



SAGSNOTAT

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Vedr.: Military capacity building: Risk-taking in Danish development aid?

CENTER FOR MILITÆRE STUDIER

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The seminar was organised by Royal Danish Defence College and Centre for Military Studies in collaboration with the East African Security Governance Network.

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Speakers:

- Dr. Thomas Mandrup, associated professor (RDDC)
- Allan R. Jacobsen, Head of International Department (MOD)
- Commander sg. gr. Felix Ebbestad (DCD)
- Johannes Riber Nordby/ Dr. Katja Lindskov Jacobsen (DIIS)
- Major and PhD. Candidate Henrik Laugesen (RDDC/CAS)
- Peter Bøgh Jensen, Ministry of Foreign Affairs Denmark
- Dr. Danielle Beswick, lecturer (University of Birmingham).
- PhD. Candidate Josefine Kühnel Larsen (CMS)
- Lt. Colonel Henrik Vedel

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Number of participants: 30-35 (including military personnel, academics, diplomats and civil servants). The seminar was conducted under the Chatham House Rules to allow free debate amongst the speakers and the audience.

Military capacity building has increasingly become an integral part of Danish defence. Military capacity is a new way of thinking Danish defence and poses a new set of challenges and opportunities for the Danish military and the Political leadership.

This seminar focussed on some of the risks involved in Military capacity building and how these risks are dealt with from a macro level, in terms of political decision-making, and on a micro level by furthering understandings of the local context.

The military as an institution is conditioned to take high levels of risk. Risks related to the potential loss of life, both military and civilian, and to the military's institutional reputation. Civilian institutions involved in international development, while also willing to take certain levels of risk, are less conditioned to these risks. Military capacity building projects that involve both military and civilian aspects therefore have to take this diverge risk experience into account.

When the focus of Danish Military capacity is on 'African solutions to African problems' it means that the practical responsibility for the project is largely repositioned from the Danish partners to the receiving partners¹. In this context African governments take the primary responsibility for resolving conflicts on the continent. The Danish government has recognised that there is risks involved in Military capacity building and have stated willingness to accept substantial risks.

Denmark assists in building the capacity of militaries to take the lead in resolving and responding to African conflicts, particularly through the provision of combat troops to peacekeeping missions. Capacity building is an integrated approach to peace-making. The hope is that by strengthening countries' military and the ability to solve their own and regional security threats will also help tackle the root causes of insecurity.

Denmark's current focus in terms of Military capacity building is in East Africa. Denmark is engaged in Military capacity building of the East African Standby Force (EASF), the Rwanda Defence Force and the Kenyan Navy. In addition to these initiatives, Danish personnel staff a number of high-level positions in the UN Mission Headquarter (UNMISS) in South Sudan. While Danish Military capacity building is largely limited to Kenya and Rwanda, other Danish development initiatives, for example in Somalia, also contribute to the restoration of peace and stability in the region. In So-

¹ In line with various development agendas on aid sustainability e.g. Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and the Accra Agenda for Action

malia, Denmark is particularly concerned with: 1. Piracy along the coast; 2. Terrorism; and 3. Food crisis. While the threat from piracy has declined and a government has been set up in Somaliland, Somalia still poses a security concern for Denmark. AMISOM, an AU force working under a UN mandate, is viewed as key to stabilisation in the country.

The suspension of the Danish Military capacity building project in Rwanda in October 2012, which had been launched only months before the suspension date, has promoted a questioning of whether there is an asymmetry between the stated willingness take risk, and acceptance of risk in practice. This example brings to the fore some issues that should be considered in relation to the planning and implementation of future Military capacity projects.

The Danish support for Military capacity building in Rwanda is contributing to the development of a 'Rapid Deployment Capability' (RDC). The Rwandan RDC will be a contribution to the East Africa Stand-by Force (EASF), which is one of five regional forces of the African Standby Force (ASF).

Rwanda has been both a player in regional peace and security *and* conflict and insecurity. Rwanda has a violent history with divisions leading to civil war in 1990-1994 and genocide in 1994, and with involvement in the two Congo wars. From an international perspective this has conjured the spectre of Rwanda's military strength as a destabilising influence in the region. However, from an internal military perspective the fighting experience has conditioned the soldiers to tough conditions and danger that they can draw upon in their work in stabilising the region, i.e. no job is too tough for a Rwandan soldier. The Rwanda Defence Force perceive African militaries to be better equipped to undertake peacekeeping than Western militaries because they have an inherent understanding of the underlying problems beneath the conflicts and that they can easier adapt to harsh operational environments because it is similar to those of their home countries.

