

# Denmark During the Cold War

## National Security Policy and the International Environment 1945-1991

### Highlights

Available June 30, 2005 10:00 am

*The comprehensive four volume report is the result of a commission by the Nyrup Rasmussen and Fogh Rasmussen governments. According to the expanded Commission of August 23, 2002, the report's purpose is not just to elucidate Denmark's strategy concerning its security policy in response to the military threat to Denmark and other West European nations posed by the Soviet Union and its Warsaw pact allies, but also encompasses a thorough analysis of Denmark's national security policy and the national security debate, with emphasis on the period leading up to the end of the Cold War. Efforts of the Warsaw Pact allies to influence Danish security policy, directly or indirectly through political organizations or the political parties, are brought forward as being of special interest to the Commission. The full contents of the (government's) commission are stated in Chapter 1.*

#### I. Overview of Danish security policy during the Cold War

1. During the entire period from 1949-1991, Denmark was firmly anchored into NATO. Alliance membership played an overwhelming role in the shaping of Denmark's national security policy in general and in Denmark's relations with and attitude towards the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe in particular. The impact of NATO membership on Denmark's foreign policy and security policy can hardly be overestimated. Denmark's commitments to NATO by far outweighed the reservations in other areas, primarily the decision that Danish soil be free of nuclear weapons in peacetime. Overall, Denmark was not a reserved ally, but became increasingly integrated in NATO over time, politically as well as militarily. For the most part, the NATO allies perceived Denmark as a loyal member. On balance, Denmark's commitment strategy towards NATO carried much more weight than the few Danish limitations on military integration, which were also a part of national security policy. From the Soviet side, Denmark was perceived in the big picture, as a country whose basic take on their national security strategy was fixed and could not realistically be

expected to change. At the same time, the Eastern bloc occasionally perceived Denmark as one of the "weak links in the chain".

2. The Eastern bloc's pursuit of *influence* was not a determining factor in Danish national security policy, but the *relations* with the Eastern bloc was a subject for constant attention and evaluation, one point of consideration being the balancing act between deterrence and non-provocation. This was the case for even the biggest countries among the NATO allies.

Alliance membership was a precondition that enabled Denmark to sidestep a policy of concessions or acquiescence towards the Eastern bloc, just as it eliminated the need to ever adapt to dictates by the Soviet Union. That resolve, with which Danish *governments* withstood pressure from the Eastern bloc, was remarked upon several times in Western diplomatic reports from Copenhagen. At the same time, it was a recurrent theme in Western diplomatic reports that a faction of Danish *opinion* was neutrally oriented.

## II. The Eastern Bloc's Influence Attempts and Intelligence Activities

3. The Eastern bloc's attempts to win influence and its intelligence activities were extensive, but produced limited results. A thorough examination of the Eastern bloc's propaganda and its influence peddling campaigns towards Denmark can be found in 11 chapters. Three aspects of the theme are covered. They are to a large extent based on new or overlooked source material. First, propaganda's known or open side is considered. Second, the Eastern bloc's plans and apparatus for this work, including their relations with Danish political parties and movements. Third, the reaction by Danish authorities, especially the intelligence services, and the Danish public to the attempts of influence peddling is treated. Public opinion is extensively covered in 20 chapters on national security policy debate in Denmark. With its integrated coverage of these three aspects of the topic, this report gives a more faceted picture of the Eastern bloc's influence peddling activities than has hereto been available.

4. The conclusion is that the Eastern bloc's attempts at influence peddling had a very limited impact upon Danes' everyday picture of the Eastern bloc's political systems, society and foreign policy. On the other hand, their efforts indubitably had a certain effect on the contents of the debate on Denmark's national security policy. However, the debates' themes and dynamic were primarily determined by the broader international climate and by developments and ideational trends in the Western societies as a whole.

A rather widely held opinion among Danes, especially in the second half of the Cold War, was that the conflict between East and West primarily represented a system threat (*weapons* and the politics behind them are dangerous in themselves) and only secondarily an actor threat ("The *Russians* are dangerous"). This opinion was not held out of sympathy towards the Eastern systems, but focused in high degree on the political and military dangers, which one in accordance to this perception saw as emanating from the dynamic of the military strategies and the arms race.

