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Gradually, then suddenly : Explaining Sweden and Finland’s Path to NATO

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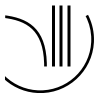

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Preface

We are pleased to present the 2024 edition of the Danish Foreign Policy Review (DFPR). The DFPR covers key topics relevant to Danish foreign, security, and development policy. In addition to articles by the Danish Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lars Løkke Rasmussen, and Minister of Defence, Troels Lund Poulsen, the 2024 Review includes four, peer-reviewed, scholarly articles written by experts in their fields.

DFPR aims to publish rigorous and insightful academic articles that focus on key foreign policy issues and tendencies that have characterised the past year – 2023 – especially those with a direct impact on Denmark and Danish foreign policy. Each of the four articles in this volume adopts a distinct approach to achieve this goal. Two articles focus on current foreign policy issues, specifically the legal aspects of supporting Ukraine in its war against Russia, and the long road taken by Finland and Sweden to join NATO. Two studies explore broader concepts and tendencies in Danish foreign policy in recent years. One by looking into the idea of pragmatic idealism in Danish development policy, the other by questioning the continued relevance of discussing foreign policy activism. The abstracts of these articles, which are available in both English and Danish, can be found at the beginning of this volume.

Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, Denmark's substantial military support for Ukraine raised two important legal questions: When does a state become a party to a conflict? And when does a donor state become responsible for the recipient state's use of weapons in violation of international law? In their article, Marc Schack and Astrid Kjeldgaard-Pedersen analyse Denmark's approach to the Ukrainian conflict through these two legal thresholds.

The Danish government announced a new Foreign and Security Policy Strategy (FSPS) in May 2023, emphasising the concept of pragmatic idealism. This pragmatic approach aims to enhance multilateral cooperation and promote a rules-based world order through partnerships and alliances. The article by Lars Engberg-Pedersen and Rasmus Hundsbæk Pedersen examines the implications of adopting a strategy of pragmatic idealism to collaborate with countries in the Global South.

'Activism', despite some criticism of the analytical precision of the term, remains a significant focus in Danish political discourse and a key aspect of research on Danish foreign policy. The article by Henrik Larsen investigates the use of the concept and other related terms since the post-Cold War era in official Danish foreign policy documents to determine how they shape policies. This study raises the question of whether the widespread interest in activism in Danish foreign policy is justified.

In the spring of 2022 Finland and Sweden decided to apply for NATO membership after Russia's aggression in Ukraine. Juhana Aunesluoma's article examines the reasons behind this policy change in both countries and the short-term significance of their entry into the Alliance. The study also evaluates the impact of their NATO membership on the geostrategic situation in the Nordic and Baltic Sea regions, and the extent to which it represents a new phase in their foreign and security policies.

Finally, we present a selected bibliography of scholarly books, articles, and book chapters on Danish foreign policy published in English, German and French in 2023. The present volume was edited by Head of Research Unit and Senior Researcher Cecilie Felicia Stokholm Banke and Senior Researchers Jessica Larsen and Mikkel Runge Olesen, assisted by Samuel Berlin. Jessica Lerche has copy-edited.

We hope that you will enjoy the read.

The Editors
DIIS, Copenhagen
May 2024

Chapter 1

Abstracts in English and Danish

This chapter includes abstracts of the scholarly articles in English and Danish

Danish military support for Ukraine War: a legal balancing act

Marc Schack and Astrid Kjeldgaard-Pedersen

When Russia launched its full-scale invasion on 24 February 2022, states wishing to support Ukraine's exercise of the right to self-defence through the supply of weapons not only had to consider the political ramifications but also the international legal challenges – as well as the potential interplay between the law and politics. As Denmark gradually expanded its support to Ukraine by donating more powerful and complex weapons systems as well as training of military personnel, two particular international legal questions became increasingly important: 1) when does a state become 'party' to an armed conflict by supporting one of the belligerents? and 2) when does the donor state become liable for the receiving state's use of weapons donations in violation of international law? Through the examples of these two international legal thresholds, this article addresses the role of international law in Denmark's approach to the conflict in Ukraine.

Da Rusland indledte invasionen af Ukraine den 24. februar 2022, måtte stater, der ønskede at støtte ukrainernes udøvelse af selvforsvarsretten gennem våbendonationer, ikke kun overveje de politiske konsekvenser, men også de folkeretlige udfordringer – og samspillet mellem international ret og politik. Efterhånden som Danmark gradvist udvidede sin støtte til Ukraine ved donation af gradvist mere kraftfulde og komplekse våbensystemer samt træning af ukrainske soldater, blev to særlige folkeretlige spørgsmål relevante: 1) hvornår bliver en stat 'part' i en væbnet konflikt ved at støtte en af de krigsførende parter, og 2) hvornår bliver donorstaten ansvarlig for modtagerstatens brug af våbendonationer i strid med folkeretten? Med disse to folkeretlige problemstillinger som eksempler behandler denne artikel folkerettens rolle i Danmarks tilgang til konflikten i Ukraine.

Danish foreign policy activism: mostly in the minds of the researchers?

Henrik Larsen

Activism has been a central theme in the study of Danish foreign policy after the Cold War. A common understanding is that there is an essential quality to activism. The assumption seems to be that the concept of activism has been particularly relevant in Danish foreign policy ever since Foreign Minister Ellemann-Jensen launched 'active internationalism' in 1989. However, there has been little interest in the way in which the term itself has been used in the Danish political sphere. The article examines the way the term is used. The analysis shows that 'active' (but never activism/activist) can be found in all government programs after 2009. However, there are no substantial political consequences of the articulation of 'active' since 'active' provides legitimacy to already existing political aims. On this background, the article raises the question of whether the unique research focus on Danish foreign policy activism is warranted.

Aktivisme har været et centralt tema i studiet af dansk udenrigspolitik efter den kolde krig. En almindelig forståelse er, at aktivisme i forskellige former er et iboende træk i dansk udenrigspolitik. Antagelsen synes at være, at begrebet aktivisme har været særligt relevant i dansk udenrigspolitik lige siden udenrigsminister Ellemann-Jensen lancerede 'aktiv internationalisme' i 1989. Der har dog været ringe interesse for den måde, som selve begrebet har været brugt på i den danske politiske sfære. Artiklen undersøger den måde, udtrykket bruges på med særligt henblik på perioden efter 2009. Analysen viser, at 'aktivisme'/ 'aktivistisk' sjældent bruges. 'Aktiv' kan imidlertid findes i alle regeringsprogrammer efter 2009. Der er dog ingen væsentlige politiske konsekvenser af artikulationen af 'aktiv', da 'aktiv' giver legitimitet til allerede eksisterende politiske mål inden for eksisterende udenrigspolitiske forståelser. På den baggrund rejser artiklen spørgsmålet om, hvorvidt det unikke forskningsfokus på dansk udenrigspolitisk aktivisme er berettiget.

Pragmatic idealism in Danish foreign policy: partnerships and the ‘Global South’

Lars Engberg-Pedersen and Rasmus Hundsbæk Pedersen

Geopolitical changes have led to foreign policy reconsiderations in many parts of the world, including in Denmark. In May 2023 the Danish government announced a new Foreign and Security Policy Strategy (FSPS) highlighting the term ‘pragmatic idealism’, which, through partnerships and alliances, aims to strengthen multilateral cooperation and a rules-based world order. The article explores the notion by analysing the FSPS and how the concept of partnership has been used in Danish development cooperation, where it has a long history. Moreover, the article discusses the notion of the ‘Global South’ and reflects on the implications of adopting a strategy of pragmatic idealism for the cooperation with countries belonging to, or identifying with, this notion. It is concluded that there is still little evidence of what pragmatic idealism in reality means, but that to achieve its stated objectives will require a revision of Denmark’s approach to low- and middle-income countries.

Geopolitiske forandringer har medført en gentænkning af udenrigspolitikken mange steder på kloden og også i Danmark. I maj 2023 publicerede den danske regering en ny Udenrigs- og Sikkerhedspolitisk Strategi med særligt fokus på pragmatisk idealisme, som ikke mindst ved hjælp af partnerskaber og alliancer skal styrke det multilaterale samarbejde og en regelbaseret verdensorden. Artiklen kigger nærmere på den pragmatiske idealisme ved at analysere den nye strategi og partnerskabsbegrebet, som det er blevet anvendt i dansk udviklingssamarbejde, hvor det har en lang historie. Artiklen analyserer også ideen om ’det globale syd’ og diskuterer konsekvenserne af en strategi baseret på pragmatisk idealisme for samarbejdet med lande, der opfatter sig som en del af det fællesskab. Det konkluderes, at der endnu ikke er meget konkret viden om, hvad pragmatisk idealisme betyder, men at Danmark må revidere sin politik over for lav- og mellemindkomst lande, hvis målet med den nye strategi skal nås.

Gradually, then suddenly. Explaining Sweden and Finland's path to NATO

Juhana Aunesluoma

Following Russia's aggression in Ukraine the governments of Finland and Sweden decided to seek NATO membership in spring 2022. The article narrates this process and, taking stock of the literature and an emerging debate on the topic, it then analyses the motivations and contributing factors behind the policy change in both countries and the short-term significance of their entry into the Alliance. The article evaluates how their NATO memberships impact the geostrategic situation in the Nordic and Baltic Sea regions, and how this influences Nordic and Baltic Sea regional cooperation. It discusses whether this should be seen as a confirmation of earlier choices whereby they have grown gradually closer to NATO since the end of the Cold War and come to rely increasingly on international defence cooperation as a critical component of their security. After assessing the extent to which Sweden and Finland's NATO accessions should be seen as an entirely new phase in the long-running trends in their foreign and security policies, the conclusion argues that, intentionally or not, for Sweden and Finland this represents a real and fundamental break with their national pasts.

Efter Ruslands aggression i Ukraine besluttede regeringerne i Finland og Sverige at søge om medlemskab af NATO i foråret 2022. Artiklen fortæller om denne proces og – med en status over litteraturen og den nye debat om emnet – analyserer herefter motiverne og de medvirkende faktorer bag den politiske ændring i begge lande og den kortsigtede betydning af deres indtræden i alliancen. Artiklen vurderer herudover, hvordan deres NATO-medlemskab påvirker den geostrategiske situation i Norden og Østersøregionen, og hvordan dette påvirker det regionale samarbejde. Den diskuterer, om dette skal ses som en bekræftelse af tidligere valg, hvor landene gradvist er vokset tættere på NATO siden afslutningen af den kolde krig og i stigende grad er blevet afhængige af internationalt forsvarssamarbejde som en kritisk komponent i deres sikkerhed. Efter at have vurderet, i hvilket omfang Sveriges og Finlands NATO-medlemskab skal ses som en helt ny fase i de langvarige tendenser i deres udenrigs- og sikkerhedspolitik, argumenteres der i konklusionen for, at det for Sverige og Finland, bevidst eller ubevidst, repræsenterer et reelt og grundlæggende brud med deres nationale fortid.

Chapter 2
Ministerial articles

A robust foreign and security policy in an uncertain world

Minister of Foreign Affairs Lars Løkke Rasmussen

Introduction

2023 was yet another tumultuous year – for the world, and for Denmark. A year where Russia continued its brutal and illegal war of aggression against Ukraine, and a year where we were reminded of the tragic and unresolved conflict between Israel and Palestine.

24 February 2022 was a key moment in history. Russia's brutal war against Ukraine has now been going on for more than two years, and 2023 did not produce the successful Ukrainian counteroffensive that we had hoped for. The conflict that brought war back to the European continent remains the biggest threat to European stability and transatlantic security.

Sadly, Russia's invasion of Ukraine is not the only ongoing war in the world today.

On 7 October 2023 Hamas committed a heinous terrorist attack in Israel. More than 1,200 Israelis were killed, thousands were wounded, and Hamas took more than 250 hostages, including women and children. The ensuing war between Israel and Hamas has resulted in a catastrophic humanitarian situation. By the end of 2023, more than 22,000 Palestinians had been killed, 57,000 wounded, and 1.9 million, or nearly 85% of the population, were internally displaced. And sadly, this war, too, continues.

The conflict in Gaza already affects other parts of the region as well, and the Houthi attacks on commercial and naval vessels in the Red Sea are a clear threat to regional stability and to global trade. The conflict has divided the world, but one thing remains clear: the only viable option is a two-state solution.

2023 was my first full year as foreign minister. In an increasingly unpredictable international landscape, I felt that it was important to formulate a strategy

that could help Denmark navigate the new geopolitical reality in which we find ourselves. Because we must face the world as it actually is. Not as we would like it to be. It is only natural for countries to pursue their own interests, but this can also, in many situations, be used as a platform for cooperation with mutual benefits. Therefore, we should pursue an active, ambitious, and optimistic foreign policy.

The government consequently published a new Foreign and Security Policy Strategy in May 2023. The strategy reflects a pragmatic idealism. While acknowledging an intensified security situation in Europe and an urgent need to scale up our security and our defence capabilities, we also need to form equal partnerships and build alliances with global partners in order to ensure more robust societies.

We have already seen some results from the strategy. In June the government, together with a broad coalition of parties, agreed on the new Danish defence agreement, which ensures that Denmark lives up to its NATO commitment of spending 2% of GDP (more than USD 22 billion annually) on defence. By the end of 2023 we had also signed a new defence cooperation agreement with the United States. With the accession of Finland and Sweden to NATO, the Nordic region will be united in the world's strongest military alliance, ensuring the safety both of its peoples and of the European continent.

Right before Christmas, the government also presented a new European policy agreement – with broad parliamentary support – and with wholehearted Danish commitment to the EU at its centre, because the new geopolitical reality calls for an EU that increasingly stands in its own right.

The geopolitical landscape continues to change and present challenges and opportunities for Denmark. In order to counter the former and reap the latter, we have strengthened the ministry of foreign affairs and also strengthened the diplomatic corps for the first time in many years.

Throughout this chapter, I will reflect on a number of different events that affected the world and formed my first year as minister for foreign affairs. 2023 was not an easy year. Far from it, we should not be naïve. But we cannot not lose hope either.

Intensified security situation in Europe

In 2023 we entered the second year of Russia's illegal war of aggression against Ukraine. The year marked the drawn-out character of the war across a frontline consisting of deep trenches, seemingly endless minefields and fortified barriers, making breakthroughs extremely challenging. We witnessed a continuation of Russia's brutal war seeing heavy shelling of residential areas, high casualty rates and indiscriminate bombing.

During the summer of 2023 Ukraine launched another counter-offensive to seize the tactical initiative and push Russia further back. With the counter-offensive, Ukraine gained the ability to control the course of events and inflicted severe damage on Russia's military capabilities, forcing Russia to allocate resources to sustaining their military posture. However, the counter-offensive did not yield the significant results in the form of liberated territory from Russian illegal occupation that were hoped for.

Meanwhile in July, off the battlefield, Russia terminated the Black Sea Grain Initiative. However, Ukrainian efforts to defend freedom of navigation in the Black Sea would gradually push Russia back, bringing Ukrainian grain exports back almost to pre-invasion levels by the end of the year. Ukraine's military ability in the Black Sea has been marked especially by its ability to put maritime drones into play, fighting back most proficiently.

Diplomatically, Ukraine's peace formula gained momentum in 2023. Denmark hosted the first meeting of four on the peace formula. Combined, these meetings have cemented the peace formula as an important starting point for preparations of peace negotiations to end the war. As co-chairs for the working group on energy security, together with Poland, Norway, and Ukraine, Denmark has worked to increase and ensure global support for Ukraine's energy security.

Russia has clearly signalled that it has no interest in genuine peace talks with Ukraine. On the contrary, Russia's calculation appears to be that eventually it can wear down Ukraine and outlast international support for Ukraine. In 2023 we saw Russia prepare for a long-term confrontation in Ukraine and transition towards a war economy. Russian production levels of defence equipment and supplies increased significantly. The Prigozhin mutiny and the Wagner Group's march on Moscow in June demonstrated that Russia's

political system is dependent on the security apparatus marching in lockstep. The incident showed how dysfunctional the system can be when that is not the case. Moreover, in the medium and long-term, the Russian state will likely find it increasingly difficult to balance macro-financial stability, welfare, and defence spending. How this will affect Russians' perception of Putin's regime is yet to be seen.

Political support for Ukraine has been strong both in Denmark and among allies and partners. The support has been underlined during several visits to Ukraine, including the joint Nordic–Baltic foreign ministers' visit to Odesa in April and the informal Foreign Affairs Council meeting in Kyiv. The need to secure long-term support became clear in 2023. In the margins of the NATO summit in Vilnius, the G7 and the EU launched an initiative to provide Ukraine with a series of bilateral security commitments, providing Ukraine with the certainty of military and civilian support for years to come. The initiative was supported by more than 30 countries in total, including Denmark and the other Nordic countries, who have since been working alongside Ukraine to provide a robust foundation for long-term support to Ukraine.

With broad support in parliament, the government decided to secure Denmark's long-term support to Ukraine by establishing the National Fund for Ukraine. The fund amounts to a total of DKK 63.5 billion from 2023 to 2028, covering military support as well as support for reconstruction, humanitarian assistance, and the private sector. In 2023, the Danish government launched two reconstruction packages amounting to DKK 770 million, including support for social infrastructure, water and energy supply, reforms, civil society engagement, and democratisation. Denmark's humanitarian support to Ukraine amounted to DKK 145 million distributed through the UN, ICRC, and strategic Danish civil society partners.

In October 2023 Denmark officially opened an embassy office in Mykolaiv to establish operative presence on the ground. The office plays an essential role in implementing our support for reconstruction in close cooperation with local authorities and international partners. Together with the prime minister and the defence minister, I visited Mykolaiv for the first time in January 2023. The damage to the city made a huge impression on all of us and confirmed the need to support the city and address the basic needs of citizens – both short term and long term.

In terms of direct military support, we saw a qualitative gearshift in 2023 as Western countries, including Denmark, combined forces and began to donate weapons with much greater capabilities and impact. Denmark announced military support to Ukraine to the value of more than DKK 27 billion, making Denmark one of the biggest military contributors to Ukraine's fight for freedom. The most ground-breaking announcement was the donation of 19 F-16 fighter aircraft in August. Together with the US and the Netherlands, Denmark took the lead in the international air force capability coalition joined by 13 other countries.

The European Union also continued its substantial political, financial, and military support to Ukraine throughout 2023, and in December the EU agreed to open accession talks with Ukraine. Furthermore, the EU reached agreement on three additional sanction packages in 2023 that strengthened the fight against sanctions circumvention, enhanced import/export and transit bans, tightened export restrictions, and further sanctioned a wide range of individuals and entities involved in supporting Russia´s continued aggression in Ukraine. The EU also established and utilised a new framework for sanctions in view of Iran›s military support to Russia, specifically related to the components used in the construction and production of unmanned aerial vehicles.

In terms of EU military support to Ukraine, the European Peace Facility reached EUR 6.1 billion in military support, and consultations with Ukraine on EU security commitments commenced. However, the urgent need to step up and scale up the production capacity in the European defence industry became evident as Member States struggled to deliver the promised rounds of ammunition to Ukraine. The need was addressed through initiatives launched with the goal of increasing joint procurement between Member States, while at the same time ramping up industrial capacity to support Ukrainian as well as European security of supply. In the coming year it will be necessary to build on all these tracks to enable Ukraine to win the war and develop as a free and prosperous country anchored in the West.

***

On 7 October 2023, Hamas committed a heinous terrorist attack in Israel. More than 1,200 Israelis were killed and over 250 hostages brought into Gaza. The ensuing war between Israel and Hamas in Gaza has led to the

killing of tens of thousands of Palestinians, including thousands of children, and the displacement of more than 1.9 million people – i.e. nearly 85% of the population. By the end of 2023 – less than three months after the attack, more than 20,000 people had reportedly been killed, around 70% of whom were women and children.

From the outset, Denmark and the EU have been clear in our condemnation of the terrorist attack against Israel by Hamas. Hamas was already designated as a terrorist organisation by the EU and has been for many years, but in 2023 more members of the military wing of Hamas were added to the EU terrorist list, and work on a separate sanctions regime targeting those supporting Hamas' terrorist activities was initiated.

About one month after the terrorist attack, I visited Israel and Palestine, where I met with both the Israeli foreign minister, and the Palestinian prime minister and foreign minister. In Israel I expressed my support following the terrorist attack and underlined Israel's right to self-defence in accordance with international law, including international humanitarian law. I also met with relatives of hostages, including those of the Danish-Israeli hostage who is still held captive by Hamas. In Ramallah I met with the Palestinian foreign minister and expressed my sympathy for the loss of civilian lives. In both meetings I stressed the need for a long-term, viable solution, based on two states living side by side in peace and security.

In 2023 Denmark provided more than DKK 280 million in humanitarian support to Palestine, whereas DKK 173 million went to UNRWA. Humanitarian access and security were severely challenging the humanitarian response, with devastating consequences for the people of Gaza. UN agencies reported of risk of famine, lack of clean water, and a collapsed health system. As a consequence, Denmark supported efforts to ensure a humanitarian ceasefire and the release of the remaining hostages, including by voting in favour of the resolution presented by the Arab group in the UN General Assembly on 12 December 2023.

On several occasions, both in Israel and Denmark, I met with the relatives of the Danish-Israeli citizen who was taken hostage during the Hamas-led attack on 7 October and expressed my deep sympathy for the extremely difficult situation that they find themselves in.

On 29 December South Africa submitted a case to the International Court of Justice claiming that Israel was violating the Genocide Convention for their actions against the Palestinian people in Gaza, as well as the incitement to genocide. Israel, in turn, argued that they were complying with international law. Naturally, we respect the ICJ as the primary judicial organ in the UN and urge all states to comply with the orders and judgments of the court.

The violence also escalated in the West Bank in 2023, including settler violence. From a Danish perspective, we have condemned the attacks by extremist settlers. Our position on the Israeli settlements is clear: settlements are illegal under international law and undermine the prospects of a two-state solution.

Aside from violence spreading into the West Bank, 2023 unfortunately also saw a wider escalation in the region. The maritime security situation in the Red Sea worsened due to numerous attacks by the Houthis against commercial shipping. The attacks led to the formation of an international maritime operation in December, Operation Prosperity Guardian, to protect commercial shipping. Shortly after the formation, Denmark decided to participate with a staff officer while subsequently starting the parliamentary process of deploying a frigate to the operation. In addition to the situation in the Red Sea, we have also witnessed increased fighting between Israel and Hezbollah across the Blue Line between Israel and Lebanon, regrettably leading to civilian causalities on both sides.

