

THE RED CROSS
Humanitarian aid in conflict areas

Danish Report

Institut for Konjukter-Analyse IFKA,Denmark

November-December 2007

Jorn Thulstrup (jt@ifka.dk), +45-33-328270, IFKA, DENMARK
Revised by: Katja Salminen , Taloustutkimus Oy, FINLAND
(katja.salminen@cati.toy.fi /+358-9-85751399
And Malin Karlsson, Taloustutkimus Oy,FINLAND

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SUMMARY

All of the MPs interviewed knew the Red Cross and had an idea of how it operated on the areas of conflict. Most of the MPs interviewed admitted that they do not have specific information about the Red Cross but as members of relevant commission most of the interviewees had been visiting Danish development programs in third world countries and conflict zones of the world, especially those areas where Denmark had sent military troops. Visiting these Danish development areas had given them information about the operations of the Red Cross in the areas too. They also had received briefings and reports about the Danish development programs and considered them to be important source of information. Information about the Red Cross especially was gained from meetings with the management of the Danish Red Cross. MPs also gained significant amount of their information about the Red Cross from the same sources as the general public; meaning media, TV, radio, newspapers and the campaigns of the Red Cross.

Five of the MPs interviewed knew the special mandate of the Red Cross with the reference to Geneva Convention. Only one had heard about the term NIHA, although the concept of neutral and independent humanitarian action was known to all interviewees.

The overall attitude towards the Red Cross could be described as positive. It was said to be effective, quick on the spot, international, neutral and impartial, experienced in different conflict and catastrophe situations and generally well-respected in the international community. Having said that, there were couple of MPs who had more negative perception of the Red Cross. They said that in the current situation in Israel and Palestine there was an air of implication that the Red Cross had been taking sides and so doing endangered its principal of neutrality. Also, many of the interviewed MPs mentioned the recent incident regarding the Danish Red Cross and the treatment of asylum seekers in Denmark. This probably had some impact of how the Danish Red Cross was seen but didn't affect the opinion about the international Red Cross.

The Red Crosses neutrality was regarded highly for the most parts. It was seen as the most important aspect of the Red Cross because it enabled the organization to move to the conflict area and operate there effectively. On the other hand one MP stated that in Afghanistan the neutrality could cause more problems than it solves, if the Red Cross or other NGOs get in the way of the military operating in the area thus endangering the soldiers. He also stated that the strict neutrality policy leads to helping the Talebans. He saw that helping the Taliban system of oppression is in fact in contradiction with the principles of the Red Cross.

The Danish MPs stressed that the nature of conflicts has changed in the world today. The NGOs have to work in the areas where combats are still going on and the respect for NGOs and their work cannot be taken for granted anymore. There are actors that don't know about the impartiality and neutrality of the NGOs and then there are actors that won't respect it even if they knew about it. The Talebans of Afghanistan were mentioned in this extent. Because of these things the military protection of the NGO workers as well as civilians who they were aiding was seen as necessity. The Danish MPs recognized the problems connected to this practice: The neutrality of the NGOs could be compromised in reality or at least in the eyes of the people in conflict areas. The problems were obvious but the Danish MPs saw that the co-operation between military and the aid organizations was a reality and had to be dealt with accordingly.

Denmark has a long history in working with the international programs that combine both military and the humanitarian actions. Especially the work they have been doing with the UN since the first peacekeeping operation in Cyprus was mentioned. Military personnel doing the humanitarian work was therefore not an unthinkable concept for Danish MPs but rather natural form of co-operation. Most of the Danish MPs stated the Danish military personnel

were well-trained to do the humanitarian work. In addition it was thought that the Danish troops had a good reputation and were usually well received by the local population.

The need for rules and regulations for the use of military in humanitarian tasks, the use of military in protection of humanitarian workers as well as co-operation between different humanitarian actors were heavily stressed by the Danish MPs. They felt that there are still many things needing for clearing concerning the questions of roles of the different operators in the conflict areas. A few MPs also stated that the lack of co-operation between different humanitarian organizations had been causing problems in the field with overcrowding and distributing the tasks. Some of the Danish MPs brought up the view that The Red Cross especially should more concentrate on providing emergency help and leave the long-term projects to other organizations better qualified in that field. - MPs felt also that there are some good examples of how the long-term projects such as rebuilding has been done by the military. This they felt was especially true concerning the Danish troops.

However, the role of the Danish troops in the conflict areas has recently been changing and this caused some concern among the MPs interviewed. Some of them felt that the close co-operation with the NATO and the US troops especially in the Afghanistan and Iraq have damaged the reputation of the Danish troops as peacekeepers and re-builders. They felt that the troops in Afghanistan are engaged in a full-blown war and can hardly do any re-building. Even the protection of civilians and NGOs are endangered if the military has to fight hard just to protect themselves, one MP stated.

