

# Why Small Navies Prefer Warfighting Over Counter-Piracy

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**Abstract.** This chapter uses recent operational history of the Royal Danish Navy as a case study into the particular challenges that small navies face. Denmark provides a useful lens because the long counter-piracy mission from 2008-2015 consumed a substantial amount of the navy's collective warfighting resources. The experience was that it was impossible to maintain a sufficient level of warfighting skills while also committing so many resources to a maritime policing operation. From the literature on small navies it is identified that they typically struggle with problems related to critical mass of materiel, maintaining a sufficient training and education system, limited bureaucratic strength, and a tendency of their leaders to be over-ambitious. It is shown that the requirement to prioritize resources has enticed the Danish Navy to find innovative solutions, but that in the process some choices may have led to an unconscious acceptance of lower standards and disregard for the complexity of less prestigious tasks.

**Keywords.** Denmark, Piracy, Somalia, Royal Danish Navy

## Introduction

In this chapter I examine how small navies manage conflicting requirements when forced to prioritize between maritime security operations and high-intensity warfighting. All navies face the challenge of balancing ambitions and means, but small navies are particularly obliged to make hard choices. For them, setting priorities is often a matter of abandoning tasks altogether, whereas larger navies have more resources to shuffle around.

I use a case study of Denmark as a prism into the problem. Denmark provides a good example because the country has combined a lean military structure with an impressive willingness to commit naval forces abroad. This means that the Royal Danish Navy (RDN) has had to display flexibility to make ends meet. Between 2008 and 2015, the counter-piracy mission around the Horn of Africa absorbed most of the resources for the country's larger warships. Then, in 2015, a dramatic shift in focus occurred, as the Navy removed its ships from the counter-piracy effort and instead focused on regaining lost abilities in high-intensity warfighting. The consensus was that the counter-piracy effort had influenced negatively on the performance of the warships in traditional naval disciplines, and that it was time to "get back to basics."

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The Danish example is profound, but it is also characteristic. All small navies face similar dilemmas of balancing tasks and resources. It is also common to experience that a long counter-piracy mission makes it hard for a crew to remain sharp at high-intensity warfighting. But the Danish case is particularly useful, because Denmark committed so wholeheartedly to the operation against Somali piracy for six years and then quit abruptly.

First, I lay out the theory about small navies. I elaborate on the theoretical aspects, as the goal of the chapter is to say something general about small navies and not particularly about Denmark. I examine different standards by which navies can be categorized, and I show why it is reasonable to say that Denmark has a small navy. This may seem like a commonsense argument, but indeed by some of the popular categorization models the RDN is not small. Then I move on to describing the particular challenges that small navies face. I particularly draw on Geoffrey Till's (2003, 2014, 2016) writing to derive a model that can function as a framework for analysis. This model identifies critical mass, training and education, and political influence as the three areas that particularly cause problems for small navies. I also expand on a point by Basil Germond (2016) to show that small navies gravitate toward overstretch in order to overcome the inherent unpleasantness of "smallness."

Then I move on to describing the history of the Danish engagement in the counter-piracy mission off Somalia. I show that it was a hard mission, and that it took time before the RDN and the bureaucracy at home mastered the challenges. I also describe the costs that counter-piracy had for the Navy in regard to retention problems and training standards. To solve these problems, the RDN contracted with training institutions in the United Kingdom and Germany to bring the ships back up to standards. To this day, this training and certification effort remains the most pronounced commitment for the Danish warships.

In the last section of the chapter, I analyze the Danish counter-piracy endeavor from a perspective of small navy theory. I identify patterns and problems related to critical mass, training and education, and political influence, and I point to instances where the desire to overcome smallness has led the RDN to make compromises. I apply the theory with a critical approach to investigate assumptions and explanations. In all areas this leads to distinctive explanations and warnings about possible pitfalls, and especially within the category of training and education the critical approach indicates some areas where unconscious assumptions may have led the RDN to make choices that probably aren't helpful in the long run. This contributes with particular (and hopefully useful) knowledge about the RDN, but it also provides an example of how small navy mechanisms play out more generally, and how such an analysis could be performed with a different case study in mind.