Apart from the diplomatic efforts towards Israel and Palestine in the UN and in the EU, I have held numerous meetings and conversations with foreign ministers of the region, including colleagues from Jordan, Egypt, Lebanon, United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia. The conversations have left me with a sense of general urgency for finding a just and lasting solution to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict through two states living side by side in peace and security.

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In 2023 the EU started the process of accession negotiations with Ukraine and Moldova, while Georgia was granted candidate status. This was indeed a positive development, although the reason behind it was anything but positive. The fact is that all of Europe – both EU Member States and candidate countries – is threatened by Russia, directly or indirectly. Enlargement remains

one of the most potent geopolitical tools at the EU's disposal; and in the current situation, the enlargement of the EU is not just a political but also a geostrategic necessity.

This applies not only to Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia, but also to the countries in the Western Balkans. The Western Balkans is a corner of Europe that continues to be characterised by internal tensions within and between countries, and which is particularly vulnerable to the spill-over effects of the war in Ukraine. Not least because Russia is doing its part to fan the flames in the region. We need to bring the countries of the Western Balkans closer to the EU, both for their sake and for ours. This is also the reason why, in 2023, the government decided to reopen the Danish embassy in Sarajevo by the second half of 2024. At the same time, the countries themselves need to take responsibility for ensuring a positive regional development. That was a key message during my visits to Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina in September 2023, and something I will continue to highlight in my future meetings with representatives from the region.

The Copenhagen criteria celebrated their 30th anniversary in 2023. It was the first time that a set of clear criteria for becoming a member of the European Union were formulated. I hosted a high-profile international conference in Copenhagen in June to celebrate the anniversary. There was general agreement that the criteria remain as important today as they were 30 years ago. They laid the foundation for the merit-based approach to enlargement, which found its fruitful completion at the start of the millennium. We need to build on that and maintain the merit-based approach. We must not lower the bar for admission, nor compromise the criteria. At the same time, we – i.e. both the Commission and the Member States – must help the countries get ready, reach the bar, and implement the necessary political and economic reforms. There must be no doubt about the EU's and the Member States' support for the enlargement process. It is not a question of *whether* the EU should be enlarged, but of *when*.

It is our obligation to make sure that the EU is ready to welcome the candidate countries when they are ready to join the EU family. In the process we also need to remember that if we do it right, enlargement can strengthen the EU. Denmark has and will continue to engage actively in the discussions and preparations.

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NATO and the transatlantic bond remain the cornerstone of European and Danish security. In 2023 NATO implemented the historic decisions from the Madrid summit of 2022 with strengthened forward defence, enhanced battlegroups in the eastern part of the Alliance, and an increased number of high-readiness forces. At the 2023 Vilnius summit, a number of new, important, decisions were made to adapt NATO for the future including a new generation of regional defence plans.

A major strengthening of the Alliance came in April – symbolically on the anniversary of the Alliance – when the Finnish flag was flown at NATO HQ. As NATO's 31st member, Finland greatly strengthens NATO with its highly capable set of armed forces and increases the security of the Alliance. Regrettably, it would take almost another year before we could also celebrate Sweden's accession to the Alliance.

In 2023 Ukraine was brought even closer to the Alliance. At the summit in Vilnius, the first meeting of the NATO–Ukraine Council was held with the participation of President Zelensky in a format where Allies and Ukraine could meet to discuss and decide as equals. Additionally, Allies agreed a multi-year package of assistance to Ukraine and decided that Ukraine had moved beyond the need for a membership action plan, changing Ukraine's membership path from a two-step to a one-step process. In the margins of the summit, the G7 and the EU released a statement regarding long-term security commitments to Ukraine. Denmark and the Nordic countries released a joint statement of support immediately afterwards, underlining our shared commitment to the defence of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

We have adapted our posture to the new realities. At the Vilnius summit, Allies also took major steps to strengthen deterrence and defence, with the adoption of three new regional defence plans. Denmark confirmed our status as a core member of NATO, offering substantial contributions to the NATO force model, and, additionally, the Danish-led Multinational Division North in Latvia was declared fully operational. As a follow-up to the pledge made in Wales in 2014, a new defence investment pledge was agreed with the commitment to invest a minimum of 2% of Gross Domestic Product annually on defence. With the Danish Defence Agreement reached that summer alongside Danish support for Ukraine, Denmark spent 2% of GDP on defence in 2023.

While there is no doubt that NATO is a regional alliance, the challenges we face are global. Russia remains the most significant and direct threat to the Alliance. At the same time, terrorism is an asymmetric threat to the security of our citizens and to international peace and prosperity, while the People's Republic of China's stated ambitions and coercive policies challenge our interests, security and values.

Further, the developments in the Indo-Pacific showed how connected we are. What happens in Europe matters to the Indo-Pacific, and what happens in the Indo-Pacific matters to North America and Europe. Therefore, it was beneficial that leaders from NATO's Indo-Pacific partners – Australia, Japan, New Zealand and South Korea – participated in the summit for the second year running, as did the leaders of the EU. Engaging with partners is crucial as we stand together to defend the rules-based international order.

As the world proved increasingly dangerous during 2023, it has been encouraging how the Alliance has continued its response to the threats and challenges we face. Allies have stepped up their support for Ukraine, and defence spending has increased across the Alliance, not least among European Allies. As we enter into 2024 and the Alliance's 75th anniversary, it is clear that NATO is paramount to the defence of the West.

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2023 saw a new flare-up of tensions in the South Caucasus region of Nagorno-Karabakh. The contested territory, located within Azerbaijan's internationally recognised borders, has been the source of a long-running conflict with neighbouring Armenia. However, after a military operation on 19 September, Azerbaijan gained control of the remaining parts of the territory which it had lost to Armenian forces back in the 1990s. Nearly the entire local Armenian population, numbering more than 100,000 people, fled from Nagorno-Karabakh and the self-declared Armenian republic of Artsakh was dissolved. The escalation had been building up following a months-long Azerbaijani blockade of the 'Lachin corridor' – the only major road from Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia. Despite their presence in the area, Russian peacekeepers did not prevent these events from unfolding. This contributed to increasing Armenian frustration with Russia's role in the region.

During 2023 the Armenian government, on several occasions, voiced intentions to forge closer ties with Western partners to avoid being overly reliant on Russia for its security. To underscore this strategic decision, Armenia welcomed more intensive cooperation with the EU. This included establishing a civilian EU mission to monitor the border with Azerbaijan, which was deployed at the beginning of the year. Moreover, the Armenian government took steps such as providing humanitarian aid to Ukraine and ratifying the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC). The latter was particularly remarkable given that, earlier in 2023, the court had issued an arrest warrant for Russian president, Vladimir Putin, over the war in Ukraine. These moves led to strong criticism from the Kremlin.

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In 2023, the number of irregular border crossings and asylum applications in the EU was at its highest since 2015-2016, although at a lower level than then. Changing dynamics and developments around the world pushed and shifted movement and displacement patterns, and more European countries witnessed Russia's instrumentalisation of migrants as a hybrid threat to destabilise Europe. A key milestone in 2023 was achieved when the Council and European Parliament reached a historical political agreement on the pact on migration and asylum. The new legislation will, for example, strengthen the control of the external borders and the internal security of the Union, as well as make it easier to return persons who are not in need of international protection. Complementing the pact on migration and asylum, the EU stepped up its efforts on the external dimension of engaging in comprehensive and strategic partnerships with third countries, exemplified by the memorandum of understanding between the EU and Tunisia. Along these lines, greater openness of the EU and its Member States to finding new ways to address irregular migration towards Europe emerged. This was illustrated by, for example, the President of the European Commission who highlighted the need for 'out-of-the-box' thinking.

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In the Arctic, our goal remains low tension. We continue to work for peace and security in the region. However, the Arctic is not immune to geopolitical competition and tension. Russia's war in Ukraine made them a more

unpredictable actor – also in the Arctic and the North Atlantic. The decade-long Russian military buildup in the Arctic continues to be a concern, and we must be vigilant regarding China's long-term interests in the region. The long-term implications of the current developments remain unclear. We will be working closely with our allies and partners on advancing our common goals and interests in the Arctic.

In recent years NATO has increased its focus on the region because of the new security dynamics. We support NATO's increased focus on the High North. The Vilnius communiqué from the NATO summit in July 2023 emphasised that Russia's capability to disrupt Allied reinforcements and freedom of navigation across the North Atlantic continued to be a strategic challenge to the Alliance.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine caused a fundamental change in the international cooperation on the Arctic. Activities in the Arctic Council were paused immediately after Russia's invasion of Ukraine; a decision taken unanimously by the seven like-minded states of the Arctic Council including the Kingdom of Denmark. Since Norway took over as Chair of the Council in May 2023, a main priority has been to safeguard and steer the Arctic Council through the challenging times it is facing without re-engaging in political cooperation with Russia. In August 2023 the like-minded states reached consensus in consultation with the Indigenous Peoples organisations to allow for working groups of the Arctic Council to resume their project work by means of written communication.

Within the Kingdom of Denmark, we continued deepening our cooperation with Greenland and the Faroe Islands in 2023 regarding foreign, security, and defence policy. In particular, on the Arctic and the North Atlantic, but also in a number of other policy areas that are of importance to Greenland and the Faroe Islands.

Global partnerships and building alliances

On the global scene, 2023 brought home two clear messages of how to navigate as a small state in a world of intensified geopolitical competition and polarisation: 1) we need more, not fewer friends. And 2) we must strive to reform and future-proof the international institutions that form the backbone of international rule of law, multilateral cooperation, and global problem-solving.

Events unfolding since then have underlined this. Regardless of whether we look to the United Nations, the G20, or the BRICS, the power balance is shifting and countries naturally wish to translate their relative weight into influence. Ignoring this – or failing to understand the long-term implications of this – would be at our own peril.

Throughout 2023 this realisation has shaped not just Danish but also wider European efforts to form new partnerships, revitalise old links and bring global governance into the 21st century. In this endeavour, I made an official visit to Kenya in August with the purpose of conveying Denmark's ambition for a strengthened partnership based on equality and common interests, both bilaterally with Kenya and between the EU and Africa.

The annual opening of the United Nations General Assembly in September provides a unique opportunity to gauge the global temperature, listen to statements from all over the world and meet with leaders from member states with whom Denmark has only limited bilateral contact. This was the case in 2023, where I attended the high-level 'UNGA' week for the first time as a foreign minister and met with colleagues from countries as diverse as Pakistan, Kyrgyz Republic, Bahrain, Indonesia, South Africa, Bhutan, Ukraine, and Bahamas. In the current geopolitical climate such meetings are vital to countering polarisation as they allow both for identifying areas of common interest and engaging in critical dialogue on topics where we may disagree.

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As a candidate to the UN Security Council 2025-2026, Denmark is aspiring to play a bridge-building role. If elected, we will work constructively with fellow members of the Council and strive to make the Council function and fulfil its important responsibility – even under difficult geopolitical conditions. Conditions are indeed difficult in an era marked by great power rivalry and global polarisation. This was already clear prior to the annual opening of the UN General Assembly in September and following the 7 October terrorist attacks and the subsequent Israeli response, the atmosphere in the UN has arguably gone from bad to worse.

The high-level week in September, which opened with the SDG Summit, was held against a backdrop of widespread lack of trust in the ability of the

multilateral system to deliver on its many aspirations, including the SDGs. In his opening statement, the UN Secretary-General thus pleaded with member states to reform the existing system. 'The world has changed. Our institutions have not', he argued, and continued, 'I know there are many competing interests and agendas. But the alternative to reform is not the status quo. The alternative to reform is further fragmentation. It is reform or rupture.'

If there was one topic uniting a growing number of countries in 2023, it was the demand for fundamental reforms of key multilateral institutions, including the international financial architecture and the United Nations Security Council. Denmark fully agrees: the institutions of global governance are outdated and must be reformed to reflect the world of today. If not, they will lose their relevance, legitimacy, and efficiency.

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In 2023, at the BRICS Summit in Johannesburg, Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa agreed to invite six new members into the BRICS grouping: Argentina, Egypt, United Arab Emirates, Ethiopia, Iran, and Saudi Arabia. Meanwhile it remains to be seen how many of these countries will eventually join the BRICS – Argentina subsequently withdrew their application, and Saudi Arabia has still to formally accept the invitation. It is also an open question whether the BRICS grouping will emerge stronger or more divided following an expansion. The trend seems clear: ad-hoc arrangements and exclusive 'clubs' are gaining ground, while existing, rules-based, formal institutions are losing ground.

This provides even further impetus for Denmark to engage wholeheartedly in discussions on how to bring the UN and multilateralism into the 21st century. At the same time, and as part of this, we must boost our efforts to create equal partnerships with countries across the globe, bilaterally and through the EU.

In 2023, a case in point was the EU–CELAC Summit held in Brussels in July. After more than eight years, EU leaders, including the Danish prime minister, met with leaders from the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) to renew the partnership and send an important signal of the willingness to strengthen bi-regional cooperation. The next summit will be held in Colombia in 2025. When acting together, the EU–CELAC can provide a strong push for effective multilateralism.

The EU Global Gateway Forum held in Brussels in October 2023 was another example of a new partnership approach. The forum brought together leaders from the European Union and partner countries from around the world. During the forum, more than 30 new partnership agreements on infrastructure investments were announced, including with countries such as Vietnam, Kyrgyz Republic, Mexico, Zambia and the Democratic Republic of Congo. The Danish project regarding a green shipping corridor made it to the list of 'Global Gateway flagship projects' of 2023, and since then the European Commission has strongly engaged in the project with the ambition of giving it a more global scale. The Global Gateway strategy is starting to deliver but much more is needed in terms of engaging the private sector and consequently adapting the projects to local demand.

While it is evidently easier for European leaders to meet counterparts and colleagues from around the world in Brussels, a key aspect of the emerging world order is the imperative for European leaders to travel more. To meet people where they are, literally, as well as figuratively speaking. If we want to establish new partnerships on an equal basis, we must also come as guests, rather than always being the host We must be willing to listen more and preach less.

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Africa is a continent on the rise. Analysts project that six out of the ten fastest growing economies in the world will be African. The rise of Africa was clearly manifested in 2023, when the African Union joined the G20 as a permanent member on a par with the European Union. An insufficient, yet significant and much welcomed step towards stronger African representation in global governance structures.

The Nordic–African foreign ministers meeting in Algeria in October confirmed the strong bonds between African countries and the Nordic countries, and our shared interest in a future multilateral system that delivers for all and has stronger African representation. The meeting also brought to bear the growing wish for more concrete follow-up between meetings and to deepen cooperation on every-day, tangible issues related to green transition, trade, and investments. This will be high on the agenda for the next Nordic–African foreign ministers meeting, which will be held in Copenhagen in May 2024.

Diverse as the African continent is, it also has, however, some deeply worrying trends and long-standing problems. For example, 2023 saw coups in Niger and Gabon, civil war in Sudan, the ousting of the UN peacekeeping mission in Mali (MINUSMA) and growing Russian influence in several of the most politically unstable and conflict-torn countries in Africa. The regional instability and massive humanitarian needs that follow in the wake of such events have underlined the importance of strengthening our engagement with partners in Africa, including the African Union, to find joint solutions. In 2023 Denmark decided to maintain an embassy in Tanzania and the process to formulate a strategic approach to strengthening Danish and European engagement with African partners began. The strategy will be finalised and issued in 2024.

The summit that saw the African Union join the G20 was held in New Delhi, only a few months after India had surpassed China as the world's most populous country – a milestone that goes hand in hand with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's global ambitions for his country. Thanks to the strong Danish climate diplomacy and the green strategic partnership between Denmark and India that was launched in 2020, Denmark was for the first time invited to join the G20 environment and climate sustainability working group as well as the G20 energy transition working group.

The friendly relations between Denmark and India were even further strengthened in 2023 when their Royal Highnesses Crown Prince Frederik and Crown Princess Mary paid an official visit to the country accompanied by 38 Danish companies, the minister for climate, energy, and utilities and myself. Here I saw with my own eyes how working with Denmark is attractive to the world's most populous country, not least on green transition.

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China is an inevitable global and political economic player and the world's largest emitter of greenhouse gasses. Therefore we need to work with China, despite differences of opinion. As I have said many times, our policy towards China must be engaged, clear-sighted and realistic, anchored in a common strategic EU approach, and taking place in close dialogue with the US and other allies and partners. These principles are the foundation for our bilateral green joint working programme, which was launched during my visit to China in August, setting the framework for our bilateral cooperation and paving the

way for offering Danish solutions to ensure a greener future for China. During my visit I met with my counterparts on foreign policy and trade, discussing a range of issues including concerns for the human rights situation in Xinjiang, Hong Kong and Tibet, the promotion of our bilateral relationship, international issues, and conditions for Danish companies in China.

The EU–China summit in December addressed many of the challenges and differences that we also have with China, and it underlined the value of open dialogue even when issues are hard to tackle. The same goes for the relationship between the US and China. Therefore, I was very pleased to see the meeting in San Francisco between presidents Biden and Xi unfold in the manner that it did.

A more robust society

2023 was a year of alarming temperature records and extreme weather events. The global average temperature almost exceeded 1.5 degrees Celsius of warming since the pre-industrial era (1850-1900). This makes 2023 the hottest year on record.

The Paris Agreement and the most recent COP outcomes have set a limit of global warming to 1.5 degrees above pre-industrial levels as the core temperature target. Due to natural fluctuations this should be considered across 10-30 years. While the goal, therefore, is not missed by exceeding 1.5 degrees in a single year, 2023 was a stark warning: if we do not act with more urgency, the world is set to experience harder and more frequent droughts, floods and storms with severe impacts on sustainable development, poverty eradication, and biodiversity to name but a few consequences.

Denmark is leading the way with targets to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions by 70% in 2030, reaching climate neutrality in 2045 and going net negative thereafter with -110% in 2050 (compared to 1990). With our EU partners, we must continue to lead by example and encourage others to do more.

The result of COP28, hosted by the United Arab Emirates, was therefore an important step forward. The summit e.g. resulted in the 'Global Stocktake',

which called on parties to transition away from fossil fuels and contribute to global targets to triple renewable energy capacity and double energy efficiency improvements by 2030.

This was a landmark decision and the first time fossil fuels have been mentioned in a COP decision. Denmark played a key role in delivering this agreement. In March 2023 we hosted the Copenhagen climate ministerial, which helped kick-start discussion of the central issues early in the year, and the minister for development cooperation and global climate policy acted as co-facilitator of the ministerial consultations on the Global Stocktake leading up to and at COP28.

With the decision at COP28 to establish a fund for loss and damage, 2023 saw a breakthrough in international efforts to respond to loss and damage. Agreement on the fund at the opening plenary of the COP was in itself extraordinary. Moreover, pledges to the fund of over US$660 million were made during the COP. Denmark was the first country to announce willingness to contribute to the fund, well ahead of COP28. This was followed by a concrete pledge at COP28 of a contribution to the fund of DKK175 million. In addition, Denmark announced an amount of DKK175 million for loss and damage through existing institutions. These commitments as well as active participation during the year in the committee that prepared the decision on the loss and damage fund marked a continuation of the proactive line that Denmark has taken in recent years and which led to the concrete results at COP28.

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Denmark benefits in many ways from globalisation. As a small open economy, Denmark has been a champion of free trade and a strong internal market in the EU. But globalisation is changing character. With rising geopolitical tension and competition, international trade and investment and technological shifts are increasingly becoming a matter of security policy. More than ever is our security deeply intertwined with our ability to make our economies more resilient and reduce the risks arising from economic linkages. We rely on access to raw materials, technologies, and other inputs to boost our competitiveness and resilience and to sustain our economy.

The Danish government has increased its efforts to address the risks and vulnerabilities the open Danish economy faces, such as risks to supply chains, and technology security and leakage. This includes increased focus on screening of FDIs, export control, strengthening the protection of critical infrastructure, and increased awareness-building about threats among Danish research institutions, companies and authorities.

At the summit in May 2023 the G7 signed a declaration on economic security with the aim of supporting each other in reducing dependencies in critical supply chains. The declaration was followed up in June 2023 by the European Commission strategy proposal on economic security, which sets out a common framework for achieving economic security in the EU by 1) promoting the EU's economic base and competitiveness; 2) protecting against risks; and 3) partnering with the broadest possible range of countries to address shared concerns and interests.

Close coordination among allies and partners and between NATO and EU is paramount to dealing with these vulnerabilities. The Danish government strives for strengthened resilience and economic security of Denmark and Europe through enhanced cooperation in the EU, in NATO, and with the US, as well as with like-minded partners.

To build resilience and counter critical dependencies in our supply chains, the EU has focused on strengthening supply chains and diversifying the network of trade, economy and technology cooperation with trusted trading partners. This includes the bilateral trade and technology councils with the US and with India. The EU concluded trade negotiations with Chile and Kenya in 2023 and signed its free trade agreement with New Zealand with a view to its entry into force in 2024. In addition, the EU also concluded new raw materials partnerships with Argentina, Chile, DRC, Greenland and Zambia to enhance cooperation on critical supply chains. A number of trade negotiations, including with important emerging economies in the Global South such as India and Indonesia, are ongoing with a view to conclusion in the time to come. As part of its strategic and assertive trade policy, the EU stands prepared to defend its own interests against unfair trade practices and economic blackmail when needed. The adoption in 2023 of the so-called 'Anti-Coercion Instrument' is a result of this.

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When OpenAI, a then relatively small Silicon Valley-based company, launched a consumer-focused large language model and subsequently a generative AI chatbot (ChatGPT), the tech company changed the digital frontier.

By the end of 2023 the markets were loaded with new projects and apps that could cite sources, write functional programming code and compose multimodal elements. Multimodality – the ability to generate text, audio, video, imagery and combinations hereof – has particularly necessitated several regulatory and legislative measures, nationally as well as globally.

Notwithstanding the ability to generate information, the new technologies do not necessarily generate *true* information. The training data on which GenAI operates is, alongside the programming of the models, the only safeguard against an overabundance of credible but possibly also false information. As there are no human pilots between the input ('prompt') and the computationally-generated output, there is furthermore no editorial responsibility embedded in the product.

At best this means that well-meaning users can receive an untrue response to a prompt and unknowingly share it with others, thus giving it a level of human credibility. At worst, users can optimise the production of disinformation substantially. As 2023 gives way to the biggest election year in human history, with more than two billion expected voters globally, the need for regulatory oversight and responsible legislation of the new technology is extremely important.

