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Denmark's Fight Against Irrelevance, or the Alliance Politics of 'Punching Above Your Weight'

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At the official memorial service for Nelson Mandela on 13 December 2013, Roberto Schmidt, a photographer from Agence France-Presse (AFP), caught US President Barack Obama and UK Prime Minister David Cameron flanking Danish Prime Minister Helle Thorning-Schmidt while all three smiled and posed for a selfie. The picture immediately went viral and sparked global media debates ranging from how heads of state and government should behave at official events to whether Michelle Obama looked angry, jealous or just more interested in following the memorial service than in group selfies.¹

In the context of Danish alliance politics, however, the symbolism of the picture carries more significant messages. In international relations, being positioned squarely and securely between the United States and the United Kingdom, and getting positive attention from both, to a large extent defines both the means and the ends of Danish security policy. Increasingly, and for the last decade or more, the core goals of Danish

1 As was the case, for instance, with UK newspaper the *Guardian* in which the selfie was 'portrayed as a mark of disrespect'. See Judith Soal, 'Barack Obama and David Cameron Pose for Selfie with Danish PM', *Guardian*, 11 Dec. 2013.

alliance politics have been to associate Denmark closely with and get the maximum amount of positive attention from the United States first and foremost.

This policy has, surprisingly to many, been consistent across governments and incurred tangible costs in both Danish blood and treasure while providing only more intangible Danish political gains. It has further positioned Denmark rather high on the US calling list as Denmark has shown itself to be a dependable and willing source of support for US military initiatives, as was the case, for instance, in the intervention in Libya in 2011. This policy concurrently sets Denmark apart from many other European small states, which have not to the same degree been willing or able to associate themselves so closely with the United States in international politics.

Andreas Løvold argues that, in today's international relations, small states—like Denmark—do not face threats to their survival. On the contrary, they face the threat of being left without influence, the threat of being irrelevant in international relations.² In many ways, Danish alliance politics seem to have taken Løvold's argument to heart. Consequently, Danish alliance politics can be seen as a continuous fight against irrelevance. In the Danish political version of this argument, that has meant constantly seeking closeness with the United States and status as a relevant actor. It has also meant being a country that, in the eyes of American decision-makers, 'punches above its weight' in international affairs.³

While not only setting Denmark apart from many other European small states, this unambiguously close relationship and almost unconditional support for US international policies marks also a historical departure from a radically different historical past, where Danish foreign policy was, if not in direct opposition to, then at least hesitant in its support of American policies and ambiguous in regards to the Danish political commitment to NATO and the transatlantic system of alliance. Consequently, this chapter does three things. First, this fundamental historical change is unpacked. That leads, secondly, to a characterisation of the relation

2 Andreas Løvold, 'Småstatsproblematikken i Internasjonal Politikk', *Internasjonal Politikk*, vol. 62, no. 1, 2004, pp. 7–31.

3 'Remarks by President Obama, Danish Prime Minister Rasmussen', IIP Digital, United States of America Embassy, 14 Mar. 2011, viewed Aug. 2016, www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/DCPD-201100173/pdf/DCPD-201100173.pdf.

between a current militarised Danish foreign policy and core assumptions of Danish alliance politics. Third, the chapter explains this radical and seemingly continuous change of politics through the convergence of different political rationales in Danish alliance politics, in Danish–US relations and in the view of the US role in the world. In conclusion, the paper argues that this shift in politics is, on the one hand, relatively solid and is increasingly being taken for granted. On the other hand, however, the chapter identifies a number of challenges that may contribute to change in Danish alliance politics.

Danish Alliance Politics: A Brief History

With the end of the Cold War, Denmark's geopolitical position changed radically. Instead of being a frontline state in a global confrontation, Denmark could see, not the end of history, but world history move away from Denmark. This is equally reflected in subsequent Danish defence and security white papers noting a continuously more secure regional environment, culminating in a 2008 white paper that was unable to identify any territorial threat to Denmark in the foreseeable future and characterised the Danish security environment as benign 'without historical precedent'.⁴

Danish politicians were not slow to recognise that this fundamental change in European geopolitics would also change both the conditions and the opportunities for Danish foreign and security policy. Danish foreign policy had been perceived as reactive and pragmatic during the last decades of the Cold War, and the end of the Cold War meant that a new line of policy was both possible and necessary. Supported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the conservative–liberal government formulated a more active and value-based Danish foreign policy. From the beginning, this policy focused on positioning Denmark as actively contributing to building and maintaining international institutional architecture in Europe, thereby ensuring simultaneously the new pan-European peace, anchoring a reunited Germany institutionally in what was then the European Economic Community and, through NATO, keeping the United States as the ultimate underwriter of European

⁴ Danish Government, *Dansk Forsvar, Globalt Engagement: Beretning fra Forsvarskommissionen af 2008*, Ministry of Defence, 2009, p. 36, viewed Aug. 2016, www.fmn.dk/viden/om/Document/Hovedbind-FKOM-2008-beretning.pdf.

security.⁵ In 1993 the conservative-liberal government was replaced by a social democratic government. This entailed few changes in the line of policy re-emphasising the importance of liberal ideas and multilateral institutions.⁶ But, simultaneously, this more active policy acquired a military dimension as Denmark, for the first time since World War II, deployed military force in the form of a navy ship in support of the US-led coalition in the Gulf War of 1991.

