

Overview of the evaluation's 36 sub-conclusions

Sub-conclusion 1: The authorities based their approach to the evacuation on four key principles of good crisis management – sector responsibility, cooperation, resolute action, and flexibility. The crisis management did not follow all Danish standard procedures for crisis management, which resulted in certain deficiencies and led to useful lessons learnt in connection with the further development of the procedures. For future purposes, adapting the established Danish inter-ministerial crisis management procedures in light of the experience gained should be considered. However, one should keep in mind that the Afghanistan evacuation was extraordinary in its scope and complexity. Most international crises with potential evacuation needs could be managed with leaner structures.

Sub-conclusion 2: In the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), an ad-hoc Afghanistan Taskforce was established, which allowed for a very fast scaling up and subsequently scaling down of the staff working with the MFA's crisis management. Furthermore, the flexible team-based structure contributed to a dynamic cooperation with other Danish authorities. However, the establishment of a crisis management unit in the MFA according to the established procedure for crisis-management could have strengthened the secretarial functions and provided greater clarity as to which of the members of the MFA's Executive Board acted as chief of staff during the crisis.

Sub-conclusion 3: The inter-ministerial International Operational Staff unit provided a useful framework for sharing updates on ground between Danish authorities. However, improved secretarial functions could have provided greater clarity about decisions and relating to the follow-up of meetings. In a crisis, early activation of the International Operational Staff can provide better conditions for cooperation between the relevant Danish authorities.

Sub-conclusion 4: In very complex crises that require rapid decision-making and dynamic involvement of the political level it may, in exceptional cases, be useful to complement the International Operational Staff unit with an inter-ministerial ad-hoc group of senior managers. If such a group is established, it should be communicated clearly and widely throughout the authorities' affiliated organisations.

Sub-conclusion 5: During the evacuation, Danish NGOs and partner organisations were challenged by, among other things, the ambiguity and lack of transparency surrounding the selection criteria for evacuation used by the MFA. In future, the MFA should increase its focus on the possibility of using the International Operational Staff unit as a framework for the

involvement of Danish NGOs and partner organisations in a crisis management that does not only include Danes in need.

Sub-conclusion 6: The dynamic involvement of the political level supported the crisis management, but is not currently included in the current Danish inter-ministerial crisis management procedures.

Sub-conclusion 7: Two factors in particular were crucial for the fast and effective initiation of the Danish evacuation operation from Kabul's airport. Firstly, an early effort of the Danish Defence in Denmark and deployment of the Defence's capacities in the neighbouring region. Secondly, the posting of experienced personnel from the MFA and agencies underlying the Ministry of Defence and Ministry of Justice to Kabul and Islamabad. Due to the group's broad composition and its flexibility and teamwork, it was possible to carry out the tasks under very difficult working conditions. There were challenges regarding access to communication at Kabul Airport and Islamabad Airport. If the need and possibilities for support had been shared among the decision-makers to a greater extent, the capabilities of the Danish Emergency Management Agency could have supported the efforts further in terms of means of communication and temporary office facilities.

Sub-conclusion 8: Delegation of responsibility from Copenhagen to Kabul and Islamabad was a very important prerequisite for the successful execution of the evacuation operation. During the evacuation, a clearer structure for both the completion of tasks and the dialogue with the authorities in Copenhagen was established. However, it did not translate into a set of short, concrete operational plans shared by all involved authorities, in which leadership structures and fixed points of contact were firmly established. In a future complex crisis with several different authorities involved, an official, general chief of local operations should be appointed.

Sub-conclusion 9: Islamabad Airport provided a necessary link for the airlift, established through a dedicated and timely diplomatic and political interaction with Pakistan, which also enabled Denmark to gain Pakistani acceptance of the continued and expanded use of the airport. Several other countries established similar approaches based on the Danish model.

Sub-conclusion 10: Necessary priority was given to security considerations in the authorities' ongoing adaptation of the evacuation operation. At the same time, the advanced Danish evacuation operation, with relatively few remaining evacuees on 25 August 2021, made it possible to end the operation earlier than most other countries and before a major terrorist attack hit Kabul Airport.

Sub-conclusion 11: In evacuation efforts involving foreign nationals, the Danish authorities should establish a clear division of responsibilities in relation to security screening and the preparation of guidelines and procedures in order to ensure that valid and relevant information can be supplied quickly by the MFA to other relevant Danish authorities.

Sub-conclusion 12: A joint authority overview of the development of the status of persons on the evacuation list, including the number of arrivals to Denmark, was lacking. In a future evacuation situation, effective procedures should be established in the International Operational Staff unit. The same applies to lines of communication between all relevant authorities prior to the commencement of the evacuation.

Sub-conclusion 13: The communication by the MFA to persons affected by a crisis should take place regularly, accurately, and through channels available to the recipients, such as WhatsApp. However, proactive communication regarding evacuation may at the same time create expectations that cannot be met during an unpredictable security situation.

