



# A Scandinavian Veteran Policy? A Comparative Study of Norwegian, Swedish and Danish Veteran Policies Since 2000

RESEARCH ARTICLE

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SCANDINAVIAN  
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## ABSTRACT

Literature on veteran policies has concentrated on empirical studies of national policies or on factors that shape those policies. There has been little comparative exploration of these matters, particularly in the context of social democratic welfare regimes. This article, based on official documents and interviews, contributes to this literature by studying Scandinavian veteran policies in a comparative light. Between May 2009 and October 2010, Norway, Sweden and Denmark all introduced national veteran policies detailing the care for and recognition of personnel from international operations. The article compares these policies by firstly addressing central similarities and differences and secondly examining factors that explain these. Overall, the veteran policies are found to be strikingly similar, to such an extent that they can essentially be regarded as a Scandinavian veteran policy. The findings support previous research that has highlighted both military developments and social and political factors as shaping veteran policies and add a new factor: international inspiration.

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The Scandinavian countries are fundamentally similar in several ways. They are small social democratic welfare states that share cultural and linguistic features. These countries have limited military resources, but a willingness to contribute to international operations. However, there have been, and still are, central differences in their security and defence policies in general (most importantly Denmark's and Norway's NATO membership versus Sweden's neutrality, although the difference should not be overstated), and their approach to international operations in particular. Since the early 1990s, Denmark has pursued what has been deemed an activist foreign and security policy, including a willingness to deploy robust forces in offensive operations abroad (see, for instance, [Heurlin, 2007a, pp. 88–89](#); [Jakobsen, 2006, pp. 84–85, 109](#)). Participation in international operations has found both political and public support to the extent that [Jakobsen and Møller \(2012, p. 106\)](#) have described a Danish “appetite for war”. Such a claim has less resonance in a Swedish or Norwegian context since these two countries have been more reserved in their use of combat forces and there is less public support for combat operations ([Berndtsson, Dandeker & Ydén, 2015, pp. 318–321](#); [Jakobsen, 2006, p. 180](#); [Saxi, 2011, p. 49](#); [Sjöstedt & Noreen, 2021](#)). Moreover, [Sjöstedt and Noreen \(2021\)](#) find that Sweden and Norway attempt to maintain a peace nation discourse when participating in international operations. Considering these differences, it is not a given that the Scandinavian countries would have pursued a similar veteran policy.

The intention of this study is to examine how veteran policies in Norway, Sweden and Denmark developed from 2000 until the early 2020s, and which factors explain the similarities and differences in their policy development. Whilst some literature has explored national veteran policies, there has been little comparative research, including research that synthesises the policies of social democratic welfare states. Existing literature has, moreover, theorised that both developments related to the armed forces and societal factors shape the design of veteran policies ([Dandeker et al., 2006](#); [Danilova, 2010](#)). This study provides further knowledge of the Scandinavian cases and thus sheds novel light on the social democratic approach to veteran issues. The study also contributes to the theoretically oriented strand of literature. It finds, in line with the existing literature as detailed below, that both military developments and social and political factors have contributed to forming the Scandinavian veteran policies. It contends as its theoretical contribution that a third factor, international inspiration, has influenced the similarities between the Scandinavian countries and should therefore be considered a factor that shapes national veteran policies.

While the various aspects of Scandinavian defence policies have been the subject of scholarly attention, their veteran policies have yet to be studied in a comparative perspective. The many similarities between the countries make them suitable cases for comparison. They particularly reduce the number of variables that might lead to any difference in their veteran policies ([della Porta, 2008, p. 214](#)). Through this comparative analysis, the aim is to gain in-depth knowledge of the Scandinavian cases (see [della Porta, 2008, p. 204](#)). While not attempting to generalise, this approach can nevertheless further the understanding of how national veteran policies are formed.

Two points on the approach of this study should be addressed. Firstly, the empirical material indicates that there has been little substantial change to the three policies in the period after they were introduced in 2009 and 2010.<sup>1</sup> This article therefore studies the national policies in the period after their inception as a whole. Moreover, as a study of official policies, it understands the term “veteran” in accordance with its definition in official policy documents. In Scandinavian policy documents, the term refers to personnel who serve or have served in one or more international operations ([Forsvarsministeriet, 2016a](#); [Meld. St. 15 \(2019–2020\)](#); [Prop. 2009/10:160](#); [Regeringen, 2010](#); [SFS 2010:449](#); [St.meld. nr. 34 \(2008–2009\)](#)).<sup>2</sup> Admittedly, there are slight differences in how the term “international operations” is defined in each country,

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1 Norway has published several action plans over the years as well as a white paper in 2020. In Denmark, a major review of the veteran policy was initiated in 2016 and new policy documents were released the same year. Still, I would argue that these documents hardly altered the main features of the veteran policy. In Sweden, an Official Inquiry was launched in 2014 with recommendations that would imply a major revision of the veteran policy, including an enlargement of the term veteran and a policy to include personnel positioned abroad from other sectors of society ([SOU 2014:27](#)). However, these recommendations have not been pursued on the political level.

2 In Norway, it was initially not limited to international operations. However, the first white paper was concerned with personnel from international operations ([St.meld. nr. 34 \(2008–2009\)](#)), which was consolidated as the official definition in the newest white paper ([Meld. St. 15 \(2019–2020\)](#)).

with implications for who is included in the term “veteran.” Nevertheless, the veteran policies are generally concerned with similar personnel categories, that is, active or former personnel of the armed forces, military or civilian, who are serving or have served in an international operation.