While only symbolic in nature and far away from any combat operations, the decision to employ Danish military assets marked a fundamental shift in Danish decision-makers' view on the role of Danish military force in foreign policy and alliance politics. Whereas a US request for Danish military assistance in 1952 for the war effort in Korea was met with the counteroffer of a hospital ship, in the Gulf War and in post-Cold War geopolitics, it seems legitimate in the milieu of the new activist Danish foreign policy to use military force—far away from Danish territory and to maintain international order. Subsequently, the Danish armed forces engaged in the peacekeeping missions of the 1990s in an attempt to end the bloodshed of the Balkan Wars. Denmark's engagements in the former Yugoslavia showed a country that was prepared to participate in potentially dangerous peacekeeping operations and Danish participation in the Kosovo campaign in 1999 showed that a UN Security Council authorisation was not a precondition for Danish use of force. Instead, NATO was increasingly seen as the most important international institution and American leadership as the most important factor for peace and security in Europe.

When NATO invoked Article 5 the day after the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the United States in 2001, it was a decision wholeheartedly supported by Denmark. Danish politicians expected that a military response would be organised through the UN or NATO.⁷ Instead, the United States opted for a more unilateral response in Afghanistan in 2001–02 and, even more contentiously, in 2003 in the Iraq War. The liberal-conservative Danish Government that took office in November 2001 unequivocally followed its American allies into war. Denmark's choice between Europe and the

5 Rasmus Brus Pedersen, 'Danish Foreign Policy Activism: Differences in Kind or Degree', *Cooperation and Conflict*, vol. 47, no. 3, 2012, pp. 331–49. doi.org/10.1177/0010836712444863.

6 Rasmus Brus Pedersen, 'Fra Aktiv Internationalisme til International Aktivisme: Udvikling og Tendenser i Dansk Udenrigspolitisk Aktivisme', *Politica*, vol. 44, no. 1, 2012, pp. 111–30.

7 Pedersen, 'Fra Aktiv Internationalisme til International Aktivisme', 2012.

United States, or the United States and the United Nations, often falls with the United States, leading Hans Mouritzen to coin Danish alliance politics as 'super atlanticist'.⁸

Denmark has been a persistent ally to the United States throughout the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and unquestionably supported US policies in both countries as well as in the wider Middle East. Instead of being a reluctant ally, Denmark has worked hard to become and remain an 'impeccable'⁹ US ally. This has established Denmark as a core NATO member, a dependable US diplomatic ally and a consistent contributor to US-led military coalitions. This consistent political support, combined with a willingness to stay the course, take risks and participate with no official caveats in military operations has not gone unnoticed in Washington. Peter Viggo Jakobsen recounts a British delegation to Washington in 2013 being told by a top official of the Obama administration that the United Kingdom ought to be more like Denmark, 'a model to follow'.¹⁰ If Danish alliance politics are about fighting for relevance and attention from the United States, then being set up as a model for the United Kingdom is indeed a mark of success.

The development of this increasingly close alliance relationship between Denmark and the United States is to a wide extent based on a specific Danish view on the use of armed force that sets Denmark apart from many comparable European small states. The continuously closer US–Danish relationship goes hand in hand with the militarisation of Danish foreign policy, where use of Danish armed force has become an increasingly legitimate and pivotal foreign and alliance policy tool.

The Militarisation of Danish Foreign Policy

On 29 April 1994, Serbian forces ambushed a squadron of Danish Leopard 1 main battle tanks that was in Bosnia as part of UN Protection Force (UNPROFOR). In the firefight taking place over the next two hours, the Danish forces manage to destroy the Serbian attackers and return to

8 Hans Mouritzen, 'Denmark's Super Atlanticism', *Journal of Transatlantic Studies*, vol. 5, no. 2, 2007, pp. 155–67. doi.org/10.1080/14794019908656861.

9 Jens Ringsmose & Sten Rynning, 'The Impeccable Ally? Denmark, NATO and the Uncertain Future of Top-Tier Membership', in Nanna Hvidt & Hans Mouritzen (eds), *Danish Foreign Policy Yearbook 2008*, Copenhagen: Danish Institute for International Studies, 2008, pp. 55–84.