Sub-conclusion 14: It should be ensured that officials who possess a broad set of skills from the relevant sectors of central administration, and who have previously been given a security brief, can be deployed quickly and flexibly in future crises. The MFA may consider establishing a standing emergency preparedness roster. In addition, it may be considered to issue diplomatic passports to a permanent group of police officers with the appropriate skills for supporting staff in preparation for ensuring possible quick deployment.

Sub-conclusion 15: To organise an even stronger collective crisis management and awareness within Danish authorities, regular training exercises of larger crisis scenarios abroad should be implemented. This includes training incentives across the central administration and underlying agencies. The training exercise should take place within the framework of the International Operative Staff and should include non-state actors.

Sub-conclusion 16: Denmark should prepare for the fact that in future evacuations there may be an absence of multilateral management or coordination, as was the case in Afghanistan. In such situations, a robust Danish preparedness level and national capabilities will be crucial to the successful management of the crisis.

Sub-conclusion 17: The Danish Defence Intelligence Service (DDIS), like the international intelligence community, underestimated how quickly Kabul would fall to the Taliban. DDIS based its assessments on the intelligence pool available from, among others, its own information retrieval, the Danish Defence, and international partners. However, this assessment turned out to be too optimistic. The process leading up to the fall of Kabul has given DDIS cause to conduct an internal and confidential evaluation in order to extract learning points that can improve the quality of DDIS' products and operational support. The internal evaluation has, among other things, identified a need to communicate more clearly in future regarding uncertainties in the assessments from the DDIS, as well as a need for increased use of analytical and methodological testing of the assumptions behind the DDIS assessments.

Sub-conclusion 18: The Centre for Terror Analysis (CTA), which is anchored in the Danish Security and Intelligence Service (PET), will continue to assess locally hired embassy staff, including their security, in threat assessments in as far as this is specifically relevant in terms of individual safety combined with an altogether exceptional country context (i.e. when the MFA deems it necessary to consider contingency planning for the evacuation of locally hired embassy staff).

Sub-conclusion 19: The Danish Defence Intelligence Service's access to information about the situation in Afghanistan was gradually impaired as a consequence of and concurrent with the withdrawal of the international coalition from Afghanistan. Thus, the Danish Defence Intelligence Service's basis for assessing the development and predicting offensives against Kabul deteriorated. Consequently, the Danish Defence Intelligence Service's assessments were gradually subject to increasing uncertainty. On this basis, the DDIS has identified a need to strengthen the focus on communicating more clearly about uncertainties, probabilities, and time perspectives to those parties who receive of information from the Danish Defence Intelligence Service. Particularly, in cases where the intelligence available becomes gradually impaired.

Sub-conclusion 20: The DDIS has identified a need for an even deeper and earlier insight into other Danish authorities' specific needs for intelligence, including the underlying context, through supplemental, targeted meetings at relevant management level. This way, the DDIS can continuously adjust its collection of information and target its reporting for the use of relevant decision-makers.

Sub-conclusion 21: The authorities have identified a need for increased focus on clearer identification and communication as well as analysis of derived consequences of low-probability-high impact scenarios. This applies in particular to potentially strategic and critical areas. In addition, Danish authorities should be aware of whether there is a risk in certain situations of international "group thinking", similar to the collective absence of sufficient critical assessment

of the intelligence information available among NATO countries prior to the Taliban's takeover of Kabul in August 2021.

Sub-conclusion 22: The contingency planning measures did take into account the deterioration of the ongoing situation and eventual rapid closure of the Danish embassy. This was comparable to several likeminded countries' plans for remaining in Kabul. The plans for a continued Danish presence in Afghanistan despite scenarios indicating either civil war or a Taliban takeover within a short space of time or the medium-long term were based on the intention not to leave the Afghan people in the lurch, on alliance solidarity within NATO, and on the intention to contributing to the prevention of a breakdown.

Sub-conclusion 23: The MFA's evacuation planning was based on the Danish Defence Intelligence Service's main scenarios. However, the premises upon which the scenarios were based - including a possibly shorter timeframe for the likely breakdown - were not challenged. Going forward, the contingency planning for evacuation should to a greater extent include low probability-high impact scenarios.

Sub-conclusion 24: A common understanding should be established between the MFA and the Ministry of Defence regarding when evacuation by means of the Ministry of Defence's military aircrafts and capacities should be planned, as well as when the use of chartered civilian special aircraft will be most appropriate. Moreover, a fixed modality should be established in the MFA for chartering civilian special aircraft.

Sub-conclusion 25: Clear criteria should be established for those exceptional circumstances when the MFA and other authorities can begin contingency planning for evacuation, which also includes locally hired staff threatened as a result of their tasks at a Danish embassy. Thus, in exceptional cases, this will provide a well-prepared basis for a possible subsequent political decision to implement an evacuation of locally hired staff to a neighbouring country in the region or – if this is not possible – to Denmark. Likewise, the Ministry of Defence can initiate contingency planning for evacuation of, for example, interpreters or others who have supported the Danish military actions.

