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- For the workshop: War Studies or Military Education.

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**‘The Power of Water:**

**How Naval Special Warfare Operators Cultivate the Danger Zone’**

*By Rikke Haugegaard, University of Copenhagen and Royal Danish Defence College*

**Abstract:**

This article looks at how naval special warfare operators prepare for combat at sea. Building on fieldwork in Ghana with the Danish Frogman Corps and the Ghana Navy Special Boat Squadron, the article reveals how operators learn to maneuver in water. The training is part of a bilateral co-operation between the Danish Special Operations Command and Ghana Navy. Through training in ‘water habituation’, the operators familiarize themselves with underwater work. In addition, the training aims to move the mental barriers of the operators, in order to build confidence for conducting high-risk operations (counter-piracy and hostage rescue operations) in the Gulf of Guinea. The article discusses training sessions in water, where Ghanaian operators learn to perform edgework by navigating the space between uncertainty and control.

The article suggests that to understand naval special warfare, we need to study the trained, controlled response to emotions of fear. Thus, the learned ability to ‘enter the calm’ during extreme situations makes these operators an efficient political tool able to conduct high-risk operations worldwide.

*Keywords: control, Danish Frogman Corps, edgework, Ghana Navy, naval special warfare*

This paper is part of a Ph.D. dissertation, which will be defended at the University of Copenhagen in autumn 2023. Currently the research paper is in peer-review and will be published in the journal ‘Conflict and Society’ in spring 2024.

**Bio**

Rikke Haugegaard is a researcher and lecturer at the Royal Danish Defence College and a Ph.D. fellow at the University of Copenhagen’s Centre for Global Criminology, Department of Anthropology. Her research focuses on cultural dynamics in transnational organized crime, maritime security and the interaction between culture and military operations. She has previously conducted field research in Afghanistan, Ghana, Nigeria and Mali and has published in both social science and military journals.