## **1. Theory about small navies**

The first problem in a theoretical discussion about small navies is how to define them. Several classification systems have been developed to group navies into conceptual categories. One of the more popular models was created by the naval historian Eric Grove in 1990. The system was mainly based on quantitative data about a navy's capabilities, and its nine categories were defined by the ability to project power abroad (Germond, 2016, pp. 35–36). Grove later revised his system and optimistically included Denmark as a rank three navy because of the improvements in force structure (Grove, 2016, p. 18).

This places Denmark as a “Medium Regional Force Projection Navy.” Grove notes that small navies are from level four and smaller, so by this standard, the RDN is not a small navy.

Germond points out that such classifications often suffer from the weakness of ascribing excessive value to the ability to project power on large distances (2016, pp. 44–45). At one end of the scale we find navies with global power projection reach, and at the other end are those navies that can only perform constabulary duties in domestic waters. The assumption is that if you can project power abroad, you automatically also have the ability to do everything else that the scale covers. That is a controversial assumption when looking at a navy like the RDN. Denmark only has five ships with warfighting capabilities, namely the Absalon-class flexible support ships and the Iver Huitfeldt-class frigates. These are large ships with great capabilities for long-range deployments, but Denmark only has the same five platforms to solve all tasks related to warfighting. Aside from a few smaller vessels for mine hunting, the rest of the ships in the RDN are designed for constabulary duties. The counter-piracy operation revealed that Denmark was unable to sustain prolonged participation in maritime security operations in the Gulf of Aden while also maintaining a satisfactory training level for high-intensity warfighting. For Denmark, participation in long-range power projection meant compromising on the ability to engage in sea denial activities closer to home.

A practical approach that does account for the limited number of platforms but still relies on quantitative data is promoted by Patton (2019). He measures fleet strength based on the ability to bring Battle Force Missiles to the battlefield. Patton uses Robert O. Work’s definition of Battle Force Missiles as “missiles that contribute to battle force missions such as area and local air defense, anti-surface warfare, and anti-submarine warfare. Terminal defense SAMs, which protect only the host ship, are not considered a battle force missile” (Work, 2005, p. 90). For Denmark this means that Harpoon missiles count, but Evolved Sea Sparrow does not. Patton works with a categorization of warships into six categories depending on the number of Battle Force Missiles they are able to carry. By this standard, Denmark has five sixth-rate warships, which is the lowest category. When Denmark receives the newly ordered SM-2 missiles for the Iver Huitfeldt-class, some of these ships will be raised to rate five. The rest of the ships in the RDN are in the “unrated” category. A total of five rated warships clearly constitutes a small navy.

An even more pragmatic definition of small navies comes from Till. For him, a small navy is not inherently different from a larger navy but has “limited means and aspirations” (Till, 2003). Denmark fits this definition. The official ambition for the RDN is defined as “Up to two large units from the navy deployed at short notice, or a large unit from the navy deployed in a sustained mission” (Danish Ministry of Defence, 2012, p. 3). In other words, if Denmark deploys one warship for a sustained counter-piracy mission, the Navy is not expected to have capacity left for anything but constabulary duties at home. That is indeed “limited means and aspirations” for a country whose domestic area covers the entrance to the Baltic Sea, the Faroe Islands, and Greenland, and whose merchant fleet contributes with 25 percent of the country’s total exports (Danish Maritime Authority, n.d.).

Till identifies a range of challenges for smaller navies (Till, 2014, 2016). First, a small navy will suffer from a problem related to critical mass. It is difficult to achieve economy of scale when you only operate a few ships of each class. It is also harder for a small navy to be flexible because deployments are a big endeavor. A larger navy can have a predictable operational schedule because it requires constant presence at sea. This

way, a large navy reacts to current events by issuing a new tasking for ships that are already deployed, whereas a small navy faces all kinds of obstacles before a ship is ready to depart. All this contributes to uncertainty for mission planners, and it may reduce the impression of value for money because the navy looks like an expensive asset to use.