As a comparative study, the article has sought to consult comparable source material. This is to a large extent based on public documents, such as official policy documents, reports and inquiries. Central documents include two Norwegian white papers (*Meld. St. 15 (2019–2020)*; *St.meld. nr. 34 (2008–2009)*), two Norwegian action plans (*Departementene, 2011*; *Departementene, 2014*), a Swedish government proposition (*Prop. 2009/10:160*) as well as three Danish policy documents (*Forsvarsministeriet, 2016a*; *Forsvarsministeriet, 2016b*; *Regeringen, 2010*). I have also conducted semi-structured interviews with people who have considerable experience in the policy area.<sup>3</sup> These include four Norwegian and two Danish current or former officials from the ministries of defence. Representatives from the armed forces’ veteran units in Denmark and Sweden were also interviewed, as was a research coordinator from the Swedish Ministry of Defence. A challenge has been to get people close to the political process in Sweden to agree to an interview, despite several requests to relevant actors. The source material is consequently, to some extent, uneven in shedding light on the political process. Even so, the available public documents, as well as the interviews conducted with other relevant participants, are sufficient to illuminate similarities and differences between the Scandinavian policies and factors that explain these.

This article is in two parts, with an additional initial literature review. The first part is a study of similarities and differences between the veteran policies based primarily on the public documents and interviews. This part is divided into four subsections that summarise the central themes and organisation of the veteran policies identified in the empirical material: care, recognition, entitlements, and a cross-sectoral and multilevel approach. By situating the veteran policies in a broader context (see *della Porta, 2008, p. 206*), the second part explores factors that explain the similarities and differences. Three sets of factors are identified: changes in the armed forces, in terms of more complex international engagements and defence reform; bureaucratic politics, in terms of the state welfare system and national principles of public administration; and international inspiration.

## FIELD OF STUDY

Studies of modern veteran policies in a historical or contemporary light is an emerging field within the burgeoning, broader area of veteran studies. One strand of this literature on veteran policies is empirical, mostly descriptive, single case studies, for instance of U.S. (*Burtin, 2020*), Dutch (*Algra et al., 2003*; *Duel et al., 2017*), Norwegian (*Gjeseth, 2012*), Swedish (*Sundberg, 2017*; *Thisner & Garpenhag, 2016*) or Danish (*Poulsen & Rasmussen, 2017*) policies. Conversely, certain contributions to the literature have addressed specific aspects of veteran policies, including health and social care (e.g. *Hodson et al., 2017*), public support (e.g. *Duel et al., 2019*) and official recognition (e.g. *Haaland & Gustavsen, 2021*; *Sørensen, 2017*; *Sørensen & Pedersen, 2012*), with a comparative or analytical approach.

Another strand of this literature has a more theoretical approach and consists of a few contributions that shed light on factors that shape national veteran policies. In an article on the UK veteran policy in an international perspective, *Dandeker et al. (2006)* assert the connection between a country’s definition of a veteran and its veteran policy. They contend that a country’s veteran definition, and consequently its veteran policy, depends on the history of warfare, national patterns of civil-military relations reflecting these historical experiences of war, and force structure. Using the UK as the empirical case, they demonstrate how a particular definition and policy was adopted that was sensitive to the country’s history of war and civil-military relations, particularly the total mobilisation and civilian hardship during the Second World War (WW2) and the official neglect of veterans reflecting its history of a professional volunteer military. Also, brief examples from other countries in the same study support the argument that veteran policies are shaped by the developments they identified in the UK (*Dandeker et al., 2006*). This framework was further developed by *Danilova (2010*; see also *Danilova, 2007*). Starting from the position that the armed forces reflect broader

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<sup>3</sup> Each participant has consented to information about them being published in a way that they can be recognised through name and occupation.

societal changes, Danilova argues that national political, economic and social circumstances, particularly the welfare system, should also be considered factors that influence the formation of national veteran policies. To support this theoretical argument, she illustrates that the historical development of Russian veteran policy has been fashioned by not only military developments, but also by political and ideological circumstances and the Russian welfare system. A fundamental postulate of Danilova's theoretical argument is that different welfare regimes will support veterans in different ways (Danilova, 2010, p. 893). Whereas Danilova describes how conservative-corporatist and liberal welfare regimes support their veterans, the lack of literature on social democratic regimes and consequently the need for more research in this area is acknowledged (Danilova, 2010, p. 894).

This study contributes to the above-mentioned literature in three ways. First, the existing comprehensive studies on veteran policies remain to a large extent focused on the national context, which leaves a lack of comparative research and understanding. Second, and related to the first point, it contributes to the theoretical strand of literature that elucidates factors shaping national veteran policies. Third, this article will further the understanding of how social democratic welfare regimes support veterans and thus contribute towards filling the current literature gap.

## VETERAN POLICIES IN THE SCANDINAVIAN COUNTRIES

### CARE

Care is a theme common to Scandinavian policy documents concerning veterans. The countries' approach to veterans' care has been similar in several ways. The objective is to provide what can be deemed a "chain of care", with measures of care for veterans and their next of kin before, during and after deployment. Nevertheless, it is follow-up support in the period after deployment that receives the most attention.