Several governments and international organisations have put forward plans and blueprints to mitigate the risks of GenAI whilst allowing for the promising potential that the technology also harbours. This includes the Biden administration's 'Executive Order on Safe, Secure, and Trustworthy Artificial Intelligence' and India's 'Digital India Act', flanked by other ambitious undertakings from, for example, the G7, G20, UNESCO, and WHO. While the industry has called for a streamlining of regulation, no central set of global rules has yet emerged. In Europe, we are proud of the 'EU AI Act' being the first set of binding rules on AI in the world. The establishment of an EU AI office shows a clear ambition for an even implementation in Europe and a strong framework for innovation. In Denmark, we have the ambition to lead on

responsible AI use in the public sector, building on our position as one of the world's top digitalised countries.

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On 5 May 2023, the World Health Organization, WHO, declared that Covid-19 no longer constituted a globa health threat – a breakthrough in the global fight against the largest cross-border health threat and pandemic in recent history. The previous years had emphasised the weaknesses of global cohesion and shown how an infectious disease can have far-reaching consequences for economies, health and society worldwide if we are not sufficiently prepared.

Covid-19 is not the last pandemic that the world will experience. Strengthening global health security and pandemic preparedness locally, nationally and globally has therefore been a major priority – almost since the start of the pandemic. Such preparedness will be crucial for the international community to better prevent and respond to outbreaks of infectious diseases and other global health crises in the future. Efforts should not only focus on health but should contain a broader societal perspective, including agriculture and food, and thus ensure a focus on sustainable production as well as economic and social development.

Based on a strong and reformed WHO, as the core of the international health architecture, Denmark has worked to increase societal robustness and critical infrastructure, including strengthened health services. The need is reinforced by a focus on equal partnerships with the Global South, especially in Africa where the partners demand increased commitment and cooperation within social sectors, including health.

Conclusion

The past year, my first full year as minister for foreign affairs of Denmark, has been anything but plain sailing. The war in Ukraine raged on despite continued efforts to fight off Russia, and then was followed by the devastating terrorist attack in Israel. The conflict, with so many lives lost, created tensions across the region and in the international community. The geopolitical rifts grew deeper in 2023 and partnerships that we took for granted – e.g. in the Sahel – were turned upside down.

However, we also saw positive developments. The fact that Ukraine managed to gain access to the Black Sea and could continue its grain export was a tremendous accomplishment by Ukraine. It showed that the support provided by its allies has had the desired effect and that long-term support to Ukraine can make a real difference. Therefore, I am also happy that we have seen a number of security commitments (in 2024), following the Vilnius summit in 2023. With Finland and Sweden (in 2024) joining NATO, together with a fundamental strengthening of the Alliance, we have shown what the world's greatest defence bulwark looks like.

We also moved forward in fighting the climate crisis in the hottest year on record. With the Climate Summit decision to call on parties to transition away from fossil fuels and contribute to global targets, fossil fuels were mentioned for the first time in the decision text. With the fund for loss and damage, the countries most responsible for global warming furthermore acknowledged their responsibility.

In 2024 I will turn 60 and I am still optimistic. Having lived through the Vietnam War, the fall of the Berlin Wall and collapse of the USSR, 9/11, and 24 February, I am surprised how much progress the world has seen despite recurring crises.

I am not of the illusion that everyone wants to play by the rules and is pursuing an altruistic goal. Far from it. Countries act according to their own interests, not necessarily according to what is good for Denmark or the international community. If we want to understand the world as it really is, we must listen more – especially to our global partners – and preach less. This is also why I look forward to presenting the government's plan for a strengthened Danish engagement in Africa in 2024.

We are also looking ahead to the UN Security Council election, and I am hopeful that Denmark's candidacy for a seat on the Council will gain widespread support. The Nordic image as a trusted partner and bridge-builder is strong, and we need to continue to live up to the expectations. This is in the interest of Denmark and in the interest of the world order that we believe in.

Europe has to step up

By Minister of Defence Troels Lund Poulsen

Introduction

Two years on and Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine continues to be the biggest threat to European stability. During 2023 the war in Europe has been a central driver in foreign, security and defence policy. This emphasises that we can no longer take peace and freedom for granted. Denmark remains deeply committed to supporting the Ukrainian people in their spirited fight against an illegal, unjustifiable, and unprovoked aggression. As the war continues, the need for long-term military support has become more apparent. The war remains a shared fight for freedom, for democracy, for a safe Europe and for the rules-based world order.

We stand before one of the most complex threat landscapes in years. Great power competition, hybrid warfare, conflicts in the Middle East and threats to maritime security are examples of the developments and threats we must take into account. This demands commitment and action to ensure our freedom, and Europe needs to step up and shoulder a much larger responsibility for our own security. It is vital that we continue to stand together and remain united in a strong NATO. And that we push for an even stronger EU, more capable of contributing to our common Euro–Atlantic security.

Against this grave backdrop, in 2023 we welcomed Finland into the NATO family, and in 2024, we have also welcomed Sweden. This did not only mark a new milestone for transatlantic and European security, it marked a historic new era for the Nordic countries where defence cooperation is stronger than ever. And it underlines that although Russia wants to create division among European countries, the motivation to stand together has only increased.

Furthermore, NATO has made important decisions on new commitments to deterrence and defence and other joint responsibilities, on which Denmark and our Allies must deliver. We need to show both our willingness and our ability to deter and defend every inch of Allied territory. For this reason, Denmark has decided to allocate 2 pct. of our national GDP to defence and

security expenditure on an enduring basis, thus fully committing to NATO's defence investment pledge. This commitment is vital to meet the common responsibilities and capabilities required for maintaining a strong transatlantic alliance.

With the return of war to European soil, we presented the new framework defence agreement in June 2023. Supported by a broad range of political parties, the framework defence agreement allocated an additional more than USD 20 billion toward Danish defence and security during the period 2024-2033, thus constituting a historic and monumental buildup of Danish Defence. Due to the deteriorating security situation, further funds have since been allocated towards defence investments through partial agreements, which are focused on delivering on NATO's needs and further increasing Denmark's enduring commitment to meet the defence investment pledge and allocate more than 2 pct. of GDP on an enduring basis from 2023 and onwards.

The defence agreement also marks a turning point for Danish foreign and security policy. Denmark will continue to contribute to peace and stability around the world. But with the agreement, Denmark will enhance its focus on deterrence and defence in the Kingdom and our immediate neighbourhood. The defence agreement states three geographical priorities for the next ten years.

First, we have an obligation in relation to the entire Kingdom of Denmark, including the Faroe Islands and Greenland. In the Arctic region, Russia's behaviour has created a more unstable security environment. Maintaining low tension remains our shared ambition. But we are facing an increased need for further surveillance, resilience, and sovereignty enforcement.

Second, the historic accession of Finland and Sweden to NATO changes the security dynamics in the Baltic Sea Region, the Arctic and the North Atlantic. With Denmark's strategic location at the entrance of the Baltic Sea, Denmark will continue the commitments in the region and in particular to the Baltic countries, where Denmark has a particular responsibility.

Third, we must continue our contributions to efforts in global hot spots. Sadly, 2023 will also be remembered as the year Hamas launched a brutal terrorist attack against Israel. The Israel–Hamas conflict has led to an immense

humanitarian catastrophe. Furthermore, it has put the wider stability of the region at risk, illustrated by the serious attacks on international shipping in the Red Sea, threatening our seafarers and businesses, maritime security, and global trade.

Furthermore, the war in Ukraine and the growing strategic competition has also illustrated the need for increased defence industrial production capacity, both nationally, in Europe, and also in Ukraine. We need to support that. At the same time, we have seen an increasingly complicated security landscape with new threats such as cyber and attacks on critical infrastructure, underscoring the need for increased resilience.

Russia’s invasion of Ukraine

When Russia invaded Ukraine, the aim was not ‘merely’ to conquer Ukraine and make it a vassal state under Russian control. With the invasion, Russia has shown a continued ambition to enforce a fundamental change in the European security architecture and challenge the rules-based world order. As such, the brave people of Ukraine are not just fighting for their country and for their right to self-determination; they are fighting for democratic values and the inviolability of all European states. Ukraine is fighting for European security.

For Ukraine to succeed in repelling the Russian invasion we need to continue the strong support for Ukraine in the EU, in NATO and in all relevant international fora. There is no time to be hesitant or waver in our support. It is a joint responsibility. This means continuing the flow of weapons, ammunition, and training of Ukrainian soldiers. And it means finding new ways and further upscaling, if necessary, in order to support Ukraine in its fight for freedom.

In 2023 it has become evident that the fighting in Ukraine is a war of attrition. While the majority of the fighting keeps evolving around the south and north-east frontlines, both sides have been using drones, fighter jets and long-range missiles to reach in-depth targets. In addition, the frontlines have been characterised by extensive systems of World War 1-like trenches, which together with heavy mining have caused both parties to advance at a very slow pace, but with a very high number of casualties.

Last year Ukraine launched its counteroffensive. Had we delivered the necessary weapons systems to Ukraine earlier the counteroffensive might have been more successful. As the year ended, with Russia back on the offensive, Russia has expanded its control over the Luhansk, Donetsk and Zaporizhzhia regions, for example with the capture of Bakhmut. The Ukrainian defence is hindered by serious ammunition shortages for both artillery and air defence. With Ukraine depending on our continued support, we need to deliver more systematically and in larger quantities in order for Ukraine not to lose more ground. And we need to be creative.

The support for Ukraine has remained one of the highest priorities for the Danish government in 2023, and this will continue in 2024 and the years to come. As a result, Denmark, in close cooperation with Allies, has provided an unprecedented level of military support relative to its size this past year.

The Government reached a broad agreement to establish the Ukraine Fund, aimed at addressing Ukraine's needs and Danish efforts in military, civilian and economic support. Within the framework of the fund, in 2023 decisions were made to allocate approximately DKK 27.1 billion for military support to Ukraine.

Significantly, in 2023 Denmark decided to donate 19 Danish F-16 fighter jets to Ukraine, and to train Ukrainian pilots, technicians, and support personnel. Furthermore, Denmark made a decision to lead an international air force capability coalition together with the United States and the Netherlands.

During the past year Danish donations have continued to evolve along with the war, including both Ukrainian urgent needs and long-term requirements. As part of this Denmark supported Ukraine with donations of weapons and highly requested ammunition, as well as the entire fleet of Danish CAESAR artillery pieces, along with support within the cyber-domain. Denmark also contributed with joint procurement of ammunition for Ukraine in the EU context. Key Danish donations were also made in close collaboration with several international partners and included, amongst others, main battle tanks such as Leopard 1 and 2s and T-72s, as well as 155mm artillery guns. Donations of non-lethal equipment included medical supplies, funding for protective measures, software, and surveillance equipment.

The Danish Defence along with the Home Guard have also supported the training of Ukrainian soldiers within several frameworks. The training has involved activities in Denmark as well as deploying Danish instructors to international training activities, including the British-led Operation INTERFLEX. In 2023 the Danish Defence conducted a total of 36 courses, 25 of them within the framework of the EU's military assistance mission in support of Ukraine (EUMAM UA). By the end of 2023 Danish instructors had trained approximately 2,400 Ukrainians.

The past year has shown that if we wish to succeed in our support for Ukraine, we need to build on our already extensive cooperation with allies and partners as well as maintaining a strong focus on supporting Ukraine through the EU and NATO. Finally, we need a lot more involvement of our defence industry, also directly in Ukraine. An increased production capacity and a technological upper hand is the only way for Ukraine to win the war.

The Nordics and the Baltic Sea Region

When it comes to our immediate neighbourhood, Finland and Sweden's decisions to join NATO are truly historic. Their membership will make NATO stronger and the Nordic region more secure. Close cooperation on defence will strongly contribute to not only Nordic defence, but to European and transatlantic security and collective defence as well.

With the accession of Finland in 2023 and Sweden in 2024, Russia will be the only non-NATO member along the Baltic Sea. It creates opportunities for the Allied nations, but it has also raised new questions. We will therefore continue to enhance our discussions on deterrence and defence-related matters with our Allies from the Nordic and Baltic countries, as well as Germany and Poland.

A close historical bond exists between the Nordic and Baltic countries, and with Denmark's geographical location as the gateway to the Baltic Sea, Denmark has a strategic interest in the Baltic Sea Region. In the first half of 2023 Denmark contributed to securing NATO's eastern flank by having a battalion battle group deployed in Latvia. Furthermore, from mid-2024 a Danish battalion will be deployed to Latvia on a rotational basis.

It is possible that Russia will increasingly pursue a campaign of destabilisation in the conflict with the West to undermine Western unity, which is fundamental to the continued support for Ukraine. This has also made efforts concerning surveillance and protection of critical infrastructure more urgent, including in the Baltic Sea Region. In the autumn of 2023, damage to the Baltic Connector pipeline and a telecommunications cable near Estonia highlighted the need to work together in the Nordic and Baltic Sea Region to increase the resilience of critical infrastructure, also with a look back to the sabotage of the Nord Stream pipelines in 2022.

The Finnish and Swedish decisions to join NATO call for an even stronger Nordic Defence Cooperation (NORDEFCO). NORDEFCO was established in 2009 between Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden to strengthen the countries' national defences, explore opportunities for positive synergies and facilitate cost-effective joint solutions. Ever since, the Nordic countries have been building trust and confidentiality with each other through longstanding cooperation based on shared values and security interests.

With all five Nordic countries becoming NATO allies, the Nordic ministers of defence decided in 2022 to develop a new NORDEFCO vision. During their NORDEFCO Chair in 2023, Sweden led the work by drafting a 2030 vision, aiming for an ambitious plan for cooperation in the coming years. NORDEFCO has thus entered a new phase and the Nordic countries are committed to stronger operational cooperation in our region. Furthermore, NORDEFCO has fostered closer cooperation on donations to Ukraine and within defence industry cooperation.

In 2024 Denmark will chair the Nordic Defence Cooperation, focusing on joint operations, continued support to Ukraine, and security in the Baltic Sea Region, the Arctic region and the North Atlantic area.

Transatlantic relations

For the last 75 years the United States has been the ultimate guarantor of Danish and European security. On 21 December 2023, Denmark and the United States signed a historic Defence Cooperation Agreement (DCA) to enable a more permanent US military presence on Danish territory. Pending parliamentary

approval, the DCA opens a new chapter in our close and longstanding defence cooperation with the United States by granting US forces access to three Danish air bases in Karup, Skrydstrup and Aalborg. This will facilitate an even closer cooperation on military activities in Denmark, and it confirms that the United States remains our closest and most important ally.

In addition, the DCA demonstrates that Denmark remains strongly committed to European and transatlantic security. Through signing the DCA, Denmark has joined our Nordic neighbours in enhancing the access and mobility of US forces in Europe.

The Arctic and North Atlantic

Turning further north, in 2023 Russia continued its military buildup and increased its presence in the Arctic region, which emphasises that Russia's strategic goals and interests in the Arctic remain key for them despite the ongoing war in Ukraine. The Arctic region's importance to Russia has only increased, and it is possible that Russia will pursue a more confrontational course – rhetorically, diplomatically and militarily.

As uncertainty and unpredictability in the Arctic region increase, the responsibility of the Kingdom of Denmark to strengthen security in the region naturally follows. The Arctic and North Atlantic region is of high priority to the Danish government, which is strongly reflected in the defence agreement of 2024-2033. It is an utmost necessity to further strengthen the situational awareness in the Arctic and North Atlantic, particularly in regard to surveillance capabilities. Denmark, the Faroe Islands and Greenland thus agreed to cooperate on improving surveillance and upholding the Kingdom of Denmark's sovereignty in the Arctic and North Atlantic, as well as supporting the interests of close allies and NATO in the region.

It is in the interest of all states to ensure that the Arctic region remains a region of low tension. However, maintaining low tension requires the right level of situational awareness and also, where necessary, deterrence through military presence. Together with NATO and our close allies in the region, we will continue to shoulder the responsibility of maintaining our shared goal of low tension.

The tense security situation in Europe has continued to have implications for the dynamics in the Arctic. It has called for a stronger and more structured cooperation with our Arctic allies, but also within the Kingdom between the Faroe Islands, Greenland, and Denmark. Throughout the year increased involvement of the governments of the Faroe Islands and Greenland on Arctic security matters has contributed to strengthened security in the Kingdom of Denmark. The strong involvement of the governments in Torshavn and Nuuk in the Danish Defence negotiations has, among other things, led to common decisions on securing additional funding for two long-range surveillance drones, and the further development of the Arctic basic training programme in Kangerlussuaq.

Enhancing skills related to preparedness and emergency services in the Arctic and North Atlantic communities is of vital importance. The Arctic basic training programme can be a first step to ensure more awareness of how to act in a more vulnerable future of climate change and an increasingly unstable security situation including hybrid threats. Foreign states and criminal hackers continue to pose a persistent cyber threat to the Faroe Islands as well as Greenland. The threat level forces us to continue to boost our resilience and our ability to respond to these threats in the Kingdom of Denmark as a whole.

European defence cooperation

The Russian invasion has prompted a number of important decisions in the EU with lasting impact, demonstrating the commitment of the EU to pursue a more strategic course of action and to increase its capacity to act. As such, the EU has played its part in the Western response to the war in Europe. In 2023 the European Peace Facility financed member states' military support for Ukraine by almost EUR 600 million and has committed a total of more than EUR 6 billion so far. At the beginning of 2023 the EU's military assistance mission in support of Ukraine (EUMAM UA) had trained more than 40,000 Ukrainian soldiers. And in March 2023 EU member states adopted a three-track approach to provide Ukraine with artillery ammunition – through donations from existing stocks or joint procurements and by setting in motion important steps towards increasing the production capacity of the European defence industry.

These significant decisions were made quickly and decisively – and with relative ease, attesting to a remarkable sense of political cohesion and European resolve. The EU has also proven to be an important platform for Denmark, promoting Danish military assistance as well as political and financial support for Ukraine. Denmark's contributions to the European Peace Facility amounted to EUR 21 million in 2023 of which EUR 13 million were allocated to military assistance to Ukraine. Denmark has also contributed significantly to the training activities of the EUMAM UA and to the joint procurement of ammunition for Ukraine within the EU framework – in cooperation with our Nordic partners, the Netherlands and Germany, as well as within the framework of the European Defence Agency (EDA).

Stronger EU cooperation on security and defence provides new avenues and opportunities for Denmark. This applies widely, from the EU's military missions and operations to cooperation on preventing cyber-attacks and hybrid threats to maritime security, defence industrial cooperation and joint capability development. Denmark is committed to common European cooperation on these important issues. And it is a stated and clear priority in the defence agreement that Denmark should take active part. The ambition for Denmark to engage wholeheartedly in EU cooperation on security and defence matters was also confirmed in the European Policy Agreement adopted in December 2023 by the Danish government and a broad majority of the parliament.

After opting-in on EU defence cooperation in 2022, joining the EDA as well as the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) were important milestones for Denmark in 2023. Denmark can now take an active part in strategic discussions on the priorities underpinning the development of the EU's defence dimension – and participate in concrete projects that facilitate cooperation and capability development between EU member states, allies and partners. Denmark's participation in PESCO projects for military mobility and cyber rapid response teams also constitutes a clear example of the added value of EU cooperation for Denmark.

The EU and NATO have shown a significant degree of alignment in the aftermath of the outbreak of the war in Ukraine. In January 2023 a third EU–NATO joint declaration was issued, reasserting the strength of the partnership and pledging renewed cooperation in areas such as emerging and disruptive technologies, protection of critical infrastructure, and space. Most importantly,

the war in Ukraine has clarified the division of labour: to simplify slightly, between a NATO that deters and defends – and an EU that sanctions, funds, coordinates, and trains.

An even stronger EU–NATO cooperation will remain essential in the coming years because the security of the EU and NATO are interconnected. The transatlantic alliance is rendered stronger by the partnership between NATO and the EU, just as EU defence initiatives contribute to Euro-Atlantic security. NATO is the foundation for our collective defence, and a bolstered European defence is complementary to it. Making both organisations stronger is mutually reinforcing and must be done in tandem.

The defence industry and technological competition

When it comes to defence industrial production capacity, the war in Ukraine puts the entirety of Europe under pressure. Russia is outproducing the West, and Europe and Denmark's production models based on peacetime logic are no longer viable. It has become evident that our supply chains are vulnerable and that our national defence industry is critical to our ability to ensure our security. Therefore, it is necessary that we contribute to a European buildup of a capable defence industrial base. Nationally, we have decided to resume production of munitions and we are looking at a revision of the current national strategy for the Danish defence industry.

Denmark has also been pursuing and supporting this agenda in the EU, which has taken on an active role in facilitating a strengthened European defence technological and industrial base (EDTIB). A strengthened European defence industry is essential in order to maintain the military support to Ukraine and to take greater responsibility for Euro-Atlantic security. To support this endeavour the EU has, for example, established instruments such as the 'Act in support of ammunition production' (ASAP) and the 'European defence industry reinforcement through common procurement Act' (EDIRPA). Both aim at creating incentives to ramp up ammunition production and for member states to jointly procure defence material. It is my hope that this can support the Danish government's plans to establish a new ammunition factory. Moreover, the EU has announced the first-ever European defence industrial

strategy (EDIS) and European defence industry programme (EDIP). Both were presented in March 2024 and will set the strategic trajectory for the years to come.

With the war in Ukraine, we have witnessed significant technological advances that surpass advances made in past decades: on drones, AI, space technology and cyber warfare. These technologies have become a part of modern warfare, and emerging technologies such as quantum technologies will generate new opportunities and risks. Space, in particular, is becoming an ever more prevalent strategic domain, which in 2023 has led the EU to publish its first-ever EU space strategy for security and defence.

NATO's defence innovation accelerator for the North Atlantic (DIANA) exemplifies how no one nation can innovate alone. Transforming cutting-edge ideas into real solutions requires an Alliance-wide and whole-of-ecosystem approach. Denmark's contribution to DIANA provides the Alliance with a unique platform to develop quantum technologies. During the past couple of years Denmark has cemented itself as a leader in the realm of quantum technologies. This was exemplified in the co- hosted Copenhagen Quantum 2023 event between the Danish government and NATO last year. Together with NATO, we gathered central decision-makers and the flourishing allied quantum ecosystems to discuss how to move the transatlantic quantum community forward. The event was a testament to the willingness to cooperate in dual-use innovation in order to sharpen NATO's technological edge in light of the threats and challenges that face the Alliance.