10 Peter Viggo Jakobsen & Jens Ringsmose, 'Size and Reputation – Why the USA Has Valued its "Special Relationship" with Denmark and the UK differently since 9/11', *Journal of Transatlantic Studies*, vol. 13, no. 2, pp. 135–53.

base without casualties, thus proving possible a more muscular approach to peacekeeping.¹¹ Later, Michael Rose, UNPROFOR commander, stated that 'the Danish tanks changed the way to solve wider peacekeeping tasks forever'.¹² They did more than that, however. They equally changed the view on the use of force by Danish foreign policy elites, making 'peace operations ... the flagship in the new activist foreign policy pursued by Denmark in the 1990s'.¹³

Successive Danish governments have used the term activism to describe a basic component of their foreign policy, denoting a more (supposedly more than before) active Danish profile in the international sphere and that Denmark would pursue its values and interests actively around the world. Both centre-right (liberal-conservative) and centre-left (social democratic) governments have increasingly used the Danish armed forces as a key component or tool of this active foreign policy. This use of armed force abroad as a central instrument of Danish foreign policy makes it possible even to label Danish foreign policy as military activism.¹⁴

Jakobsen defines military activism as the use of armed force in international engagements for purposes that exceed Denmark's narrow national defence.¹⁵ Thus, military activism is more than self-defence. It is about the use of armed force to influence international developments, but it is also about increasing Danish status and visibility among key Danish partners and allies. In a comparative perspective, and dating back to the tank engagement in Bosnia, Denmark has been unusually willing to deploy military force. Denmark's so-called military activism has led Danish decision-makers to adopt a remarkable risk-prone profile. Risk-taking and few national restrictions (caveats) have been notable features of Denmark's military activism.¹⁶ Consequently, the Danish Government supported the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, and a comfortable parliamentary majority decided to deploy Danish land forces to help stabilise Iraq after combat

11 Ole Kjeld Hansen, 'Operation "Bøllebank"', *Dansk Militærhistorie*, 28 Oct. 2013, viewed Aug. 2016, milhist.dk/slaget/operation-bollebank/.

12 Quoted in Peter Viggo Jakobsen, *Nordic Approaches to Peace Operations: A New Model in the Making*, London & New York: Routledge, 2006, p. 83.

13 Jakobsen, *Nordic Approaches to Peace Operations*, 2006, p. 109.

14 Kristian Søby Kristensen, *Danmark i Krig: Demokrati, Politik og Strategi i den Militære Aktivisme*, Copenhagen: DJØF Forlag, 2013.

15 Peter Viggo Jakobsen, 'Danmarks Militære Aktivisme Fortsætter Med Eller Uden USA', *Politik*, vol. 18, no. 4, 2015, pp. 5–13.

16 Karsten Jakob Møller & Peter Viggo Jakobsen, 'Good News: Libya and the Danish Way of War', in Nanna Hvidt & Hans Mouritzen (eds), *Danish Foreign Policy Yearbook 2012*, Copenhagen: Danish Institute for International Studies, 2012, pp. 106–30.

operations were deemed to be over. Working with the British in Basra region, the Danish forces quickly found themselves engaged in what ended up being the losing side of a counterinsurgency operation costing eight Danish lives.

It is, however, the 2006 decision to deploy—again with the British—to the Helmand Province in Afghanistan that symbolically, and in terms of both human and economic costs, stands out as the most significant example of Danish military activism. In Helmand's 'green zone' a Danish battalion battle group conducted frequent and intense combat operations fighting the Taliban, and the number of casualties increased dramatically, especially in the years 2007–11.

That the operation could lead to heavy fighting was not lost on the Danish Defence Command. In addition to the risks associated with the deployment to Helmand, however, the top echelon of the Danish armed forces equally saw this as, first, an opportunity to provide a distinct Danish military contribution to the development of Helmand. Second, to show Danish politicians that their armed forces could function in a militarily activist foreign policy. And third, by combining both of the above, prove their own 'military metier', as stated by then Chief of Defence General Hans Jesper Helsø.¹⁷ Consequently, both the Danish armed forces and Danish political decision-makers went to Helmand with their eyes relatively open, knowing the risk involved. In Afghanistan, by 2013 the Danish forces had suffered 43 casualties and more than 200 seriously wounded,¹⁸ making Denmark the country with the highest number of fatalities relative to the size of its population of all those contributing troops to the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF).

The government's decision to deploy troops to Helmand was supported by a broad majority of the Danish parliament and, perhaps surprising to the government itself and despite rising casualties, public support remained relatively constant with between 40–50 per cent of Danes supporting the mission. This leaves Denmark changing places with the United States as the two ISAF countries with the highest public support for the operations in Afghanistan (between 2006 and 2011).¹⁹

17 Quoted in Mikkel Vedby Rasmussen, *Den Gode Krig*, Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 2011.

18 'Combat Mission in Afghanistan is over', *CPH Post Online*, 22 Jul. 2013.

