



# Editors' Note: Stocktaking of an Emergent Field After Five Years of *the Scandinavian Journal of Military Studies*

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FROM THE EDITORS

SCANDINAVIAN  
MILITARY STUDIES

## INTRODUCTION

Five years ago, five Scandinavian research institutions collaborated to establish a new open-access journal. All identified the same lack: the avenues for publishing high-quality academic and practice-oriented research on the military were limited; avenues relevant to the military profession in Scandinavia even more so. *The Scandinavian Journal of Military Studies* (SJMS) was established to meet this lack.

Five years later, having published upwards of 100 articles from both researchers and practitioners, the journal has consolidated itself as a popular forum for discussion on a wide range of topics on the military. Our articles have had over 100,000 online views and tens of thousands of downloads. As a new editorial team has taken over, we find it appropriate to take lessons from five years of publication and to point forward by drawing the contours of the emergent field of military studies in Scandinavia.

First, we dissect each of the three key words constituting the journal's title: Scandinavian, military, and studies. That is – we discuss what we do; what “military studies” in a Scandinavian context means when we assess and edit research articles in our daily work. After this, we turn to how we do it. The journal has a dual ambition of contributing to academic debates and practical problem-solving. We lay out the requirements for these two publication tracks and provide examples from the journal's vibrant archives, hoping this will help authors structure their arguments in future submissions.

## WHAT WE DO

### MILITARY

The journal deals with military issues. Militaries, in short, are held to be organisations authorised by sovereign powers to orchestrate state-sanctioned violence (Rech et al., 2016, pp. 2–3). On a closer look, however, the state- and violence-centric definition does not fully capture how militaries operate, or indeed what they are, in the 21st century. While private military contractors have become essential players on the battlefield, for example, they neither enjoy a typical state-sanctioned mandate nor exist exclusively to defend a particular state. Further, militaries are increasingly being used in humanitarian aid and emergency relief; in certain nations, meanwhile, the broader issue of societal security falls to the military organisation (Dahlberg & Stevnsborg, 2021; Jensen, 2018; Madsen, 2020). As a result, military research increasingly overlaps with other well-known areas of study such as defence studies, strategic studies, war studies, peace and conflict studies, and security studies.

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As editors of SJMS, we approach military matters in broad terms. We encourage examinations of military institutions, operations and strategies, and we consider studies of the political, economic, organisational and social aspects of national defence and broader strategies for managing deterrence relevant as long as such studies include reflections on the implications for the military organisation. In that sense, we are broader in scope than the more functional military journals.

While studies of military affairs are not identical to studies of war, the two have much in common. We are interested in war as a phenomenon – its history, causes, and consequences. We share war studies' interdisciplinary approach (Schmitt, 2018). Like war studies, military studies seeks to leave the “ivory tower.” But while much of war studies tends to engage primarily with policy-making, echoing defence or strategic studies, we encourage, equally, engagement with the everyday practices of officers and soldiers in the armed forces (Jakobsen, 2022). Additionally, it is worth pointing out that we, following Clausewitz, understand war as a social phenomenon and are, thus, interested in publishing papers that would fall under the broader umbrella of social studies.

Similarly, peace and conflict studies and (international) security studies overlap with military studies but are broader in scope. Both fields of study include a range of perspectives where militaries may play very little or no role. Conflict resolution processes, dynamics of structural violence and peace at the interpersonal level between individuals, neighbours or ethnic groups, for example, do not necessarily require involvement by the military; neither do efforts to improve human, environmental or economic security (Buzan and Hansen, 2009, 1–20). This is not to say we are uninterested in conflict resolution, structural violence or human security. On the contrary, when these topics involve theoretical or empirical overlaps with military organisational, operational or strategic practices, they are highly relevant (see Bramsen, 2019).

In short, given the “military” in the journal's title, we expect all articles to link or be relevant to the military profession. But we also insist that any such link or relevance may be understood broadly. Examples from the journal's archives cover a wide range of themes, including digital education (Kosonen, Vekkaila, & Pullinen, 2023), life-writing (Hagen, 2019), veterans transitioning to civilian life (Pedersen & Wieser, 2021), peacekeeping (Wisén et al., 2021), cyber militias (Svantesson, 2023), and search and rescue (Dahlberg et al., 2020).