Question of funding humanitarian aid and military caused some disagreement between different political parties. Most the right-wingers are more inclined of thinking that funds should be directed to the military as most the left-wingers think that the funds should be more balanced between the military and development aid. On the same time the right-wingers think that more money should be spend on emergency aid whereas the left-wingers state that development aid should be the priority.

The Danish MPs underlined the need for international rules and regulations of the roles, responsibilities and rights of different actors in conflict areas in the future. An international convention around the matter was on the wish-list. Also, the Danish MPs felt that UN should gain back it authority and that Denmark should work more closely with the UN as well as with other European countries in the conflict areas.

The Danish MPs also expressed their willingness to gain more information about the Red Cross and hoped that the Danish Red Cross would be more active in distributing information.

1. INTRODUCTION

Goals of the survey and the target group

The goal of this survey was to get a close look to the ideas, impressions and opinions the Members of the parliament had on humanitarian aid especially on the conflict zones where military action is/was involved. In addition, this survey aimed on getting information on why certain methods and viewpoints are chosen when taking part in humanitarian action and management of crisis. The aim was also to find out what grounds the MP's make their decisions on how to direct funds to humanitarian aid.

The people interviewed for this survey were MP's of the Nordic Countries parliaments attending the Committees of Defense and Foreign Affairs. The aim was to interview good mix of representatives of both committees as well as both men and women.

This report deals with the material gathered from the MP's of the Parliament of Denmark: The actions of both Red Cross and the Red Crescent are covered together in this report. This Survey was carried out by Institute of Business Analysis IFKA, Denmark on the behalf of Taloustutkimus Oy, Finland.

Methods of the survey

Project was designed by Kati Myrén of Taloustutkimus Oy, Finland. Ms. Myrén also was responsible on briefing and construction of the interview guide.

The Danish Red Cross initially provided IFKA with priority list of 12 MPs, who were members of the Committee of Foreign affairs, the Foreign Policy Council and the Committee of Defense. Dual membership of the councils is rather common. MPs on the priority list received a letter from the Danish Red Cross signed by the General Secretary and dated the 18th of October 2007 with information about survey.

The face-to-face interviews took from 20 minutes to one hour, average time being 34 minutes. They were carried out in November and December of 2007 by IFKA's Senior Analysts Mr. Jørn Thulstrup at Christiansborg, home of the Parliament of Denmark.

The Interviewed and the political parties in Denmark

IFKA interviewed 10 MPs one of which was a woman. Among the interviewed there were three senior politicians with more than 20 years of experience as a MP, two of them had even be ministers for many years, having served among other positions as the minister of Foreign Affairs. Five participants were also more experienced as MPs, having served since election of 2001 or longer. Two had less years under their belt as MPs.

With few exceptions MPs contacted were rather willing to give an interview on the subject of this survey. Two refused saying that they either had no time or expertise to give an interview.

Two MPs of both of the largest parties in the Danish Parliament at the moment were interviewed. The two largest parties are the Danish Liberal party, Venstre, which is a right-wing party (46 seats in the parliament) and left-wing party Danish Social Democrats (45 seats). In addition, one MP of each of the six smaller parties was interviewed.

In the following, the term "political left" refers to the opinions of interviewed that were members of The Danish Socialist peoples party (23 seats) and the Unity list ;also know as the Red-Green alliance of Denmark (4 seats). The term "political right" refers to the opinions of the interviewed that were members of the Danish peoples party (25 seats), The Danish Liberal party and the Danish Conservative peoples party (18 seats). In the political center there are three parties, The Danish Social Democratic party, the Social Liberal party (9 seats) and The New Alliance (3 seats).

Election in Denmark

IFKA Denmark reported to Taloustutkimus Oy Finland that it experienced some difficulties getting the interviews done in time. This was not because of reluctant attitude of MPs towards the survey, its subject or the Red Cross, but rather, IFKA reported, because right now the interview could not raise very high on the priority list of MPs because of the elections. The first interview was carried out on October 22nd and on the 24th the Prime Minister of Denmark called a general election. Within the following 24 hours all appointments for interview were cancelled or at least postponed.

Two MPs on the original priority list of interviewees were not re-elected and therefore not interviewed.

2. THE GENERAL KNOWLEDGE OF THE RED CROSS

2.1. Overall attitude positive, no detailed knowledge

Most of the respondents said at the beginning of the interview that they felt that they didn't have any special or detailed knowledge about the Red Cross. Despite of that, five of them said that they knew the Red Cross having a special mandate with reference of the Geneva Convention. All ten interviewed had the image of the Red Cross as being neutral, impartial, and having access to people who are imprisoned. The interviewed also brought up the historical relevance of the Red Cross by mentioning its actions in the Second World War and other wars in the past.