5. A special place in the report holds a thorough examination of the contacts of the Danish Communist Party (DKP) with Eastern bloc countries and the party's operations in Denmark. It is supplemented by almost 20 pages of minutes declassified for this

report from former DKP chairman Aksel Larsen's secret conversations with representatives from a Western allied country in the years 1958-1964. Aksel Larsen laces these conversations with his personal observations concerning DKP's role in Denmark and the situation in West European revisionist parties. Larsen, who was by then chairman of the Socialist People's Party, obviously was an agent of a Western intelligence service.

6. All in all, 9 chapters describe *the civil and military side of Eastern bloc intelligence activities* towards Denmark. We are presented with the picture of an extensive and systematic intelligence gathering operation in Denmark. Intelligence officers from especially the Soviet and Polish embassies were active throughout the period, particularly in the military field through terrain reconnaissance. The East Germans worked mainly with agents, the so-called "illegals". Danish citizens were also among the agents recruited by East German intelligence operatives—26 in all during the period from 1972–1988, according to Stasi's Foreign Department, HVA's, own files (Rosewood). Despite intensive Eastern activity in the intelligence operations arena, no Danish citizens have been identified as "top spies", in contrast to the situation found in other countries, e.g. the Federal Republic of Germany. In addition, it is unproven that any serious infiltration of Denmark's defense and/or administrative departments occurred, aside from the few and hereto well known cases (e.g. Blechingberg and Lenz).

7. The above findings are based on fresh, hereto unavailable, source material; the first being from the archives of Denmark's two Intelligence Services and the second being Polish, East German and Soviet intelligence operations archives. Especially noteworthy among the many new sources is: a) a huge amount of Polish and East German material, showing all phases of military intelligence activities -- from the first stages of plan development, to the execution of the operation, to the final results in the form of, for example, detailed descriptions of Danish port and landing sites; b) several thousand pages of material detailing Polish intelligence's infiltration of the Danish Embassy in Warsaw, through the photographing of official documents and wiretapping (as was to a certain degree anticipated and planned for from the Danish side); c) several hundred pages of material that through words and pictures describes Polish intelligence's "dead letter boxes" and contact sites all over Denmark—along with in some cases, buried depots; d) circa 300 documents from the archive of the Danish counterintelligence (PET). Among them is PET's Stasi case, which presents a picture of Danish Stasi-agent activities—among which the well-known Lenz case.

8. This is the first time that the findings and assessments of Danish counterintelligence have been incorporated in so broad a picture. In this respect, the report delivers a compendium for further debate and research. The first spade has been turned in a huge cache of new material—primarily with an eye towards revealing aspects of the Eastern bloc's political and military threat. The material presented, aside from its factual information on the Eastern bloc's activities, sheds light on the ideology and worldview of the Danish intelligence services.

### III. The Military Threat to Denmark

9. The Eastern military threat towards Denmark is analyzed in the course of 14 chapters. From the available sources, one can not demonstrate that the Soviet Union

and the other Warsaw Pact countries had intentions of embarking on an unprovoked attack upon the West. Neither is this considered likely. On the contrary, the Soviet Union had, in general, a quite cautious policy towards the West; despite numerous plans and war games, the thinking of the Warsaw Pact was focused on how to react to a possible attack from the West and thereafter to seize the initiative through an offensive operation, as quickly as possible. Concerning the Eastern bloc's potential use of nuclear weapons, even through the 1960's, its plans at that time implied the use of big nuclear weapons against Danish targets. At the latest, from the beginning of the 1970's, this picture began to change and now the premise for the Eastern bloc's use became that NATO forces first used atomic weapons or had decided to do so.

10. As early as 1950, in Polish military exercise material, Denmark is conquered by Polish forces. That is to say, in a period where Poland hardly had the ability to fulfill such an operation. Polish exercises in the period up to 1955 were built upon the premise of large scale Western (especially British and American) operations against Poland using Danish, and especially, Swedish harbors and airbases, as jumping off points. The Soviet Union engaged upon a clear, offensive strategy towards Western Europe around 1961, where Denmark should be subdued within 14 days and the Eastern bloc's navies penetrate Danish waters into the North Sea. The mission to conquer Denmark, after their own request, fell to Poland. To all appearances, that particular task was maintained as an obligation up until 1987, when the Warsaw Pact countries adopted a defensive military doctrine.

