arctic states (Home Rule of Greenland & Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2008: 4). In general, Copenhagen prefers to preserve Arctic cooperation. A militarization of the Arctic would mean that small states, like Denmark, risk being caught between the great powers. Denmark's position is especially precarious, because of the undetermined status of Greenland. Tensions between the Inuit population of Greenland and Denmark proper would be more difficult to manage in an Arctic in flux, where other great powers – most notably the United States – would try to solidify their geopolitical interests in Greenland. Simply put, Copenhagen risks that Washington decides to cut out the middle-man and supports Greenlandic independence. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs moved quickly to help create better relations between the Arctic nations. The Ilulissat Declaration, the result of a meeting held in Greenland between high-level representatives of the five Arctic costal states in May 2008, helped establish these five states as the key players in the region. The hope was that interstate cooperation could prevent an Arctic great game for resources and territory.

Danish strategic thinking about the Arctic was grounded in policy documents and academic studies. The first academic studies of the impact of climate change for defense planning were soon conducted (Jørgensen & Rahbek-Clemmensen, 2009; Petersen, 2009). These studies focused on the strategic aspects of the changing Arctic and they plugged into the nascent strategic debate about the future of the Arctic that had already been going on within the halls of government. The Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs co-published an Arctic strategy draft together with the Greenlandic Home Rule in 2008 (Home Rule of Greenland & Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2008). The 2008 defense commission placed the Arctic among the fix points for future defense planning (Defense Commission of 2008, 2009). Finally, in 2011, the Danish government published an official Arctic strategy for the period running through 2020 (Government of Denmark, Government of Greenland, & Government of the Faroe Islands, 2011). These strategic publications marked a shift away from seeing the Arctic as a pristine area that should be conserved – a nature reservation in the High North, so to speak – to a region ripe with commercial opportunities (Home Rule of Greenland & Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2008: 7). Though conservation of the environment still played a role in Danish planning, the focus was now on facilitating commercial opportunities. Denmark should focus on facilitating and supporting regional cooperation, while ensuring that the Danish and Greenlandic authorities were ready to handle changes in the commercial set-up in Greenland.

However, as is the case with most public strategies, the Danish Arctic strategy papers remain mum when it comes to certain politically sensitive issues. There are two significant omissions. First, the strategy papers do not discuss what Denmark gets out of its Arctic presence or how Denmark could maximize Greenland's value as a bargaining chip. Why does Denmark spend significant resources on a remote Arctic island? How does Denmark get the most out of its Greenland's strategic position in Washington? How does Denmark intend to engage with other foreign powers and how should it balance its Arctic engagement against other foreign policy goals? Denmark's relationship to the other Arctic nations is analyzed in the next section.

Second, the strategies and the academic texts do not debate how Copenhagen can retain Greenland within the Commonwealth of Denmark. Instead, they either assume that Greenland is

a natural part of Denmark or they bracket the discussion as a choice to be made by the Greenlandic government and people. However, one can argue that Denmark has an interest in keeping Greenland within the Commonwealth. Given that Denmark actually benefits from the current arrangement – as, arguably, does Greenland – it would seem natural to discuss how this arrangement can be preserved. How can policymakers curb Greenlandic nationalism? How can it be avoided that foreign powers interfere in Greenlandic politics? This debate is rarely taken in public and it is notably absent from the Danish Arctic Strategy.

To be sure, these omissions are not irrational mistakes. Instead, they reflect a highly developed political sensitivity to the contentious issues that characterize the relationship between Denmark and Greenland and the Arctic region at large. Discussing such issues out in the open would not only be bad form, especially when one takes the contentious relationship between Copenhagen and Nuuk into consideration, it would also reveal Denmark's preferences and thus be a poor bargaining strategy. One cannot conclude that these considerations are not being made behind closed doors.

Denmark's strategic thinking about the Arctic has thus matured over the past ten years. It has gone from tacit and informal debate within the halls of government to formal, written strategies. The strategies focus on regional cooperation and handling the commercial opportunities that follow from climate change, while omitting certain politically sensitive issues and debates.