19 Peter Viggo Jakobsen & Jens Ringsmose, 'In Denmark, Afghanistan is Worth Dying for: How Public Support for the War was Maintained in the Face of Mounting Casualties and Elusive Success', *Cooperation and Conflict*, vol. 50, no. 2, 2014, pp. 211–27. doi.org/10.1177/0010836714545688.

Looking at the apparent appetite for warfare that had developed in Denmark, it should come as no surprise that the Danish Government did not hesitate to offer a Danish military contribution when NATO started preparing Operation Unified Protector as a response to the conflict in Libya. Indeed, the then Minister of Foreign Affairs called it ‘good news’ when the government had gotten parliamentary backing to deploy Danish F-16s to the effort against Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi’s forces.²⁰

All parties in parliament, including the radical socialist left wing, supported the decision and no critical questions were asked by the media when the Minister of Foreign Affairs announced the deployment. Six F-16s took off for Sicily at such a pace that only French, American and British aircrafts were in place before them.²¹ Denmark put no national restrictions on the use of its aircraft. The Danish F-16s took a central role in the operations and the Joint Force Air Component Commander, Major-General Margaret H Woodward, of the US Operation Odyssey Dawn called the Danish F-16s the ‘rock stars of the campaign’ due to their versatility.²² The flexible character of the Danish contribution was supplemented with a large amount of precision-guided munitions. According to the RAND Corporation, ‘[the Norwegian and Danish] air forces proved critical to maintain pressure on Muammar Qaddafi’s regime’.²³ Thus, RAND concludes that the Danish air force ‘made a contribution to Libya operations out of proportion to its size, both quantitatively and qualitatively’.²⁴ Equally, when US Secretary of Defense Robert Gates in 2011 lambasted European allies in general for their lack of political will and military capability, the efforts of the Danish air force in Libya was noted as a positive exception to both things lacking in wider Europe. Libya thus becomes a perfect example of the use of force in Danish alliance politics. It positions Denmark as a relevant and noticed ally, contributing more than expected.

In sum, when looking at the above examples of Danish use of force under the foreign policy heading of military activism, a number of characteristics are worth noting. First, political as well as military risk-taking have been prevalent and, in comparative perspective, a significant feature of Danish

20 Annelise Hartmann Eskesen, ‘Lene Espersen: Jeg Har to Gode Nyheder’, *Politiken*, 18 Mar. 2011.

21 Møller & Jakobsen, ‘Good News’, 2012.

22 Møller & Jakobsen, ‘Good News’, 2012.

23 Karl P Mueller, *Precision and Purpose: Airpower in the Libyan Civil War*, Washington DC: Rand Corporation, 2015.

24 Mueller, *Precision and Purpose*, 2015.

use of military force. By agreeing to operate in dangerous or difficult areas without many national restrictions or caveats, Danish politicians have accepted an increased risk of casualties. But more risks follow. Danish politicians have additionally accepted the political risks of potentially causing civilian casualties, of taking political responsibility for potentially unpopular—and sometimes unwinnable—military operations and, finally, accepted the political risk incurred by delegating control of Danish armed forces, without caveats, to allied or coalition command.

Second, the colour of government has had limited influence on Danish use of force, and both centre-right and centre-left governments have enjoyed wide parliamentary support as well as positive public opinion in response to their decisions to use force abroad. This has meant that shifting governments have been able not only to use force abroad, but to prioritise the speed of the decision-making process with which Denmark decides to use military force—as was the case in Libya. This in itself is an indication of the degree to which military activism and the use of force has become a constant feature of Danish foreign policy, setting Denmark apart as a special case compared to other Nordic or European countries.²⁵ The active use of force has been a consistent feature of Danish foreign policy, the continuity of which has surprised many engaged with the analysis of Danish foreign policy.²⁶

In the following we ask why this is so, and why this feature has been so consistent and prevalent. Our answer is that the special Danish willingness to use force needs to be understood as a specific conflation of three distinct political rationalities guiding Danish foreign policy. This has, in turn, made possible the ever closer alliance with the United States. Denmark has—because of this conflation—been able to maintain the political and public support required to incur the costs necessary to constantly be relevant to and noticed by American decision-makers. Just as Gates noted, the Danish contribution to the Libya campaign showed Denmark to be punching above its weight.

25 See Hakon Lunde Saxi, 'Defending Small States: Norwegian and Danish Defense Policies in the Post-Cold War Era', *Defense and Security Analysis*, vol. 26, no. 4, 2010, pp. 415–30. doi.org/10.1080/14751798.2010.534649.