One of the interviewed was so familiar with the NIHA – concept, that he mentioned the name himself.

The overall attitude towards the Red Cross was positive. Its impartiality, neutrality and experience in working in different conflict zones around the world was highly appreciated. In addition, the MPs mentioned the high level of commitment of the Red Cross's staff and the ability to respond very quickly when there was need for humanitarian aid anywhere in the world. Red Cross was considered the main actor when it comes to emergency help.

"It's the classical aid organization, they are professional and operate all over the world on a neutral basis. They are expected because they help those in distress" MP5

"I know them as a serious and professional organization. People feel that they trust them and seek help from them when needed" MP8

"When I think about the Red Cross I see them as compassionate, altruist, merciful and brave" MP1

"The Red Cross has a very broad area of expertise. They help not only in areas of war and fighting but in the cases of natural catastrophes and man-made catastrophes as well" MP2

There were few that had negative attitudes towards the Red Cross. Mainly people who had negative things to say mentioned the problems of maintaining neutrality in certain areas.(see chapter 3.2.), and the quite recent incident concerning the conditions the asylum seekers were living in the facilities provided by the Danish Red Cross. This incident was mentioned by several MPs and it influenced their overall opinion about the Danish Red Cross in particular. It seemed that this incident didn't influence the ideas the MPs had about the operations of the international Red Cross.

The MPs had gained their knowledge about the Red Cross operations from the organization itself. They had attended meetings with the management of the Danish Red Cross. The names of Jorgen Poulsen and Anders Ladekarl were mentioned in this aspect. In the conflict areas where Denmark was involved the MPs had also received reports and briefings.

MPs gained information also from the same sources as general public, meaning mass media, campaigns of the Red Cross and such.

"I am not a specialist but I think that I know more about the Red Cross than the average Dane. I have no professional relationship with the Red Cross, and have not been directly involved with their activities. But I do know the points they are stressing and those are the points I have been stressing here in the Parliament" MP10

2.2. The operations of the Red Cross in the conflict areas

The operations of the Red Cross in conflict areas were generally described as efficient, quick on the spot and politically neutral. The MPs knew about the general work the Red Cross is involved in the conflict areas, and individual cases such as building clinics in Darfur where mentioned (MP1).

However, even in the early states of interviews the MPs mentioned that there are many problems when working in the conflict areas. The concern of the safety of the humanitarian workers was mentioned by all MPs interviewed as well as problems with the co-operation with military forces. There were MPs that thought that the very important aspect of Red Cross's neutrality had been already compromised while working on these conflict zones with the military. (see chapter: 3.2)

As members of the Committees of Defense and Foreign affairs most of the interviewed had some experience on humanitarian work: They had visited Danish development programs in Africa and Asia as well as conflict areas such as the Balkans, Iraq and Afghanistan. Only one mentioned having visited an area where the Red Cross was involved though.

"It's my impression that the Red Cross is the organization which is closest to the conflict and catastrophe areas. They are often the first on the spot because they have a world wide organization, the experience and the capacity. They are efficient in the tasks they are assign to. They are indispensable!" MP1

2.3. Special mandate for operating in conflict areas

MPs were asked if they thought the Red Cross having a special international mandate on operating in conflict zones. It seemed that the mandate was not very familiar to the MPs especially in the more detailed level. However, most of them thought that the Red Cross had such a mandate which was based in the rules established by the Geneva Convention and which consisted of the idea of political neutrality and impartiality. It enables them to operate on different sides of the frontline in the conflict areas and among other things, visit prison camps. The American prison camp of Guantanamo was mentioned a few times. One MP said, in association on this particular prison camp and the prison camps as a whole, that the neutrality which the mandate of the Red Cross expects of it causes a problem when the employees of the Red Cross visit such a camp: They are granted access but have to keep confidentiality about the information they might receive or collect during such visits in order to protect their neutrality. (MP9)

None of the MPs remembered the Red Cross having briefed them about their international mandate especially.

2.4. The Red Cross compared to other humanitarian actors

The interviewees were not willing to do many differentiations between Red Cross and the other major humanitarian actors. The other organizations mentioned by the name were Bornefonden, Care, MS, Amnesty, Human Rights Watch, The Danish Church aid, SOS Barnebyerne, Medecines sans frontiers, and the UN organizations. Even though the differentiations were not made per se, the expertise, experience and commitment of the Red Cross staff were mentioned as being outstanding. The role of the Red Cross was seen as especially of an emergency helper, taking care of the immediate needs of people in distress.