## STUDIES

This is a journal of military studies. The term “studies” connotes a broader meaning to “science” – defining military studies as an independent research tradition, discipline, or science is complex, perhaps even undesirable. A specific object of research often characterises a scientific area of research and, within it, some core problems and issues are studied through broadly agreed-upon methods. Yet, as presented above, military affairs are multifaceted, and their issues so numerous that reducing them to a single method, or several methods, makes little sense. That is why SJMS is multidisciplinary and does not subscribe to any particular epistemology, ontology or theoretical and methodological concept or approach. Nor does it engage only in critical approaches, like journals such as *Critical Military Studies* – even if such perspectives are welcome in SJMS. Military studies are closer to “area studies” than a specific scientific discipline (Møller & Jensen, 2007). It resists specialisation and disciplinisation because such academic practices, their benefits notwithstanding, risk deprioritising the creation of syntheses, holistic perspectives, and dialogue with practitioners.

## SCANDINAVIAN

Lastly, the journal is about Scandinavian military studies. “Scandinavian” has a distinct meaning in this setting, understood as empirical investigations of military matters specifically related to the Nordic countries and often conducted by researchers affiliated with Scandinavian research institutions. Part of our scope is to strengthen networks and the field of military studies within Scandinavia. Comparative studies of Danish, Norwegian and Swedish veteran policies, or the differences in Swedish and Danish approaches to Nordic Defence Cooperation chairmanships, for example, are prototypical examples of this ambition (Yttereng, 2023; Dahl, 2021).

Yet, importantly, this does not mean that only articles on Scandinavian military studies will be accepted. Roughly 60% of our published articles relate specifically to Scandinavian military issues. “Scandinavian” refers, rather, to any military studies topic relevant for smaller states. Such topics range from future warfare (Coker, 2019; Kilcullen, 2019; Betz, 2019) to war gaming, command and logistics (Roennfeldt, 2022; Sjøgren, 2022; Skoglund, Listou, & Ekström, 2022), and they even include studies of subjects such as civil-military relations in Turkey and Israeli territorial defence (Genç Yılmaz, 2023; Druck, 2023). In other words, “Scandinavian” refers to empirical investigations of military matters related to the Nordic countries *and* the conceptual interest of small countries.

## HOW WE DO IT

The journal operates two distinct peer-reviewed tracks: the research track and the practice track. While the research track is well established, the practice-oriented track breaks new ground – at least in military studies.

The differences between the two tracks mainly concern the intended audience and the research contribution. In short, the research article is oriented toward an academic audience, contributing theoretical, conceptual, or empirical knowledge to an ongoing academic debate; the practice-oriented research article is oriented toward a community broader than that of academics, contributing research-based solutions to practical problems. All articles, however, are required to uphold academic standards for knowledge production – meaning many swing both ways, depending on the author’s intended focus.

## THE RESEARCH TRACK

The research track operates like that of any other academic journal. It is double-blind, peer-reviewed, and seeks to contribute to an existing academic debate by filling a gap in the existing literature or building on what is known. While this debate does not have to exist in military studies or SJMS, its introduction into the field Scandinavian military studies should make sense. Thus, the intended audience is primarily other academics engaged in an academic debate. Submission in this track must be written in English.

Besides closing an academic gap, the paper must be relevant to somebody. Of course, methodological clarity, rigour, and stringent analyses are essential – yet the “for whom” and “for what”, when clearly and convincingly stated in the introduction, significantly increase the chance of getting a paper from submission to peer review. Who are the other scholars you want to engage with in your study? Our two initial signposts as editors in this track, then, are “what is the contribution?”, and “does this paper address the ‘and so what?’ question?”.

But rather than discussing abstractions, perhaps it would be better if we showed three good, and somewhat different, examples from the past year.

In her article on “the military family,” Maj Hedegaard Heiselberg (2023) outlines how the term emerged as a research field in the United States in the 1960s and 1980s and identifies dominant themes on military families within three academic disciplines: psychology, sociology and feminist studies. Heiselberg’s article is exemplary not only because it systematically maps existing academic debates and produces several unanswered questions, but because her anthropological contribution points, also, to the importance of including “reflections on contextual framings” in studies on military families, thereby encouraging further academic debate within a sub-discipline of military studies.

Similarly, Iselin Silja Kaspersen (2023) does an excellent job positioning her article in existing academic research, in this case on female soldiers. Kaspersen’s research introduces the core (Goffmanian) concepts through which she reads her interview transcripts of female soldiers in the Norwegian Army. Her analysis of the *becoming* and *negotiation* of a female soldier identity both touches upon a very politically salient issue in Scandinavia and demonstrates the difficulties of developing functioning whistleblowing systems.