11. Presumably, the Warsaw Pact countries were at their greatest military strength around 1975. However, already from 1976, Eastern bloc intelligence services delivered disturbing reports at Warsaw Pact top meetings concerning the modernization of the West's defense systems. From that point on, the Eastern bloc's intelligence officers presented, from their point of view, an increasingly dark picture of the West's capabilities and intentions. From 1981 on, the idea of an American led nuclear attack preyed on the Soviet leadership's consciousness. Meanwhile, the Americans were ratcheting up their psychological warfare, and that also contributed to the Soviet leadership's increasingly extensive readiness preparations in reaction to Western military exercises from around 1981. Under the impression of a gradual shift of the balance of power to the West's advantage, expressed in one of many ways through increased Western naval and air force activity in the Baltic Sea region, the Soviet General Staff changed the Eastern bloc's offensive military strategy in the direction of greater emphasis on Eastern defensive operations. This occurred in the first half of the 1980's. This trend also made itself felt in the naval sphere, where the East Germans, in 1980, had already abandoned their plans for a sea landing operation against Denmark.

The military sections are based on information gleaned from several thousands of pages of reports and threat evaluations from the archives of the Danish Military Intelligence (FE), along with a sizeable cache of Warsaw Pact material from particularly Polish and East German military archives.

#### IV. The Development of Western Grand Strategies

12. The Western grand strategy towards the Eastern side changed throughout the Cold War. The USA's grand strategy—ostensibly the same as NATO's—was one of "containment". At the end of the 1960's and through most of the 1970's, this containment policy was supplemented by the policies of détente and co-operation

(primarily due to the Helsinki process and West Germany's Ostpolitik; both primarily European initiatives). Inspired by the Harmel formula's balance between defense and détente, NATO's grand strategy was now defined as a strategy of military parity and co-operation, not least by West Germany.

13. This picture changed, however, at the end of the 1970's under President Carter, but especially in the 1980's under President Reagan (1981-1989). Under the Reagan administration, the USA took on a grand strategy (the Victory Strategy) that developed in parallel with NATO's grand strategy. The USA's goal was to force the Soviet Union to its knees -- politically, economically and militarily. The means were both open (rhetoric, rearmament, SDI, offensive naval politics) and secret (psychological warfare and covert operations). The covert operations have just begun to come to light in recent years.

14. The Americans' new Victory Strategy increased tension in relation to The Soviet Union and it also created a tangible feeling of uncertainty and hesitancy in Europe, where one did not have full insight to the developments in American grand strategy. This was the background for the widespread anger and frustration in connection to the USA that broke out among the Europeans in the beginning of the 1980's. On the other hand, the Soviet Union reacted cautiously to the new American strategy, closest with a "wait and see policy". Under all circumstances, it was an economic impossibility to compete with the American rearmament.

15. From the second half of the 1970's, Warsaw Pact countries interpreted the West's military upgrading as a growing military threat and were forced to gradually revise their offensive strategy. That job commenced long before Gorbachev came into power. Under the impression of a perceived and strongly felt increasing threat of an American nuclear attack, in 1981 the Soviet leadership initiated an extensive intelligence operation which it dubbed "Ryan". Operation Ryan ran throughout the 1980's. The operation was designed to give the Soviet leadership trustworthy information concerning if or when a Western nuclear attack was underway.

16. The heightened readiness level in the Soviet nuclear preparedness areas became apparent in 1983 during the NATO exercise "Able Archer". It became obvious to President Reagan that the Americans' Victory Strategy considerably increased the risks for atomic warfare between the USA and the Soviet Union. Thereafter a more conciliatory tone was taken up from the American side in some respects—and a cooperative relationship was initiated with the new Soviet leadership under Gorbachev, along with arms control negotiations being set into place (1985).