Other organizations, some MPs claimed could have their strengths in working in the more long-term projects. If many aid organizations worked in the same area it was considered a problem because this could mean that they were not as efficient as they could be, and the aid was not distributed that well-coordinated as it could be.

"Why I think the Red Cross is better than others –Its global, it has a great history, it has not been involved in any major scandals, it has been a reliable and solid." MP8

"We prefer to give money to those who don't have very large administrative costs, they work effectively: this is the reason why we choose to our bid to this organization (Red Cross) rather than to for example to UN which can have very large administrative level and therefore lost of expenses in there." MP6

"The issue we do not talk about so often is the over-crowding, which we often see in places where many NGOs are present. There is a competition of houses and other facilities for staff as well as local support personnel" MP10

3. HUMANITARIAN AID IN CONFLICT AREAS

3.1. Regions and challenges to humanitarian work

When asked about the conflict areas in the world today, the Danish MPs mentioned Afghanistan, Iraq , Darfur, Sudan, Congo, Somalia, Tanzania, Middle East and The Balkans. The MPs weren't sure in which countries the Red Cross was operating at the moment.

In these areas, MPs agreed, people live in desperate need of outside assistance. The interviewees also saw the problems in these areas particularly. The problems rise from the changing of rules of engagement. The wars are different than they were before and that changes the way the aid organizations can operate in the conflict areas. The main problem is, the MPs commented quite unanimously, that there are no clear frontlines and no real knowledge of who is in what side of the conflict. Also, the people fighting in the conflict areas don't always know the way NGOs operate and it is possible that they see the aid workers as siding with their enemy. Not even all the governments involved in conflicts respect the Red Cross and its mandate or other humanitarian organizations.

The humanitarian work on the conflict areas consisted, in MPs minds, both immediate help for those in need and more long-term goals in re-building societies.

The safety of the humanitarian workers is a concern in the conflict areas, the MPs agreed. In the conflict areas it seems to be essential to provide armed protection to humanitarian organizations. This means of course co-operation with the international military forces and raises questions about neutrality. The estimation of the situation and the decision to get involved has to be made by NGOs themselves. It might be more important to guard the neutrality and the independence than to be involved in all possible conflict zones, some MPs said.

"In traditional conflict you had the on party on one side and the other in the other side of the frontline and the Red Cross could go there between the front lines and help the wounded. Now the scene might be completely different. You don't know where the enemy is and who actually is the enemy. In the daytime person can act as an ordinary civilian, and in the night time the same person might shoot at you. The military strategy is changing – everything is blurred. It is very difficult and this is something we should discuss." MP10

"First of all I think that neutral and independent humanitarian assistance is particularly difficult in areas with armed conflicts. And usually there is a civil war going on, which creates a very difficult situation. Who is the enemy? Who is who? (..) We have experienced this kind of situation in Bosnia. Military confrontations yes- but also civil war going on. And conflict between neighbors, ethnics groups, and tribes, and that kind of problem. It was extremely difficult. Also difficult to remain neutral(..)I think we are now considering the situation – but it is very difficult. There are areas where you can not really trust the NGOs – Zimbabwe is an example. I know that the Church Aid DK tried to work there but found it very difficult. They managed to work there through some contacts but it was very difficult. The extraordinary violence and suppression by the government of Zimbabwe not only by the armed forces makes it very difficult or impossible to introduce any kind of humanitarian aid there. Another similar case is the situation in Burma. I believe that the humanitarian organizations find it very difficult to operate inside Burma." MP2

3.2. Defining the neutral and impartial humanitarian work

Members of the both committees understood the concept of neutral and impartial humanitarian work in the similar way: It means that the humanitarian aid is targeted to all in

need, not making the difference between parties of the conflict. Many interviewees referred to the Geneva Convention and honoring the rules and regulations laid out by it.

The Red Cross was seen, by the vast majority of the interviewed MPs, as an organization following the rules of Geneva Convention and taking great care of its reputation of neutral and impartial actor in the areas of crisis. The neutrality and impartiality were seen as essential to the effective work of Red Cross and other NGOs as well. It was seen as the most important factor for the Red Cross for getting behind the frontlines to help those in need, or being allowed to visit prisoners in camps and elsewhere.