The civilian welfare system, organised across various public sectors and levels of government, constitutes a cornerstone in the provision of health and social services to all Scandinavian citizens. This means that, as citizens, veterans are covered by an expansive safety net that ensures universal health care and social services and benefits, available for free or highly subsidised, if necessary. Nevertheless, the countries' veteran policies all assign responsibility to the armed forces as an employer, to care for their personnel and provide follow-up support (Forsvarsministeriet, 2010, p. 16; Prop. 2009/10:160, pp. 149–150; St.meld. nr. 34 (2008–2009), p. 7). A clear testimony to this is that a veteran unit has been established within the defence sector in all three countries in order to coordinate the armed forces' veteran effort (Departementene, 2011, p. 30; Prop. 2009/10:160, pp. 202–204; Regeringen, 2010, p. 18).

One feature of Scandinavian veteran policies is that they seek to provide follow-up support for veterans within the armed forces. This entails the armed forces initiating contact with personnel after deployment with the intention of identifying potential support needs (Departementene, 2011, pp. 26–27; Prop. 2009/10:160, pp. 148–149; Regeringen, 2010, p. 19). In Sweden and Norway, this is regulated by law, which stipulates a five-year and one-year responsibility for the armed forces to provide follow-up support to their personnel after deployment to international operations, respectively (Forsvarsloven, 2017; Forsvarspersonelloven, 2005; SFS 2010:449). While Denmark has not introduced similar statutes, Danish policy documents state an intention to maintain contact with veterans who have left the armed forces (Forsvarsministeriet, 2016a, p. 6; Regeringen, 2010, p. 19). The outcome of this part of the policy has been relatively similar in the three countries, with routines having been established by the armed forces, involving meetings, health consultations or surveys, and information letters. The effort has been even more far-reaching in Denmark, where a routine has been developed to approach formerly employed veterans through letters for eight years post-deployment, as well as through reminders, phone calls and in some instances home visits (Forsvarsministeriet, 2013, p. 26).

The support provided beyond this active post-deployment contact varies. In all three countries, an "open door policy" is pursued, meaning that both former and active personnel can contact the armed forces to receive information and guidance about the support available within the armed forces and in the civilian services. An aim of each country's veteran policy in this regard has been to establish one point of contact for veterans within the armed forces (Departementene, 2011, pp. 30–31; Prop. 2009/10:160, pp. 202–204; Regeringen, 2010, p. 18). In Norway and

Denmark, this is maintained by the veteran units, whereas it is local veteran coordinators at the various training units, schools and centres that have this function in Sweden. In respect to the support available from the armed forces, Denmark provides the most extensive offering with, for instance, free lifelong access to psychologists and social and employment counsellors (Forsvarsministeriet, 2016b, pp. 11, 13). In the two other countries, veterans are to a greater extent left to the civilian system.<sup>4</sup> Efforts of volunteer organisations in providing care such as peer support and recreational activities are also encouraged by the authorities through funding and direct cooperation in all three countries.

Scandinavian veteran policies reflect an acknowledgement that deployment to international operations not only affects deployed personnel, but also their families and others close to them. Next of kin are therefore included in the chain of care, before, during and after deployment, primarily through providing information and organising meetings (Departementene, 2011, pp. 23–24; Prop. 2009/10:160, pp. 155–159; Regeringen, 2010, p. 18). As with the veterans themselves, next of kin in Sweden and Norway are to a great extent left to the civilian welfare system and volunteer organisations for support, whereas Danish next of kin also have access to support such as social counsellors and psychologists through the armed forces (Forsvarsministeriet, 2016b, p. 11).

## RECOGNITION

The other central component of veteran policies shared by the Scandinavian countries is recognition of the veteran population. However, a distinction can be made between societal and official recognition. Societal recognition concerns how veterans are perceived by the public and their knowledge about international operations and veterans and their acknowledgement of veterans' competences. This element has been less significant than official recognition provided by the authorities. Official recognition has been manifested through similar practices in the three countries; medals have been implemented, national veteran monuments have been unveiled and official ceremonies to observe their Veterans Days have been introduced.

Looking more closely, national variations appear in these official practices of recognition. In Norway, Veterans Day was instituted on 8 May, Norway's Liberation Day after WW2 and official speeches have attempted to establish a link between the Norwegian WW2 effort and recent military experiences (Haaland & Gustavsen, 2021, p. 444). This symbolic link has been further accentuated by the reinstatement of the War Cross in 2009, a decoration originally awarded to participants of WW2. Official manifestations of recognition have been framed differently in Norway's Scandinavian neighbours. In the Swedish case, connections to Sweden's past international engagement and its national identity as a proponent of peace and internationalism are central in official narratives (Strand, 2021, pp. 34–36; Wendt, 2019, p. 62; Wendt & Åse, 2016, pp. 371–373). Sweden's Veterans Day is 29 May, the International Day of UN Peacekeepers, and the national veteran monument is also located close to a UN monument (Åse, 2022, p. 87). In Denmark, 5 September, a date with no significant historical connection, was chosen as the Danish flag-flying day for deployed personnel, although other dates were proposed (Martinsen, 2013, pp. 92–93).<sup>5</sup> However, narratives that link recent military operations to national values and historic war experiences such as the 19th century wars against Prussia and WW2 are prevalent (Martinsen, 2013, pp. 77–78; see also Marklund, 2013; Wendt, 2019, p. 62). So, although official recognition has been manifested through similar practices, there are also clear national distinctions.