Hybrid warfare, cyberthreats and resilience

Modern warfare is no longer only a matter of kinetic military action. European states remain a target for hybrid warfare such as influence campaigns, sabotage of critical infrastructure and cyber-attacks. Indeed, these cases illustrate that we are facing an increasingly complex and unpredictable threat landscape.

In the case of cyber, the threat against Denmark has proven serious and persistent. The threat from cyber espionage and cybercrime remains very high. While the challenges we face are far from new, the threat is constantly

evolving, and the cyber threat against Denmark has, in some areas, intensified as a result of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.

In May 2023 a coordinated cyber-attack compromised 22 Danish energy organisations in the largest cyber-attack against Danish critical infrastructure to date. The attack highlights that the threat is imminent, and our public authorities and private companies are likely to fall victim to either cyber espionage or cyber-attacks.

In response to these challenges Denmark actively works to strengthen our defence and resilience against cyber threats. The Danish national strategy for cyber and information security raises the ambitions and objectives for a cyber-secure Denmark, as we simultaneously continue to explore ways to advance cyber defence with our international partners. International collaboration on cyber defence is fundamental, as our interconnectivity makes the threats transnational.

Indeed, resilience and civil preparedness are vital to safeguarding our society, ensuring critical services and the continuity of government functions. Due to the altered security situation, we have increased the focus on resilience and preparedness against all kinds of disruptions. The implementation of the critical entities resilience directive (CER) is underway in all EU member states as well as in Denmark.

A supplement to the directive includes a collective encouragement for member states to conduct stress tests on national critical infrastructure in the energy sector. Furthermore, the recommendation encourages the development of a blueprint to coordinate a Union-level response to disruptions of critical infrastructure with significant cross-border relevance. Also, the operations carried out under the EU civil protection mechanism have greatly increased during the last few years, especially given the immense amount of donations for Ukraine, which have been the greatest single task for the mechanism so far. While boosting our national capacity to prepare for, resist, respond to, and quickly recover from strategic shocks and disruptions, Denmark is also strongly engaged in strengthening collective resilience within NATO in order to ensure the Alliance’s functions, including through implementation of NATO’s seven baseline requirements and resilience objectives.

International operations

In 2023 Danish efforts towards peace and stability provided important contributions to international efforts in conflict-affected areas. These include contributions to NATO Mission Iraq (NMI) as part of the international effort to fight terrorism as well as other efforts such as contributions to NATO's mission in Kosovo and the UN mission UN- TSO in the Middle East.

On 7 October 2023 Hamas launched a brutal terrorist attack against Israel. Since then a horrifying escalation of the situation in the Middle East has followed, causing immense human suffering and instability across the region. Against the backdrop of Hamas' attacks, a C-130 Hercules aircraft and personnel from the Danish Defence contributed to the evacuation of Danish citizens from Tel Aviv.

The security situation in the broader Middle East remains critical with negative spillover effects to other parts of the region. In the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden the Houthi movement has committed illegal and unacceptable attacks on commercial vessels, threatening lives and constituting a significant international problem that demands collective action. Seeing the problem as not being isolated to 2023, Denmark consequently decided to take part in US-led Operation Prosperity Guardian by deploying a frigate and staff officers to the region in 2024.

On the African continent, fragility and instability have unfortunately continued in a number of regions throughout 2023. The deteriorating security situation also had direct implications for the Danish military presence on the continent. In the summer of 2023 the transitional government of Mali requested the withdrawal of the UN mission in Mali, MINUSMA, effectively terminating its mandate. In December the last Danish staff officer left Mali, marking the end of ten years of continuous military presence in the country. While the Danish military footprint on the African continent is currently limited, several developments remain of great concern for Denmark. The developments have potential long-lasting effects given the imminent regional security threats, including the ongoing threats of terrorism, the risks of uncontrolled migration, and the expansion of Chinese and Russian influence on the continent.

Conclusion

The year 2023 has regrettably confirmed that the dramatic events of 2022 were part of a concerning trend. The tensions of previous years have increased further, and we now live in a new geopolitical reality. The Russian invasion of Ukraine and general aggressive Russian behaviour has resulted in a new security situation. Russian and Chinese cooperation has created further uncertainty. Europe needs to step up and take greater responsibility for our own security. Conflict in the Middle East continues to be the reality, and instability is growing in parts of Africa. Meanwhile, we are facing an increasingly complex and unpredictable threat landscape, including in the cyber domain and attacks on critical infrastructure.

At the same time, 2023 has marked a year of great Danish resolve to take responsibility. Denmark continues to be one of the strongest supporters of Ukraine – particularly illustrated through our substantial military donations throughout the year. It is vital that we make the support sustainable and viable for the long term.

Ukraine's fight for freedom is our fight for freedom. We must and shall stand by Ukraine for as long as it takes.

Furthermore, as our new political reality emphasises the crucial importance of adapted and strengthened collective deterrence and defence in Europe, Denmark is taking responsibility and has decided to fulfil NATO's defence investment pledge by allocating 2 pct. of our national GDP to defence and security from 2023 and onwards.

Through the historic ten-year framework defence agreement, we will continue our contributions to our common security. Specific capabilities and initiatives will be negotiated in partial agreements during the ten-year period. Greater compliance with NATO capability targets is a particular priority for Denmark.

Our defence must be equipped and capable of acting in the increasingly complex security landscape. This is also true in the Arctic and North Atlantic region, where close cooperation with the Faroe Islands and Greenland is crucial. The Kingdom of Denmark must be able to withstand the external pressure, and we will take upon us a greater responsibility for security in the

Kingdom. This includes strengthening resilience against the enduring threats of hybrid and cyber-attacks. In a European context, EU member states must be able to enforce our common security, and Denmark will shoulder our part of that responsibility. Outside our continent, Danish contributions to international efforts in conflict-affected areas such as the Middle East and Africa continue to be of importance.

Overall, the new geopolitical reality demands that we continue to adapt in order to protect the fundamental values of freedom and democracy on which our society is built. Denmark will continue to take responsibility for the strengthening of our common security.

We must and will do our part – now and in the future.

Chapter 3

Scholarly articles

Danish military support for Ukraine War: a legal balancing act

Marc Schack and Astrid Kjeldgaard-Pedersen [1]

Introduction

In March 2022, a month into Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the NATO Heads of State and Government held an extraordinary summit to discuss the situation. As the summit drew to a close, NATO Secretary General, Jens Stoltenberg communicated to the international press that he considered Russia's invasion of Ukraine to be the biggest threat to NATO's security in a generation.[2] In response, the NATO Allies decided to provide Ukraine with weapons, munitions and military training – and one of the most ardent supporters of this policy was Denmark. While support trackers and reports on military assistance come to varying results depending on methodology and focus, they consistently place Denmark among the most generous donors and supporters of the Ukrainians' self-defence against the Russian aggression.[3]

The purpose of this article is to assess how Denmark has so far approached the delicate balancing act between providing effective assistance to Ukraine in its fight against Russia while formally remaining a non-party to the conflict and steering clear of international law violations. We begin by briefly outlining the extent of Denmark's assistance to Ukraine to date. We then explain the definition of the concept 'party to an international armed conflict' under international humanitarian law (IHL). On this basis, we discuss – by analysing statements of Danish decision-makers – the role of this legal standard in the public debate in Denmark. Subsequently, we turn to the international legal rules that are, presumably, continuously considered by the Danish authorities so as to avoid responsibility for Ukraine's (potential) internationally wrongful use of Denmark's weapons donations. Finally, we reflect on what the Danish public debate concerning these two issues tells us about the overall importance of international law to Denmark's approach to the conflict between Russia and Ukraine.

What does the Danish military support for Ukraine consist of?

Generally speaking, Denmark has chosen a 'multifaceted and long-term support' policy towards Ukraine, through which Denmark provides Ukraine with considerable lethal and non-lethal military equipment, including large weapons systems and associated munitions, as well as assistance through targeted training efforts and humanitarian and economic aid. The Danish National Ukraine Fund – to which DKK 60.4 billion has been allocated as of writing – was established in March 2023 and is expected to last until the end of 2028.

In terms of specific hardware, the Danish support trajectory has been to move from more limited military donations, such as the donation of 2,700 shoulder-fired antitank weapons in early 2022,[4] towards providing larger and more powerful weapons systems – and eventually training Ukrainian soldiers in the utilisation of these systems. The most notable (pledged) donations comprise Harpoon anti-ship missile systems, the entirety of Denmark's CAESAR artillery systems, Leopard 1A5 and 2A4 battle tanks, and F-16 fighter jets.[5]

As regards military training, the key efforts revolve around the more complicated systems donated by Denmark as well as more generalised basic military training of Ukrainian soldiers.

At the time of the donation of at least 100 Leopard 1A5 battle tanks, it was noted in the joint statement by the defence ministers of Denmark, Germany and the Netherlands, that the donation included training as well as the required logistical support.[6] The Danish part of the effort has been implemented mainly through the training of about 450 Ukrainian soldiers on the operation and maintenance of the tanks. Denmark is also a co-leader of the international air force coalition to support Ukraine, which entails both the donation of F-16 fighter jets and the training of pilots, technical personnel, and support personnel.[7] This training takes place in Denmark and commenced in August 2023, when the Danish Defence Command announced that 73 Ukrainians, including eight pilots, had arrived at Fighter Wing Skrydstrup. The focus of the training is on developing basic skills and prerequisites for flying, servicing and maintaining the F-16 fighter jets.[8] Furthermore, Denmark is a part of the British-led Operation Interflex, which provides basic military training to Ukrainian

soldiers, including *inter alia* training in the use of donated equipment. As such, Denmark is engaged in a wide variety of training efforts aimed at enabling Ukraine to defend itself against Russia's aggression.

In light of the legal standard determining when a supporting state becomes a 'party' to an international armed conflict, which will be explained immediately below, it is worth noting at this juncture that Denmark is *not* providing the Ukrainians with assistance related to specific combat situations or providing intelligence.

When does a state become 'party' to an international armed conflict?

The concept of becoming a 'party' to the armed conflict in Ukraine has frequently been understood in terms of being 'at war' with Russia. Indeed, this concept is often brought to the fore in discussions concerning the risk of triggering a broader armed conflict between NATO and Russia.[9] While the connection is rarely made explicitly, discussing the question of Article 5 in NATO's founding treaty and the question of 'party status' in the same context implies some degree of confusion about the actual legal consequences of becoming a 'party' to an armed conflict. We will return to this confusion below.

Common Article 2 of the Geneva Conventions

First, we must consider when exactly a state becomes a party to an international armed conflict. The main challenge in that regard is that no specific rule provides a clear framework for making this determination. Our analysis therefore revolves around the inner legal logic that emerges from closely related rules and from relevant practice.

The key rule of relevance is common Article 2 of the four Geneva Conventions. This rule determines when the Geneva Conventions – and by extension IHL in general – apply to specific conflicts. Common Article 2 notes that the Conventions 'shall apply to all cases of declared war or of any other armed conflict which may arise between two or more of the High Contracting Parties, even if the state of war is not recognized by one of them.'[10] The article goes on to explain *inter alia* that the Conventions also apply during occupation.

The aim of common Article 2 is clearly to define when a situation moves from a peacetime scenario and into a wartime scenario – thus activating IHL. For present purposes, this happens when an 'armed conflict' arises between two or more parties, meaning that an 'international armed conflict' has materialised. While the two criteria – 'armed conflict' and 'two or more parties' – regulate the original triggering of the application of the Geneva Conventions, in this case between Russia and Ukraine, the assessment is essentially the same in relation to the possible addition of more states to the list of parties to the conflict. This is because the Geneva Conventions, as mentioned, contain no parallel rules that deal with the specific situation of 'new additions to the conflict', making the generally worded rule in common Article 2 the only available statement on the matter of the activation of the Conventions. Against this background it is necessary to consider, first, when an 'armed conflict' arises between two or more states, and, secondly, at what point such a conflict could be considered to also encompass third states.

As to the former question, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) 2016 Commentary to the First Geneva Convention makes clear that there is 'no central authority under international law to identify or classify a situation as an armed conflict' (ICRC 2016: 214). Therefore, these classifications have, as a point of departure, to be made by the states themselves and by organisations like the ICRC. The challenge is that while common Article 2 does define the 'parties to an international armed conflict', it does not define the concept of an 'armed conflict' itself. Even so, the ICRC Commentary – while referring to state practice, case law, and academic literature – notes that 'Armed conflicts in the sense of Article 2(1) are those which oppose High Contracting Parties (i.e. States) and occur when one or more States have recourse to armed force against another State, regardless of the reasons for or the intensity of the confrontation.' (ICRC 2016: 218). Furthermore, the ICRC Commentary points to the Tadić case from the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY), which notes that 'an armed conflict exists whenever there is a resort to armed force between States'.[11] In this way, the Commentary translates the concept of an international 'armed conflict' within the framework of the Geneva Conventions into instances where 'armed force' has been used between states, irrespective of intensity. This relatively low threshold would presumably mean that even if Denmark used armed force against Russia in very minor ways, or in isolated instances, Denmark would still cross the threshold and become party to the armed conflict. As Denmark has not done

so, however, the more pertinent question is whether Denmark's provision of aid and assistance has crossed the threshold. The ICRC Commentary does not provide much guidance on this particular question but given its reliance on the *kind of force* applied (i.e. armed force) and the lack of reliance on the *intensity of the confrontation*, it would be reasonable to follow a similar logic in relation to the assistance provided to the warring parties. Following this logic, the turning point is the kind of assistance provided to Ukraine rather than, for example, the quantitative numbers of weapons provided.

International case law

If we look towards international case law, the famous Tadić case before the ICTY, also mentioned above, is useful in this regard, although it does not deal with the question of third state party status to an international armed conflict as such. Rather, the ICTY had to decide in this case whether the armed conflict in Bosnia at the relevant time should be considered of an 'international' or 'non-international' character. This question hinges on whether a state is party to the conflict on each side. According to the tribunal, this would be the case firstly, if a state intervened through the deployment of its own troops, or secondly, if a non-state party to the conflict acted on behalf of a state.[12] It is the second question that is of interest here. In the Tadić case, the ICTY argued that the question of whether a non-state party to the conflict acted on behalf of a state hinged on the specific relationship between the state and the non-state party. In its judgment, the tribunal therefore noted that it had to consider whether the relationship between the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (a state actor) and the army of the Serbian Republic in Bosnia (representing a non-state actor) was close enough to 'internationalise' the conflict. The tribunal explained that this would be the case if the state had 'overall control' of the non-state group. The deciding factors for establishing this level of control were whether the state, '*ha[d] a role in organising, coordinating or planning the military actions* of the military group'.[13] To underscore what this meant in practice, the tribunal emphasised that the state's role had to go further than simply 'financing, training and equipping or providing operational support'.[14] Put differently, the state would not *de facto* become a party to the armed conflict through its assistance to the non-state actor if it simply provided military training or operational support to the non-state group. It would have to plan (specific) attacks or organise or coordinate military action in order to internationalise the conflict. Now, the question of whether a state actor is so closely connected

to a non-state actor as to internationalise an otherwise non-international armed conflict is different from the question of when a state provides enough assistance to another state involved in an international armed conflict as to make the former state a party to the armed conflict. It is, however, reasonable to suggest that similar considerations are relevant in both scenarios. This general idea also finds support in state practice.

State practice

Most prominently, it is commonly held that the United States did not become a party to the armed conflict during World War II, despite its massive material support to the Allies, including through the Lend-Lease Act of 11 March 1941, until the attack on Pearl Harbour on 7 December 1941. Simply put, it was not considered sufficient that the United States acted as 'the arsenal of democracy', providing primarily the United Kingdom with vast quantities of war materials. It was only when the United States became more directly involved, through an attack on its territory and armed forces, and through subsequent declarations of war in the immediate aftermath thereof, that the conditions changed sufficiently to make the United States a party to the armed conflict. Along similar lines, the United States considered states 'that send military forces to participate in Coalition combat operations or that allow their territory to be used as a base for such operations' to be co-belligerents in regard to the invasion of Iraq in 2003 (US Office of the Legal Council 2004: 44). Within the latter context, these states were contrasted with states that had not participated in 'actual combat operations' in Iraq but played other subsequent roles in the occupation.[15] In this context, the United States mainly focused on the question of whether these states' contributions had a 'direct nexus with belligerent or hostile activities.'[16] Similarly, the Netherlands did not consider Kuwait a party to the Iran–Iraq war in spite of Kuwait's support for Iraq, because Kuwait had not thereby directly involved itself in the armed conflict (Siekmann 1988: 390). Of course, we see similar practice develop in connection with the war in Ukraine, including Denmark's practice, which further solidifies the general understanding of the concepts of co-belligerency and co-party status as they relate to the question of when third states become a party to an ongoing international armed conflict. Overall, this practice suggests that even when states provide significant military aid to a party to an international armed conflict, this is not enough to make them parties to the armed conflict. This is also the conclusion generally reached in the literature,

including in recent literature focusing on the war in Ukraine (Schmitt 2022; Heller & Trabucco 2022; Wentker 2023; Wentker et al. 2024). While the specific references to relevant authorities differ somewhat from one analysis to the next, the underlying rationale is seemingly the same: what really counts is the directness of the assistance provided, not the intensity of the assistance. This means, for example, that if Denmark were to make military personnel available to Ukraine (even in very small numbers) who took direct part in the hostilities by operating military equipment engaged in combat, engaging in specific planning activities related to Ukraine's military operations, or who took part in specific targeting decisions, this would likely make Denmark a party to the armed conflict. Indeed, even a negligible troop contribution would generally result in Denmark becoming a party to the conflict because of the directness of the assistance, while Denmark could provide Ukraine with vast quantities of military equipment, which could make a significant difference on the battlefield, without making Denmark a party to the conflict because of the indirect nature of the contribution.

What are the actual legal consequences of becoming a 'party' to an armed conflict?

As mentioned in the beginning of this section, there seems to be some confusion about the actual legal consequences of becoming a 'party' to an armed conflict. It seems to us that the public debate about the question of whether Denmark risks becoming a party to the armed conflict between Ukraine and Russia – or, colloquially being 'at war' with Russia – through our military assistance to Ukraine entangles two very different sets of legal questions, which should be clearly separated.[17] The first question seems to be whether *different rules* would apply if Denmark crossed the threshold of becoming a party to the conflict, and thus fundamentally be about IHL (*jus in bello*), while the second, and more important question, seems to be whether such a party status would allow Russia to *lawfully target Danish territory or Danish military equipment and personnel*, and thus fundamentally be about the rules on the use of force (*jus ad bellum*). The answers to these questions are quite different.

The first question could, in principle, be easily answered in the affirmative. Indeed, were Denmark to become a party to the armed conflict, this would mean that a new set of rules applied between Denmark and Russia. Instead of

peacetime rules, IHL would apply to *military conduct* between the two states. This would entail, for example, that Russian attacks on Danish civilians would be considered IHL violations, while attacks on Danish armed forces would not. Similarly, if Russia were to take Danish prisoners of war, the specific rules set out in the Third Geneva Convention would regulate their treatment, while the conduct of hostilities would mainly be regulated by the specific rules set out in Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions. However, a significant qualification needs to be made on this point: the same would be true if Russia simply attacked Denmark *before* Denmark became a party to the armed conflict. From the moment that such an attack occurred, IHL would apply in any event. This means that an attack by Russia against Denmark would result in exactly the same legal situation, irrespective of whether or not Denmark had already crossed the 'party threshold' through its support for Ukraine. Therefore, legally speaking, it makes little difference whether Denmark supports Ukraine in a way that is too indirect for Denmark to become a party to the conflict under IHL; at least if the fear is of providing legal leeway to Russia, because at the moment Russia were to choose to react forcefully to that support, Denmark would become a party to the armed conflict anyway. Depending on the specific circumstances, such an armed conflict would arise either between Denmark and Russia, independently of the conflict in Ukraine, or with Denmark becoming a co-belligerent in the conflict between Ukraine and Russia.

The key question is therefore rather whether Russia would be legally allowed to use force (*jus ad bellum*) against Denmark or Danish military equipment or personnel in response to Denmark becoming a party to the armed conflict. The answer to that question is exactly the same as the answer to the question of whether Russia is legally allowed to use force against Ukraine: 'No'. Because Russia is fighting an unlawful war of aggression, in plain violation of the rules of *jus ad bellum*, any use of force against Denmark, when acting in collective self-defence of Ukraine, would be equally unlawful. Even if Denmark became a party to the armed conflict, each and every use of force by Russia against Denmark would be a *jus ad bellum* violation – as is the case in relation to Ukraine. In other words, it makes little practical-legal difference whether Denmark becomes a party to the armed conflict if the fear relates to providing Russia with legal justification for using force against Denmark. The legal threshold referred to by Denmark and our NATO Allies must therefore instead be understood as a stand-in for a more politically motivated threshold. This makes much more sense, as the IHL threshold of 'party status' provides a

concrete point of departure for discussions about escalation-avoidance and relies on established legal practice. However, while the problem is thus mostly political in nature, the line is clearly being drawn through legal analysis, and several states have openly drawn the line exactly there, as has, seemingly, Denmark (Wentker 2023).

The Danish public debate on the question of 'party' status

While Denmark has, on the one hand, readily and openly assisted Ukraine in its war efforts by providing increasingly more powerful weapons and military training, Denmark has, on the other hand, been equally eager to avoid being perceived as a 'party' to the armed conflict. When asked about the prospect of Denmark being 'at war' with Russia, the Danish government has continuously emphasised that the indirect Danish assistance to Ukraine falls below the threshold of what makes a state a 'party' to an international armed conflict.[18] Indeed, much of the Danish public debate has pivoted around this intricate legal threshold, which we have attempted to explain above.[19]

During a large donor conference in Copenhagen in August 2022, for example, then minister of defence, Morten Bødskov, was asked whether Denmark was now formally a party to the armed conflict and thus at war with Russia. Bødskov responded in no uncertain terms: 'No, we are not! We are helping a country regain its freedom. We do not have Danish soldiers in Ukraine. We are not at war with Russia, but we are helping a country.'[20] It is clearly implied that Bødskov and the rest of the Danish government's main concern was to avoid – in practical terms – triggering an escalation of the conflict. Yet, both the question and Bødskov's answer emphasise the importance of the legal threshold for a state becoming party to an international armed conflict under IHL.