Relationship to Other Nations

Denmark's approach to the other nations in the High North is shaped by a general wish to further Arctic cooperation, mixed with a need to stand for the preservation of what is considered the natural claims and the sovereignty of the Commonwealth of Denmark. Denmark's relationship to the other Arctic states is quite amenable. The relationship to the United States is, as mentioned above, the central pillar of Denmark's Arctic presence. The early strategies also recognized that Denmark – the only Arctic costal state that is also an EU member – could play a special role in ensuring that thinking about the High North in Brussels would not antagonize the Arctic states (Government of Denmark et al., 2011: 52; Home Rule of Greenland & Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2008: 15–18). Denmark's role in the EU is complicated by a tension between Copenhagen and Nuuk's focus on Arctic commercial development and energy exploitation and the more environmentally-oriented approach found in Brussels (Offerdal, 2014: 81).

Denmark and Canada cooperate on a host of practical issues, including search and rescue and a possible common satellite surveillance system. The few territorial disputes between the two states, for instance the row over Hans Island or the recent dispute over territory north of Greenland, are just minor blips in an otherwise well-functioning bilateral relationship (Hansen, 2014; Offerdal, 2014: 82; Stevenson, 2007). The Ilulissat Declaration provided the foundation for a peaceful solution to the border disputes between the Arctic costal states, following the framework provided by the UN Convention of the Law of the Seas (UNCLOS). Like the other littoral states, Denmark is currently submitting its claims. Denmark is interested in getting as much Arctic territory as possible and Copenhagen expects that these issues will be solved according to a rules-based approach (Government of Denmark et al., 2011: 13–15).

Denmark's relationship with the four Nordic Arctic nations occurs within a framework of Nordic cooperation. Denmark supports increased Nordic cooperation in the Arctic, but concurrently recognizes that its practical value is limited due to the relative isolation of Greenland. The 2009 Stoltenberg report, published by the Norwegian government as a platform for additional Nordic cooperation, suggested several options for Nordic cooperation in the Arctic (Stoltenberg, 2009). However, although the report created a lot of positive buzz among Danish officials and analysts, its recommendations have met significant practical barriers. The long distances between Scandinavia and Greenland mean that the Nordic countries are not likely to provide useful capabilities in case of emergencies. Instead, Denmark sees Canada as the most likely partner country in that regard. Nordic cooperation plays a more significant role in other areas like scientific research, education, and health (Government of Denmark et al., 2011: 35–36 & 40). The Ukraine crisis means that Nordic Defense Cooperation (NORDEFCO), a collaboration scheme between Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden, have come to play a more important role for each of the five member states (Nilsen, 2014). The collaboration increases defense efficiency by taking advantage of synergies between the five states, while functioning as an additional way of integrating non-NATO members Sweden and Finland into the Western security architecture (Dahl & Järvenpää, 2014: 129–30; Järvenpää, 2014). However, NORDEFCO mainly focuses on Northern Scandinavia and will not play a significant role in the Danish Arctic for now.

Russia has been the main cause for concern in Danish Arctic policy, even before the Ukraine crisis, and a rivalry between Moscow and Washington is the most likely source of conflict in the region (Jørgensen & Rahbek-Clemmensen, 2009; Rahbek-Clemmensen, 2014; Rahbek-Clemmensen, Larsen, & Rasmussen, 2012). Denmark is not concerned with a possible land-grab by Russian forces – instead, the main danger is that Denmark will be squeezed between Russia and the United States in case of a great power rivalry in the High North. Copenhagen is consequently walking a tight-rope between deterrence and accommodation. Denmark wants to keep Russia within the well-functioning cooperative order in the Arctic and is willing to surrender short-term political advantages to achieve that goal. However, Denmark is also well-aware of the need for effective deterrence of Russia. For instance, the recent Danish F-16 exercises in Greenland was as much a test of the aircraft's ability to act under Arctic conditions as a clear demonstration of Danish military prowess (Martin, 2014).

Denmark is, together with Canada, generally opposed to increased NATO involvement in the High North and NATO is largely absent from the Arctic Strategy. Copenhagen has not been as vocal as Ottawa about its opposition to an increased NATO involvement, but Copenhagen policymakers believe that an Arctic NATO involvement would be a red flag for Moscow that would complicate regional governance and increase the likelihood of militarization. Denmark has contributed with F-16s to NATO's air-policing operations in Iceland.