The second problem is related to the small number of people. It is difficult for small navies to maintain NATO standard training and education systems. The cost of running top-of-the-line training facilities for specialists and higher education institutions for officers may exceed the possibilities of a small navy that only has a few students for each course. This may force a small navy to either send their personnel abroad for training or to be satisfied with lower standards than a larger navy can achieve. Reduced manning also tends to lead to fewer days at sea, which greatly impacts training levels and cooperation opportunities with other navies.

A third problem for smaller navies is that they have fewer people to influence national policy. It is difficult for small navies to achieve institutional mass, and there are fewer advocates for the naval cause in the political system and in society as a whole. This problem is exacerbated if the navy has compromised on the education of officers, or if the navy's structure has made it difficult to achieve a balanced sea-shore employment ratio. In that case, officers will be less likely to have the necessary professional experience to influence policy when they are faced with the opportunity. In this sense, countries with small navies are even more prone to sea blindness than other countries.

A fourth problem for small navies is pointed out by Germond (2016): It is inherently unpleasant to be labeled as small. The dominant discourse about navies is based on ranking systems like Grove's nine categories or Patton's focus on firepower, and it is a lot more attractive to be near the "major global force" end of the scale than to the "token navy" moniker at the bottom (Grove, 2016, p. 16). This tendency to equate smallness with inferiority can leave small navies susceptible to overstretch as their leaders try to "punch above their weight."

All this leads to an analytical model where small navy problems can be viewed as relating to:

1. Critical mass
2. Training and education
3. Political influence

And below this there will be an undercurrent that nudges the small navy in a direction of trying to bite off more than it can chew.

Based on this model, I will examine the choices and coping techniques of the RDN when forced to prioritize between counter-piracy and high-intensity warfighting. But first, in the next section, I explain the nature of that dilemma.

## **2. Denmark's dilemma between counter-piracy and high-intensity warfighting**

The problem that the RDN faced was a classical one: Should the navy be used to protect the maritime trading system or for military warfighting? But the RDN was not alone in facing this choice. The whole international system saw a change in focus around 2014 that led many countries to reorient their naval assets to peer-level warfighting rather than counter-piracy. Incidentally, the Somali piracy problem seemed to be under control around the same time as Russia annexed Crimea and engaged in a proxy war in Eastern Ukraine.

The Absalon-class was still new when Somali piracy accelerated. While both Absalon and the second of class, Esbern Snare, were commissioned in 2005, they did not achieve full operational status until 2007 and 2008 respectively (Nørby & Wismann, 2016, p. 26). Absalon deployed to the Horn of Africa in August 2008 and joined the Combined Task Force 150 a month later. This means that preparations to deploy Absalon to the Horn of Africa began almost immediately after the last sea trials. It soon became clear that this was new territory for Denmark. Just two days after Absalon's arrival to the operations area, the ship arrested ten suspected pirates and caused a minor political crisis in Denmark (Ellemann, 2008). The legal framework was far from ready, and nobody knew what to do with them. They were eventually released back into Somalia, which to the chagrin of the Danish sailors appeared to become the standard procedure during the early years of the operation (Ritzau, 2013). Later, such things became more organized, and the RDN developed routines and a comprehensive legal catalogue so captured pirates could have their cases tried. But it illustrates that counter-piracy is complex business, and that a navy should be careful not to underestimate the requirements.

The counter-piracy operation continued to be the most important international commitment for the RDN until 2014. With only short breaks, Denmark was present around the Horn of Africa with either the Absalon-class or the Iver Huitfeldt-class. So intense was the effort that Iver Huitfeldt in 2012 deployed to relieve the Absalon-class even before reaching full operational status (Danish Defence Command, 2012).