In general, however, Danish decision-makers have chosen to say very little in concrete terms about Denmark's legal status in relation to the war in Ukraine,[21] and on the particular question of whether and under what circumstances Denmark would consider itself to be a party to the conflict, there has predominantly been silence. Indeed, when Danish media have tried to get access to the underlying legal assessment on this question, they have been

rebuffed: in response to a specific request for this assessment the Danish ministries of defence and foreign affairs denied access and even decided not to elaborate on the reasons for keeping the relevant documents secret, because this would undermine the considerations that led to exempting the documents from the media's request for access in the first place.[22] An obvious reason for this hesitation could be that Denmark does not want its opponents to be able to figure out exactly where Denmark draws the line, and what underlying legal logic is applied and considered in this regard. If this was made public in explicit detail, it could potentially be used by Russia to probe and challenge Denmark in this space.

While an overall strategy of relative silence on specific elements of the policy has been followed, the Danish government has not been completely silent on its legal views, as illustrated also by the exchange referenced above. For example, in an answer given to a member of the Parliamentary Defence Committee on whether Denmark would be considered 'at war' with Russia in the event of Danish missiles being used to sink Russian ships, the minister of defence answered the following:

> Support to Ukraine in connection with their defensive battle – such as financial support, arms- or ammunition-supplies – has the character of indirect support, which is considered to fall below the threshold of what is, according to international humanitarian law, required to make a state a party to an international armed conflict.[23]

The official Danish view is, correspondingly, that indirect support does not make a third state a party to an existing international armed conflict. Thus, Denmark is not party to the armed conflict in Ukraine. One further instance where Denmark has made it clear where it wants to draw the line has been in relation to the question of whether Danish soldiers were allowed to support Ukraine in their private capacity. The initial question, however, was whether Danes in general could legally join either side in the conflict, as private persons. The straightforward legal answer to that question was 'yes', but the political view in early 2022 was that it would be unacceptable for Danes to travel to Ukraine and join Russia. On the other hand, the government did not want to prevent Danes from traveling to Ukraine to fight alongside the Ukrainian defenders in a private capacity.[24] Nevertheless, stories emerged not long afterwards that the Danish Defence Command had actively discouraged

Danish soldiers from joining Ukraine in a private capacity. The reason was simple: The Defence Command worried that this could have implications for (the perception of) Denmark's legal status in relation to the war in Ukraine. In a response to a Parliamentary Defence Committee question, the minister of defence underscored that 'Denmark is not a party to the armed conflict between Russia and Ukraine. It is important for the government that it stays that way.'[25] From here, the minister emphasised the concern about Danish soldiers acting in a private capacity in the conflict:

> With a more direct Danish involvement, there will be a risk that Denmark could be regarded as a party. Against this background, it has been announced within the ministerial area of the Ministry Of Defence, that the Defence Command is very concerned about the prospects, if employees sign up for service in the war in Ukraine in their spare time, because this could contribute to a false perception of Denmark as being a party to the conflict.[26]

What is, again, noteworthy in these statements is the reliance on the standard of acting directly versus more indirectly. The worry in this regard is, of course, that if the Danish soldiers' conduct was seen as the conduct of the state, this would involve direct participation in the conflict, which could make Denmark a (perceived) party to the conflict. In any event, despite a lack of transparency regarding the specific legal logic that operates underneath this approach, it is clear that the key line drawn is between the provision of *direct* versus *indirect* military assistance to Ukraine. Against this background, it is somewhat puzzling that this approach does not seem to be directly reflected in the Danish Military Manual (Danish Ministry of Defence & Defence Command Denmark 2016).[27]

The Military Manual explains how assessments about Denmark's legal status in relation to armed conflicts are made, and it notes that there is no formal mechanism or procedure for deciding such questions. In Denmark, it thus falls upon the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in consultation with the Ministry of Defence to make such assessments. In this context, the Military Manual explains that the assessment of whether Denmark is considered a party to an armed conflict 'depends, among other factors, on the intensity of the Danish military effort, including the character and scope of the overall active military contribution' (ibid: 53). While this statement certainly includes considerations

about the directness of assistance, it seems even more focused on the magnitude – both in terms of numbers and size – of the contribution. In light of recent statements by the Danish government in relation to Ukraine, the language of the Manual should perhaps simply be understood to mean that many factors can play a role in the assessment.

When does a donor state become liable for the receiving state's use of weapons donations in violation of international law?

Since 24 February 2022 there have been several stories in the Danish media concerning possible violations of international law committed by Ukraine – although there have, of course, been far more concerning Russian violations, including not least potential war crimes. The stories concerning Ukraine's conduct have mainly been about possible mistreatment of Russian soldiers, who as prisoners of war are protected under the Third Geneva Convention. Early in the conflict, in March 2022, there were, for example, stories of pictures of Russian prisoners of war posted online by the Ukrainians in violation of Article 13 of the Third Geneva Convention, which *inter alia* prescribes that 'prisoners of war must at all times be protected, particularly against acts of violence or intimidation and against insults and public curiosity.'[28] As discussed further below, however, the reports of Ukraine's use of cluster munitions have more directly given rise to controversy in the public debate in Denmark, because such use entails the risk of Denmark incurring responsibility under *inter alia* the Cluster Munitions Convention (CMC).

A number of general rules of international law, such as the Articles of the Responsibility of States for Internationally Wrongful Acts (ARSIWA), as well as specific legal regimes applicable only in a certain context or with regard to a certain type of weapon (e.g. IHL or the CMC) include rules on various kinds of 'complicity', which may become relevant when State A decides to collaborate with or provide support to State B in a military context (Wiesener & Kjeldgaard-Pedersen 2021). In the following, we will concentrate on the rules that have – either explicitly or implicitly – been important in the public debate in Denmark in relation to the war in Ukraine.

The Cluster Munitions Convention (CMC)

The CMC was signed in Oslo in December 2008 and entered into force on 1 August 2010. So far 112 states have ratified the Convention, including Denmark on 12 February 2010, but notably not Ukraine and the United States. Similar to other conventions regulating specific weapons, such as the Chemical Weapons Convention, the Anti-Personnel Mines Convention, and the Nuclear Weapons Convention, the Cluster Munitions Convention prohibits the use, development, production, acquisition, stockpiling, retention and transfer of the weapons in question. More importantly for present purposes, Article 1(1)(c) of CMC reads as follows: 'Each State Party undertakes never under any circumstances to: … assist, encourage or induce anyone to engage in any activity prohibited to a State Party under this Convention'. This provision applies regardless of whether the partner state is also a member of the CMC. Remarkably, however, Article 21(3) provides:

> Notwithstanding the provisions of Article 1 of this Convention and in accordance with international law, States Parties, their military personnel or nationals, may engage in military cooperation and operations with States not party to this Convention that might engage in activities prohibited to a State Party.

In the event of cooperation with a non-member state that engages in, for example, the use of cluster munitions, Denmark and other member states are obliged under Article 21(1) of the Convention to 'encourage States not party to this Convention to ratify, accept, approve or accede to this Convention, with the goal of attracting the adherence of all States to this Convention.' In the context of cooperation with a non-member state, member states are also, according to Article 21(4), prohibited from 'expressly requesting the use of cluster munitions in cases where the choice of munitions used is within its exclusive control'. The 'interoperability clause' embodied in Article 21 has, understandably, given rise to some controversy about what exactly member states are allowed to do in relation to military partners who are not bound by the CMC. The ICRC has expressed the view that the following activities by member states and their nationals would be inconsistent with the object and purpose of the CMC, including the obligation to discourage non-member states from using cluster munitions:

> …transporting cluster munitions; specifically requesting others to use of [sic] cluster munitions; ordering the use of cluster munitions (as opposed to passing an order in a chain of command); allowing the stockpiling of cluster munitions on territory under a States Party's jurisdiction or control; training others in the use of cluster munitions. [29]

Article 21 of the CMC was the subject of debate in Danish media in July 2023, when MP Trine Pertou Mach (Enhedslisten) expressed concern about the United States' donation of cluster munitions to Ukraine and argued that Denmark is under an obligation to warn its partners against the use of these weapons.[30] The Danish Ministry for Foreign Affairs issued a written statement noting that while neither Ukraine nor the United States are bound by the CMC, Denmark generally discourages the use of cluster munitions.[31] It is not clear from the statement how exactly, if at all, this discouragement has been communicated directly to the Ukrainians and/or Americans. In October 2023, *Arbejderen* published an article under the headline 'Denmark may be complicit in the use of cluster bombs in Ukraine.'[32] In the article, Amnesty International claimed that there is a significant risk that the Danish donations of CAESAR artillery systems as well as the F-16s will be used to launch cluster munitions. In a response, the Danish Ministry for Defence emphasised (again) that Ukraine is not a party to the *CMC*, but also underlined that the 'CAESAR artillery systems are not donated with a view to launching cluster munitions.' As apparent from the above, the stated purpose of the donation on the part of the donating state is not in itself enough to steer clear of the obligations enshrined in the CMC. Moreover, the risk that the CAESAR artillery systems and the F-16s will be used in violation of IHL must also be assessed in light of the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT).

The Arms Trade Treaty (ATT)

The ATT was adopted in 2013 and entered into force in 2014. So far 113 states have ratified the ATT, including Denmark on 2 April 2014. Notably, Ukraine signed the ATT on 25 September 2014, but has not yet ratified it (United Nations Arms Trade Treaty 2013). Pursuant to Article 6(3), the ATT prohibits the transfer of conventional arms, ammunition or parts thereof if the transferring state has 'knowledge at the time of authorization that the arms or items would be used in the commission of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes.' Moreover, Article 7 *inter alia* obliges member states to carry

out an assessment of the 'potential' that the transferred arms could 'contribute to or undermine peace and security' and/or 'could be used to: (i) commit or facilitate a serious violation of international humanitarian law; or (ii) commit or facilitate a serious violation of international human rights law (…).' If such an assessment leads to the conclusion that a relevant risk exists, member states must, in accordance with Article 7(2), consider whether there are measures that could be undertaken to mitigate the risks 'such as confidence-building measures or jointly developed and agreed programmes by the exporting and importing States.' If an 'overriding risk' remains, following the risk assessment and consideration of available mitigating measures, the 'exporting State Party shall not authorize the export.'[33] For each donation of weapons to Ukraine, Denmark must, correspondingly, assess the risk of the donation's use in serious violations of IHL – and where relevant consider the available mitigating measures. As discussed above, the potential to use CAESAR artillery systems and F-16s to launch cluster munitions would seem to require particular attention on the part of the Danish authorities. Similar considerations are also relevant in relation to Denmark's adherence to the EU Council Common Position on Arms Exports.

Common Article 1 of the Geneva Conventions

Common Article 1 of the Geneva Conventions (1949), which obliges states to 'respect and to ensure respect for' the Conventions, is highly controversial. The article reads in full: 'The High Contracting Parties undertake to respect and to ensure respect for the present Convention in all circumstances.' It is, at present, not clear to what extent the 'ensure respect' element implies an *external* dimension directed at 'others', in particular the member states' military allies and partners. In the updated Commentary on the Geneva Conventions, the ICRC states:

> The interpretation of common Article 1, and in particular the expression 'ensure respect', has raised a variety of questions over the last decades. In general, two approaches have been taken. One approach advocates that under Article 1 States have undertaken to adopt all measures necessary to ensure respect for the Conventions only by their organs and private individuals within their own jurisdictions. The other, reflecting the prevailing view today and supported by the ICRC,

> is that Article 1 requires in addition that States ensure respect for the Conventions by other States and non-State Parties (ICRC 2016, para. 120).

According to the ICRC, the duty to ensure respect applies regardless of the whether the armed conflict is international or non-international and whether or not the state in question is a 'party'. The obligation has a *negative* aspect, which entails a duty to 'neither encourage, nor aid or assist in violations of the Conventions by Parties to a conflict' (ICRC 2016, para. 154). As such, common Article 1 obliges states to refrain from transferring weapons if there is an expectation, based on facts or knowledge of past patterns, that such weapons would be used to violate IHL (ibid. para. 162). In the ICRC's view, states also have a *positive* obligation to take feasible measures in order to influence the parties to the conflict towards full compliance with IHL (ibid. para 154). In relation to military partners, this positive aspect is particularly relevant:

> The fact, for example, that a High Contracting Party participates in the financing, equipping, arming or training of the armed forces of a Party to a conflict, or even plans, carries out and debriefs operations jointly with such forces, places it in a unique position to influence the behaviour of those forces, and thus to ensure respect for the Conventions (ibid. para 167).[34]

The ICRC is not alone in interpreting common Article 1 as laying down an obligation of states to ensure respect for IHL by military partners. Both state practice and ICJ rulings support the ICRC's view to a significant extent (Wiesener & Kjeldgaard-Pedersen 2022). But there are also strong voices on the other side. In 2021, for example, the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs spoke out against the ICRC interpretation arguing that it is likely to have a chilling effect on the 'willingness of states to engage in peace and stabilization operations' (Wiesener & Kjeldgaard-Pedersen 2022: 139). In light of the considerable uncertainty, including not least as regards the precise content of the obligations enshrined in common Article 1, it will be interesting to follow the proceedings instituted by the Republic of Nicaragua against the Federal Republic of Germany on 1 March 2024. Nicaragua's application includes the claim that:

> Germany has failed to fulfil its obligations, in particular its obligation to ensure respect for humanitarian law as is mandated in common Article 1 of the four Geneva Conventions of 1949, and customary rules, including the obligation not to encourage violations of international humanitarian law by parties to an armed conflict, and to exert its influence to the degree possible to stop such violations.[35]

Eventually, if the ICJ ends up deciding this case on its merits, the court will get a unique opportunity to provide clarity on a rule of potentially vast importance to all states engaging in various kinds of support of, or military partnerships with, states as well as non-state entities in the context of armed conflict.

Conclusion

The purpose of this article has been to discuss two particular international legal thresholds, which have become increasingly crucial for Denmark to consider as the war in Ukraine has developed and the Danish military support to the Ukrainians has been expanded: 'When does a state become "party" to an international armed conflict?' and 'when does a donor state become liable for the receiving state's use of weapons donations in violation of international law?'. As explained in detail above, the legal analysis of these two thresholds is neither straightforward nor uncontroversial. Indeed, on both issues the relevant international legal sources, including treaty provisions, international case law, and state practice, are relatively sparse and to a wide extent unclear. Despite the common traits in terms of the – somewhat undeveloped – legal framework, however, the two questions have played quite different roles in the Danish public debate. Remarkably, the legal threshold concerning the status of 'party' to an international armed conflict is seemingly used as a stand-in for the politically motivated goal of avoiding escalation. While the application of the concept of a 'party' does have significant legal consequences, these consequences do not seem to be the main motivating factor for Denmark's decision-makers. Indeed, it seems that the goal of avoiding being counted among the 'parties' to the armed conflict is actually one step removed from the legal threshold, which could activate Article 5 of NATO's founding treaty, namely suffering an armed attack. Rather, the primary aim for the Danish decision-makers seems to be to avoid the notion of being 'at war' with Russia. Although the public debate has thus, first and foremost, had a political rather than legal

focus, pronouncements by Danish authorities have provided some clarity as to the current understanding of the scale by which international lawyers must assess the question of 'party' status. Remarkably, the approach taken by Denmark in the present conflict – that is, measuring 'directness' rather than 'intensity' – seems more convincing than the approach reflected in the Danish Military Manual. As for the threshold of when a donor state becomes liable for the receiving state's use of weapons donations in violation of international law, the Danish public debate has in fact largely revolved around a strictly legal analysis – although the potential political consequences of incurring international responsibility for the acts of a military partner have naturally played a role. Unsurprisingly, it has been important for the Danish authorities to convey that they are doing what they can to ensure that Denmark lives up to its treaty obligations, including in situations where Denmark's military partners are not bound by the same rules. The image is somewhat blurred, however, by the fact that the proper interpretation of some of the applicable international legal rules, including not least common Article 1 of the Geneva Conventions and the duty to 'ensure respect' for IHL by military partners, is far from settled.

Notes

1 Marc Schack is Associate Professor of International Law and National Security at the Faculty of Law, University of Copenhagen. Astrid Kjeldgaard-Pedersen is Associate Dean for Research and Professor of International Law at the Faculty of Law, University of Copenhagen.

2 North Atlantic Treaty Organization. (24.3.2022) 'Press conference by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg following the Extraordinary Summit of NATO Heads of State and Government'. Available at: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_193613.htm.

3 Kiel Institute for the World Economy, 'Ukraine Support Tracker'. Available at: https://www.ifw-kiel.de/topics/war-against-ukraine/ukraine-support-tracker/

4 Ministry of Defence (27.2.2022), 'Danmark donerer 2.700 skulderbårne panserværnsvåben til Ukraine' [Denmark donates 2,700 anti-tank weapons to Ukraine]. Available at: https://www.fmn.dk/da/nyheder/2022/danmark-donerer-2.700-skulderbarne-panservarnsvaben-til-ukraine/

5 General overview of donations is available at Ministry of Defence, 'Militær støtte til Ukraine' [Military support for Ukraine]. Available at: https://www.fmn.dk/da/arbejdsomraader/internationale-operationer/igangvarende-operationer/militar-stotte-til-ukraine/

6 The Danish Government (07.2.2023), 'Danmark indgår samarbejde om Leopard 1 kampvogne til Ukraine' [Denmark enters into a cooperation on Leopard 1 tanks for Ukraine]. Available at: https://www.regeringen.dk/nyheder/2023/danmark-indgaar-samarbejde-om-leopard-1-kampvogne-til-ukraine/

7 Ministry of Defence (11.10.2023), 'Denmark will take on co-lead role in international air force coalition to support Ukraine'. Available at: https://www.fmn.dk/en/news/2023/denmark-will-take-on-co-lead-role-in-international-air-force-coalition-to-support-ukraine/; Ministry of Defence (11.7.2023), 'Danmark og en kreds af lande er klar til at træne ukrainere til F-16' [Denmark and a circle of countries are ready to train Ukrainians for the F-16]. Available at: https://www.fmn.dk/da/nyheder/2023/danmark-og-en-kreds-af-lande-er-klar-til-at-trane-ukrainere-til-f-16/

8 Ministry of Defence (20.8.2023), 'Forsvaret har påbegyndt træningsforløb af ukrainske piloter' [Danish Defence has begun training courses for Ukrainian pilots]. Available at: https://www.forsvaret.dk/da/nyheder/2023/forsvaret-har-pabegyndt-traningsforlob-af-ukrainske-piloter/

9 See e.g. the discussion on Germany's provision of battle tanks to Ukraine in Thurau, J. (31.1.2023), 'Is Germany becoming a 'warring party' in Ukraine?' Deutsche Welle. Available at: https://www.dw.com/en/is-germany-becoming-a-warring-party-in-ukraine/a-64540239.

10 In its entirety, Common Article 2 reads: 'In addition to the provisions which shall be implemented in peacetime, the present Convention shall apply to all cases of declared war or of any other armed conflict which may arise between two or more of the High Contracting Parties, even if the state of war is not recognized by one of them. The Convention shall also apply to all cases of partial or total occupation of the territory of a High Contracting Party, even if the said occupation meets with no armed resistance. Although one of the Powers in conflict may not be a party to the present Convention, the Powers who are parties thereto shall remain bound by it in their mutual relations. They shall furthermore be bound by the Convention in relation to the said Power, if the latter accepts and applies the provisions thereof.'

11 ICTY, Tadić Decision on the Defence Motion for Interlocutory Appeal on Jurisdiction (1995), para. 70.

12 ICTY, Tadić Appeal Judgment (1999), para. 84.

13 Ibid. para. 137. Italics in original.

14 Ibid. para. 137.

15 Ibid. p. 45.

16 Ibid.

17 See further on the Danish public debate below.

18 Minister of Defence (22.6.2022), 'FOU Alm.del – endeligt svar på spørgsmål 260 (2021-22)' [Answer to parliamentary question]. Available at: https://www.ft.dk/samling/20211/almdel/fou/spm/260/svar/1895684/2598227.pdf

19 Notably, it is not always entirely clear whether the colloquial concept of being 'at war' with Russia aligns neatly with the legal concept of being a 'party' to an armed conflict.

20 Klarskov, K. 'Danmark sender våben til Ukraine for milliarder, men vi er ikke i krig', Politiken, 4 March 2024. https://politiken.dk/danmark/art9805896/Danmark-sender-artilleri-og-v%C3%A5ben-til-Ukraine-for-milliarder (authors' translation).

21 See however Ministry of Foreign Affairs (14.6.2022), 'UPN Alm-del – Bilag 313' [Answer to parliamentary question]. Available at: https://www.ft.dk/samling/20211/almdel/UPN/bilag/313/2596001.pdf

22 Lindqvist, A. 'Det er så hemmeligt, at vi ikke må vide hvorfor: Hvornår er Danmark i krig med Rusland?' [It is so secret that we must not know why: when is Denmark at war with Russia?]. Berlingske. 21 July 2022. https://www.berlingske.dk/samfund/det-er-saa-hemmeligt-at-vi-ikke-maa-vide-hvorfor-hvornaar-er-danmark-i

23 Minister of Defence (22.6.2022), 'FOU Alm.del – endeligt svar på spørgsmål 260' [Answer to parliamentary question]. Available at: https://www.ft.dk/samling/20211/almdel/fou/spm/260/svar/1895684/2598227.pdf

24 Sinnbeck, P. ‘Nu slår regeringen fast: Danskere kan straffrit kæmpe for Putin og Rusland i krigen mod Ukraine’ [The government makes clear: Danes can fight for Putin and Russia in the war against Ukraine with impunity]. B.T. 3 March 2022. https://www.bt.dk/politik/nu-slaar-regeringen-fast-danskere-kan-straffrit-kaempe-for-putin-og-rusland-i

25 Minister of Defence (31.3.2022), ‘FOU Alm.del – endeligt svar på spørgsmål 181’ [Answer to parliamentary question]. Available at: https://www.ft.dk/samling/20211/almdel/fou/spm/181/svar/1869947/2552254.pdf

26 Ibid.

27 Hereafter ‘Military Manual’.

28 Ritzau. ‘Ukraine kan have brudt krigens regler ved at vise fanger frem’ [Ukraine may have broken the laws of war by displaying prisoners]. Kristeligt Dagblad. 7 March 2022. https://www.kristeligt-dagblad.dk/udland/ukraine-kan-have-brudt-krigens-regler-ved-vise-fanger-frem.