Rwanda's potential involvement in destabilising the region was highlighted in a UN rapport in 2012 that accused members of the military and political leadership of supporting the rebel group M23 in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). This resulted in several donor countries freezing their aid to Rwanda, despite Rwanda's previous involvement in DRC, and previous accusations of supporting rebel groups in DRC as well as committing human rights abuses both in DRC and during the genocide. These issues were evident to the Danish administration upon starting up the Military capacity project, and it was judged that the risks related to these issues were acceptable.

A main factor impacting willingness to take risk is the behaviour of Denmark's allies. As several western countries froze aid to Rwanda over the perceived support for the rebel group in DRC, Denmark followed suit and suspended the project. The relationship with other allies deems it necessary to take higher risks in some countries, such as Afghanistan and Somalia, than others, like Rwanda. In this regard, the risks involved in the Military capacity project were related to Denmark's political reputation. Denmark could potentially be accused of developing Military capacities that may be abused and lead to undesired results. The risks to the political reputation highlights the fact that risks may not be directly project related, but related to the larger context in which the project takes place. This raises questions of whether Denmark involved in Military capacity building for domestic benefits such as international reputation, or if the projects are carried out with the local partner's well-being as the highest priority. Thus, the motivations for undertaking the projects should be clear. In addition, the projects location in the regional as well as national political climate must be considered in relation to the extent to which the Danish administration is willing to take risks.

The Danish Military capacity project in Rwandan is supporting the development of a *regional* RDC. In this way, Denmark is not directly supporting Rwanda, but supporting a multinational project that provides capacities that will enable the African Union to quickly respond to emergencies. Forces are provided by nations under the umbrella of a *regional* composition. While support may be given to a specific country, e.g. Kenya or Rwanda, the larger objective is to strengthen the *regional* security architecture. The regional focus must be emphasized when addressing the political risks involved in the project support.

The suspension of the Danish Military capacity building project responded to the potential negative risks; however the positive benefits of Military capacity building must also be emphasised in addressing willingness to take risks. Rwanda is the 6th highest contributor to UN and AU peacekeeping missions, and consequently a key actor in regional peacekeeping. The Rwandan soldier perceives himself as a 'skilled combatant' and a 'guardian of peace'. The Rwandan soldier has been a main contributor to reconciliation and development in Rwanda and therefore has a lot of experience with building peace that he draws upon when on peacekeeping operations. To transcend the history of violence, the RDF has created a culture of standing as an example of a pure, proud and clean military. Rwanda is a small state with a strong, developmentally minded government, and has enjoyed high international support despite previous involvement in DRC and previous accusations. This predicament is illustrated in the United Kingdom's (UK) risk

assessment of their contributing of aid to Rwanda. In July 2012 the UK withheld aid to the country. Nonetheless, DIFID later described the Rwandan military as a 'force for peace', and restated aid in September. It is important to note that aid was reinstated despite the set conditions set by the UK government *not* being met. This raises the question of whether the contribution to security elsewhere in Africa shields Rwanda's government from criticism of polities that have provoked insecurity.

Willingness to take risk in Military capacity building is thus linked to the response of allies to the risks, and to the negative risks to political reputation. Other factors related to willingness to take risk is the regional vs. local nature of the project, and the positive factors that influence the severity of risk, as shown in the UK reinstatement of aid to Rwanda. The extents to which the decision making institutions have been prior conditioned to risks are highly influential in deciding if and when the risks are too high. Increasing coordination between the military and the civilian actors may increase understandings of the risk levels involved in undertaking Military capacity building. It could be argued that Military capacity building does not differ markedly from other projects undertaken within a development context. Willingness to take risk in Military capacity building should thus draw upon lessons learnt from capacity building in development programmes.

It is essential to bear in mind that the sustainability of the projects is a shared responsibility and that engagement with another country's military should foster the development of strong professional relationships founded on mutual respect. The donor/recipient relationship should be transcended by one of partnership and mutual respect. When projects are suspended for risk purposes mutual respect may be damaged and the unequal relationship of donor and recipient is reinforced.