26 See Ringsmose & Rynning, 'The Impeccable Ally?', 2008, pp. 55–84.

Why? Convergence of Three Rationales in Danish Alliance Politics

On 26 September 2014, then Danish Prime Minister Helle Thorning-Schmidt announced that Denmark would contribute F-16s in the fight against Islamic State. At the press conference, the Prime Minister reminded the journalists present that ‘Denmark is one of those countries that have already taken responsibility’, and then informed them that ‘Denmark last night received a formal request from the US ... for, among others, Danish F-16s’.²⁷ The Prime Minister had already in the morning informally contacted key parliament leaders to make sure the deployment could be voted through parliament the following week. The first question from the press addressed not the risks, mission parameters or the strategy of the operation, but the pace of the decision-making process: ‘You hope that it will be possible to summon the Parliament and pass the bill already next week. What will that mean in terms of getting the planes in the air?’ The Prime Minister replied that ‘the planes can be in the air as soon as the bill is passed by Parliament. Luckily, we can deliver quickly.’²⁸

The bill was passed by approximately 90 per cent of the votes in the parliament, and the F-16s took off a week after the request was received. In the public debate about use of force, the question is not if, but how fast. The almost automatic reaction to the American request was not surprising, however. A year before, the Prime Minister participated in a dinner hosted by Fredrik Reinfeldt—then Swedish Prime Minister—on the occasion of President Obama visiting Sweden. Also present were the heads of state and government of Finland, Iceland and Norway. Prior to the meeting, Sweden, Norway and Finland had refused to participate in any intervention punishing the Syrian regime for its use of chemical weapons against its own civilian population. Denmark, on the other hand, had announced that it, without any indications of US intentions or plans, would support the United States against the regime of Bashar al-Assad. Thorning-Schmidt emphasised that it was important to ‘signal to the Americans that they have a very close ally here that they can count on’.²⁹

27 Helle Thorning-Schmidt, ‘Prime Minister’s Press Conference September 26 2014’, Statsministeriet, viewed Aug. 2016, www.stm.dk/_p_14084.html.

28 Thorning-Schmidt, ‘Prime Minister’s Press Conference September 26 2014’.

29 Helle Thorning-Schmidt, ‘Thorning Lover Støtte til Obama’, *TV 2 Nyhederne*, 3 Sep. 2013, viewed Aug. 2016, nyhederne.tv2.dk/article.php/id-71152061:thorning-lover-obama-st%C3%B8tte-i-syrien.html.

The unequivocal support for any potential US military action against Assad, as well as the pace of the decision-making process and the political unity in the parliament in the case of a US request for military support against ISIS show how established the use of force has become in Danish foreign policy and how this is linked to Denmark's special relationship with the United States.

Traditional foreign policy analysis would emphasise that these decisions are based on a calculation of Danish interests and values in relation to a particular political interpretation of the international environment. Møller and Jakobsen thus identify three primary objectives: to protect Danish territorial integrity, promote and protect Danish values and to 'do our part' as a trustworthy partner.³⁰ While all these objectives are significant, it is difficult to see how these objectives should set Denmark radically apart from its Nordic neighbours, following often very different policies. Similarly, explaining Denmark's particular military activism on particular domestic policies of shifting governing parties, on the other hand, fails to explain the significant continuity across governments.³¹

To make sense of this almost instinctive and unconditional military and political support to American military operations as well as the continued willingness by large parts of the Danish public and political establishment to take risks and use military force, we argue that three long-standing rationalities in Danish foreign policy converge, reinforcing simultaneously the use of force and the US–Danish relationship. Building on Mikkel Vedby Rasmussen—who debates Danish strategic culture as a reflection of changes in the relation between two discourses on the utility of force in international relations³²—we show the value of analysing Danish alliance politics, as being a consequence of long-term historical convergences of a cosmopolitan, a strategic and a moral rationale for Danish use of force.

The cosmopolitan rationale is based on the idea that Western use of force can be a universal force for good. The air campaign against Serbia in the spring of 1999 was aimed at stopping human rights violations occurring in Kosovo. The bill that was presented to the Danish parliament read: 'Folketinget [the Danish Parliament] hereby declares its consent to send

30 Møller & Jakobsen, 'Good News', 2012.

31 See Pedersen, 'Danish Foreign Policy Activism', 2012, pp. 331–49.

32 Mikkel Vedby Rasmussen, "'What's the Use of It?': Danish Strategic Culture and the Utility of Armed Force', *Cooperation and Conflict*, vol. 40, no. 1, 2005, pp. 67–89. doi.org/10.1177/0010836705049735.

a Danish contribution to the NATO efforts in the Western Balkans to prevent a humanitarian catastrophe in Kosovo'.³³ As the air campaign unfolded in April 1999, Danish Defence Minister Hans Hækkerup expressed the cosmopolitan view: 'Kosovo can become the example of how it is necessary to go in and apply the necessary pressure to solve things out ... NATO will not draw any geographical boundaries describing where the Alliance can act'.³⁴ The engagement in Kosovo showed how military force could safeguard human rights. The words of Hækkerup, who describes NATO acting without boundaries, today seems like a succinct prophecy for the following decade. The cosmopolitan rationale was upheld through the 2000s, as humanitarian concerns have been central to political arguments for why Denmark deployed or maintained a military presence in, for instance, Kosovo, Iraq, Afghanistan or Mali.