Denmark has seen China's entrance to the Arctic as an opportunity for further cooperation with Beijing. Denmark has generally supported giving China and other Northeast Asian states a seat at the Arctic table, including by giving them observer status in the Arctic Council (Government of Denmark et al., 2011: 54). A recent SIPRI study, commissioned by the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, has sought to explore new ways to facilitate Arctic cooperation between Denmark and the Northeast Asian states (Jakobson & Lee, 2013). Some analysts look at China's

rising influence in the High North with concern. They are particularly concerned with the possibility that Chinese investments in the Greenlandic minerals industry will give Beijing influence over Greenland's government (Danish Defense Intelligence Service, 2013: 15; Wang, 2012).

All in all, Denmark's Arctic relations are characterized by an optimistic belief in the potential for future cooperation. Although Russia and China are viewed with caution, Copenhagen generally emphasizes the need to integrate both states within the regional institutions.

Danish Military Strategy

Danish defense planning in the Arctic largely reflects the strategic considerations outlined above. This means that the blind spots that were found on the strategic level also reappear in defense planning. The Danish Armed Forces do not consider what Denmark gets out of its Arctic presence nor does it plan to keep Greenland within the Commonwealth. Instead, these political-strategic considerations become tacitly accepted assumptions that underpin Danish defense planning.

Denmark does not have a separate coast guard and the Danish Armed Forces fulfills both military and coast guard functions. The Armed Forces' permanent Arctic capabilities consist of two Thetis class inspection ships (OPV/frigate) with Lynx helicopters, two Knud Rasmussen class inspection vessels (OPV), one Agdlek class patrol cutter (which will soon be replaced with a third of the more formidable Knud Rasmussen class patrol vessels), one CL-604 Challenger patrol aircraft for roughly ten days per month, minor sea charting capabilities, and the Sirius patrol, an elite unit that conducts patrolling and reconnaissance missions in Eastern Greenland. Danish C-130 Hercules transport aircraft can also operate in the Arctic. The Armed Forces have access to bases dispersed along the Greenlandic coast. The Armed Forces also have a range of capabilities stationed in Denmark proper that can be deployed to the Arctic if needed. These include Iver Huitfeldt class frigates, Absalon class support ships, F-16 Fighting Falcons, Army and Navy Special Forces units (Huntsmen and Frogmen corps), and additional Challenger and Hercules capabilities.

The Armed Forces' missions include sovereignty enforcement, patrolling, surveillance, environmental protection, fisheries inspection, and search and rescue. Most major long-term decisions about defense matters are made in the Danish Parliament's five-year defense agreements. The strategic rationales for these agreements are made in ad hoc defense commissions that include experts and parliamentarians and are established roughly every ten years. The last defense commission statement – the Defense Commission of 2008 – specifically mentioned the Arctic as a focus area for the Danish Armed Forces (Defense Commission of 2008, 2009: 70–71, 98 & 101).

The defense agreement for 2010-2014 focused on rationalizing the existing command structures by merging the Faroe Islands Command and the Greenland Command in a common Arctic Command, headquartered in Nuuk. It also resulted in a number of initiatives that focused on maritime environmental protection (Danish Parliament, 2009: 12–13). These initiatives had already been recommended by the 2008 defense commission (Defense Commission of 2008, 2009: 274 & 290).

The recent defense agreement for 2013-2017 continues the emphasis on the Arctic. The Arctic is meant to be one of the new core theaters for Danish defense policy as the mission in Afghanistan is winding down. The agreement continues the broad investment in capabilities and it emphasizes the inclusion of the local population of Greenland in the Armed Forces' activities. The Danish Armed Forces were criticized by the Danish Parliament's Public Accounts Committee (*Rigsrevisionen*), the Danish version of the GAO, for not supplying the necessary services in the Arctic (The Public Accounts Committee, 2013). The defense agreement responded by highlighting that the harsh geographical and climatic conditions in Greenland mean that the level of emergency preparedness cannot be comparable to the one found in Denmark. Furthermore, the agreement also established an inter-departmental working group, which is meant to provide a comprehensive strategic and operational analysis of the Armed Forces' mission and capability requirements until 2030 The working group's report will most likely be published ultimo 2014 or primo 2015 (Danish Parliament, 2012: 14–16 & 43–44; Vammen, 2014: 1).