“ It crucial that the Red Cross can maintains its neutral position – it can be difficult in short-term, but in the long it’s the only possible way of operating. There are other organizations that may take sides in conflicts but this should never happen with the Red Cross. It is better to not be involved at all if the neutrality is compromised.” MP9

“ It is immensely important that we have such an organization that is neutral and cannot be suspected of taking sides. I very much agree with the Red Cross when they say that they need to guard their neutrality.” MP10

One MP brought up that there have been rumors that Red Cross had already been compromising its neutrality in the Middle East:

“Israelis have been irritated over the rumors that some parties have been taking advantage of the neutral position of the Red Cross by smuggling weapons to conflict zones. I think that this claim was probably produced by those wanting to weaken the Red, Cross’s position in the area; Should they really choose sides in the Middle East that would be catastrophic. I know that the Israelis have already dismissed the aid from Danish Church, Folkekirke, because of the claim that they have been siding with the Palestinians. This is what I have heard straight from the high authoritative sources of the Israeli Government.” MP4

In the modern day conflict areas it could be very difficult to remain neutral and impartial many of the MPs interviewed stressed. One of the problems is that in the conflict areas there are people that don't even know the concept of neutral humanitarian work and therefore assume that the Red Cross as well as other NGOs have been taking sides in the conflict. One example of this is the situation is Afghanistan, where the Taleban fighters don't see NGOs as being neutral. The recent situation in Iraq was also mentioned by some of the MPs: The UN

and the Red Cross were forced to leave the country because there all the western actors, both the military and impartial non-military were seen as not-wanted.

None the less, most of the MPs though that sticking to neutral policy was absolutely necessary, even though it might not always been the most popular policy:

"I think it is good that the Red Cross has been openly criticizing the US and underlining their own neutrality, because I think that the US has not been honoring the rules and regulations of the Geneva Convention." MP9

Sticking strict neutrality-policy could also be seen as a problem.

"It is important that the Red Cross does not get in the way of military operations. I can relate to the principle of impartiality but its not the most important factor for me. There is of course a place for independent humanitarian aid, but first of all I want to stress that our military people such not be distracted from their main mission by the NGOs! The demand for neutrality creates certain problems - If they (NGOs) create more problems than they solve, they should keep away from the area! If the Red Cross wants to operate in the Taleban-areas and in so doing also help our enemy it simply is not right. I don't think we should be doing any rebuilding in the areas where the Talebans is in power. I understand the problems of the Red Cross but I would not like to see any aiding in the areas where the Talebans are in charge and still are keeping up with their system of suppression – Helping them would also be in contradiction with the Red Cross's own principals." MP8

4. THE PROTECTING AND AIDING THE CIVILIANS IN THE CONFLICT AREA

4.1. Basis for humanitarian aid and humanitarian aid as a process

The Danish MPs mainly saw the Red Cross as being at its best in emergencies where it is important to quickly provide immediate help for those in need. Most of the MPs did not speak about long-term and short-term aid especially, but those who did, seemed to be in the opinion that the Red Cross might not be the best possible aid-provider for long-term goals such as rebuilding the society. For example the Danish Church Aid was said to be maybe better on those tasks.

In this extent, the need for better coordination between different aid-providing organizations was mentioned by some of the MPs especially. One MP said that the coordination of aid in conflict and catastrophe areas had been more successful between the organizations of the Nordic nations and perhaps organizations of other countries as well, but on the whole, the coordination was not usually very successful or effective.

Humanitarian aid was considered to be a process. On the governmental level it starts with the political decision of providing aid to certain area. The international organizations such as Red Cross are on their part ready to move quickly to areas where the help is needed and their neutral position makes it easier to cross borders and provide help. Immediate help means first of all food, water, shelter and medical aid. After this is provided and re-building can start, the other organizations as well as aid provided by foreign governments can move in.

In modern conflict zones it might be very dangerous to aid workers to do their job and therefore it is agreed among the MPs that the need for military protection exists – nowadays more than before. It creates some problems that are explained more detailed in the following chapters. Nonetheless the safety of the aid workers and the need for creating a humanitarian space to do the aid work is commonly acknowledged as a basis for humanitarian work.

"I think that nowadays, under these very difficult circumstances (the aid workers need to operate) it is impossible to provide humanitarian assistance and reconstruction without providing them (the aid workers) some security. These things are in many areas so intertwined that one cannot exist without the other and protection is always needed. In situation where its very bad, like in Iraq reconstruction and providing aid becomes very difficult" MP2

"The humanitarian organizations can hardly work in southern Afghanistan where even the military have problems just to defend themselves. – And how are they supposed to do any reconstruction in those situations?" MP10

4.2. The role of the military and states in protection and aiding civilians

All interviewed were of the opinion that in fact most of the areas where there is an armed conflict going on, the Red Cross and the other NGOs cannot operate without the protection of international military forces. All of the respondents thought that protection of the civilian population in these areas is also a high priority. However, there is a difference in the opinions of how large part of the aiding of the civilians the military personnel should do, and what

should be left to NGOs. For most part the MPs felt that the co-operation between the military and the NGOs is the most effective way to help the civilian population.