29 See also: ICRC 2012.

30 Vestergaard, M. (08.7.2023), ‘Forsvarsekspert reagerer på donation af klyngebomber: ”Et udtryk for, at Ukraine er presset”’ [Defence expert reacts to donation of cluster bombs: ’Shows that Ukraine is under pressure’]. DR.DK, 8 July 2023. https://www.dr.dk/nyheder/udland/forsvarsekspert-reagerer-paa-donation-af-klyngebomber-et-udtryk-ukraine-er-presset

31 Ritzau. ‘Danmarks udenrigsministerium fraråder brug af klyngevåben’ [Denmark’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs advises against the use of cluster munitions]. Berlingske. 8 July 2023. https://www.berlingske.dk/politik/danmarks-udenrigsministerium-fraraader-brug-af-klyngevaaben.

32 ‘Danmark kan være medskyldig i brug af klyngebomber i Ukraine’ [Denmark may be complicit in the use of cluster bombs in Ukraine]. Arbejderen. 16 Oct. 2023. https://arbejderen.dk/indland/danmark-kan-vaere-medskyldig-i-brug-af-klyngebomber-i-ukraine/

33 ATT, Article 7(3).

34 See also para. 181, which notes measures that could be employed vis-à-vis military partners: ‘conditioning joint operations on a coalition partner’s compliance with its obligations under the Conventions and/or planning operations jointly in order to prevent such violations’; ‘intervening directly with commanders in case of violations, for example an imminent unlawful attack against civilians, by a coalition partner’; ‘offering legal assistance to the Parties to the conflict and/or supporting assistance provided by others, such as instruction or training’; ‘conditioning, limiting or refusing arms transfers’.

35 Carlos J. Argüello Gómez (Agent of the Republic of Nicaragua) (01.3.2024), Application institution proceedings, para 17. Available at: https://www.icj-cij.org/sites/default/files/case-related/193/193-20240301-app-01-00-en.pdf .The case has, unsurprisingly, revived the debate on common Article 1. See, for example, Schmitt & Sean Watts 2024; and Milanovic 2024.

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Danish foreign policy activism: mostly in the minds of the researchers?[1]

Henrik Larsen[2]

'Activism' or 'activist foreign policy' has been one of the main, if not the main, theme in the study of post-Cold War Danish foreign policy (Pedersen & Ringsmose 2017: 339). There does not seem to be an equivalent focus on this theme in the research on any other state after the Cold War, including the Nordic states. Nonetheless, the interest in this theme in research on Danish foreign policy shows no clear sign of abating in the literature, which is dominated by Danish scholars (see for example, Pedersen 2023; Mouritzen 2021; Dreyer & Nissen 2020; Wivel 2020; Jakobsen 2019). The focus has often been on the field of military security, as the underlying assumption in much of the literature has been that Danish foreign policy activism primarily – but not only – plays out in this field (Pedersen & Ringsmose 2017: 339-40).

A common understanding in the literature is that there is an essential quality to activism. Two (partly overlapping) approaches can be identified. The first one is that the nature of Danish activism is an obvious fact when studying Danish foreign policy behaviour after the Cold War (see for example Pedersen & Skjoldager 2015; Heurlin 1996; Due-Nielsen & Petersen 1995). This is often linked to a body of work which presents a broad, longstanding, dualist Danish foreign policy tradition predating the end of the Cold War, sometimes going back as far as the 18th century. The dualism consists of two poles in Danish foreign policy, which are variably described as adaptation/pragmatism/determinism/ or decoupling versus activism/internationalism/coupling (Pedersen 2015; Wivel 2014; Branner 2013; Branner 2000; Holbraad 1991). In some historical periods both elements are present in Danish foreign policy, whereas in others one is dominant, depending on the leeway provided by Denmark's external environment. The more permissive the external environment, the more activism; the less permissive, the more necessary adaptation prevails (ibid). The activist element is frequently seen as aimed at furthering a rules-based international order resting on international law, justice and equality, but also

on promulgating liberal and egalitarian values (ibid). Activism is therefore not a new feature in Danish foreign policy, but the international context after the Cold War has provided a favourable environment for the activist element (Larsen 2017a: 155-165).

The second approach, particularly aimed at the post-Cold War period, is to determine whether Danish policy behaviour has been activist or not according to given criteria (Dreyer & Nissen 2020; Jakobsen 2019; Pedersen & Ringsmose 2017; Branner 2013; Wivel 2014; Holm 2002). The most common conclusion is that Danish foreign policy is, or has been, activist after the Cold War, although it may depend on the policy area and period studied (ibid). Villaume is an exception in arguing that Denmark was more activist during the Cold War (Villaume 2017).

A few have been critical of the analytical use of the term 'activism' on the grounds that it originated in the political sphere and lacks analytical precision – it was first employed by foreign minister Ellemann-Jensen in 1989, who used 'active internationalism' (Mouritzen 2021; Pedersen 2017: 5). However, this has not affected the general interest in activism as an analytical concept.

The underlying assumption seems to be that the concept of activism has been particularly relevant in Danish foreign policy ever since Ellemann-Jensen launched 'active internationalism'. However, there has been little interest in the extent to and way in which the term itself has been used in the Danish political sphere. This is somewhat surprising as the use of 'activism' by Danish politicians or civil servants could be a legitimate reason why researchers and foreign policy pundits should occupy themselves with this term. Otherwise, there is no immediate rationale for why activism should occupy such a prominent place in the study of Danish foreign policy in comparison with similar countries where a thematisation of foreign policy 'activism' cannot be found. Characteristically, the definitions of 'active' or 'activism' focus on foreign policy behaviour, thus downplaying the importance of whether and how political actors give meaning to 'active' and 'activism' (for an overview, see Olesen 2012: 9-11). Holm's 2002 definition of 'active' foreign policy, which is still widely referred to, includes three elements: 1) initiative-taking, not just reactive to events, 2) external opposition, and 3) policy profile. A policy '…is active when it is based on high public profile where policy is clearly manifested and spelled out' (Holm 2002: 23). Although the third criterion also includes public

communication, it is about the communication of given policy measures, not about the way active/activism is understood by the actors (ibid).

In neither of the two approaches to the study of Danish activism is there a concern with how the term activism is used by the political actors. The argument in this article is that the way the term is used in the political/administrative sphere has wider relevance. From the perspective of performativity (explained below), words used are not just descriptions of an already existing world. The enunciation of words does something that goes beyond the mere use of them; words play an independent role in shaping and moulding the world. The interesting question is what the uttering of a word like 'activism' and related terms such as 'active' or 'actively' do in Danish foreign policy. Is the enunciation of these words followed by policy moves which establish a certain pattern in what 'activism' means? If so, we have found a different analytical angle in the study of activism. If there is no pattern, this may be a challenge to the study of Danish activism.

Against this background the article analyses the use of activism and parallel terms in official Danish foreign policy documents with a view to how they shape policy. A key point in the article is that the terms 'activism' or 'activist' are rarely used in official Danish foreign policy documents, counter to the focus on this term in the literature. However, the words 'active' and 'actively' are used very frequently, which is why they are the most relevant to study. For reasons of space, the focus is on Danish government programmes in the period 2009-2022, although some general observations are also offered on the period since 1989. It is shown that 'activist'/ 'activism' do not occur in Danish government programmes after 2009, but that the terms 'active' and 'actively' are frequently used. However, the way these words are used to legitimise policies varies so much that they cannot be said to further specific policies. The only exception to this is the use of 'active' in relation to Danish participation in military operations that are aimed at maintaining Denmark's international status. In this context the word 'active' is nearly always used and contributes to promoting a particular kind of military contribution. Based on this analysis, the article questions whether the widespread interest in 'activism' or 'active' in relation to Danish foreign policy is justified.

Thus, the article aims to answer the following three questions: First, can the terms 'activism/activist/active' be found in official Danish foreign policy

documents after 2009 (and, more briefly, before)? Second, if so, how are they ascribed meaning and how are they performative in legitimising a particular Danish foreign policy? Thirdly, how do the findings in this article contribute to the study of activism in Danish foreign policy?

Based on this, the article will first present some thoughts on the performativity of 'activism', 'active' etc. This is followed by a brief section on the use of these words since 1989. Then I present an analysis of the use of 'activism etc.' in Danish government programmes from 2009. This is de facto an analysis of 'active' and 'actively' since 'activist/activism' are not used. I conclude that the meaning of 'active' varies as a function of the dominant political discourses in which it is embedded. The term 'active' therefore has limited substantial performativity – except for the promotion of high-profile military operations. On this basis, the focus on activism in the study of Danish foreign policy is questioned.

The performativity of 'activism etc.'

My starting point is that an 'active' or 'activist' foreign policy can be considered as either a floating or an empty signifier (Larsen 2017a: Ch.5). A floating or empty signifier is a word which has no clear link to an underlying meaning (the distinction will be explained below); the meaning is different according to who is using it and there is wide scope for interpretation of its possible meanings (Lévi-Strauss 1987; see also Laclau 2001: 405).

A floating signifier can be a term that political actors compete to give meaning to in their own terms. Examples of floating signifiers are words such as state, freedom, peace, democracy – and an active or activist foreign policy. The adjective 'active' is generally understood along the broad lines of 'capable of acting upon something; originating or communicating action; spontaneous, voluntary. Opposed to passive' (Oxford English Dictionary 2023).[3] It is a term with positive connotations, so policy measures gain more weight, value and legitimacy by being characterised as 'active'. There is an overlap between active and activism/activist, but activism/activist also has connotations of 'campaigning to bring about political and social change' (Oxford English Dictionary 2024).[4] With the connotation of social change, activism has a hint of political progressivism. But apart from that, there is no pre-existing yardstick

ensuring that 'activist/active' (foreign policy) is ascribed meaning in a similar way by different political actors. Rather, it is the claim that certain policy elements are part of 'an active/activist' foreign policy which creates an 'active/activist foreign' policy. The question of what the term 'active' foreign policy 'does' is in that way closely linked to how the term is ascribed meaning by the dominant discourses of the political actors.

Discourse is here understood as a limited range of statements promoting a limited range of meanings. Discourse creates the social world by constituting certain forms of knowledge, identities and social relations, which are socially and culturally specific (Foucault 1989).[5] New claims about an 'active foreign policy' may be driven by new dominant political discourses, for example linked to changes of government. Opposition to previous ways of ascribing meaning to 'active' may be an expression of movement towards defining a new foreign policy project.

Performativity is a helpful concept to use to inquire into the role of terms such as 'active' foreign policy. By performativity I refer to what the enunciation of words *does* when they are launched in a particular context (Loxley 2007; Larsen 2017b).[6] The political actors' use of terms (such as 'active' foreign policy) may also in itself trigger meanings within specific discourses which lead to particular policy outcomes.

These reflections give rise to three possibilities for how the use of 'activism etc.' may be performative in Danish foreign policy:

1) 'Activism etc.' is given meaning through a set of discourses which cut across time and governments. When 'activism etc.' is used, it is performative in promoting a distinct set of discourses and policies in foreign policy texts (and vice versa). Thus, there is such a thing as a dominant Danish understanding of 'activism etc.', which can be expected to shape policies. However, in this case we will also have to ask critically whether 'active etc.' is understood so broadly that it does not shape or constrain foreign policy in a clear way; that it is an empty signifier rather than a floating signifier (Laclau 2001). A word might start out as a floating signifier and end up being attributed with such broad meanings that it becomes empty. An example of the latter is the word Solidarność which started as the name of a movement which put forward concrete demands from the workers in the shipyards in Gdansk in 1980 and

later became used in relation to demands for change in Polish society (Laclau 2006: 652-653).

2) 'Activism etc.' is given meaning within discourses in the same way as in 1), but these discourses vary across governments. 'Activism etc.' is ascribed meaning by the political projects of the changing governments. It is performative in giving weight, value and legitimacy to the dominant discourses and policies of the time, but not in defining and promoting distinct discourses and policies across time and governments.

3) There is no use of the words 'activism', 'activist' or 'active'. In this case, the words cannot be seen as performative and, hence, do not play a role in Danish foreign policy.

I will return to these three possibilities after the next section.

'Activism' in Danish foreign policy after the Cold War – a rare acquaintance

In the following I will provide a brief account of the use of the terms 'activism', 'activist' and 'active' in Danish foreign policy in the period 1989-2009 (for a more extensive treatment of Danish activism in this period, see Olesen 2012).[7] 'Active internationalism' was first used in a speech by Foreign Minister Ellemann-Jensen in April 1989 at the opening of the new Foreign Policy Commission. His speech could be seen as a genealogical moment (Garland 2014) in the launching of the word 'active' in Danish foreign policy in so far as its launching in a specific context may have laid the ground for uses of the word right up until the present day. Subsequently, the terms 'active' or 'actively' were frequently found in speeches by the prime and foreign ministers and in other government material relating to Danish foreign policy (even if 'active' was not used in the general foreign policy projects of the Social Democrat-led coalition governments in the 1990s as they appear in their government programmes). Interestingly, prior to the Fogh Rasmussen premiership in 2001, I have found no signs of the terms 'activism' or 'activist' being used in these contexts. For example, the terms do not appear in the report 'Principper og perspektiver i dansk udenrigspolitik', which was meant to sketch out the main lines for Danish foreign policy after the Cold War (Udenrigsministeriet 1993),

the report 'Fremtidens Forvar' (Forsvarskommissionen 1997) nor in any of the government programmes in the 1990s. This stands in contrast to the academic literature where the term 'Danish foreign policy activism' gains ground in the 1990s (see references above).

The Fogh Rasmussen governments from 2001-2009 distanced themselves openly from the previous governments, the foreign policies of which were presented as part of the tradition of small state adaptation (Farbøl 2011). The Fogh Rasmussen governments' overall project for Danish foreign policy has been characterised as 'international activism' or 'an offensive foreign policy' (Larsen 2009; Pedersen 2012). International activism was about engaging directly in central global conflicts. Denmark was seen as a strategic actor that should take clear a stance in conflicts – contrary to earlier governments which had not broken with the Danish 'adaptation policy' tradition (Larsen 2009; Rynning 2003; Farbøl 2011). Military support was a clear expression of commitment and of taking responsibility in international affairs (Rynning 2003). There was, therefore, a link between the understanding of international activism and political and military support for the US, although international activism was also applied in relation to the EU (Rynning 2003; Larsen 2009).

Despite the above labels, which are highlighted in the literature above, the terms 'international activism', 'activism' or 'activist' do not figure prominently in official Danish foreign policy documents during the period 2001-2009 (nor, as mentioned, before).[8] They do not appear in relation to foreign policy in any of the three Fogh Rasmussen government programmes (2001, 2005, 2007), which all contain sizeable sections on foreign, security and European policy (where 'active' and 'actively' appear frequently). The foreign policy headlines in three programmes are: 'A Foreign Policy with a Profile' (Regeringen 2001), 'A New and Active Danish European Policy' (Regeringen 2005) and 'Active Danish Foreign Policy' (Regeringen 2007). Neither do they figure in Prime Minister Fogh Rasmussen's opening speeches to the Folketing. 'Activism' and 'activist' do appear in some of his speeches and interviews about foreign and security policy, but 'activism' and 'activist' are used much less than 'active' and 'actively', which are dominant in most of the speeches. The tendency seems to be that the more the speeches are the product of civil service speech writers, the less 'activism/activist' appears.

In the interview in the book *Anders Fogh Rasmussen – i godtvejr og storm* (2003), Rasmussen uses the term 'activism' three times. He states that,

> The foreign policy strategy which I envisage for Denmark is based on four basic principles. First, it is important for a small country to be active in international organisations…Secondly, a small country should assert itself through foreign policy activism. We must participate actively in international military operations (Larsen 2003: 219-20, author's underlining).

Later Rasmussen said (in answer to the question of how to engage the Danes more in Europe) 'We shall conduct a more activist policy. If you are on the stage, participate actively and have a role, you can engage the population' (ibid: 359). In an interview in 2006 Fogh Rasmussen said,

> It is obvious that globalisation has brought about a dramatic shift in foreign and security policy thinking… But it is also clear that it is a development that demands that one organises one's foreign and security policy offensively, if not in an activist way (*Ugebrevet Mandag Morgen* 2006: 7. See also Rasmussen 2003).

'Activism' and 'activist' are either used by the Fogh Rasmussen government very broadly to signify a policy that is more active than 'active', or they are given meaning through Danish participation in international military operations or through initiatives in the EU. This is embedded in the Fogh governments' overall understanding of Danish foreign policy outlined in the literature above. However, most significantly, 'active' and 'actively' are used a lot more frequently than 'activist/activism', and almost exclusively so in official contexts.

Foreign Minister Møller used the term 'activist' once in his presentation of the 2003 foreign policy report 'En verden i forandring. Regeringens bud på nye prioriteter i Danmarks Udenrigspolitik' (Regeringen 2003). In the concluding section he said: 'Denmark must pursue an activist foreign policy based on fundamental values. Passivity and adaptation are a thing of the past. There is a need and space for Denmark to act actively outside our borders' (Møller 2003). Møller used 'active' 12 times in his speech. 'Activist' or 'activism' cannot be found in the report itself, but 'active' is used 23 times.

The annual accounts of the international situation and Danish foreign by the permanent secretary for foreign affairs in the period 2000-2008 in the 'Danish Foreign Policy Yearbook' do not contain 'activism/activist' either, with the notable exception of the article in 2003: 'Denmark has for years conducted an engaged and offensive foreign policy. The overall aim after the important enlargement decisions in 2002 is to prepare the ground for an even more activist foreign policy' (Petersen 2003: 22). However, in this article and the other articles, 'active' is used a lot more frequently.

At the same time, 'activism' had become a positive term in the political debate about foreign policy. But it was a contested term in a way that 'active' or 'actively' were not. Activism was a floating signifier (it will later be argued that 'active/actively' is an empty signifier). The opposition leader at the time, Mogens Lykketoft, wrote in 2003:

> Today, everyone – including the prime minister, at least rhetorically – confesses to the 68ers' demand for foreign policy 'activism'. No one rejects the need for Danish involvement in global developments. But the principle of activist foreign policy hides big differences in the perception of what the content of activism should be. A reasoned debate about this is inevitable (Lykketoft 2003).

Summarising the use of the terms 'active', 'activist' and 'activism' in the key official documents analysed in the period 1989-2009, 'active' is very commonly used whereas 'activist' and 'activism' can only be found during the Fogh period and are used much less than 'active'. 'Activism/activist' are rare acquaintances judging from the documents analysed. It is possible that one would get a different picture if other material than the key official documents studied here were analysed (for example, debates in the Folketing). But the limited presence of 'activism/activist' in these official documents is under all circumstances significant, as the draftsmen and women of these documents are the same civil servants who implement Danish foreign policy.

The performativity of ‘active foreign policy’ in Danish government programmes 2009-2022

In the following I will present an analysis of the use of ‘active’ and ‘actively’ in official Danish foreign policy documents after the Fogh Rasmussen period. The reason why the focus is on these terms and not ‘activist’ or ‘activism’ is that these words are mostly not present in the official documents examined (government programmes; speeches by the prime minster at the annual opening of the Folketing; articles by the foreign and defence ministers in the Danish Yearbook on Foreign Policy/Danish Foreign Policy Review; or the four foreign and security policy strategies [2016, 2018, 2022, 2023]). There is a significant exception to this: ‘activism’ and ‘activist’ appear on five occasions in the report ‘Danish diplomacy and defence in times of change from 2016’, which had a semi-official character. In all these cases they are used in relation to security, in particular Danish contributions to international military operations that have increased Denmark’s prestige in international organisations (Taksøerapporten 2016: VII, 75, 79). However, ‘active/actively’ appears approximately 140 times in the report.

It is illustrative that Prime Minister Frederiksen, in her speech to commemorate Uffe Ellemann-Jensen in June 2022, chose to say, ‘He was the father of Denmark’s active foreign policy’ (Frederiksen 2022). ‘Activism/activist’ has all but left the official government vocabulary of speeches, strategies etc. on foreign and security policy after Fogh Rasmussen. However, this does not mean that members of the governments distance themselves from the terms when accusations are made that the government is not activist (or activist in the wrong way). The government response is often about confirming the necessity of using military means. For example, Prime Minister Frederiksen responded as follows in the Folketing 8 April 2022:

> I disagree that it has been fundamentally wrong to pursue an activist foreign policy. I stand completely behind that and have myself been a supporter of it for many years, not least because of what happened in the Balkans….and since then, Denmark has pursued an activist foreign policy, which of course also involves the use of military force, which may be necessary when faced with an enemy of the calibre we have faced in various contexts. So I think that is the right thing to do, and I would also think that it continues to be.

While 'activism' is mentioned occasionally in the above way, official government documents on foreign policy are not structured around activist/activism. Against this background, it seems reasonable to focus on 'active/actively' to see if it has a distinct meaning which shapes policy. In the following I will present an analysis of whether, and if so how, 'active' and 'actively' are used by Danish governments during the period 2009-2023 based on the three categories of performativity presented above. The focus will be on whether, and how, these words are ascribed meaning and whether they are embedded in one distinct discourse or several different discourses varying across governments. I will do so based on an analysis of the foreign and security elements of the six government programmes of the period. Apart from practical reasons, the reason for this choice is that they communicate the political aims and motivations of the governments at the most general level. To the extent that the use of 'active' is significant, one would expect it to be found here. For each government, the general foreign policy project in the programme is first presented, followed by an outline of the dominant discourses and the use of 'active/actively'. By the general foreign policy project I understand one or several formulaic phrases in the programme which are presented as the general aim of the government's foreign policy. Due to space limitations, it is the results of the analysis with reference to the programmes that are presented here rather than the analysis itself.

The 2009-2011 Liberal-Conservative government (PM Lars Løkke Rasmussen I)

In Prime Minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen's special announcement upon his accession to the premiership, he said, 'the active foreign policy continues' (Rasmussen 2009). In the subsequent government programme, 'Denmark 2020', a heading in the section on 'International Cooperation' reads 'the government will continue to conduct an active foreign policy', followed by seven points which appear to flow from it: a referendum on the EU opt-outs; free trade; human rights and democracy; international aid; international climate cooperation; peace and stability; and a modern defence (Regeringen 2010: 37). They read like a combination of immediate concerns (the referendum on EU opt-outs) and general priorities of Danish foreign policy after the Cold War. Three main discourses on foreign policy can be found in PM Rasmussen's announcement and the new government's programme: discourses on

Denmark's contribution to international security and the international standing that flows from that; Denmark's significant development contribution; and the central role of the EU for Denmark. Two other discourses take up less space: one on Denmark's significant role in climate negotiations and one that stresses the importance of defending the national interests (Regeringen 2010; Rasmussen 2009).