These specific initiatives reflect three tacit strategic goals:

- Handle the new challenges that follow from Arctic climate change
- Support regional interstate cooperation
- Minimize tensions between Denmark and the Greenlandic government and population

The defense planning process reflects the challenges that result from climate change and the need for political cooperation between the Arctic states. The omissions in these strategies are mirrored in defense planning: the Danish defense does not consider the possibility that Greenland might become independent and that Arctic capabilities may become redundant in its long-term defense planning. However, the Danish defense establishment is well-aware of the contentious nature of the Danish-Greenlandic relationship and it goes to great length to include the Greenlandic population in future initiatives. The following sections examine how the three tacit strategic goals are reflected in concrete defense planning.

The Challenge of Climate Change

The main challenge for the Danish Armed Forces is increased activities in Greenlandic waters, be it as increased sea traffic to and from Greenland, oil and gas exploitation off the Greenlandic coast, or increased fishing or tourism. The opening of new sea routes – the Northeast and Northwest Passages – will most likely not lead to a significant increase in traffic along the Greenlandic coast within a reasonable planning horizon. Although climate change may affect conditions on land, these land-based activities are beyond the purview of the Danish Armed Forces. They only have an impact for the Armed Forces' portfolio insofar as they require transport to and from Greenland.

Planning new capability investments is the main challenge facing the Danish Armed Forces. Global warming opens a larger area for more traffic for a longer period of the year. The main question is how the Danish Armed Forces plan to cover a larger task portfolio and which tasks it aims to prioritize. There is a certain degree of synergy between the different tasks. Most of the tasks require increased presence on the Greenlandic seas. For instance, sovereignty enforcement, patrolling and fisheries inspection can all be handled by the same vessel, doing a regular patrol of

the Greenlandic seas. Investing in new naval vessels has consequently been one of the main issues. The Danish Parliament announced the purchase of a third Knud Rasmussen class patrol vessel – a platform that is tailored for Arctic missions - as part of the latest defense agreement (Danish Parliament, 2012: 10). To be sure, some tasks do require separate capabilities. For instance, search and rescue missions require specific capabilities that cannot be used for other purposes. Defense planning is not only a question of procuring more capabilities – it is also a matter of prioritizing separate tasks.

Defense planners have also been looking at how new technologies could offer a cheap solution to some of the challenges of climate change. Indeed, the Danish Parliament recently allocated DKK 220 million (USD 40 million) to extensive tests of new technologies – including Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) and satellites – in Greenland (Danish Parliament, 2012: 15). UAVs have sometimes been seen as a cheaper option for aerial surveillance of Greenland (Defense Commission of 2008, 2009: 300; Jørgensen & Rahbek-Clemmensen, 2009: 39). However, preliminary analyses indicate that the harsh weather conditions and the long distances mean that only strategic UAVs, like Golden Hawk, would be feasible in the Arctic. With a present unit cost of roughly DKK 2 billion (USD 365 million), the Golden Hawk is definitely beyond the spending limit of the Danish armed forces. In the mid- to long-term, new and cheaper strategic UAVs may enter the market, making drones a feasible option in Greenland (Kristensen, Pradhan-Blach, & Schaub, 2013: 20 & 23–24; Ringsmose, 2014: 16–20).

Satellite surveillance is also being considered. Denmark does not have the funds to launch a satellite program alone and would most likely cooperate with other Arctic nations. Satellites are a prerequisite for the use of larger UAVs. If Denmark has to invest in satellites either way, it might as well invest in surveillance satellites (Kristensen, Pradhan-Blach, et al., 2013: 23–24). Satellites are consequently seen as the most likely long-term solution to the Danish surveillance requirements in the Arctic.

Mission creep is a potential risk for Danish defense planning in the Arctic (Jørgensen & Rahbek-Clemmensen, 2009). The Greenlandic authorities lack the capabilities to handle all the major contingencies that may arise as commercial activities increase. For instance, they may be unable to quell popular unrest in remote mining settlements, handle urgent health emergencies in locations with harsh weather conditions, or perform search and rescue in case of the sinking of a cruise ship within Greenlandic waters. Defense planners face a dilemma. On the one hand, these contingencies are the responsibility of the Greenlandic authorities and should not influence Danish defense planning. On the other hand, it is hard to imagine that refraining from preparing for such contingencies would not be seen as a failure by the public, should they actually occur. Defense planners may thus be motivated to plan for missions that are strictly speaking not within the purview of the Armed Forces.