The neutrality of the Red Cross and the other NGOs plays a big part in the minds of MPs when they think about the positive sides of using mainly NGOs in the aiding of the civilian population: The civilians usually trust the NGOs better than those carrying arms and military uniforms.

"The modern soldier is no longer there just to kill the enemy and keeping enemy forces out of the country. He is also there to participate in developing and reconstruction, using his military skills to protect himself and others participating in rebuilding.(..) But how can the local population be sure that the same soldier, carrying weapons all the same, will not be using those weapons against them even though he just yesterday was working on the construction? " MP10

At the same time, even though the civilian population usually trusts the NGOs better than the military, sometimes there is a need for NGOs to accept military help even though it might be problematic.

" There are some good examples of what the military has done but they are usually in a small scale. Every time the soldiers are doing something for aiding the civilians they are at certain risk. The Red Cross has better opportunities to operate because the people there are accepting and enabling the help from the Red Cross more easily and even providing some kind of protection for them. But there is always a risk that there are some – the Talebans for example – that don't know that the Red Cross is neutral. In those cases the aid by the Red Cross can only be delivered to the people after the military had secured the area." MP3

The majority of the Danish MPs stressed that Denmark has a long experience in foreign military operations and that the Danish military forces are specialized in humanitarian projects like re-building and providing food and water to the civilians in the area. Because of this the Danish MPs talked mainly about the Danish military forces when they referred to military.

"In Kosovo the Danish forces were able to resolve problems and really help the civilians. We were far better in it that for example French forcercs." MP8

"Denmark never involves in wars unless it is absolutely necessary. In Iraq, where I was, it was clear that the civilians were much more willing to accept the presence of the Danish

troops, because they were in a sense an intermediate form between military troops and humanitarian aid. When we arrive on the scene our primary objection is to help in re-building and the locals accept that. We also budget our military operations in such a way that there is funds reserved for the re-building. It is clear that we exceed the accomplishments of our American colleagues in that sense because we can operate in the 'gray zone' between military and civilian aid, unlike the Americans " MP6

There were also those who thought that Denmark was no longer as well accepted by the civilians and not as capable of providing humanitarian aid as before because of the co-operation with for example U.S. troops and perhaps the changing nature of the Euro-corps (see chapter 5.) One MP (MP10) brought up that he felt that the Danish troops are no longer even able to provide aid and protection to the civilians because they have to be so involved in actual fighting:

"The problem is obvious in Afghanistan – The government tells us that the soldiers are there in order to rebuild and try to make the life tolerable for the local population. That's not what's going on. They are in a full-fledged war and they use all their energy to defend themselves (..) It is impossible to work in development. On the other hand without the military there won't be any development because the NGOs can't operate in area without the military protection."(MP10)

MP10 also said that the soldiers in Danish troops are not always experienced and/or trained enough to meet the two roles of military actor and provider of humanitarian aid. Same MP suspected that sometimes these young soldiers don't have the right mentality and for some extend feel that they are more "on an adventure" than being strictly professional.

4.3. The problems of separation of the military and non-military actors

Because the neutrality of the NGOs was highly valued among the most of the MPs the problems that close co-operation with the military, although necessary, could cause were clear to interviewees. The biggest concern was that the neutral status of the Red Cross and other NGOs could be compromised or at least seems compromised in the eyes of people living in the conflict area. One problem was, the MPs stated, that not all knew or recognized the neutral status of the NGOs. The idea of armed forces helping the civilian population and doing humanitarian tasks was also considered to be quite strange to some parties. The

Taliban fighters of the Afghanistan were especially mentioned in this extent. This would hinder both the NGOs and the military troops for providing humanitarian aid.

"We should continuously carry on the debate and try to separate civilian and military assistance as much as possible, but in some cases this is not possible because the situation on the ground is so severe. Therefore we also should leave room for the military to operate in humanitarian tasks and reconstruction. I see need for careful analysis of roles: What is called for each situation? How do we provide assistance in the best possible way? The problem with mixing civilian and military assistance only appear in few cases however, where you have peacekeeping operations going on. – The big bulk of humanitarian aid goes on without military action. Military is only called for in armed conflict areas" MP2

One MP (MP8) especially stressed that the presence of the Red Cross and other NGOs in the conflict area could cause security risks to the military personnel. He felt that the security of the troops in the conflict area is the uttermost priority and therefore, if the NGOs got in way of the military operation or otherwise hindered the functionality and security of the troops they should quite clearly "stay away" and let the army provide the assistance for civilian population if it is called for.