Furthermore, official recognition has a greater political profile in Denmark. On the Danish flag-flying day, a parade takes place on a public square outside the building that houses the parliament and some government offices. In contrast, the Veterans Day ceremonies occur at Akershus fortress in Oslo and Djurgården in Stockholm, areas outside the political centre and with ties to military history, and in the Norwegian case still used by the military (Haaland & Gustavsen, 2021, pp. 442–443; Åse, 2022, pp. 87–88). This is not to say that the political level has not been involved in official displays of recognition. The national Veterans Day sees the attendance of both the military and political elite in all three countries, and in Norway certain

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<sup>4</sup> A notable exception in Norway is recreational stays and activities provided by the Norwegian Armed Forces at its veteran unit's centre at Bæreia.

<sup>5</sup> Denmark uses the term "flag-flying day for deployed personnel" rather than Veterans Day.

decorations may be awarded by the government. Nonetheless, the location of the Veterans Day parade indicates a more prominent political element in Denmark.

## ENTITLEMENTS

As mentioned above, Scandinavian veterans may receive certain forms of care from the armed forces. Scandinavian veteran policies have not, however, established a parallel welfare system for veterans. A Danish report published by the Ministry of Defence asserts that all citizens in need of support are to be treated equally and that Danish society will normally assist in such cases (Forsvarsministeriet, 2010, p. 16). In Sweden, the government proposition establishes that the armed forces are not to take on the tasks and responsibilities of other actors (Prop. 2009/10:160, p. 150), whereas the Norwegian action plan states that ordinary health and social services should provide ongoing care to injured veterans (Departementene, 2011, p. 8). The civilian system remains the primary provider of welfare services for veterans in all three countries.

Veterans are, however, subject to certain entitlements. First, veterans are entitled to compensation beyond ordinary occupational law, for physical or psychological injuries or death due to service in international operations.<sup>6</sup> In Denmark, the provision of entitlements goes even further as veterans are subject to more lenient regulations concerning compensation for PTSD and to an occupational scheme which allows public employers to give preferential treatment to injured veterans and provides cash benefits to private employers for employing veterans (Lov om jobordning for veteraner, 2016; Særloven for tidligere udsendte, 2014).<sup>7</sup> Second, the veteran policies inherently contain other entitlements. The Scandinavian governments have instructed their armed forces to provide follow-up support to veterans to an extent that exceeds ordinary duties of the employer and supplements welfare services with support and lifelong access to guidance regardless of employment status. The veteran policies can, moreover, be considered a form of differential treatment in all three countries, seeing that other groups in Scandinavian societies – other state employees who have been stationed abroad or personnel of the armed forces who have served domestically, for instance – are not subject to an equally comprehensive national policy and system for care. This means that veterans have obtained entitlements through supplementary measures and legislation.

## A CROSS-SECTORAL AND MULTILEVEL APPROACH

Perhaps the greatest difference between the Scandinavian countries' veteran policies relates to how they are organised. Their starting points are very much alike as the veteran effort involves several sectors and levels of government due to their reliance on the civilian welfare system. How this effort has been organised across sectors and levels varies, however.

Since its first white paper in 2009, the Norwegian veteran policy has been aimed at improving cross-sectoral cooperation on the veteran issue. This objective has been accompanied by cooperation at the departmental level, which from 2011 onwards has been formalised by an interdepartmental task force with representatives from initially six, and later seven, ministries. This task force has been responsible for developing and implementing the veteran policy since then, although the Ministry of Defence has a leading role. A challenge throughout the period has been to get each ministry to assume its responsibilities rather than relying on the Ministry of Defence (E. Rømming, special advisor in the Norwegian Ministry of Defence, interview, 27 May 2022; S. Olerud, former assistant director general in the Norwegian Ministry of Defence, interview, 4 July 2022). Still, the task force has been able to delegate responsibility for aspects of the veteran policy to the various ministries and their underlying agencies. A distinctive feature of the Norwegian approach has been the establishment of competence networks and hubs of knowledge within the civilian sector to build competences in public agencies and increase knowledge of veteran affairs across the civilian support system (Departementene, 2011; Departementene, 2014). The Norwegian veteran policy thus involves cooperation across several sectors.

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<sup>6</sup> Main agreements include *intopserstatning* in Norway, *statens riskgaranti* in Sweden and *forsvarets særlige erstatning- og godtgjørelsesordning* in Denmark.

<sup>7</sup> Admittedly, these laws also extend to other state employees and personnel from the Ministry of Justice.

Recently, the municipal level has been under the spotlight in Norway, demonstrated in the government's follow-up plan from 2014, after evaluations found weaknesses at that level (S. Olerud, interview, 4 July 2022). The plan included a recommendation encouraging municipalities to develop local action plans to address coordination in the civilian sector at the municipal level (Departementene, 2014, p. 25). The response from municipalities has, however, varied (Johannessen, 2020; S. Olerud, interview, 4 July 2022). Even so, the Norwegian approach has been multilevel as municipalities are advised by government guidelines.