By 2010, the international counter-piracy effort started to have a positive effect, and the number of new attacks gradually declined. By 2013 there were almost no new attacks. This left room for the Navy leadership to look in new directions. By then, the RDN was marked by the busy deployment schedule (Kidmose, 2014, p. 15). Employee retention was appalling, as the same few crews rotated through the operations area (Kolding, 2015). There was also a realization that the counter-piracy mission consumed too many resources, and that the crews needed more time for training and exercising. It probably didn't help that the ships had deployed almost directly from sea trials to the counter-piracy operation, so they had never been fully tested as warships, and for many tasks they lacked proper standard operating procedures. This made it difficult for the crews to maintain standards through internal training in the mission area. The result was unsatisfactory warfighting abilities on the Danish warships, but the intensive schedule left few possibilities for the Navy to do anything about it.

The leadership of the RDN decided to look abroad for assistance in bringing the warships up to standards in high-intensity warfighting. The estimate was that Denmark did not have the resources to do this on their own. The first reason was that the Danish school structure did not have the manpower to solve the task. The notion was that this would be a fundamental paradigm change that involved the entire Navy and not just the ships and their crews (Trojahn, 2014, p. 10). The second reason was that Denmark no longer had enough ships or aircraft to conduct meaningful exercises on their own (Brøndum, 2015; Kidmose, 2014, p. 17). For example, the Navy had abandoned its submarine fleet in order to concentrate resources on the Absalon-class and Iver Huitfeldt-class (Till, 2014). This meant that Denmark no longer had resources to train anti-submarine warfare (ASW) without the assistance of a foreign submarine. And a third reason, which was less vociferously expressed in public, was that the leadership knew how unpopular this move would be with many employees. Concepts such as action messing (i.e. eating your lunch really fast) and pedantic safe for sea procedures are a tough sell for a crew that is accustomed to the calm operational pace of a counter-piracy mission. The operation off Somalia had taken so long that many specialists and younger

officers had never experienced what it means to be professional at high-intensity warfighting. They had an overconfident self-image because the counter-piracy mission was so successful, and because the RDN received a lot of praise for its efforts (Ewence, 2014). These crewmembers would not be willing to learn from a fellow Dane, because they had the impression that they were the experts.

So, the RDN required outside assistance, and the answer was found in the United Kingdom and Germany. The ambition was that Danish warships would complete a full training and certification program with Flag Officer Sea Training (FOST) in the United Kingdom. FOST has a reputation of being the golden standard of warship training, so this was an ambitious goal (Kolding, 2016). A full program for a Danish warship at FOST takes six weeks, but it requires a lot of practice beforehand. To ensure a sufficient entrance level, the RDN engaged with the German battle damage school Einsatzausbildungszentrum Schadensabwehr Marine (EAZS M) in Neustadt. Here the Danish crews would receive world class training in battle damage management, which is the dimension of warfighting often dubbed “the internal battle.”

It was impossible for the RDN to initiate the project with FOST and EAZS M while also sustaining a counter-piracy mission. Taking a crew through a full FOST certification was an effort at least on par with the demands of deploying that same crew to the Indian Ocean for a comparable amount of time. In order to begin the process of prioritizing high-intensity warfighting abilities, the RDN needed a less intensive operational schedule.

By 2014, it was clear that the counter-piracy mission would end, and the frigate Peter Willemoes was sent to FOST for a pre-course familiarization visit (Hviid, 2014). In 2015, Peter Willemoes completed the full program with a good result, and the naval leadership expressed undisclosed enthusiasm to reach this milestone. Naval chief, rear admiral Frank Trojahn, boldly exclaimed that “The crew of Peter Willemoes is now in the premier league of warships”, and squadron commander, captain Torben Mikkelsen, explained the transformative significance for the RDN: “A year ago, we worried whether the Danish crew would flunk. They didn’t, and on the contrary both the Danes and the British were impressed” (Danish Defence Command, 2015). The RDN had taken the first step to becoming capable of “Full Spectrum Operations” (Trojahn, 2014).