A third example is Jørgen Staun and Camilla T. N. Sørensen’s article on the limits to Russian-Chinese cooperation in the Arctic (Staun & Sørensen, 2023). The article is an example both of how to provide empirical insights relevant to developing Nordic defence capacities *and* how to offer new perspectives on existing theoretical frameworks. It is exemplary not only because it

succeeds in stringently applying Yarger's Ends-Ways-Means model to Russia and China in the Arctic, but also because it contributes with a reinterpretation of the model itself through a more social constructivist reading of the concept of strategic culture.

## THE PRACTICE-ORIENTEERED TRACK

The practice-oriented track operates with a double-blind peer-review process in which one of the reviewers is a practitioner with intimate knowledge of the practical implications in the organisation. In this track, submissions are accepted in English or in a Scandinavian language so that local issues may be better addressed. We expect submissions in this track to contribute to the solution of practical problems related to processes and practices in the profession, building on established theoretical literature and organisational practices; they should seek to develop such practices or to report retrospectively on how practices were developed. The gap which these articles fill, therefore, is not a gap in the academic literature, understood as something we do not understand conceptually or theoretically, but a problem within or related to the military profession – for example, practices that need adjusting, new routines, systems or weapons, challenges facing the military profession or new implementation.

The best submissions to this track have taken well-known theories and used them to understand professional problems and to suggest changes to practices. Based on a combination of a sound academic foundation and knowledge of practical issues or challenges in the profession, they aim to make the profession better. Student theses from military and defence colleges sometimes have the potential to be developed into practice-oriented articles; we encourage supervisors who see such potential to engage with their students with a view to reworking their theses into an SJMS practice article. Even the promising theses, however, can take quite some reworking to fit the scope.

The intended audience for this track is, first and foremost, the military practitioner, and we expect the article to produce suggestions for material changes or reports of lessons learnt during development projects closely related to the profession so that others may implement changes themselves. Answering the question of “and so what?” is as important in this track as it is in the research track – as are methodological rigour, a transparent research design, and systematic work with the empirical material.

We now turn to some of the best examples showcasing our thinking.

Christine Svop's article *Juggling Risk* is an excellent instance of our requirement for methodical and methodological rigour in the practice-oriented track (Svop, 2021). Through an analysis based on interviews with seven female soldiers, Svop clarifies both the empirical foundation and the phenomenological starting point before exploring the (often overlooked) challenges to soldier identity currently faced by pregnant officers. The article provides a strong argument for gender mainstreaming and, more specifically, calls on the Danish Armed Forces to implement and enforce workspace-specific pregnancy policies. Having recognised relevant literature in the field, the article even illustrates the interconnection between the two SJMS tracks by pointing the way forward for further academic research.

Reflecting the ideal starting point of the journal's practice-oriented articles, Mikkel Kronborg and Henrik Claus Hansen were presented with a clear practical problem to solve: the personnel in charge of the Royal Danish Navy's training programme, the Seariders, had no idea how their social interactions during exercises affected the learning outcome of the ship's crew. Kronborg and Hansen developed an elaborate micro-sociological three-phase fieldwork study to answer the question of social interaction. The resulting article shows how and why ostensibly trivial social interactions with those playing roles such as game master, teacher and reporter influence learning. The two authors then provide six questions to support the Seariders in their effort to develop and conduct exercises (Kronborg & Hansen, 2021).

Martin Gaard Grunne, Christian Robbins, Kåre Inge Skarsvåg and Trygve Steiro (2023) also seek to improve a practical problem in their article *Learning in the Force Protection Environment Between International Operations*. Rather than being tasked by the military practitioners to solve a specific problem, they observed in their own practice how much knowledge is wasted between deployments in the Norwegian Air Force and sought to understand how learning can be optimised in a military operative context. Notably, the authors do an excellent job of *not*

taking their experiences for granted, instead both seeking inspiration in the existing writings on learning and developing a research design capable of both confirming their suspicions and finding solutions. The study offers a conceptual model for facilitating and better supporting the acquisition of knowledge through a continual process, maintained throughout the exercise, rather than through knowledge-gathering executed at the last minute.

## AVENUES FOR THE FUTURE


We have looked back on five years of publications in the *Scandinavian Journal of Military Studies* and described how we, as editors, see the field's contours. But we do not control the avenues the journal should take in the next five years. That is your task, as authors. We depend on you to contribute your thought, both materially, as those practicing the military profession, and as the theoretical foundation supporting this development. Each of these contributions is equally wise and urgently needed in light of contemporary challenges.

## COMPETING INTERESTS

For clarity, the authors recognize that this article is a non-peer-reviewed note from the editors, summarizing and discussing the scope of SJMS and military studies as a research field.

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