Sub-conclusion 26: It should be examined whether a specific provision of appropriation can constitute the legal basis for financing the costs of evacuation of and support to persons who do not have Danish citizenship or residence when there is a clear political mandate to do so.

Sub-conclusion 27: The MFA should establish a clear procedure for *when* in a crisis the list of Danish citizens and persons with residence in Denmark can be translated into a list with detailed and verified personal data on citizens who can receive support for evacuation, including with regard to proactive evacuation planning.

Sub-conclusion 28: The number of people on the list of Danish citizens and persons with residence in Denmark was not accurate and grew significantly in the days immediately after the fall of Kabul. The MFA's Consular Services Department should envisage measures to promote voluntary registration on the MFA's list of Danish citizens and persons with residence in Denmark /crisis list, as well as alternative communication channels to spread its crisis communication.

Sub-conclusion 29: Only at a late stage (i.e. late July) did the locally hired staff choose to follow the MFA's call to apply for support via the Interpreters' Agreement. The Interpreters' Agreement from 2013 contains a number of security measures for interpreters and locally hired embassy staff working for Denmark who are directly imperilled as a result of having assisted the Danish effort in Afghanistan. As a result, it was only possible to practically test the Interpreters' Agreement in the new security context at this late stage, at which time several likeminded countries had either already offered evacuation or begun contingency planning of evacuation. The MFA could at an earlier stage have intensified its targeted efforts to address the questions of the locally hired staff relating to the application process under the Interpreters' Agreement, and similarly have communicated the need to test the Interpreters' Agreement in the new security context in practice.

Sub-conclusion 30: The robustness of the Interpreters' Agreement from 2013 has been confirmed in relation to a normal situation. In this connection, an assessment of whether the applicant is directly imperilled as a result of having assisted the Danish effort in Afghanistan is necessary in order to determine whether the applicant is entitled to support in accordance with the Interpreters' Agreement and if so which support measures are required. In the acute emergency evacuation situation, it was positive to see political will to adapt to the developments and thus temporarily abandon the criteria under the Interpreters' Agreement in favour of a more general evacuation criteria of having worked for Denmark in Afghanistan and the subsequent return to the normal administration of applications in accordance with the criteria of the Interpreters' Agreement.

Sub-conclusion 31: Information was continuously gathered by Danish authorities regarding changes to other countries' initiatives and offers to their locally hired staff. The situation regarding handling of locally hired staff developed dynamically and included elements of complexity and uncertainty. However, the information gathering by Danish authorities could have been more systematic.

Sub-conclusion 32: It was challenging that the political understanding of 14 August 2021 was not translated into a written political agreement. It led to doubts/uncertainty about the selection criteria with regard to persons affiliated with NGOs and partner organisations – both internally in the MFA and within external organisations. Additionally, some of the political parties in the Danish Parliament were subsequently unsure about the agreed number of evacuees. Furthermore, the MFA could have benefited from communicating more frequently and more clearly with the external organisations regarding the selection criteria that had been defined in the MFA.

Sub-conclusion 33: With the Interpreters' Agreement of 2013, Denmark had an instrument to manage cases of intimidation of locally hired staff and interpreters in place in the spring of 2021. The Interpreters' Agreement was equivalent to or better than the instruments in place in other countries in the Nordic-Plus group. Despite the fact that some countries initiated their contingency planning of an evacuation that also included locally hired staff earlier, Denmark was the first country in the Nordic-Plus group and among like-minded countries to evacuate its locally hired staff.

Sub-conclusion 34: The MFA ought to initiate a process of knowledge exchange with the other Nordic countries. This process should focus on the criteria of contingency planning for evacuation of locally hired staff in exceptional cases as well as guidelines for the use of respectively posted Danish staff and locally hired staff with regard to sensitive value-based political agendas. Additionally, the MFA can advantageously draw up guidelines for how the dialogue with Danish non-state partner organisations can incorporate a focus on the organisation's own capacity to deal with potential threats to its own employees.

Sub-conclusion 35: In the light of the experiences from the military engagements in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Danish Defence in 2015 implemented a set of guidelines concerning the cooperation with interpreters and other local staff during international military operations. The evacuation from Afghanistan has confirmed the importance of these guidelines. Thus, the Danish Defence should continue its systematic application of said guidelines in all international operations in which Danish military forces participate.

Sub-conclusion 36: The Danish Defence should ensure a uniform mode of registration pursuant to the guidelines concerning the cooperation with interpreters and other local staff during international military operations from 2015 across various areas of operation and deployed units/teams. Moreover, the Danish Defence should improve the ways to unambiguously confirm

a collaborative relationship with local civilians, for example by implementing Danish ID-numbers and registering the primary Danish collaborator.