Today, the Danish operational schedule involves a full FOST program for one of the five large warships per year. In 2019, Iver Huitfeldt was the last in line to complete the course, and in 2020 the rotational schedule starts over. In practical terms this means that the RDN at all times has one large warship preparing for FOST, while one of the others recently completed their program. The RDN does not routinely deploy ships in an international mission upon completion of FOST, so it is not mission specific training. This is connected to the fact that Denmark does not constantly have ships on deployment, so it is impossible for mission planners to schedule deployments in direct succession of FOST. Instead, crews usually return to base after FOST for a period of less intensive tasks and some time off with their families. This has introduced problems related to continuous maintenance of training standards between FOST courses, and the RDN has sought to alleviate this problem through regular short deployments in operations with a focus on high-intensity warfighting such as participation in carrier strike groups (Vavasseur, 2019).

In the coming years, the RDN will continue this movement toward a greater focus on high-intensity warfighting. The procurement of SM-2 air defense missiles is well underway and will mean a new role for the Iver Huitfeldt-class as area air defense assets (Defense Security Cooperation Agency, 2018). Anti-submarine capabilities will be

improved through the purchase of towed array sonars and an ASW upgrade of the fairly new MH-60R Seahawk helicopters (Danish Ministry of Defence, 2018). The current defense agreement also envisions a possible future acquisition of SM-6 missiles, Tomahawk-like strike missiles, and a possible upgrade for integration with NATO's ballistic missile defense system. All this will ensure that the Danish warships become even more capable for a wider range of high-intensity warfighting duties, but it also means that the Navy will continue to require access to sophisticated training facilities and plenty of time for exercise.

### **3. Small navy theory applied to Denmark's counter-piracy story**

In the previous section, I briefly accounted for the history of Denmark's participation in counter-piracy operations and the subsequent shift in focus to high-intensity warfighting duties. In this section, I use the theoretical model of small navies to analyze the case more deeply. The analysis also touches on possible future implications for the RDN.

#### *3.1. Critical mass*

The first problem for small navies is that of critical mass. This question is inherently connected to materiel. It is difficult to sustain prolonged operations with very few ship hulls, and it is hard to achieve economy of scale if you only have a few ships of each class. Denmark has two classes of large warships, but the Navy wisely decided to build them as similar as possible. This means that the Absalon-class and the Iver Huitfeldt-class have many identical parts, which makes it possible to achieve some economy of scale. There are still unique parts for each class, of course, but it is kept at a minimum.

During the counter-piracy operation in 2008-2014, Denmark did not have the luxury of five large warships. Until 2012, the RDN had to make do with just the two ships of the Absalon-class, when Iver Huitfeldt was declared operational enough for a counter-piracy mission. During this period, it was difficult for the Navy to fulfill the political ambition of having the capacity to sustain an international deployment of one large warship for a long period of time. Today, all five warships are fully operational, and the Navy is in a better condition to support such an operation.

But the shortage of ship hulls is still a factor that complicates mission planning for the RDN. The ambition level has climbed as more ships entered service, and today the Navy's commitment to the FOST training schedule absorbs so many resources that it is comparable to the deployment of a warship in a counter-piracy mission. This is necessary if the Navy is to maintain a sufficient training level for high-intensity warfighting, but it also means that the number of available ships would still impose serious constraints on the ability to sustain a prolonged counter-piracy effort.

On the materiel front and related to the question of cost-effectiveness, the Navy also faces the challenge that the large warships have been upgraded with so much equipment that it may give an impression of low value for money to use it for less demanding duties. After all, there is no use for a towed array sonar system or SM-6 missiles in a counter-piracy mission. If there comes a new demand for a counter-piracy effort, naval planners will face a dilemma when forced to choose between using the expensive equipment for warfighting practice or devoting time to the low-intensity maritime security task. If they choose to neglect training and exercising, they will create a sense of wasted opportunities amongst themselves because the Navy does not fulfill its

warfighting potential. And if they neglect the counter-piracy mission, the politicians may wonder what the purpose is of these expensive warships if they are not available for urgent missions. And indeed, according to the theory about small navies, the naval planners have plenty of incentives to choose the shortsighted solution and try to do both in the hope that the counter-piracy mission will soon be over.