Denmark has been involved in military conflicts in the past providing troops to international military and peacekeeping operations. The MPs felt that Danish troops have been able to quite successfully co-operate with the NGOs (see chapter 4.2.). It seems that the completely separation between military and humanitarian actors is not an absolute in the minds of some Danish MPs, especially when it comes to co-operation with the Danish troops. Many of them said that even though the separation of the military and the humanitarian actors would be ideal, it is mostly impossible in today's conflict zones and this is why it is important to concentrate working co-operation. The most important thing is to provide aid for those in need. In many cases this is a question of either accepting military presence and protection or not be able to get aid for those needing it.

"I have a feeling that sometimes the NGOs don't want to operate with the military at all. I think this is regrettable – This is not a black and white situation. It's important to have both those walking in military boots and those wearing the sandals of the humanitarian worker to have successful operations in these areas. The re-building cannot be done if the area is insecure and this is the situation is for example in Afghanistan and Iraq. (..) I have been communicating this to the Red Cross. If we want to help the Afghans we need both elements. Same goes with Darfur – You can't help the population there without having security " MP6

The Danish MPs thought that one way of dividing the humanitarian tasks between NGOs and the armed forces could be that the NGOs could be providing the immediate help like food, water, shelter and medical assistance while the armed forces could, in addition of providing the protection, be of an assistance with re-building. This because the army has the manpower and the know-how to take on bigger building operations like roads, bridges, hospitals and so on.

"In Darfur the Red Cross took care of the clinics and the health care with the help of 'Doctors without Borders' – organization. The US Aid provided foodstuff: Corn and oil. That was a good combination." MP1

5. THE ROLE OF DENMARK AND THE RESPONSIBILITY OF HUMANITARIAN WORK IN CONFLICT AREAS

5.1. Denmark's changing role in the world's conflict areas

Denmark has a long history of sending troops to international military operations. Many of the interviewed thought highly of Denmark's participation in UN peacekeeping ever since there have been UN's blue berets on Cyprus. They felt that Denmark has gained a lot of valuable experience working with the neutral UN troops and also gained a certain respect in international community. Many of the MPs saw that Denmark has a certain responsibility to continue sending troops to conflict areas as it has been, and try to offer some relief the distressed people of conflict areas.

"There are people in this country, like in other countries as well, who argue that we should never be engaged in military operation but only in humanitarian operations. I do not share this view and there is a rather broad agreement as well in this country that sometimes you do need to send in the military personnel in order to provide security, which in time can lead to relief and reconstruction. So I certainly do not exclude the use of military forces. Our defense agreement makes it possible to Denmark to provide 2000 people to international military operations. We have made a commitment to this rather early- we may have been the first country to organize our national defense around the notion that our army should be used also internationally. Noting that territorial defense of Denmark has lost its meaning." MP2

However, many felt that this situation has been changing and the role of the Danish troops is now very much different. So much so, that there is a need for reconsidering the use of Danish military forces. Mainly this is because the close relationship with the UN has changed to the relationship with the NATO and US. Many saw this as not being the best possible tendency for Denmark.

"The tendency has lately been, that the Danish troops are no longer serving as peacekeepers but peacemakers. This is the situation in Afghanistan where we are now involved with a real full-blown war. Even more so in Iraq. And that is something new for us. The reason why we went in to these areas was the simplistic notion that we always share the same interests with the United States – This differed from the policy of many European countries." MP3

"The problem the Denmark now faces is drawing away from the very element we have been known for in Cyprus, the Middle East and other places where we have been part of UN's Blue Berets. What we are now engaging ourselves to is not creating peace but war! We should get back to UN mandate. I think it's tragic that UN has been losing its significance in international conflicts" MP9

"The role of the Danish has changed: In later years we have followed the American strategy and there have been a dramatic shift in paradigm since 2001. Where we before very much orientated towards Europe and towards the challenges of civilian nature like human rights, freedom movements around the world we are now close to American foreign policy(..) We are in Iraq and Afghanistan because the US is there. We are there as a loyal alliance nation. This is wrong in my opinion. We should co-operate more with Europe including working for achieving consensus in Europe concerning these matters. Only after then we should look for partners outside Europe. In the long run we can't go on pretending that we are fighting for democracy when we are in fact just fighting the American War Against Terror!" MP10

All MPs saw that primary goal for Danish troops, whether they fought with NATO and US or took part in UN operation was to protect and aid those suffering in war.

5.2. Funds for humanitarian aid and military

The Danish government allocates humanitarian aid in the hope that it can help people in underdeveloped countries and areas of armed conflict or natural catastrophes. This policy has a broad support of politicians as well as general population.

The committees usually make the decisions of the funds for humanitarian aid. Only the decision about military involvement like in Iraq and Afghanistan has to be made by the parliament. The ministry of development has a strong say in how the budgeted money to aiding people in underdeveloped countries and areas of armed conflict or natural catastrophes should be allocated and distributed.