One should look to the political level to find a strict definition of Armed Forces' area of responsibility. The latest defense agreement includes some guidance in that regard. It specifies that one cannot expect the same level of emergency preparedness in Greenland as in Denmark – a claim that has later been reiterated by the Danish Minister of Defense (Danish Parliament, 2012: 15; Vammen, 2014). By making this an explicit strategic guideline, Danish policymakers relieve some of the pressure from the shoulders of the Armed Forces. Should a major accident

occur in the Arctic, the Armed Forces can refer to the agreement to justify its level of preparation.

Support Regional Cooperation

Danish defense planning not only reflects a wish to handle the challenges of climate change. Following the general strategic thinking about the Arctic, it also has a political dimension that sees practical cooperation between the Arctic states as a way of defusing regional tensions. Defense planning is thus meant to support the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' diplomatic initiatives by providing a practical dimension to the somewhat lofty agreements in the various regional fora. By actually cooperating about practical missions, the Armed Forces helps defuse some of the conflict potential in the High North.

Some defense planners are aware of the potential Arctic security dilemma, caused by the investments in new capabilities. Although these new capabilities are procured for peaceful purposes, they can typically also be used for offensive ends. This may spur a reaction in the other Arctic states, who may decide to bulk up their military capabilities. States consequently risk inadvertently starting a negative spiral of militarization in the Arctic, even though they only have peaceful intensions. Arctic cooperation may help prevent a security dilemma (Jørgensen & Rahbek-Clemmensen, 2009: 19).

One potential avenue for cooperation is the Radarsat Constellation Mission, the Canadian satellite surveillance program, which is meant to be launched in 2018. Denmark is considering participating in the program that could provide a comprehensive overview of activity in the Arctic. However, Copenhagen still hesitates, citing the considerable cost of the program as one of the reasons (Svendsen & Hannestad, 2013). Defense analysts also highlight joint UAV procurement and development as another potential source of cooperation (Kristensen, Pradhan-Blach, et al., 2013: 29–30).

Naval exercises essentially serve both an operational and a political purpose. They allow the authorities to prepare for several contingencies by running through possible outcomes, thus sharpening operational readiness. They concurrently help reduce tensions between the Arctic powers by showing a sense of openness. They also allow military commanders a better understanding of the command chain of other Arctic nations and they allow them to build informal networks across borders. Historical experience shows that these mechanisms may prevent misunderstandings from spiraling out of control (Axelrod & Keohane, 1985; Jervis, 1976, 1985; Jørgensen & Rahbek-Clemmensen, 2009: 39–40).

Finally, operational cooperation in various defense fora – for instance, the North Atlantic Coast Guard Forum - also supports regional cooperation in general. Much like exercises, these fora create informal networks that give commanding officers alternative information channels. American analysts have suggested the development of a new Arctic Coast Guard Forum, the purpose of which should be to increase mutual awareness among Arctic coast guards (Conley, Toland, Kraut, & Østhagen, 2012: 38–39; Troedsson, 2013; United States Coast Guard, 2013: 27). Denmark has not rejected this idea and Danish defense planners consider it a potential for future cooperation.

Avoid Conflict with Greenland

Danish defense planning in the Arctic is also influenced by the somewhat contentious relationship between Denmark and Greenland. As mentioned before, the legitimacy of the Danish presence in Greenland is contested by some Greenlandic elite groups and segments of the Greenlandic population. The Danish authorities try to avoid offending Greenlandic sensibilities, while concurrently standing its ground on certain key matters.

Certain strategic questions, many of which would be thought to be reasonable considerations of any state, are almost taboo. For instance, the consequences of Greenlandic independence are rarely taken into consideration in Danish defense planning, although one could argue that it would have an impact on operational planning. Many of the Arctic capabilities that Denmark is currently procuring will have limited usefulness if Greenland becomes independent. In simple terms, what is Denmark supposed to do with its Arctic capabilities, if Greenland becomes independent?