### 3.2. *Training and education*

The second problem for small navies is the small number of people. This makes it difficult for the navy to maintain its own training and education institutions, and it may cause the small navy to accept lower standards than a larger navy can achieve.

The full-hearted commitment with FOST and EAZS M demonstrates that the RDN has recognized the limitations of its own training possibilities when it comes to full-spectrum warfighting. The national training centers play a role in the preparation of crews and the training of individuals, but they are unable to lift the ship as a whole to a sufficient professional level. The various Danish training centers have largely embraced this supporting role, and they have invested many resources over the last five years in harmonizing Danish procedures with the respective British and German ways.

Nevertheless, Denmark still struggles with the low personnel numbers. The Danish warships were built to have a very lean manning. The Absalon-class originally had a crew of just 99 persons, and the Iver Huitfeldt-class was designed to have just 101 crewmembers (Danish Defence Command, 2013). These numbers have since been increased in the acknowledgement that they were too small, and the Danish warships now have a crew size that is closer to comparable warships in other countries. However, the desire to operate the ships with the leanest possible manning does reflect an inclination toward wishful thinking about what can be achieved with technical innovation. This attitude was for example expressed by rear admiral Kurt Birger Jensen back in 2004:

Despite being four times larger in terms of displacement than the minelayers and corvettes that they replace, and even though they have far more complicated sensors and weapon systems, the [Absalon-class] and the [Iver Huitfeldt-class] can be operated with approximately the same crew size as the old ships. In addition to standardization, this is achieved through a high degree of automatization. (Jensen, 2004, p. 461)

This prediction seems overly optimistic in hindsight, but it illustrates the pressure that leaders of a small navy are under to overcome resource constraints through innovation. However, as FOST has shown the RDN, for some tasks you cannot compensate for the lack of personnel with innovative solutions and a high education level.

Another dilemma related to the small number of people is how to maintain a high degree of professionalism at many different tasks at the same time. The counter-piracy mission in 2008-2014 demonstrated that it was hard for the crews to also master other disciplines like high-intensity warfighting. But it also demonstrated that counter-piracy in itself is a difficult task that should not be underestimated. It requires the sailors to work within a complex law enforcement framework, where they depend on people with other professional backgrounds both on-board and in the bureaucracy at home. For example, Denmark put a lot of effort into developing a concept of Special Maritime Task teams (SMI-team) which combined special forces, explosives experts, military police, language experts, medical doctors and other specialists into flexible and integrated units that could be deployed by RHIB or helicopter (Hansen, 2010, p. 211). Developing the



SMI concept was no simple task, and it took time before these different professional groups could work smoothly together. Today, this organizational knowledge is probably all but lost, as key personnel has rotated into other jobs.

The refocus on high-intensity warfare was not a bad idea for the RDN, but it came at a cost. While the Navy has its personnel directed toward peer-competitor warfighting, law enforcement concepts are largely neglected. That is a natural consequence of having limited personnel resources. Based on small navy theory, it is fully understandable that the RDN prioritizes high-intensity warfighting whenever possible, because that is what allows them to play a role amongst the big navies. The unfortunate thing is if the Navy leadership is unaware of the consequences of these choices, for example because it believes that it is possible to have a high training standard at too many things at once. One indication that this can be the case is the PowerPoint slide shown in Figure 1.