There are different opinions as how much Denmark should spend on humanitarian aid and how much on military action. The left-wingers are more inclined to say that there should not be as much military involvement in the first place and therefore most of the funds should be directed towards humanitarian aid. The right-wingers are more in favor of spending about the same amount of funds to support troops too.

There is also a disagreement about how the funds should be balanced between the emergency help and funds directed to re-building. The left-wingers would like to see more money spend on long-term developing of the suffered areas, as the right-wingers would like to see more funds directed to emergency help and less to development and re-building. This is because there are certain studies suggesting that the positive effects on placing funds to long-term goals are doubtful and the money could go to wrong pockets so to speak.

"We are now talking about governmental programs and what I would like to see is more clear separation of money for development and money for emergency – presently there is a competition between the two areas. A more clear separation between money going to emergency help and money to the development is called for. The definition what is what is becoming more blurred. Today money for relief is taken from development aid. We should have two different budget lines as we had in the previous government" MP2

5.3. Hopes and suggestions for the future

In the future, the conflicts in the world and the need for humanitarian aid as well as providing protection for the NGOs working in the conflict area will regrettably continue. The MPs interviewed though that there is even more need for making clear what roles the different

actors will play in these situations. There might be a need for international convention that could make global decisions of the roles of NGOs on the one hand and the international military on the other hand. This agreement of roles and rules should be recognized by as many countries as possible.

Couple of MPs interviewed wanted to underline the importance of UN and expressed their hope that in the future UN will gain back the authority it had before.

As for the international Red Cross, most of the MPs felt that it needs to protect its independency and neutrality in the world today even more vigorously as it has before.

The role of the media was also brought up. It was considered a hugely important factor nowadays and even more so in the future. One MP (MP2) said that it is important that the media will continue covering the conflicts and catastrophes in the world. This draws a public attention and could that way greatly assist in achieving humanitarian goals in the areas of distress. – As was clearly seen in the case of tsunami catastrophe in Thailand in 2004.

Many MPs felt that more funds should be directed to humanitarian aid, although there were some disagreement of how the money should be distributed between emergency help and long-term development aid. There is also an on-going political debate whether Denmark should be spending more funds to the military action in areas of conflict or to humanitarian action.

In the future Denmark cannot take part in every conflict there is going on. MP3 suggested:

“Denmark should agree on the list of priorities on what they can and cannot do. We cannot take part in every conflict there is in the going on the world. What can we do and to what extend? We should continue to keep on our high profile when it comes to emergency aid”

MP3

As for Red Cross, many MPs felt that there is a need for better distribution of information and that the Danish Red Cross should take more active information strategy. A short newsletter published eight to ten times per year and distributed to MPs in relevant committees might be useful.

The Danish Red Cross was involved in a misfortunate scandal associated with the asylum seekers in Denmark and their living conditions. MP9 thought that this damaged the image of the Danish Red Cross:

"The domestic asylum debate is problematic for the Danish Red Cross. In that they got involved in a political scandal that put a question mark on their neutrality. They should withdraw from that field and let others deal with it. They were partly to blame for the mistreatment of these asylum seekers" MP9

At the moment the political debate as well as the interest of the public concerning humanitarian matters circle around the situation in Afghanistan and Iraq. The conversation about use of military and co-operation with the humanitarian organizations is on-going, and will continue as long as Denmark is involved. There are big questions still waiting for to be answered satisfactorily and there is no doubt that the Red Cross will continue having a large role in attempt to find answers to them in Denmark and elsewhere.

6. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION BY IFKA DENMARK

Depending of how one formulates the question in a representative study, the majority of the Danish population will either support the 0,8 % of GDP spend on humanitarian aid, or are willing to increase it to 1,0 % or even more, or are willing to reduce it to the same level as the average of other EU-countries. The reducing will not probably take place in the near future, but it could very well happen if the political climate changes like it did in Finland some years ago.

For an organization like the Danish Red Cross which receives most of its funding from the government the neutrality might not be a given thing. Any NGO might be suspected of taking sides when the funding is in question. The NGOs might be seen as supporting political parties that argue for more money to be spent on humanitarian aid. With that in mind it is quite surprising that the Red Cross is commonly respected across the whole political spectrum and it is also regarded as being strictly neutral. The high respect for the Red Cross and the Danish Red Cross is supported by a multi-client study carried out by IFKA Denmark in December 2006. That study showed that the Danish Red Cross was at the time familiar name for 99% of the adult population of Denmark and rated to be second when asked about the most respected organizations with the highest public profile. It came second only to Medicens sans Frontiers – organization. The UNICEF was third in this survey that included questions about ten NGOs.