The normal reaction is a mix of resigned moralism and belief that Greenland will never reach independence. On the one hand, Denmark is responsible, so one argument goes, for ensuring that an eventual transition to independence runs smoothly. Denmark must dispense of narrow national interests and invest in the capabilities regardless of the fact that they might become obsolete in the future. This line of thinking also contains an argument that sees responsibility as a way of ensuring the persistence of the Commonwealth. Perhaps Greenland will stay within the Commonwealth even if the conditions for independence arise, if Denmark acts responsible now and shows Greenland that it is not pursuing narrow national interests.

On the other hand, many observers do not believe that the time will ever be ripe for Greenlandic independence. As mentioned above, independence requires that either a major energy resource deposit is found along the Greenlandic coastline or that the United States becomes willing to sponsor the Greenlandic state. The latter does not seem likely, even in the long term. No-one knows if enough exploitable oil and gas can be found in Greenland, but even if they were found, these resources could only become profitable in the long term (Jørgensen & Rahbek-Clemmensen, 2009: 16).

The Danish Armed Forces have made establishing a better relationship to the Greenlandic society a long-term goal. The Arctic Strategy and the 2013-2017 defense agreement both stipulate the need to involve the citizens of Greenland in the activities of the Armed Forces (Danish Parliament, 2012: 15; Government of Denmark et al., 2011: 21). Translating this wish into concrete initiatives has been rather difficult. A recent study has suggested various measures, such as the inclusion of Greenlanders in land patrolling activities in North-East Greenland, using Greenlandic volunteers and local knowledge in the activities of the Armed Forces, opening military education facilities in Greenland, and including Greenlandic companies in coast guard activities (Kristensen, Hoffmann, & Pedersen, 2013).

These initiatives would probably improve the operational effectiveness of the Danish Armed Forces, albeit only marginally. From a purely operational perspective, they hardly merit the effort made to integrate Greenlandic society. Their benefits are primarily political. They serve to reduce tensions between Greenland and Denmark in general and the Armed Forces in particular. They

also help create a base of military know-how within Greenlandic society – a resource that would become essential in an independent Greenland.

Conclusion

The purpose of this piece has been to examine the challenges of Danish political-military planning in the Arctic. It shows how Danish grand strategy and political and military strategy in the Arctic fit together. Danish political military strategy reflects grand strategic goals that follow from Denmark's relationship with the US and its status as a NATO member and from Greenland's geopolitical role. Greenland functions as a bargaining chip that Denmark uses to get goodwill in the United States. Danish strategic thinking about the Arctic has become formalized over the past ten years. However, some strategic questions regarding the relationship to other powers and to the Greenlandic government are not considered in the strategies. These different strategic elements have to be elucidated from the variety of policies that make up Danish Arctic policy and more general security policy.

Handling low politics defense planning and supporting peaceful cooperation between the Arctic states are seen as ways of reproducing Danish sovereignty over Greenland. The main challenge for Danish defense planning is thus to handle the geo-economic challenges that follow from climate change. Political considerations also have an impact on defense planning. Defense planners aim to cooperate with the other Arctic states to the greatest extent possible in order to facilitate peaceful relations between the Arctic states. They also try to defuse tensions between Copenhagen and Nuuk by including Greenlandic society in the activities of the Armed Forces.

Copenhagen hopes to defend the status quo in the long term. Regional cooperation and inclusion of Greenland in decision-making are means to this end. Whether or not this actually succeeds is an open question. Several developments – most importantly the exploitation of energy resources in Greenland – may destabilize Denmark's position. However, for now, Copenhagen sees no reason to change course. Centuries of Arctic presence has taught policymakers that when it comes to the High North, prophecies of change are plentiful – actual change is sparse.

Notes

1. The Commonwealth of Denmark consists of three parts: Denmark proper, the Faroe Islands, and Greenland. The latter two are autonomous territories with extensive self-rule. Denmark largely controls the Commonwealth's defense, security, and foreign policy. This article uses the term "the Commonwealth" to denote the political unit that is made up of the three parts. "Denmark" is used to denote the Danish part of the Commonwealth, "Faroe Islands" denotes the Faroese part, and "Greenland" the Greenlandic part.

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