Similarly, the veteran policy in Denmark is characterised by cooperation across sectors and targets different levels of government. Several ministries have been involved in the process of developing the policy, which contains measures to be implemented in other sectors outside the armed forces, in particular the health and municipal sectors (Forsvarsministeriet, 2016b; Regeringen, 2010). As in Norway, municipalities have been the subject of increased focus following evaluations and are now recommended to develop local veteran policies and employ local veteran coordinators (Forsvarsministeriet, 2013, pp. 20–22; Forsvarsministeriet, 2016b; Veterancentret, 2016). Nonetheless, the defence sector maintains the primary role. On the question of the extent of cross-sectoral cooperation, a Danish official stated that the Ministry of Defence holds the most responsibility (J. B. Rasmussen, deputy chief of the Danish Ministry of Defence Personnel Agency, interview, 13 June 2022). Operationally, the Danish veteran unit, affiliated with the Ministry of Defence, plays an essential part, with an active role in providing support for veterans and in coordinating and assisting the civilian sector. In contrast to the Norwegian model, where competence networks have been established within the civilian sector, it is the veteran unit that is the main hub of knowledge and competence regarding veterans in Denmark, serving as a resource for the civilian sector (in addition to the National Board of Social Services). Compared to Norway, the Danish approach, while being cross-sectoral and multilevel, is to a greater extent hinged on the defence sector.

Sweden has arguably the least cross-sectoral and multilevel approach. While the Swedish proposition establishes that the measures implemented by the armed forces are only to supplement the support provided by other actors (Prop. 2009/10:160, p. 150), the proposition was developed in the Ministry of Defence and, to a great extent, focuses on the armed forces. Where cooperation between sectors was encouraged, it was stated that this should be initiated by the relevant authorities (Prop. 2009/10:160). Although the Swedish veteran unit has been tasked with cooperating with authorities in other sectors, this cooperation is described as challenging by the deputy chief of the Swedish veteran unit because these other authorities have not been given similar guidelines (M. Larsson, deputy chief of the Swedish Armed Forces Veteran Centre, interview, 23 June 2022). Moreover, this reflects another distinctive characteristic of the Swedish approach. In contrast to the Norwegian and Danish policies, the Swedish proposition largely contained recommendations as to what the armed forces should do, rather than orders or direct instructions, besides the law proposed. This implies that the Swedish Armed Forces had a great amount of autonomy to formulate measures within the veteran policy. The Swedish veteran policy thus rests to a large extent on the armed forces.

## EXPLAINING SCANDINAVIAN VETERAN POLICIES

The similarities and differences between the Scandinavian veteran policies with regard to four elements – care, recognition, entitlements and cross-sectoral and multilevel approach – have been detailed above. The following section will examine the factors that help explain these similarities and differences. In accordance with existing literature (Dandeker et al., 2006; Danilova, 2010), the section identifies developments related to the armed forces and the organisation of welfare and public administration as factors that have shaped Scandinavian veteran policies. However, it also finds another factor that explains some of the similarities between the countries: international inspiration.

## CHANGES IN THE ARMED FORCES

The similar focus on care and recognition, as well as the similar approach to care, in the three Scandinavian countries reflects changes in the armed forces' deployments abroad following the end of the Cold War.

In the 1990s, the Scandinavian countries had similar experiences that contributed to laying the foundation for their current veteran policies and their similar focus on and approach to care. Although their military contributions have differed, the three Scandinavian countries have all participated in more complex international operations since the end of the Cold War (Jakobsen, 2006). Increased participation in such operations had implications for both the deployed personnel and their families with, for instance, higher risks of injuries and death and frequent and long separation from home (Gjeseth, 2012, p. 66; Haaland, 2007, pp. 503–504). Haaland (2007) believes that “for the military organization, the new missions have created demands for a new policy, firstly to take care of the families of those who are abroad, and secondly to take care of a new generation of military veterans” (p. 503). In both Norway and Sweden, scholars have described a realisation within the armed forces of the need for improved preparation and support due to these types of operations (Haaland, 2008, pp. 158–159; Thisner & Garpenhag, 2016, pp. 55, 64). As the Danish Armed Forces implemented similar measures, it is probable that this was the case in Denmark as well.

The increasing participation in such operations coincided with increasing knowledge and research. Internationally, the “Gulf War syndrome” and “Balkan syndrome” had gained attention. In Scandinavian countries, surveys and studies were conducted to shed light on issues related to deployment for both veterans and families.<sup>8</sup> The importance of psychiatric and psychological knowledge is emphasised by Thisner and Garpenhag (2016, pp. 64–65) who assert that this reflects an increased understanding of the issues that were being identified. Together with the realisations following participation in complex international operations, this arguably contributed to the Scandinavian armed forces implementing several measures during the 1990s. These included measures before, during and after deployment, in particular related to medical and psychological support, as well as for next of kin (Jakobsen, 2006, pp. 103–104, 165–166, 196–197). This means that similarities in the approach to care in the Scandinavian veteran policies (the chain of care and the concern for next of kin, for instance), were elements that were already part of the armed forces’ personnel policies prior to the formulation of national veteran policies.<sup>9</sup>

Furthermore, the responsibility assigned to the armed forces as the employer in each of the Scandinavian countries can be tied to the defence transformation in these countries prior to and during the formulation of their veteran policies. While the extent and speed of transformation has varied, the physical transformation of the Scandinavian armed forces since the beginning of the 1990s is structurally similar, with large cuts in the size of the armed forces, a shift in focus from territorial defence to expeditionary forces, and a shift in recruitment from compulsory to voluntary service (Petersson, 2011, pp. 110–111, 116). In all three countries, this has entailed a professionalisation of the armed forces (Heurlin, 2007b, pp. 65–70). As with other aspects of the defence transformation, the extent and speed of the professionalisation has differed, but in essence Norway, Sweden and Denmark all moved towards less (or no) conscription and greater employment of professional soldiers. In addition, international deployment was made obligatory for all employed personnel (Petersson, 2011, pp. 118–119; Sundberg, 2017, p. 173).<sup>10</sup> As international operations became prominent in the Scandinavian armed forces, participation in international operations became a natural part of a career in the armed forces.