## V. Security Policy Developments in the 1980's

17. The Reagan administration's confrontational approach brought forth a widespread skepticism among Europeans. That skepticism included people such as Hans-Dietrich Genscher, liberal Foreign Minister of West Germany and Lord Carrington, former British Foreign Minister from the Conservative Party and future Secretary-General for NATO (the 1983 Alastair Buchan Memorial Lecture on the State of the Alliance in the IISS). But the skepticism that set in was especially strong among the North European Social Democrats (the Scandilux-cooperative partners) who all came into opposition in the beginning of the 1980's. The skepticism manifested itself especially in relation to

the negotiations around the INF double decision in 1982-1983. In light of the proceedings and political circumstances surrounding the INF negotiations, the European Social Democrats perceived a break with NATO's earlier policy and an expression of a new policy with relation to the Soviet Union. The Danish Social Democrats' political stance was shaped under the influence of discussions within the Scandilux-partnership. However, due to the alternative security policy majority in the Danish Parliament, there were better possibilities to plead Scandilux's political position in Denmark than in the other countries.

18. The Social Democrats' policy in relation to the double decision did not affect the party's support of NATO membership. But it was an expression of the party's security policy shift to the left—in order to hold together internally -- in light of the onset of a generation change (1971 and 1973 elections), experiences from the Vietnam War, European Reagan skepticism—and, finally, the belief that the political adjustment could contribute to bringing the party back into government.

19. Whereas INF politics (and to a certain degree the politics concerning a nuclear free zone) were based on common Scandilux positions, then the handling and high political prioritization of a nuclear free zone and – finally – the "nuclear port call case" in 1988 was mainly a *Danish* Social Democratic security turning point. Other Scandilux Social Democrats were not fully behind in these cases —and especially the "nuclear port call case" developed into a serious domestic conflict. However, in no instance was the politics an expression of concessions to the Soviet Union and the Eastern bloc.

20. The Social Democrats' turn to the left concerning security policy was not markedly reflected in defense policy. On this issue the traditional defense consensus parties were united concerning a continued effort to increase the effectiveness and improve infrastructure. This made the Danish military an increasingly valuable alliance partner (within the means at their disposal). There was a crack in the national security policy consensus, but it was not broken. The fundamental orientation of Danish security policy was unchanged.

21. In the critical years (1982-1985), the non-Socialist government chose to let national security policy partially follow in the steps of the USA in the West's sharpening of tone and stance towards the Soviet Union. At the same time, the government chose to live with the footnotes as it decided that economic policy and co-operation with the Social Liberals took priority. There were different perceptions within the government concerning this political tactic. Obviously, the more problematic one made footnote politics to be publicly, the more problematic it became that the government did not take the parliamentary consequences. At the same time, outside of the media's searchlight, the Foreign Minister tried to argue the majority's (and the government's own) point of view in order to moderate aspects of the Americans' Victory Strategy -- especially concerning SDI and the interim solution in the INF-case.

## VI. The Consequences of Footnote Politics

The report's conclusions concerning two of the decisive questions in the Danish national security debate on the Cold War's last ten years can be summarized as follows:

### 22. *What were the consequences of footnote politics?*

a) It had no demonstrable impact on *international development* that Denmark placed INF and SDI footnotes (and it is also understandable in this light, that the Schlüter government did not elevate it to a question of confidence). To that purpose, Denmark lacked, quite simply, sufficient influence in NATO.

b) In NATO and the international security policy environment, Denmark's *general foreign policy influence and reputation* was to some degree negatively affected by parliamentary agenda politics and the footnotes, but without demonstrable ensuing consequences for Danish *security*. This evaluation is encumbered by uncertainty and carried out on the basis of divergent observations and pronouncements. Outside of NATO and the security policy environment, the effects of the footnote politics were presumably limited.

## VII. Why Did The Soviet Union Lose the Cold War?

23) There is a main explanation and two supplementary explanations to this question. Together, these three explanations create an integrated explanation nexus. The main explanation is the multiple years of stagnation in the Soviet economy and the deep crisis within the society that, after a while, led to a genuine decline.

The two supplementary explanations are, respectively, Western idea politics and the Western "policy of strength". The crucial aspect of Western idea politics – as it came to expression in, for instance, CSCE and the German Ostpolitik—was its double effect: it was both accommodating and subversive in relation to the Eastern bloc. What concerns the Western "policy of strength", the outcome of its multifarious components was the undermining of the Soviet elite's belief in the Soviet system's ability to cope within the new (information) technological revolution and thereby to cope in a traditional policy of strength competition with the West. At the same time, seen in a rear view mirror, it is clear that during the Cold War's final 10 years, the course of events was stamped by a somewhat dangerous Western politic.