Strong Intelligence, Strong Democracy?
Denmark's Security and Oversight Challenge

Theresa Lillelund
(Graduate student, MA in International Relations, Webster University Athens)

Introduction

The global situation is complex and unpredictable, which is affecting the threat level for each country. In 2025, the Danish Resilience Agency (SAMSIK)[1] stated that Denmark is navigating its most serious security and risk environment since the Second World War.
Denmark is facing a multi-faceted threat landscape, spanning terrorism, cyber-espionage, and hybrid warfare, which complicates the work of both the Danish Security and Intelligence Service (PET)[2] and the Danish Defence Intelligence Service (DDIS)[3].

Historically, the first laws on PET and DDIS were passed in 2013 and have been changed through the years. The Danish Intelligence Oversight Board (TET)[4] was also established back in 2013, and its work is independent – to guarantee the services follow the law.
Even though current threats require a strengthening of intelligence capabilities, it is essential for Denmark to continuously ensure effective democratic oversight and accountability – this to prevent an undermining of Denmark's strong democratic values.

Threat Level & the Work of PET and DDIS

This year PET has categorized the official terror threat level as serious, which is mainly due to the terror threat from militant Islamism. In 2025, cyber espionage was assessed as very high, according to SAMSIK. The same year DDIS classified both sabotage against the Danish Defense and military provocation against NATO allies as high. The level of destructive cyberattacks was ranked as medium, while the risk of regular military attacks

[1] In Danish: "Styrelsen for Samfundssikkerhed."
[2] In Danish: "Politiets Efterretningstjeneste."
[3] In Danish: "Forsvarets Efterretningstjeneste."
[4] In Danish: "Tilsynet med Efterretningstjenesterne."

against Denmark was deemed as none by DDIS. These differentiated threat levels show the complex work of especially PET and DDIS – making threat assessments both from a national and an international perspective in a rapidly shifting world.
But behind all these categorizations of threats there is the reality – there is a global connection, which means Denmark is not an isolated country. This is evident in attacks such as the one at the Israeli embassy in Copenhagen in 2024, state-sponsored Iranian plotting against Israeli and Jewish targets in Denmark in 2025, Russian espionage on military equipment and routes from Denmark to Ukraine, and confrontational behavior by the Russian military against Denmark and other NATO member states.

The global perspective is seen in these attacks – some conflicts and wars outside of Denmark affect the national Danish threat assessment. For example, the attack on the Israeli embassy, which might be rooted in the Israel/Gaza conflict, as well as the Iranian plotting that may be traced back to the conflict between the Jewish and Muslim people in Israel. Therefore, the military escalation that happened on 28 February this year, involving the USA, Israel, and Iran, could indirectly heighten the categorized threat level in Denmark hereafter.

Another situation affecting Denmark is the Russia-Ukraine war, where Denmark is a strong supporter of Ukraine, which might be the trigger for Russian espionage against the Danish military. Additionally, Russia's confrontational behavior towards Denmark may be rooted in what Russia views as a conflict with the West and NATO.

This interplay between geopolitical conflicts and the Danish threat level shows how Denmark is not isolated, but that countries across the world are intertwined. Additionally, it also shows that every action has consequences, such as the Danish support of Ukraine, although Denmark should not stop this support but instead be aware of the potential consequences of this support. Moreover, it also means that both PET and DDIS need to collect much information and remain attentive to both national and global situations.

Even though PET and DDIS have some different angles, the common goal is to assess the threats against Denmark and support preventive actions. A part of the two services' work involves collecting a massive volume of data, which requires some processing and therefore a need for sufficient digital solutions. Currently, PET is experiencing an increase in non-evaluated complex data and needs more capacity to store and analyze all this data. In order for both PET and DDIS to assess situations and risks, it is essential that they can analyze the data within an actionable time frame; otherwise, the consequences might be severe in the worst-case scenario.

As intelligence work is changing, PET is also pushing for real-time digital access to external government registries to replace manual, paper-based information. Meanwhile, there is also a risk when collecting data, whether it is digitally, manually, or in real time. How is the data used, and how is it stored?

Democratic Oversight & Accountability

Every year TET conducts an audit of both PET and DDIS – the findings are provided to the Danish Minister of Justice and the Minister of Defence, respectively, and subsequently presented to the Intelligence Services Committee of the Danish Parliament (UET)[5] before being released to the general public. TET's work and the process of revealing the findings should be a way of securing independent democratic oversight but also accountability; otherwise, the risk might be distrust of both the authorities and politicians by the public.

The TET reports from 2025 show different findings; one is that all the massive data collected and stored by both PET and DDIS is creating a challenge, especially due to severe compliance failures in deleting data in accordance with legislation. These findings could cause a feeling of insecurity among the public, especially about how data is stored, but also mistrust in how it is used – is the law being followed, and what happens when failures are discovered by TET?

Meanwhile, as the intelligence work is changing and becoming more digital, it has been described as "putting a puzzle together" – it is more about analyzing massive data than being case-based as previously. Therefore, the data collection is essential for both PET and DDIS in order to provide sufficient intelligence and threat assessments, but equally important is that the legislation is followed – so they have to balance this dilemma.

Another finding by TET is regarding PET's use of closed AI systems, where there is disagreement about whether or not these systems should be subject to strict logging, deletion, and data-protection rules. Currently this is not the case, so consequently there is a lack of access tracking in the systems. It might be the same dilemma if PET gets real-time access, which they are pushing for. With no logging, the risk is that no one can be held accountable, which goes against Danish values.

In order to provide more transparency and increase democratic control of PET, new mandates were provided to TET and UET by law in 2024. So, now TET's audits are risk-based, focusing on where the potential risks to civil liberties are greatest. Together with this, TET has gained more authority, such as requesting PET to conduct internal audits, and PET is required to report relevant breaches of rules to TET. Besides, UET can direct TET to initiate a deep-dive investigation into specific cases. These legislative changes indicate an increase in focus on democratic oversight, but maybe there is a need for further strengthening TET's authority – are these mandates enough to ensure that the law is followed by PET and DDIS?

[5] In Danish: "Udvalget vedrørende Efterretningstjenesterne."

Conclusion

The global geopolitical effect on Danish security demands that PET and DDIS collect massive data in order to conduct sufficient threat assessments, but both services are still adjusting to collecting, storing, and analyzing all this data. With the new "puzzle" situation and current threats, there is a need to further strengthen the intelligence capabilities but also provide TET with the authority to ensure that PET and DDIS are compliant with the law. It is essential to have transparency in democratic oversight, but especially accountability when legislation is not followed.

This means that while intelligence technologies are accelerating, strong oversight must also keep pace – and remember that public trust is not an obstacle to national security but its very foundation.

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