The defence transformation had, in other words, the same result in all Scandinavian countries: international operations were performed by personnel voluntarily employed by or enlisted in the armed forces who are obliged to deploy if ordered. In the Swedish case, Sundberg (2017) suggests that this change in personnel policy brought about a new perspective on the responsibility of the armed forces towards its personnel. As deployment was no longer voluntary, there was a realisation at the political level of the increased responsibility that followed (Sundberg, 2017, p. 174). A similar perspective on the armed forces’ responsibility is reflected in Norwegian and Danish veteran policy documents. The Norwegian government emphasises that their authority to order personnel to serve in international operations also

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<sup>8</sup> Examples include research conducted by Bache and Hommelgaard (1994), Norwegian Armed Forces Joint Medical Services (*Forsvarets sanitet*, 1993) and Johansson (1996).

<sup>9</sup> Although at that point the veteran effort in all three countries lacked priority and a comprehensive approach (Haaland, 2007, p. 504; Haaland, 2009; Jakobsen, 2006, p. 103; Poulsen & Rasmussen, 2017, pp. 97–98; Thisner & Garpenhag, 2016, pp. 58–59).

<sup>10</sup> Denmark was first to institute such a requirement in 1994. Norway and Sweden followed in 2005 and 2010.



entails a particular responsibility of care (St.meld. nr. 34 (2008–2009), p. 7). Similarly, the Danish government positions obligatory deployment and its consequences for the working and private life of personnel as part of the rationale for its veteran policy (Regeringen, 2010, p. 5). Yet, the introduction of obligatory deployment does not seem to be a sufficient cause for political prioritisation, as deployment had in fact been made obligatory for new employees in all three countries years prior to formulation of their veteran policies.

One specific event seems essential in bringing about the realisation, at the political level, of the need to improve veterans' care in the Scandinavian countries: the military involvement in Afghanistan. Scholarly literature has indeed emphasised Afghanistan as a turning point for Scandinavian veteran policies (Daltveit, 2014; Poulsen & Rasmussen, 2017; Roosberg & Weibull, 2014; Sundberg, 2017; Wendt & Åse, 2016). In their study of the Danish veteran policy, Poulsen and Rasmussen (2017, p. 98) found that the more violent operations in Afghanistan and Iraq caused political and public interest in Denmark, with discussions being raised about both clinical and socioeconomic issues. This is supported by Danish interviewees who link the political interest and wish to formulate a veteran policy to the large number of injured and dead in Afghanistan (J. B. Rasmussen, interview, 13 June 2022; J. Kirk, chief consultant in the Danish Ministry of Defence, interview, 14 June 2022). Despite a lower number of dead and injured soldiers, the operation in Afghanistan also involved armed combat alongside high risks and casualties for the Swedish and Norwegian troops, which the literature and the source material suggest played an important part in drawing political attention to the issue in both countries (Gjeseth, 2012, pp. 67, 80; M. Herberg, former senior staff officer in the Norwegian Ministry of Defence, interview, 17 August 2022; M. Larsson, interview, 23 June 2022; Sundberg, 2017, pp. 172–173). The experiences from the operations in Afghanistan certainly appear as a factor in explaining the similar focus on veterans' care in the three countries.<sup>11</sup> This is particularly interesting as one could expect the impact of Afghanistan to be greater on the Danish veteran policy (for instance, the timing or the approach to care), since Denmark was involved in a more combat-ridden southern province and suffered a higher number of casualties.<sup>12</sup> The same can be said for the operations in the Balkans in the 1990s where Denmark contributed with more robust combat forces, at least initially, compared to Norway and Sweden (Agrell, 2016, p. 123; Saxi, 2011, pp. 39–40; See also Jakobsen & Rynning, 2019, p. 890). However, I have found no evidence for such claims. Essentially, various developments related to the armed forces and their deployments abroad in the years leading up to the formulation of their veteran policies seem to have contributed to the countries' shared focus on and similar approach to veterans' care.

These changes in the armed forces also influenced new practices of official recognition. The increasing participation in international operations, as well as the professionalisation of the armed forces, called for public recognition of the veteran population in the Scandinavian countries. Scholarly research has asserted that recognition is a way to legitimise and give meaning to military operations for the public, and to recruit military personnel (Haaland & Gustavsen, 2021; Strand, 2021; Sørensen, 2017; Sørensen & Pedersen, 2012; Wendt, 2019; Åse, 2022). In several Western countries, new recognition rituals were therefore established in the 2000s, following recent military operations and particularly following the operation in Afghanistan (Haaland & Gustavsen, 2021, p. 437; Wendt, 2019). This development also occurred in the Scandinavian countries where recognition became the second central component of their veteran policies.