'Active' appears five times in the programme in addition to the general heading mentioned. In the above-mentioned seven-point list, 'active' is mentioned in relation to the items 'human rights and democracy' and 'international climate cooperation'. In the first case 'active' is ascribed meaning in terms of the national discourse of interests, while in the second case 'active' mainly works as a marker of Denmark's achievement in the 2009 climate negotiations (Regeringen 2010: 37-40). The remaining three uses of 'active' are ascribed meaning within the discourse on Denmark's contribution to international security and Denmark's international standing. One example is in the special announcement (2009) where Prime Minister Løkke Rasmussen stated:

> There is great international respect for Denmark's active security policy. …It is the government's intention that the upcoming defence settlement should form the basis for us to maintain our high international profile (Rasmussen 2009, author's underlining).

In this citation, active (security policy) is linked to Denmark's high international profile. This link can also be found in the programme, where the efforts for 'international stability and peace' are prefixed by 'very active' and are linked to 'a modern defence with a capacity for relevant international operations' (Regeringen 2010: 37-38).

In summary, 'an active foreign policy' is articulated as the general project for Danish foreign policy associated with that of the former government. 'Active (foreign policy)' is largely ascribed meaning within the discourse on security policy and Denmark's international standing, where military contributions are linked to international recognition. But 'active' is also ascribed meaning within a discourse on the furthering of general Danish interests and a discourse on engagement in climate politics.

The 2011-2015 Social Democratic, Social Liberal and Socialist People's Party government (PM Thorning-Schmidt)

The foreign policy project of the government led by Helle Thorning-Schmidt was presented as 'an active and responsible foreign policy' in the programme called 'A Denmark which stands together' (Regeringen 2011: 6, 35). Continuity was articulated with the previous government's 'active foreign policy' while also marking a difference through the addition of 'responsible'.

The dominant discourses in terms of space are about the central role of the EU and international organisations and legal order (Regeringen 2011: 6, 35-42). The first discourse is illustrated by the sentence: 'Denmark's interests and values are best served through strong European cooperation… Our membership of the EU gives us the strongest platform for influence…' (Regeringen 2011: 36). The second discourse on the role of international organisations and legal order is articulated in the sentence 'Denmark is a small country…Hence, Danish security policy is anchored in the continuous work to strengthen the international organisations and the international legal order…' (Regeringen 2011: 39).

The programme ascribes meaning to 'an active and responsible foreign policy' in this way:

> …all people have the right to live a life free from fear and poverty… It is therefore necessary to conduct an active and responsible foreign policy… to influence the world…. We must promote a more peaceful and just world...contribute to…green growth and sustainable development...continue to take responsibility and be a strong and reliable partner...from development aid to military missions. But we must do it responsibly and ambitiously. Therefore, there is also a need for a policy that contributes to strengthening Europe's role in the world and Denmark's role in Europe (Regeringen 2011: 35).

An 'active and responsible foreign policy' is presented as making necessary efforts to influence the world because 'all humans have a right to a life free of poverty and fear' through the promotion of a more peaceful and just world etc. These general tenets are a combination of (at the time) centre-left political priorities (peace and justice, development aid etc.) and priorities shared with the

previous centre-right government. These priorities must be promoted through a strengthened EU to qualify as 'ambitious' and 'responsible' (Regeringen 2011: 35). In this way an 'active and responsible foreign policy' is embedded in the discourse on the central role of the EU.

Throughout the programme 'active' is used more in relation to Europe than other foreign policy areas (seven out of ten times) such as in these cases: 'Denmark actively engages in Europe's economic governance and development' and 'Denmark is actively working to ensure that the EU's new foreign service becomes a strong and efficient player' (Regeringen 2011: 35-36, author's underlining). In all these cases 'active' is performative in emphasising the policy aims put forward within the discourse on a central role of the EU.

In areas other than the EU 'active' is mentioned twice. It is used in the section on 'Poverty and Global Inequality' (Regeringen 2011: 38) and under the subheading 'International peace and security':

> Denmark must make an active contribution to maintaining international peace and security. The Danish defence must continue…to deliver a significant contribution to international missions. The level of ambition for Danish contributions…(Regeringen 2011: 39. Cf. p. 41, author's underlining).

As in the 2009 programme, 'active' is linked to a discourse on Denmark's military contributions as a way of maintaining Denmark's international status (this discourse is otherwise not prominent in the programme).

In summary, 'an active and responsible foreign policy' differentiates itself from the foreign policy project of the former government while maintaining continuity through 'active'. 'Active' is mainly ascribed meaning within a discourse on the central role of the EU, linked to the political project of the centre-left government. But 'active' is also present in the discourse about military contributions and status.

The Liberal Party government 2015-2016 (PM Løkke Rasmussen II)

In the (brief) government programme 'Together for the Future', the foreign policy project is presented as 'A strong and focused foreign policy which will secure Danish interests and influence' (Regeringen 2015: 6, 30-33). This project is different from that of the former governments in that 'active' is not part of it. The dominant discourse presents Denmark as a small, open economy which lives off trade and whose security depends on external events. A strong international engagement makes it possible to secure Danish interests and influence, which are central aims. The programme lays out plans for a report (the 'Taxøe Report') to present a proposal for 'how to bring all our instruments into play to look after our interests' (ibid: 6, 30-33).

Even though 'active' is not mentioned in the general foreign policy project, 'active' appears on four occasions. It is used in the subheadings 'We must actively engage in the international organisations' and 'Denmark must be an active partner internationally'. Within these two subsections, the discourse drawn on is the dominant one (ibid: 31). The same is the case in the sentence 'The government will work actively to safeguard Denmark's interests through strong European cooperation' (ibid: 31). In the last instance, 'active' is located within a discourse on complex and unpredictable threats against Denmark where Denmark should contribute to NATO's efforts against these threats: 'Active support for NATO's eastern Member States…which are threatened by the aggressive Russian behaviour'. In contrast to the dominant discourse and the discourse on Danish military contributions and status found in the two former government programmes, 'active' is ascribed meaning within a discourse emphasising necessity rather than Danish influence (ibid: 30-31, 33).

In summary, 'active' is not used in the foreign policy project. Where 'active' is used, it is mainly within the dominant discourse on furthering Danish interests and influence.

The Liberal, Conservative and Liberal Alliance government 2016-2019 (PM Løkke Rasmussen III)

The foreign policy project of the 2016 programme, 'For a freer, richer and more secure Denmark', is 'a focused and foresighted foreign policy' (Regeringen 2016). Like in the former programme, 'active' is not part of the project ('focused' has also remained). The dominant discourse is the same as that of the former government but places more emphasis on increasing threats to security from Russia, failed states and terrorism. Denmark shall be prepared in terms of defence and the ability to face the increasing internationalisation of markets (trade is accentuated more than in the former programmes) (Regeringen 2016: 41, preamble).

There are six references to 'active' throughout the programme (two about general foreign policy, two about security, one about European policy and one about exports). The section on foreign policy states the following:

> In the neighbouring areas…, the threats…are very real…Russia threatens the European security order…It is a new reality that we must actively deal with. The government will strengthen Danish engagement…to secure Danish interests (Regeringen 2016: 41).

In this citation, 'active' is ascribed meaning within the dominant discourse. Concerning the EU, 'active' is also ascribed meaning within the dominant discourse of furthering Danish interests, which 'the government will work actively to take care of' (Regeringen 2016: 44). It will also take care of 'Danish interests….by working actively to increase Danish exports' (Regeringen 2016: 42, author's underlining).

'Active' is also used within the discourse found in earlier programmes where military contributions are linked to Denmark's international standing:

> Denmark will…contribute actively to military operations…will ensure that Denmark will also in the years to come be amongst the nations that offer the biggest contributions in relative terms to the American-led coalition's military campaign against ISIL (Regeringen 2016: 46. Cf. p. 42)

Summing up, the Løkke Rasmussen III foreign policy project does not include the word 'active', but 'active' is used six times in the programme. 'Active' is mainly ascribed meaning within the dominant discourse, but 'active' is also used within the discourse where military contributions are linked to Denmark's international standing.

The Social Democratic government 2019-2022 (PM Frederiksen I)

The Social Democratic government, headed by Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen, did not publish a programme but, instead, it issued a 'Political Understanding' between the Social Democrats, the Social Liberals, the Socialist People's Party and the Red–Green alliance – the government's parliamentary majority (Frederiksen et al. 2019). The document is short and contains little about foreign policy. The closest to a foreign policy project is the sentence '…a new government will allow Denmark to take on an active, committed and engaged international responsibility' (Frederiksen et al. 2019: 2). Here, 'active' is reintroduced following two government programmes without it. The words 'engaged' and 'responsible' were also part of the foreign policy projects of the former centre-left governments in 1993-2001 and 2011-2015.

The dominant discourse is about broader international commitments rather than a clear demarcation and pursuit of Danish interests, as in the previous programmes. It also places more emphasis on human welfare, international conventions, and the climate (the section on the climate is the longest in the Political Understanding):

> We must shoulder a responsibility for the world. So, Denmark is a country that helps people in need. That stands guard over the international conventions, actively works for the UN's world goals and is a committed member of binding international communities (ibid: 1).

'Active' is used twice in relation to international affairs. In these two cases, the first of which is presented in the quote above, the use of 'active' is embedded within the dominant discourse of broader international commitments (ibid: 1, cf. p. 15). In the second case, active is performative in promoting EU policies that are 'a lot more progressive than [those of] today':

> A new government will…assume an active, binding and committed international responsibility. Regardless of the fact that the parties behind the political understanding view…the EU differently, there is agreement that Denmark…must work to ensure that the policy pursued in the EU becomes far more progressive…particularly in…pursuing a more ambitious climate policy… (ibid: 2, author's underlining).

The use of 'progressive' is related to the disagreements on the EU between the four party co-authors, where 'progressive' EU policies might be a compromise between not accepting EU membership and accepting more ambitious policies, such as on the climate, within the discourse on broader international commitments.

In summary, 'active' appears in the foreign policy project together with 'committed' and 'engaged'. In The Political Understanding 'active', which appears twice, is ascribed meaning through the dominant discourse on broader international commitments. The Political Understanding stands out from previous programmes by making no reference to Danish engagement in military security.

The Social Democratic (SD), Liberal and Moderate Party government 2022- (PM Frederiksen II)

The three-party government produced the programme 'Responsibility for Denmark' (Regeringen 2022). The foreign policy project, 'prepared in an uncertain world', does not include 'active' (Regeringen 2022: 35). While the SD had formed the previous government (with 'active' as part of the foreign policy project), the coalition parties made clear that they were engaging in a new project (Regeringen 2022: 3-4).

The dominant discourse presents a world order that is breaking down, where there is a need for Denmark, with its allies, to react (Regeringen 2022: 35). Increased military expenditure is urgent due to the Russian invasion of Ukraine (the subsection on 'Strengthening Danish defence and security' is the longest in the programme [ibid. 2022: 35-41]). There are also elements of the discourse which articulate a link between Danish military contributions and status known from previous governments (if not the one immediately preceding it):

> The international order is breaking down …We must therefore use…our membership of the EU and NATO to defend [it]…it requires Denmark to strengthen our security and continuously maintain our work to make an international impression (Regeringen 2023: 35. See also 3).

A stronger Europe is mobilised to face the global pressures, drawing on the discourse on 'Europe as essential for Denmark' which had been drawn on in previous programmes: 'A stronger Europe is needed in an uncertain world… European cooperation with a committed Danish voice' (Regeringen 2022: 37). There is also a discourse on the importance of free trade for Denmark and the world: 'Free trade benefits Denmark and is…a way to…lift people…out of poverty. Therefore, Denmark must play an active role in…creating increased global trade' (Regeringen 2022: 37).

'Active' is used three times. First, in the title of the subsection 'Active voice in Europe'. In this subsection, the need for a stronger Europe in an uncertain world is merged with a need for an 'engaged Danish voice' in areas such as climate, trade policy and industrial policy (Regeringen 2022: 37). Second, at the end of this subsection: 'The government will actively strengthen efforts for efficient and fair corporate taxation' (in the context of a level playing field for Danish businesses [(Regeringen 2022: 38)]).Third, in the sentence: 'Free trade benefits Denmark and is…a way to create prosperity…Therefore, Denmark must play an active role in removing trade barriers and creating increased global trade' (Regeringen 2022: 37).

Summing up, 'active' is not part of the general foreign policy project but is used in three places. In the first case, 'active' is used within the dominant discourse on an uncertain world and the discourse on Europe as crucial for Denmark. The two other uses of 'active' are ascribed meaning within a discourse of free trade.

‘Active’ foreign policy in Danish government programmes: broader perspectives

In this section, I reflect on the findings above and the broader implications for the study of Danish foreign policy. First, the word ‘active’ or ‘actively’ is used in relation to international affairs in all Danish government programmes from 2009. The frequency of use varies across programmes but ‘active’ as a prefix in various forms occurs frequently, whereas ‘activism’ and ‘activist’ do not occur. The latter is noteworthy given the centrality of these concepts in the existing research literature. The programmes all contain a formulaic phrase which is presented as the general aim of the government’s foreign policy. But only about half of the governments’ foreign policy projects contain the word ‘active’ or ‘active foreign policy’ (2009/2010, 2011, 2019). Since about half of the projects do not contain these words, ‘active’ cannot be said to be an inherent part of the foreign policy projects.

Second, concerning the three categories of performativity proposed above, the use of ‘active’ mostly falls within the second category where ‘active’ is ascribed meaning by the dominant foreign policy discourses. The discourses and their strengths vary between the programmes. ‘Active’ is therefore not tied to distinct discourses or policies (see however below).

As the discourses are mostly drawn on in the programmes without the word ‘active’ being used, the use of ‘active’ cannot be said to be performative in bringing about particular meanings and policies. Rather, the use of the word ‘active’ can be seen as performative in giving value and legitimacy to the existing discourses and policies in Danish foreign policy. Against this background, ‘active’ can be seen as an empty signifier rather than a floating signifier. Like the later use of the concept of Solidarność, ‘active’ is used within, and about, so many different discourses and policy measures (including security policy, European policy, development policy, climate policy, tax policy and Danish exports) that it has few substantial connotations other than legitimacy and positive political weight. There may be differences between the foreign policy projects of Danish governments (and political parties), but these do not take the form of struggles over the meaning of ‘active’.

Third, a significant exception to the above is the use of ‘active’ in the discourse on Danish military contributions linked to Denmark’s international status which

mostly include the term 'active'. In this case it may be argued that the use of 'active' is performative in promoting meanings of Danish military contributions in international hotspots as a way of furthering international recognition of Denmark. The use of 'active' may promote a particular purpose for military contributions, which makes some kinds of contribution (high profile, demanded by allies) more likely. This article has not examined the Fogh Rasmussen governments' use of 'active' in relation to the use of military means, but it may be suggested that the performativity of 'active' in this context is a trace from the way 'active' was linked to high profile military operations under the Fogh Rasmussen governments as part of his distancing from the foreign policy tradition (Farbøl 2011: 66, 72). Or possibly it is a trace from the early years of 'active internationalism' with the increased Danish use of military means, and distancing from the tradition.

Fourth, the word 'active' does not have a privileged status in official documents related to foreign policy. Words such as 'engaged', 'ambitious', 'make a difference' and 'leading' are also frequently used and often appear to be interchangeable with 'active'. This raises the question of whether 'active' is the most relevant word to examine rather than (or in combination with) these other words. If these other terms are seen as identical to 'active', their presence in the government programmes is a lot more significant. However, the starting point in this article is that the word 'active' originated in the political sphere with Elleman-Jensen and has spilled over into the academy (often in the form of an interest in 'activism'), which is why it is a relevant focus. The study of Danish foreign policy has not been focused on these other terms but on whether it has been 'activist', even if the conceptualisation of 'activist' is sometimes expanded to include some of these terms (Pedersen & Ringsmose 2017: 339).

More importantly, an equivalent analysis (if more quantitative) of the role of 'active' together with 'engaged', 'ambitious', 'make a difference' and 'leading' in the four Danish foreign policy strategies since 2016 does not lead to markedly different results (Larsen 2023). In the four strategies, 'active' is used most frequently about security/defence, Europe/EU, the economy/trade/digital order, and international institutions/human rights. The use of 'active' seems to follow the concrete political priorities in the context where the individual strategies have been drafted. If you extend the list to 'committed', 'leader', 'ambitious' and 'difference', we see a parallel, if not identical, pattern. Climate is right at the top in 2022, together with world order in 2023. The economy is in

the top four list in the 2016 and 2018 strategies. And refugees/migration are in the top four in 2022. However, Europe and especially security, are both among the four most frequent areas mentioned. There is a tendency for 'active' to be used more about security/defence and Europe compared to the four other words (Larsen 2023).

Taken together, the articulation of 'active' in official foreign policy documents does not appear to have played a performative role in taking Danish foreign policy in a particular direction after 2009. Rather, 'active' has been ascribed meaning by the dominant discourses which have shaped and enabled Danish foreign policy throughout the period. Frequently, the term 'active' is not used in the governments´ foreign policy projects, even if 'active' appears in other parts of the programmes as an adjective to qualify foreign policy measures. 'Active' was part of the foreign policy project of the Rasmussen I government, the Thorning-Schmidt government, and the Frederiksen (I) government, but not the Rasmussen II and III or the Frederiksen II governments. A prominent view in the literature is that active/activism is an organising term for Danish foreign policy post-Cold War. This contrasts with the finding in this article that the word is not consistently part of the general foreign policy projects as formulated in the government programmes (as was also the case before 2009). Neither is the use of 'active' linked to the political orientation of the governments in any straightforward way. The political orientation of the government plays a role through the dominant discourses and policies in the programmes, and this is where the differences in the use of 'active' come in. In addition, 'active' is often used to give weight to certain policy measures. For the centre right Rasmussen and Frederiksen II governments these have often been military action/security, responses to international threats and the defence of Danish national interests. For the Social Democratic governments, it has often taken the form of support of international organisations, including the EU (under Thorning-Schmidt), human welfare and the climate (cf. Olesen 2012).

It can, of course, be argued that the findings in this article reflect the source material drawn on. A different use of 'active' or 'activist/activism' may have been found if the analysis had been extended to all the speeches given by the prime and foreign ministers rather than only the government programmes, the foreign and security policy strategies, and many selected speeches. Likewise, if interviews with civil servants on the use of the words had been conducted. However, while such a full analysis would be desirable, the documents analysed

have a high status as guidelines for governments, including civil servants in the Danish ministries of foreign affairs and defence. It may be presumed that the language used in these documents reflects and guides the language in other relevant documents and in the civil service. The many speeches by prime ministers and foreign ministers analysed and memoires of ministers and prominent civil servants confirm this.

It should be mentioned that the article has not dealt with the possible reasons for differences between the governments in the use of 'active', 'activist' and 'activism'. This is an area for future research. Most interesting here seems to be the difference between Fogh Rasmussen's (limited) use of 'activism' in official contexts and the near absence of the term in the language of the subsequent governments.

It is also important to stress that the limited use of the term 'activist/activism' in official material since 1989 and the mainly non-performative use of 'active' have no direct bearing on the analytical relevance of the term 'activism'. Researchers' use of concepts does not hinge on practitioners using the same concepts. However, it might nevertheless be pertinent to reflect on the implications of the issues raised in the article for the use of activism as a concept. As mentioned, 'activism' is not an analytical concept in the literature on the foreign policy of other countries, and the literature on Danish foreign policy activism rarely has a comparative perspective. 'Activism' is hardly ever linked to other concepts in international relations and foreign policy analysis, such as bandwagoning or 'flocking' for example. 'Activism' appears to be an analytical concept which works through encapsulating what is seen as the (unspoken) guidelines and lodestars for Danish foreign policy.

At the present time, the concept seems to be a generalisation of what were widely seen as significant changes in Danish foreign policy around 1990 (often described as a change from 'adaptation' to 'activism'), which is applied as a hypothesis or framework in subsequent analyses of Danish foreign policy. While such a generalisation may well be relevant, the question is whether it can continuously be asserted solely through reference to Danish foreign policy practice without reference to the understandings of the political actors. The relevance of many analytical concepts in IR and FPA clearly does not depend on the political actors' use of the terms, as they aim to say something general about the actions of states across their different cultures and identities. But

because 'activism' stands out as a concept for analysis of Danish foreign policy, there may be a need to substantiate why this concept has been particularly relevant for analyses of Danish foreign policy for more than 30 years. It is difficult to sustain that Denmark's geopolitical position or societal structures are so unique that they merit a specific concept in themselves. Considering the language of the Danish political actors would seem relevant for legitimising the use of the concept by researchers (or the opposite if the Danish political actors don't use the concept).

Conclusion

The analysis has shown that 'active' (but never 'activism/activist') can be found in all Danish government programmes since 2009, even if it is only present half of the time in the titles of the general foreign policy projects. Moreover, it has been shown that 'active' is ascribed meaning within the dominant foreign policy discourses in the government programmes; 'active' is not performative in promoting distinct discursive meanings, rather it is performative in reinforcing the meanings of the dominant discourses. There are no substantial political consequences of the articulation of 'active' since 'active' provides legitimacy to already existing political aims defined within existing political discourses. Against this background I conclude that 'active' predominantly functions as an empty signifier rather than a floating signifier. The only exception to this is in relation to military contributions. Here, the use of 'active' seems to promote a discourse of Danish contributions to international operations that raise Denmark's international standing. This is a meeting point with the existing research literature which often focuses on the military dimension as central to Danish activism. However, rather than focusing on whether Danish military engagements can *per se* be considered as expressions of activism, the approach in this article has been to look at how the use of 'active' may be performative in promoting a particular kind of military engagement – namely high-profile operations. I suggest that further research could fruitfully focus on whether and how articulations of 'active' have played a role in political argumentation and decision-making about Danish high-profile military operations.

The article contributes to the study of 'activism' in Danish foreign policy by showing that official Danish foreign policy documents hardly, if at all, use

the words ‘activist’ and ‘activism’. Since these documents legitimise Danish foreign policy action, it seems fair to suggest that ‘activist’ and ‘activism’ are not performative in Danish foreign policy. This offers a different approach to the many analyses of Danish activism which focus on foreign policy behaviour.