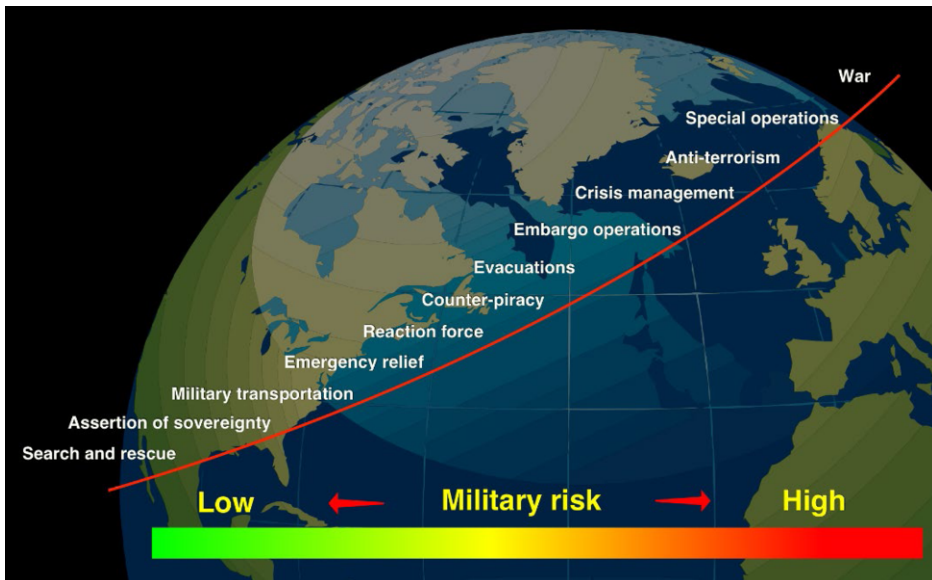


Figure 1. Spectrum of operations for the Absalon-class

The image shows the spectrum of possible operations for the Absalon-class. It was developed some 15 years ago by the Danish Naval Command as a smart way to show the versatility of the new ships. But since its conception, the slide has changed meaning. It is still shown in briefings from time to time, but now it apparently illustrates a training philosophy. The idea is that there is a hierarchy between the tasks, and that if you master the ones at the top, you automatically also master the ones below. That is a convenient explanation for a small navy that has to choose a few tasks to focus on: If they just focus on high-intensity warfighting, they actually don't have to make any compromises because they will be good at everything. This is a weak assumption, but it is repeated often.

The example with the task spectrum slide that turned into a training doctrine illustrates how the process of lowered personnel standards may be an unconscious process for a small navy. The RDN made a sensible decision to prioritize high-intensity warfighting over counter-piracy, but they downplay the costs to a degree where the move seems uncontroversial. In fact, through a catchy myth they have managed to turn an unmistakable loss of competence in the field of counter-piracy into a story of improved

professionalism across the board. This rationalization may be understandable on the basis of small navy theory, but it will hardly contribute to a realistic task understanding when the RDN again faces a counter-piracy challenge.

### 3.3. *Political influence*

The third problem for small navies is related to the limited influence they have on national policy. Navies are not as such supposed to conduct politics, but they play a crucial role in advising the political leadership about maritime issues and naval options (Golby & Karlin, 2017; Rapp, 2015). If the navy does not manage to catch the ears of leading politicians, the naval instrument may well be forgotten in the rush of government business. Small navies have small staffs, and it is difficult for them to achieve institutional mass at the government level. In addition, the small navy has fewer employees, which means that fewer citizens will argue the naval cause. While most countries suffer from problems of sea blindness, this problem may be exacerbated if the country has a small navy.

By nature, policy is a long-term issue, and it is difficult to identify consequences in an isolated case study like Denmark's counter-piracy effort. As rear admiral Frank Trojahn noted, rephrasing a famous statement by Donald Rumsfeld, "We have the navy that we have" (Brøndum, 2015). When the counter-piracy challenge emerged, the RDN responded with the warships that they had. These ships proved capable for the job.

Overall, the leadership of the RDN has reason to be satisfied with the policy decisions that were made in the course of the counter-piracy operation and during the subsequent refocus on high-intensity warfighting. This is probably a result of equal doses of skillful naval leadership and lucky timing of world events. When the Absalon-class was new, it was utmost convenient for the Navy to have a counter-piracy operation to demonstrate the relevance and capabilities of the new ships. Six years later, in 2014, the Navy's desire to refocus on high-intensity warfighting coincided with the Ukraine crisis, so the decision to withdraw from counter-piracy served both an organizational and a political agenda.

The real test of the RDN's ability to influence national policy will come if piracy surges again. The Navy is deeply committed to its rotational FOST schedule, and a new sustained counter-piracy mission will challenge that modus. It remains to be seen whether the Navy can keep a counter-piracy effort limited enough that they can still rotate a large warship through FOST every year.