## **BUREAUCRATIC POLITICS: THE WELFARE SYSTEM AND PRINCIPLES OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION**

The veteran policies of the Scandinavian countries share a reliance on the civilian welfare services in caring for their veterans. This means that several sectors and levels of government have a role in this duty, as for other citizens. However, the greatest difference between the veteran policies is the extent to which they have targeted these various sectors and levels

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<sup>11</sup> My material suggests that veterans and veteran groups may also have played a role in raising awareness of what they deemed insufficient care and recognition. However, further research is needed to shed light upon their role.

<sup>12</sup> Denmark suffered in fact the highest number of losses per capita among the countries participating in ISAF.

and outlined cooperation between them. These features of the Scandinavian veteran policies reflect not only similarities in the countries' welfare systems, but also differences in their public administration.

As this study has illustrated, Scandinavian veterans are not subject to a parallel system. This sets the Scandinavian countries apart from other countries such as the United States and the Netherlands where parallel, separate health care institutions for veterans are in place (Burtin, 2020; Duel et al., 2017). A reason for this may be the elaborate state welfare systems in place in the Scandinavian countries. As claimed by Poulsen and Rasmussen (2017) in their article on the Danish veteran policy, the "[rather modest policy] may be explained by the existence of a strong welfare state and a relatively well-functioning health care system" (p. 102). These are common features of the three countries, as Denmark, Norway and Sweden all can be considered social democratic welfare regimes (Esping-Andersen, 1999) or as adhering to the "Nordic model" (Pedersen & Kuhnle, 2017). Among the central features of the Nordic social democratic countries is an active state, the provision of generous public services and benefits based on the principles of universal social rights, egalitarianism and the marginalisation of private welfare (Esping-Andersen, 1999; Pedersen & Kuhnle, 2017). This, arguably, eliminates the need for a separate welfare system for veterans since there already is a comprehensive public system that extends to the veteran population as citizens.

Moreover, the egalitarianism of the Nordic model arguably makes it controversial to establish any kind of parallel system. The social democratic mentality is one of egalitarianism in which no one is to be offered "favours, advantages, special recognition" (Esping-Andersen, 1999, pp. 171–172). Indeed, one Danish official explained that there is a need to balance support for veterans with consideration for other citizens and claimed that if one goes too far in supporting veterans, one might lose public support (J. B. Rasmussen, interview, 13 June 2022). In Norway, the difference between care for personnel deployed on behalf of the state and citizens who are injured in their personal life was claimed by an interviewed official to be subject to a lengthy discussion between different ministries (S. Olerud, interview, 4 July 2022). These claims shed light on the delicacy of the matter.

Despite the elaborate public welfare systems and egalitarianism of the Scandinavian countries, Scandinavian veterans are granted certain entitlements through compensation arrangements and legislation, and more broadly through a comprehensive veteran policy. The explanation from the government is that these entitlements are derived from the special circumstances surrounding deployment to war zones. This necessitates, in their view, particular compensation agreements, as ordinary compensation and insurance arrangements are insufficient (Ot. prp. nr. 67 (2008–2009), p. 31; Prop. 2009/10:160, pp. 174–175; Regeringen, 2010, p. 20), as well as a veteran policy that reflects the risks and difficult situations veterans are exposed to while serving their country (Prop 2009/10:160, p. 144; Regeringen, 2010, p. 5; St.meld. nr. 34 (2008–2009), p. 9). In this view, provisions to veterans constitute egalitarian entitlements. If we consider the special treatment of veterans compared to other personnel groups who also face risks while serving their country, this is not a sufficient explanation. Arguably, the veteran policy may rather reflect that veterans are ordered not only to risk their own lives, but also to take the lives of others if needed. A similar claim has been made by Bjurström (2022, p. 4) who argues that recognition mirrors the monopoly of violence maintained by the military profession. The Norwegian government also emphasises the issue of combatting the enemy and potentially having to take lives in their distinction between the armed forces' personnel and personnel in other sectors (Departementene, 2011, p. 11). This aspect of military operations may be one factor explaining the special treatment of veterans. However, one cannot rule out the influence of strong interest groups either.

Whereas the Scandinavian countries all adhere to a model of welfare with many fundamental similarities, the countries are less equal when it comes to principles of public administration. This variance between the countries has contributed to the greatest difference in their veteran policies – the extent to which each policy has targeted various sectors and levels and involved cooperation between them. Both Norway and Denmark are characterised by ministerial rule, which implies that governmental ministers have a formal authority and responsibility towards underlying agencies (Christensen, 1999; Direktoratet for forvaltning og IKT [Difi], 2014). Sweden is, in contrast, characterised by a dualism. This dualism entails that governmental ministries are organised under one government office where government decisions are

collective and that public agencies are relatively autonomous since the government and ministers are constitutionally obstructed from interfering in particular cases (Hall, 2016). Although the government retains certain powers to govern public agencies, dualism is so influential in Sweden that it remains challenging for politicians to interfere too much in their work (Jacobsson & Sundström, 2007, p. 9). This political-administrative difference provides one possible explanation as to why the Swedish veteran policy is marked by a less cross-sectoral and multilevel approach. Such relative autonomy also explains why specific measures within the Swedish veteran policy were to a larger extent left for the armed forces to formulate and implement. This interpretation of the disposition of the Swedish veteran policy is supported by Petridou's (2020) study of the Swedish response to the Covid-19 pandemic, in which she found that the dualistic relationship between politics and administration was an essential factor in the Swedish decentralised response, in contrast to the centralised decisions taken by the other Scandinavian countries.