Cosmopolitan concerns were thus repeatedly emphasised during the Danish engagement in Afghanistan. While 9/11 and the terrorist threat were accentuated, so was the need to focus on humanitarian development. In 2008, Danish Minister of Foreign Affairs Per Stig Møller and Minister for International Development Ulla Tørnæs explained Denmark's strategy in Afghanistan:

The goal is to stabilise Afghanistan, to ensure that the democratic elected government is the only master of the house and to ensure higher standards of living, human rights and democracy for the Afghan population ... Human rights are now ensured in the constitution, and a human rights commission has been established with Danish support.³⁵

Parallel arguments can be found in relation to more recent deployments of Danish armed forces. In Denmark the intervention in Libya was seen as the international community coming together acting to prevent genocide. Thus it made sense for conservative Minister of Foreign Affairs Lene Espersen, as noted above, to declare it a 'good thing' that Danish military action was forthcoming. Equally, in deciding to deploy F-16s to fight ISIS

33 Danish Parliament, 'Forslag til Folketingsbeslutning om et Dansk Militært Bidrag til en NATO-Indsats på det Vestlige Balkan', Motion no. B4, Copenhagen, 1998.

34 Morten Jastrup, 'NATO er Uden Begrænsninger', *Information*, 21 Apr. 1999, viewed Aug. 2016, www.information.dk/29859.

35 P S Møller & U Tørnæs, 'Derfor er vi i Afghanistan', *Politiken*, 16 Jan. 2008, viewed Aug. 2016, politiken.dk/debat/kroniken/ECE458081/derfor-er-vi-i-afghanistan/.

in Iraq, the bill authorising Danish use of force repeatedly emphasises humanitarian concerns, human rights violations and an international responsibility to help Iraqi authorities protect its civilian population.³⁶

The strategic rationale, also associated with the use of force, is in Danish alliance politics about being closely aligned with the United States and providing political and military support when requested by the US Government. Thorning-Schmidt was open about this in 2013 when she declared that Denmark would support American actions in Syria even before the US Government had declared that it would take action, and what that action would entail. As British support foundered in the House of Commons, Denmark found itself—together with France—as the only European country openly supporting American-led military action in Syria. This made Denmark stand out in Europe, in what seemed like a peculiar position for a Scandinavian small state. But, if the strategic goal is closeness, attention and relevance vis-à-vis the United States, it is an almost perfect position.

This reflects the strategic rationale in Danish politics. Maintaining a close relationship with the United States is not a new element in Danish alliance politics—indeed, this rationale was emphasised throughout the 2000s. With liberal Anders Fogh Rasmussen as Prime Minister, building ties with the United States was a core concern and, consequently, Denmark developed a close bilateral—and personal—relationship with the administration of George W Bush in the years after 9/11.

In September 2003, Rasmussen established the main lines in his government's alliance politics, and why that, for instance, entailed Danish support for the American invasion of Iraq:

We are in the middle of a showdown with the policy of adaptation, which has dominated Danish foreign policy since the defeat [to Prussia] in 1864 ... Cooperation with the US is not adaptation. It is equal cooperation with a friend, a partner, an ally, who honour the same principles and values as we do: democracy, freedom of speech, market economy, and human rights.³⁷

36 Danish Parliament, 'Proposal for a Parliamentary Resolution for Additional Danish Military Contribution to Support the Fight Against ISIL', Motion no. B123, Copenhagen, 30 Sep. 2014, viewed Aug. 2016, www.ft.dk/samling/20131/beslutningsforslag/b123/bilag/1/1403349.pdf.

37 Anders Fogh Rasmussen, 'Statsminister Anders Fogh Rasmussens tale på Københavns Universitet den, 23 September 2003, "Visioner om Danmarks aktive Europapolitik"', viewed Aug. 2016, www.stm.dk/_p_7451.html.

In order to safeguard these principles and values, close cooperation with the United States is, for Rasmussen, self-evident. Per Stig Møller, as Minister of Foreign Affairs in Rasmussen's government, later elaborated: 'The USA is incredibly important to us. If we find ourselves in a crisis it will be the US that can help us. No one else can help us.'³⁸ The quid pro quo of this strategic calculation is that if Denmark needs to be able to count on the United States in a crisis, the best way to ensure that is to make sure the United States can count on Denmark. Rasmussen's liberal-conservative government continuously emphasised this strategic rationale through the 2000s and so did Thorning-Schmidt's social-democratic government, as shown above.