Perhaps, one indication that the Navy does not have such influence on national policy is the fact that the RDN is so small in the first place. As Stöhs points out, it is indeed striking that a country so dependent on a global system of merchant shipping only has five warships (2018, p. 142). Adding nuance to this observation, Till notes that Denmark suffers from "an absence of popular support for substantial naval defense spending that derives from a reduced sense of national threat and apparently more urgent requirements to fund social welfare programs" (2014). This argument is important, because it indicates that the Danish population is content to outsource its security to stronger allies like the United States (Schaub & Jakobsson, 2018). Therefore, the Danish population would probably prioritize a counter-piracy effort over the Navy's need for warfighting practice, because they don't see war as a credible concern. Or put differently, the RDN has been unable to convince the public that it solves many important tasks, and that it is worthwhile to invest in naval force. An unfortunate consequence of this

argument is that it is circular. The RDN does not have much influence on national policy because it is small, and it is small because it is unable to influence national policy.

#### 4. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have used a case study of Denmark's counter-piracy effort to examine dynamics related to small navies. Based on theory about small navies, an analytical framework was derived. This identified critical mass, training and education, and political influence as the three areas where small navies particularly experience problems. Underneath these three problem areas there is a desire for small navies to "punch above their weight," which leaves them particularly susceptible to overstretch.

The Danish counter-piracy mission off Somalia was used as an example of the dilemmas that small navies face. Denmark provides a useful case study because there is so much contrast in the story. For about six years from 2008-2015, counter-piracy was the all-dominating task for the Danish warships, and then abruptly attention was turned to high-intensity warfighting. The essential problem for the RDN was that they did not have resources to run a counter-piracy mission abroad while also doing sufficient training and exercising at home. The experience was that crews in a counter-piracy mission were unable to maintain training standards in core warfighting disciplines. The RDN also realized that they did not have the necessary training facilities to solve the problem domestically, so they contracted with FOST in the United Kingdom and EAZS M in Germany to create programs that could realize the warfighting potential of the Absalon-class and the Iver Huitfeldt-class.

The analysis showed that distinct problems could be found in all the three categories related to small navies. Regarding critical mass, the most important problem for the RDN remains the limited number of hulls. They still only have five warships, and the current training schedule with regular programs at FOST requires so many resources that it cannot be combined with a new prolonged counter-piracy mission. Another problem is that the warships have been upgraded with so much sophisticated equipment that it raises serious questions about cost-effectiveness to use them for less demanding maritime security operations.

On the matter of training and education, the analysis showed that Denmark has made a wise decision to partner up with foreign training institutions, and that they have successfully managed to find a role for domestic training centers as supporting facilities. There are still problems relating to a tradition of very lean manning on the Danish warships and a sometimes overly optimistic belief in the possibilities of technical innovation and automatization. It was also noted that there appears to be a weakly founded assumption that warfighting abilities are universal enablers of all other skills. This indicates that the RDN downplays the complexity of tasks that they don't focus on at the moment, which may leave them vulnerable when conditions change.

When it comes to political influence, the RDN has generally benefitted from a lucky timing of world events, which made it politically attractive to do the things that the Navy wanted. In 2014, the Navy wanted to refocus on high-intensity warfighting, and at the same time a war broke out in Ukraine just as the piracy problem off Somalia seemed solved. This means that the Navy's influence on national policy was never really tested. It will be more interesting to see how things play out next time there is a maritime security crisis that the RDN must respond to. By then, the Navy will also want to maintain resources for the rotational schedule at FOST so they don't lose skills at high-

intensity warfighting, so there is a more controversial question of prioritizing resources. There is, however, one indication that the RDN's influence on national policy is small: The fact that the navy is so small. Although Denmark is a maritime nation, the public has found little interest in funding a naval force. Apparently, the Navy has been unable to explain what benefits it brings to society. This hints at a problematic circular logic, whereby a small navy finds it hard to grow because it has limited influence to move the national policy.

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