However, the Norwegian and Danish political-administrative structure does not necessarily favour a cross-sectoral approach either, with ministerial rule representing a possible restraint on coordination (Difi, 2014). But at the same time, political will and effort can contribute towards making it possible (Difi, 2014, p. 31). My research shows that political effort cultivated a cross-sectoral approach to the veteran policies in Denmark and Norway, where the initiative to discuss the veteran issue with other ministries came from the defence ministers (J. B. Rasmussen, interview, 13 June 2022; S. Olerud, interview, 4 July 2022). An interviewed Norwegian official, moreover, describes the effort to get other ministries to take on their part of the responsibility as a long process that has demanded resolution from the Ministry of Defence (S. Olerud, interview, 4 July 2022). Coordination across sectors thus seems like an initiative, if not a priority, for the Ministry of Defence. The principle of ministerial rule then allowed the various ministries to implement specific measures within their sectors and delegate responsibility to underlying agencies.

## INTERNATIONAL INSPIRATION

Changes in the armed forces and the state welfare systems have certainly shaped Scandinavian veteran policies. Still, certain similarities emerged from the process. The source material provides evidence to support the argument that the three Scandinavian countries have drawn inspiration from other countries, including each other, when formulating their veteran policies and in particular specific measures. In some instances, there is a clear link. A Danish book aimed at children with a deployed family member was translated into Swedish and Norwegian. In Sweden, the proposal for a veteran unit was inspired by the then Norwegian veteran administration, and the proposal for personal contact with veterans was derived from the Danish approach (SOU 2008:91, pp. 240, 326). The Swedish Official Inquiry also refers to international experiences when proposing possible displays of recognition (SOU 2008:91, pp. 286–291). In addition, Norway looked directly to Denmark when developing the part of their veteran policy that related to recognition, with for instance, government officials travelling to see the Danish veteran monument (S. Olerud, interview, 4 July 2022). Even where the source material does not demonstrate a direct link, other countries' approaches and measures may indeed have served as a source of inspiration since the material clearly illustrates that policymakers in each country have looked abroad during the process (Forsvarsministeriet, 2010; SOU 2008:91; St.meld. nr. 34 (2008–2009)). The Scandinavian countries even shared information and exchanged experiences directly (M. Herberg, interview, 17 August 2022).<sup>13</sup> In fact, cooperation, both formal and informal, between the Scandinavian (and even the wider Nordic) countries occurs in many policy areas, with the countries turning to each other for foreign models and sharing of experiences (see for instance Strang, 2016, p. 9). International inspiration on the veteran policy area may be another part of the explanation as to why the Scandinavian veteran policies share many similarities regarding care and official practices of recognition. International inspiration as a factor shaping national veteran policies is, moreover, not a strictly inter-Scandinavian phenomenon. This is, for instance, illustrated by the Estonian veteran policy, particularly its emphasis on recognition, being to some extent modelled on the Danish one (Truusa, Kasearu and Trumm, 2019, pp. 46–47).

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13 Since 2010, this exchange of experiences and information has been formalised through NORDEFCO.

## CONCLUSION

Despite certain national differences, the Scandinavian veteran policies are remarkably similar in content, organisation and timing. The most notable Scandinavian trait is the reliance on civilian welfare state institutions in the provision of health care and social services to veterans. In contrast, the greatest difference between the Scandinavian veteran policies is the extent to which the policies have been cross-sectoral and multilevel. Sweden stands out with a veteran policy that is executed first and foremost by the armed forces themselves. In Norway and Denmark, several ministries as well as local municipalities play a larger role in the formulation and implementation of the countries' veteran policies.

The study has identified three overarching factors that explain the development of Scandinavian veteran policies. First, participation in increasingly complex international operations, including in Afghanistan, and defence transformations after the Cold War led to the realisation of the need for both veteran recognition and for their care; both civilian and military authorities were made responsible for addressing these needs. Second, the Scandinavian welfare system has provided a framework in which the veteran policies have been implemented and has thus shaped their design. National principles of public administration have contributed to the difference in the direct involvement of various sectors and levels of government in the veteran policies. Finally, similarities in the establishment of veteran units within the armed forces, in official practices of recognition and in measures of care can be explained by the inspiration that the countries have drawn from abroad, including each other.

These findings not only contribute to our understanding of veteran policies in Scandinavian social democratic countries, but also adds to the theoretically oriented literature on the design of veteran policies. In the latter regard, the study supports existing literature that has argued that both military developments and social and political circumstances will shape a country's veteran policy. The fact that the three countries' veteran policies were so similar and came into being at almost exactly the same time implies that similar contemporary military experiences, more than differing military history and historical war experiences, were essential in explaining these policies. The main contribution to the theoretical strand of literature is, however, that the study adds a third factor: international inspiration. Given the relevance of this factor beyond the Scandinavian cases, the impact of international inspiration on national veteran policies is worth further research. What is more, as recent military experiences, such as the operations in Afghanistan, have been an influential factor in explaining Scandinavian veteran policies, it is likely that the current war in Europe will affect future policy development.

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The author has no competing interests to declare.

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