While Møller emphasises that the strategically motivated partnership with the United States is about a reinforced security guarantee, it is also about privileged access and influence. As stated by Rasmussen:

At present I will say that Denmark has a unique strong position in international and European politics. Internationally we have direct access to the top political leadership in the US, the world's only superpower, and the only state that has global reach. Of course that does not mean that we can control such a state's foreign and security policy ... But all things being equal, it makes Denmark a more interesting partner for negotiations and conversations.³⁹

During his time in office, Rasmussen visited President Bush seven times, and Danish diplomats enjoyed increased access to Washington. Thorning-Schmidt's selfie with Cameron and Obama symbolises the strategic rationale of close alignment with the United States.

Lastly, Danish alliance politics has been formed by a moral rationale that rests on a distinct moral historiographic understanding of Danish foreign and alliance politics during World War II and the Cold War, making it, as noted by Karsten Møller and Jakobsen, morally necessary for Danish decision-makers today to 'do our part'. In his book on Denmark's war effort in Afghanistan, Mikkel Vedby Rasmussen highlights that one of the core principles of Danish military activism has been that Denmark should fight shoulder to shoulder with the United States and the United Kingdom

38 PS Møller, 'Danmark skal være en allieret, som USA altid kan regne med', *Information*, 20 Jul. 2015, viewed Aug. 2016, www.information.dk/539896.

39 Anders Fogh Rasmussen, quoted in A Henriksen & J Ringsmose, 'Hvad fik Danmark ud af det? Iraq, Afghanistan og forholdet til Washington', DIIS Rapport 2011:14, Copenhagen: Danish Institute for International Studies, 2011, p. 8.

because that is the right thing to do.⁴⁰ The importance of this principle was highlighted by Anders Fogh Rasmussen in repeated statements in the early 2000s. At the brink of the Iraqi invasion in March 2003 the Prime Minister thus argued that 'world history is filled with such dilemmas [of going to war]. And we would not be where we are today, if we or others had chosen to do nothing. There are situations where it is necessary to choose the uncomfortable option to ensure freedom and peace'.⁴¹ In other words, had it not been for the United States and United Kingdom fighting in World War II, Denmark would not have been liberated from German occupation. Consequently, to pay that historical debt, Denmark cannot now do nothing, but is morally obligated to actively choose to do something.

In August 2003, Anders Fogh Rasmussen's government continued this line of reasoning and launched an attack on the Danish cooperative policy during most of the German occupation between 1940 and 1945. The Prime Minister stated: 'It has been of vital importance to Denmark's international reputation that we had a showdown with the policy of cooperation [during the German occupation]. Also for the way we see ourselves.'⁴² In an op-ed, the Prime Minister further emphasised: 'Even judged on the premises of that time the Danish policy was naïve, and it is highly objectionable that the Danish political elite so strongly followed a policy of not only neutrality but active adaptation.'⁴³ In this way, current military activist policy is put forth as the morally right thing to do, as opposed to previous small state adaptation.

Denmark's historical debt was, according to Anders Fogh Rasmussen, now due, and Denmark's hesitant membership of the NATO alliance during the last decades of the Cold War further reinforced the need for Denmark to start down payments on its moral debt. That underlines the importance of the transatlantic alliance and entails supporting US policies, making hard but active choices, and bearing the costs and risks associated with using military force abroad. It is the right thing to do.

40 Mikkel Vedby Rasmussen, 'Den gode krig', *Gyldendal*, Copenhagen, 2011.

41 'Anders Fogh Rasmussens Tale Vedrørende Irak', 18 Mar. 2003, viewed Aug. 2016, danmarkshistorien.dk/leksikon-og-kilder/vis/materiale/anders-foghs-tale-vedroerende-irak-180303/?no_cache=1.

42 Anders Fogh Rasmussen, 'Opgøret med samarbejdspolitikken', Statsministeriet, 26 Aug. 2003, viewed Aug. 2016, www.stm.dk/_p_6393.html.

43 Anders Fogh Rasmussen, 'Fogh angriber samarbejdspolitikken', *DR Nyheder*, 29 Aug. 2003, viewed Aug. 2016, www.dr.dk/nyheder/htm/baggrund/tema2003/60%20aaret%20for%20bruddet/22.htm.

Taken together, these three rationales emphasise different reasons and objectives for the active use of military force and the significance of the transatlantic alliance. Combined with early lessons learned in the Balkans in the 1990s, they converge through a variety of arguments that have enabled broad political consensus in the Danish parliament and substantial and sustained public support for the use of force. Military deployments and political decisions have been mandated on the basis of bills and political debates that have drawn upon all three. Thus, the deployments to Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Mali and Iraq (again) were all founded on combinations of these rationales. Further, the military activist policy that is thus made possible and rational has enabled changing Danish governments to develop and maintain a position as a key NATO member and a close and dependable US ally. 'Punching above one's weight' to seek close relations with the United States makes sense from cosmopolitan, strategic and moral grounds. The United States is often the precondition for Danish force being a cosmopolitan force for good. Supporting US military actions is sound strategic realpolitik for a small state like Denmark. Finally, penance for past Danish foreign policy sins can be paid by standing by the United States.

Conclusions and Consequences

In July 2015, Danish servicemen warned against continued air operations in Iraq. Ground crews were exhausted and aircraft were increasingly in need of maintenance. The shop stewards in the Royal Danish Air Force, unusually and very publicly, asked Danish politicians 'to step up to their responsibility and withdraw the Danish contribution so the planes and mechanics can get a break'.⁴⁴ The aircraft returned to Denmark on 1 October only to see the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Kristian Jensen, responding to the November 2015 Paris terrorist attack by suggesting a redeployment of F-16s to Iraq.⁴⁵ The use of military force has become not only a key component in Danish foreign policy but also an accustomed practice.

44 H Jensen & JA Bjørnager, 'F-16 Mekanikere: Stop fly-aktionen mod Islamisk Stat', *Berlingske Tidenden*, 27 Jul. 2015, viewed Aug. 2016, www.b.dk/nationalt/f16-mekanikere-stop-fly-aktionen-mod-islamisk-stat.

45 Søren Ploug Lilmoes, 'Kristian Jensen: Regeringen er Klar til at Bombe i Syrien', *Politiko*, 15 Nov. 2015, viewed Aug. 2016, www.politiko.dk/nyheder/kristian-jensen-regeringen-er-klar-til-at-bombe-i-syrien.

The convergence of the cosmopolitan, the strategic and the moral rationale has entailed a sedimentation of the active use and political utility of military force in Danish alliance politics. Military force is what Denmark contributes within alliance settings and, due to consistent high public and broad political support for both NATO membership and participation in international military operations, the Danish politicians are not challenged to explain why military force is the right contribution. Instead of being just a label that describes current Danish alliance politics, military activism has become a foreign policy custom. The Danish public and politicians have become accustomed to sending Danish military forces to armed conflicts and, even though casualties have resulted in political discussions, it has not deterred the Danish parliament from repeatedly deploying military forces. Consequently, the current view on the use of force as a key component of Danish alliance-politics structure and lock-in-place Danish politics. Continuity is easy, whereas a new political course of action inevitably ends up in a difficult confrontation with some combination of the three rationales mentioned above.

Still, what may account for change if it is unlikely that an internally and politically driven break takes place? We highlight two potential sources of change. First, the current and future force structure of the Danish armed forces may increasingly be a deciding factor for how force can be used in Danish alliance politics. Second, perhaps military activism is not suited to the alliance politics of the future. The challenges that arose in Iraq with regard to the flight mechanics and aircraft can be seen in other areas of the Danish armed forces. A considerable number of capabilities are worn down, limited in numbers and need to be recapitalised. Thus, Denmark can still deploy fighter jets, tactical air lift, navy vessels, special operations forces and a battalion-sized task force, but the force structure is challenged in terms of sustainability.

Denmark has in the last decades—along with most Western European states—consistently spent less on defence and is currently spending 1.17 per cent of GDP, substantially off NATO's 2 per cent target. During the war in Afghanistan, Danish politicians and diplomats could argue that Denmark made a considerable contribution to the alliance through risk-taking. This has given rise to a notable discussion on whether member states should be assessed based on input, output or outcome measures. In other words, should alliance status be assessed on defence spending, deployable forces and capabilities, or *deployed* forces and capabilities? By always being willing to heed the call, and deploy forces,

military activism has enabled Denmark to provide an outsized NATO contribution while keeping defence spending low. The cost has not been financial but increased risk to service personnel and a narrowing down of Danish capabilities.

With Russia's annexation of Crimea and its involvement in Eastern Ukraine, NATO's debate about defence spending has been re-emphasised, lessening the value of Danish risk-taking. So while Denmark's military activism proved a politically beneficial alliance policy in a world formed by the American 'war against terrorism' and subsequent counterinsurgency operations, it seems less likely to thrive in a world that is returning to geopolitics, with NATO increasingly focused on Russia, and the United States increasingly focused on China.

Military activism has—for a while—produced an equilibrium in Danish politics due to its ability to encompass cosmopolitan, strategic and moral rationales in Danish foreign policy, and simultaneously strengthening relations to the United States. Due to both internal and external factors, however, this could be changing. Denmark will in the coming years be challenged in balancing global, regional and Arctic demands. Denmark will need to refocus on the Nordic region and further develop policies and capabilities for the Arctic. Simultaneously, Denmark will be asked to contribute to collective defence in NATO. Doing that, while still being both able and willing to deploy military force out of area will be difficult for the very slim and not well-funded Danish force structure. Defence policy, for Denmark, immediately transforms into foreign and alliance politics.

In sum, military activism turned out to be a solid basis for consistent Danish alliance politics. The days of military activism might, however, be coming to an end. Not because of a critical and causality intolerant public or a war-weary parliament, but because of the slimming Danish force structure and because the key Danish ally—the United States—is now increasingly asking for defence spending rather than risk-taking.

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