The analysis also suggests that the existing literature may face a challenge of relevance given that ‘active’ is used in many different policy areas dependent on the dominant discourse and the political aims of each government and, therefore, that the articulation of ‘active’, does not lead to distinct political outcomes across time (even if it has also been pointed out that the utility of the term does not *per se* depend on its use by practitioners). Based on the general non-performativity of ‘active’ identified in this article, it is reasonable to ask whether the unique research focus on whether Danish foreign policy is activist is warranted. A cursory examination of the word ‘active’ in foreign and security policy strategies in Norway and Sweden suggests that the two countries’ levels of use of ‘active’ do not differ significantly from the use in Denmark’s foreign policy strategies (Larsen 2023: 108-109). But the research focus for more than 30 years has mainly been on whether and how Denmark is activist. Given the contingent use of ‘active’ in government programmes, the research focus on Danish foreign policy activism may itself be more performative in bringing Danish foreign policy activism into being as a concept than Danish foreign policy itself! It may be worth considering whether research on Danish foreign policy activism could gain from including reflections on the practitioners’ (non) use of the term.

Notes

1 The author would like to thank the editors and the anonymous reviewer for excellent comments on the draft of this article.

2 Henrik Larsen is Associate Professor at the Department of Political Science, University of Copenhagen.

3 The OUP also gives several other specialised meanings of the term.

4 This is a translation from the Danish words 'aktivisme', 'aktivistisk' and 'aktiv'.

5 For the use of the concept of discourse in relation to foreign policy analysis see for example Larsen (1997).

6 For a detailed presentation of the concept of performativity drawing on Derrida in relation to foreign policy and European studies, see Larsen (2017b).

7 All translations from Danish by the author.

8 Branner's observations fully concur with my findings here (see Branner 2013, endnote 11).

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Pragmatic idealism in Danish foreign policy: partnerships and the 'Global South'

Lars Engberg-Pedersen and Rasmus Hundsbæk Pedersen[1]

Introduction

On 16 May 2023 the Danish minister for foreign affairs, Lars Løkke Rasmussen, published the government's new Foreign and Security Policy Strategy (FSPS). It was less than 16 months after the most recent strategy, but in the very first paragraph of the preface the minister justifies the new strategy by the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which, he argues, introduced a new geopolitical reality. He goes on to say that in order to address that reality, and to safeguard Danish interests and values, Denmark has to meet the world with pragmatic idealism (Danish Government 2023: 5). The concept is not easy to pin down. Implicitly, it interacts with realist notions of national interests which call for compromising on ideology and values when, for instance, security concerns, commercial interests or social cohesion require one to do so (Milne 2012; Baker 2007). It could be argued that its advent in Danish foreign policy is a reflection of the world moving away from a unipolar world order dominated by the US, which provided a small state like Denmark with significant foreign policy action space, towards something more unpredictable (Pedi & Wivel 2022).

'Uncertain, unpredictable and complicated' is precisely how the minister describes the world. 'Brutal at times' (Danish Government 2023: 5) – a notable change from the opening phrase of a strategy from only four-and-a-half years earlier: 'The world today is in a much better place than ever before' (Danish Government 2018: 5). Implicitly, the minister characterises Europe as squeezed between a Russia that is neglecting international law, a China seeking to gain international influence, and the US directing its attention towards Asia. However, he also calls for an active, ambitious and optimistic foreign policy based on values such as democracy, freedom and human rights. As 'a big nation, but a small country' (Danish Government 2023: 5), Denmark needs close cooperation, notably within the EU but also beyond.

It is against this background that the minister promotes the concept of pragmatic idealism. He sees it as a way to create partnerships and alliances that can uphold a rules-based world order – something in which a small state like Denmark has a clear interest. The idea seems to be that closer cooperation with countries in different parts of the world, including in the 'Global South',[2] should be a central element of Denmark's foreign policy. As we shall see, this is a notable change from a 2016 foreign policy review and recent development policies, and it is therefore important to examine the concept and its relevance, particularly in relation to countries where actors express opposition to the liberal world order of the last 80 years.

The article analyses the concept of pragmatic idealism and its use in the strategy, and it explores its antecedents in recent Danish development policy where the central component, namely partnerships, has been much in vogue. Accordingly, the ambition is to respond to the question: What are key challenges if a Danish foreign policy based on pragmatic idealism should enable partnerships and alliance building with countries in the Global South with the purpose of strengthening a rules-based world order? Partnerships and alliances are also elusive concepts that are rarely defined in policy discourse but seen as basically positive. Partnerships have been discussed as longer-term cooperation where both parties believe they gain something they would not have achieved without working together (Engberg-Pedersen 2019).

However, partnerships are not free of power, and this is precisely why partnerships with countries in the Global South 20 years ago and today may be rather different. A small donor country like Denmark may no longer have the upper hand when partnerships are being considered due to several reasons. First, as the liberal world order is being challenged by the emergence of new powers, lower-income countries in the Global South increasingly have alternatives when pursuing alliances and partnerships as will be demonstrated below. Secondly, for some of these countries, development assistance has become less important due to their own economic growth. Of 51 countries that in 1987 had low-income status, 29 have middle-income status today (Baah et al. 2024). Accordingly, the conditions for engaging in partnerships have changed significantly.

Denmark is clearly an example of a small state whose foreign policy is heavily influenced by geopolitical changes. Denmark has historically looked to the

US for security, and has prioritised development cooperation as a kind of soft power foreign policy instrument while military force was de-emphasised. Since the end of the Cold War the foreign policy has oscillated between pursuing commercial interests and disseminating liberal values. In the latter half of the 1990s, and particularly after the change of government in 2002, the pendulum swung towards hard security policies and deployment of Danish soldiers in support of US foreign policy goals. This happened at a time when the West, under US leadership, could still pursue a liberal world order. Simultaneously, Danish development assistance was increasingly seen as an instrument for short-term Danish interests in anti-terror, deradicalisation, migrant and refugee management, etc. although human rights, democratisation and gender equality did not vanish from the agenda (Engberg-Pedersen & Fejerskov 2021).

Development cooperation has always had an ambivalent relationship with foreign policy in Denmark. On the one hand, it is of considerable size economically and constitutes therefore a relatively independent policy field, with poverty reduction as the official overriding objective. But on the other hand, it is expected to contribute to foreign policy objectives. Managed by the same ministry one may expect a certain cross-fertilisation across the two policy fields, and the experience from development cooperation is particularly relevant for the ambition expressed in the FSPS of engaging in partnerships and alliances with countries outside Europe. Thus, the present article adopts a particular focus on an increasingly vocal Global South that seeks to gain influence on international affairs. It is in that context not least that pragmatic idealism should demonstrate its value.

Three different challenges to enable partnerships and alliance-building through pragmatic idealism are identified. First, the idealism that has characterised Danish foreign and development policies for the last 30 years, if continued, is likely to prevent new partnerships and alliances. Second, the West's dominance of the rules-based world order is strongly disputed by the Global South. Denmark will have to acknowledge that the rules of this order will change. Third, commercial and security interests excluding low-income countries from world markets also jeopardise cooperation, as countries in the Global South will not accept to remain suppliers of critical raw materials without getting access to the profitable processing links in the supply chains. The article is organised into four sections before the conclusion, namely: a discussion of pragmatic idealism in the FSPS; a brief historical analysis of the

partnership concept as used in Denmark's development policies; reflections on the Global South, its common concerns and heterogeneity; and thoughts on the implications and challenges for Danish foreign policy initiatives vis-à-vis countries in the Global South.

Pragmatic idealism

The FSPS discusses pragmatic idealism in terms of context and content in the section called 'Global Partnerships and Alliance Building' (Danish Government 2023: 17-21). In terms of context and need for a changed approach, the section points in two directions. First it is argued that the 'distribution of power in the world is changing' (ibid. p. 17). This is related to the increased importance, in terms of economy, population and technology, of regions and countries that have played a less significant role hitherto. At the same time Europe's influence is diminishing. The strategy seems to acknowledge that countries and regional powers with a growing economy want to increase their influence. This is not in itself a problem, or it may be assumed to be inevitable, but the challenge is 'the global strategic competition' where, notably, 'China and Russia assert themselves through offers of investments, cooperation, and support, which is often aimed directly at the local elites, and thus seek to shape the foreign policy orientation of these countries' (p. 17). It is directly and indirectly argued that China and Russia seek to change the current world order and multilateral cooperation for their own benefit. Thus, Denmark must, together with like-minded partners, confront this reality and defend the rules-based order which is presented both as beneficial to Denmark and as necessary to solve global challenges.

Secondly, the increasingly important countries and regional powers around the world present an opportunity. Thus, Denmark should engage in the strategic competition and seek to build alliances and partnerships with these countries. This is not only to defend the rules-based world order, but also to address climate change, poverty, the prevention of conflicts, the debt crisis, etc. One may wonder whether all emerging economies agree with the assumption that the current world order is well-suited to address the global challenges. Many politicians in the Global South, meaning countries that have suffered from colonialism, financial marginalisation, resource exploitation, trade imbalances etc., are actually calling for changes of the world order, both to rectify injustices

and to legitimately address global challenges (see below). However, this is not mentioned in the section. It is noted that some governments are troubled that 'the West's strong solidarity with Ukraine' (p. 17) comes without a similar concern for the plight of poor countries, but the FSPS does not consider whether some of the frustration may be related to the contemporary world order.

In terms of content, equal partnerships seem to be the cornerstone of pragmatic idealism. The identification of shared interests is central, and Denmark should 'guarantee attractive and more sustainable solutions that meet the demands of the countries and that can contribute to their development and independence' (p. 18). This entails 'listening and understanding the points of view of others' (p. 18), and cooperation should not be prevented by value disagreements if there are shared interests. This is an interesting distinction between values and interests as, seemingly, the goal is to promote a rather value-informed, rules-based world order. It is also emphasised that fundamental values such as democracy and human rights should continue to inform Danish foreign policy. The challenge is that there are few indications of how to navigate between an ideal Scylla and a pragmatic Charybdis.

After addressing issues related to different geographical parts of the world, the section takes up climate change, which is described as 'the 21st century's greatest challenge' (p. 20). The text refers to Denmark as 'a bridge builder', as 'forming alliances' in this field, and as assuming 'a leading role' in raising ambitions. It is also argued that there is 'a credibility about Denmark's commitment to the climate negotiations' (p. 20). While this may be so, all countries may not share Denmark's ideas of how to go about facing the climate crisis, and this part of the FSPS seems to revert to earlier strategies stating Danish concerns and interests rather than exploring how shared interests can be identified.

All in all, the FSPS calls for a not very well-defined pragmatism in Danish foreign policy. The idealism seems more clearcut and standard with its emphasis on democracy and human rights, including the rights of women and girls, minorities and workers, and the freedom to express oneself and to live a life without torture (p. 18). Commercial interests, curbing irregular migration, and the Danish concern with the climate are also voiced. The pragmatism consists in listening to and understanding others, identifying shared interests, and

establishing partnerships and alliances with the overall purpose of increasing Denmark's influence on international cooperation. This necessarily entails compromises, but the nature of these is not spelled out. To explore this further, we will now briefly turn to earlier ideas and experiences with partnerships in Danish development cooperation where the concept has been central.

Partnerships in development cooperation

Danish development cooperation has often been described as comparatively pragmatic and flexible (OECD 2016). A central notion in this context is the partnership approach, which this section deals with on the basis of five strategies published over the last 25 years, namely in 2000, 2010, 2012, 2017 and 2021. While implementation does not necessarily correspond with stated policies, the strategies are interesting for the way they conceptualise the approach. Each of the strategies contains a chapter on partnerships so the idea is neither new, nor a minor concern in Danish development cooperation.

In the 2000 strategy, the chapter is entitled 'Partnership – the basis for development cooperation' where 'solid, long-term partnerships based on trust with the developing countries and with the other participants in development cooperation [are seen] as the basis for poverty reduction' (Danish Government 2000: 14). Thus, the purpose of the partnerships is linked to the overall objective of Danish development cooperation at the time, namely poverty reduction, which is different from the FSPS. However, the 2000 strategy also states that 'Denmark will seek to strengthen the work in the UN and other organisations through the establishment of alliances with its programme countries and other relevant cooperation partners' (ibid. p. 16). This resembles quite closely the ambition of the FSPS to defend the rules-based world order and influence how countries position themselves in the global strategic competition. The partnerships involve 'a broad dialogue with governments, the public sector and municipal authorities as well as representatives of different interests in the private sector and civil society, including representatives of the poorest segments of the population' (p. 14). Such agreements should be reached while acknowledging that a 'realistic partnership must be based on a recognition of and respect for differences in the partners' points of departure with respect to values, resources and capacity' (p. 15). Although partnerships should be organised around the policies and political priorities of developing countries,

it is also clear that Denmark expects the partnerships to support the private sector and civil society along with other issues such as democratic control and decentralisation. Thus, the support of country policies should take place within a framework defined by Denmark meaning that the Danish government sets the parameters of the partnership.

The 2010 strategy highlighting freedom is much in line with the above, but it emphasises contextual challenges to a larger extent: 'China, India, Brazil, South Africa and the Arab countries are playing an ever-greater international role, both in multilateral cooperation and in developing countries. [...] These countries [...] do not always have the same interests and values as the traditional donors [...] This challenges the role of the traditional donors and the principles and values that apply in development cooperation' (Danish Government 2010: 9). Thus, already in 2010, the global strategic competition is clearly emphasised. The strategy repeats that Denmark has an interest in a 'binding multilateral system' (pp. 8-9), and that it is important to form alliances in support of it. This resembles the FSPS. The basis for this is long-term partnerships with many different actors and at local, regional and international levels. The partnerships should be characterised by 'openness and mutual commitments' (p. 8), and at country level a partnership with the government will be the point of departure. While adaptation to country conditions and flexibility is emphasised, pragmatism in relation to differences in values and interests is not discussed and does not seem to be a possibility. The strategy strongly advocates values such as freedom, democracy and human rights.

For domestic political reasons, the 2012 strategy moved the focus from freedom to human rights. While poverty reduction and human rights promotion are central concerns, the introduction by the minister also highlights Denmark's interests in foreign aid: 'Denmark's development cooperation is an investment – in peace and fewer refugees, in combatting crime, degradation of our natural resources and climate change, and an investment in growth, employment and new opportunities in Denmark and in Europe. It is an investment in global influence.' (Danish Government 2012: Introduction) Hence, the strategy represents a heightened focus on Danish interests in development cooperation. Partnerships are described as flexible and mutually binding. They can be established with all sorts of actors at local, national and international levels. A distinction is made between political dialogue, commercial relations, and development cooperation, but all three instruments can be used in country

partnerships. A section entitled 'Active cooperation with new development actors' mentions China, India, Brazil and South Africa, and it is stated: 'We will proceed pragmatically, forging partnerships in areas of common interest' (p. 35). This resembles the concern with pragmatic idealism in the FSPS, but China is here mentioned as a possible cooperation partner together with other emerging economies, and not together with Russia as a competitor in Africa. The concern with the rules-based world order is again clear: 'The diffusion of global power and the establishment of new alliances and forums, such as the G20, challenge the multilateral system. As a small, open country, Denmark has a clear interest in orderly international cooperation, an international legal order and a well-functioning multilateral system' (p. 34). While the strategy emphasises values and long-term interests in rules-based international cooperation, it reflects an increasing political concern with shorter-term commercial and other interests.

The 2017 strategy has a strong focus on preventing irregular migration. In line with a review of Denmark's foreign and security policy from 2016 (Taksøe-Jensen 2016) the strategy emphasises the challenges close to Europe: 'The arc of crisis and insecurity reaches all the way around Europe' (Danish Government 2017: 3). The strategy also states: 'The developing countries must increasingly mobilise their own resources through strengthened initiatives via tax systems, combatting tax havens and an improved business climate to encourage private investments, economic freedom and respect for private property' (p. 4). Such arguments enable a move away from the objective of poverty reduction and the attention to development problems in poor countries in favour of short-term Danish concerns with respect to security and migration. The emphasis on the private sector is carried into the discussion of partnerships which should be 'innovative and courageous' and 'catalyse the development of markets and attract knowledge and financing' (p. 11). A relatively detailed section on Danish actors spells out public–private partnerships, cooperation between sector authorities in Denmark and in developing countries, and partnerships between civil society organisations and the ministry of foreign affairs on the one hand and private companies on the other. Little is said about the specific characteristics of partnerships. Geopolitical changes seemingly did not enter the debate when this strategy was drafted, and pragmatism, idealism, and long-term interests in a specific world order are sidelined.

The most recent strategy from 2021 identifies democracy and human rights as the foundation for a Danish development assistance that addresses irregular migration and climate change. The strategy aptly identifies a challenging world with the Covid-19 pandemic, climate change, conflicts, authoritarian tendences and geopolitical competition. It acknowledges the potential impact of these calamities on Denmark but is, at the same time, very optimistic about Denmark's role and capacities: 'Denmark possesses the knowledge on and the solutions to many of the world's key challenges. […] We must take the lead and change the world for the better. A world with which Denmark is closely interconnected. We take care of Denmark when we take care of the world' (Danish Government 2021: 5). When discussing the partnership approach, potential partners ranging from the international to the local, both in Denmark and abroad, are mentioned, but civil society, the UN, the EU, the private sector, development banks, etc. are emphasised as partners. Denmark is in the driver's seat and apart from being dynamic and innovative the nature of partnerships is not clarified, and they do not seem to require much consideration of other countries' interests. Pragmatism and rules-based international cooperation are not concerns.

Across the five strategies the partnership concept is never defined in detail. Many different actors can be partners, and the nature of a partnership is highly dependent on the context. There are, however, significant differences across the strategies with respect to context, purpose, and approach. The 2000 strategy does not address the global context while later strategies increasingly situate themselves in relation to global crises and, to some extent, geopolitical changes. Notably, China is seen as a potential partner in the 2010 and 2012 strategies, quite differently from its role as competitor in the FSPS. Despite the increased contextualisation, the strategies have not become any humbler because Denmark is consistently presented as a leader and a pioneer. In the first strategy the purpose of the partnerships is primarily poverty reduction, but their role in strengthening multilateral cooperation is also noted. The significance of poverty reduction is gradually weakened in later strategies, first in favour of values such as freedom and human rights and later to respond to Danish concerns regarding irregular migration and climate change. The last two strategies do not link partnerships to the Danish interest in rules-based international cooperation, whereas this is mentioned in the first three strategies. Finally, a pragmatic approach to cooperation and partnerships

is discernible in the 2000, 2010 and 2012 strategies, but not in the last two strategies which focus almost exclusively on Danish concerns.

Overall, it seems that the FSPS both builds on and breaks with the five strategies for development cooperation. The basic idea of partnerships as a cornerstone of pragmatic idealism has a long history in Danish development cooperation. Idealism, in terms of values such as human rights, democracy and freedom, is also well rehearsed in earlier documents. Moreover, one can identify a pragmatic approach, particularly in the first three strategies. On the other hand, the FSPS breaks with the strategies for development cooperation by acknowledging that Denmark and its Western allies no longer dictate the framework for cooperation. It is also more modest in relation to Denmark's ability to solve all problems in the world. While the analysis of the global context is significantly different, it is interesting to note that the FSPS almost reverts to the first strategies with its focus on pragmatism. This feature has disappeared from Danish development cooperation during the last ten years but may now experience a renaissance because of the FSPS.

The ascendance of the Global South – a challenge to a small state like Denmark?

The FSPS demonstrates how Russia's invasion of Ukraine was a wake-up call, stating how it 'revealed that the EU and the West are challenged in the battle for influence that is unfolding globally' (p. 17). However, as demonstrated in our discussion of partnerships above, tensions in the 'old' world order had been brewing for longer. In academic literature attention to the existence of a 'Global South' has indeed been on the increase in the previous couple of decades (Dados & Connell 2012; see also Criekemans 2022: 97). These developments pose particular challenges to a small state like Denmark, which has tended to align with the US-led liberal world order (Pedi & Wivel 2022). Questions about how to position itself, prioritise interventions and forge partnerships become more acute when the geopolitical tectonic plates are moving. However, as discussed in this section, for lower-income countries in the Global South the rise of China and other emerging economies has provided alternatives of a kind that were not present in the first decades after the end of the Cold War.

It is hard not to see the emergence of the notion of a Global South as related to the coinciding rise of China, which challenged the dominance of what was perceived to be a hegemony of Western ideas and institutions (Gray & Gills 2016). Other major countries like Brazil and India, initially labelled emerging economies, have also increasingly demonstrated ambitions of talking on behalf of the Global South (Lubin 2023). The emergence of alternatives gave renewed impetus to ideas about South–South cooperation that initially had been conceptualised by the Non-aligned Movement of mostly recently decolonised countries in the 1950s and 1960s (ibid). South–South cooperation has indeed been highlighted by China in its overseas development activities with its emphasis on cost-competitiveness and speed of implementation (Dreher et al. 2022: 124, 127).

Whereas China was initially more concerned with encouraging outward investments, in 2006 it published its first Africa Policy, which combined investments with intensified political cooperation as embodied in the first head of state summit the same year. In the policy, and more generally, China emphasised that it was a different kind of global power, itself a developing country that therefore had a better understanding of African needs (Carnegie Endowment 2006; Large 2021: 22; van Wieringen & Zajontz 2023). In 2013 followed the Belt and Road initiative, which on the surface was about large-scale infrastructure projects but has been seen as a de facto 'multifaceted grand strategy' that promotes China as a normative power and aims at reshaping global governance (Large 2021: 27). It has been estimated that China-led infrastructure projects and other transactions amounted to US$838bn between 2013 and the end of 2021 (see Horn et al. 2023).

However, overall it is sometimes clearer what the Global South is against (i.e. dominance by 'the West' headed by the US) than what it is for (Ganesh 2023; De Waal 2023). As a concept, the Global South is inherently slippery. This has implications for the terms under which Danish and Western governments seek to forge partnerships with countries in the Global South. On the one hand, the concept's emergence may designate changing global power dynamics with a stronger position for Southern actors. On the other hand, it may also reflect normative agendas about breaking up existing hierarchies related to language politics. In the past, concepts like 'underdeveloped countries', 'developing countries', 'least advanced countries', 'Third World countries', 'poor countries', 'peripheral countries' and 'emerging countries' or 'emerging economies' have

been used for a similar category of countries (Toussaint 2023). Some of these older concepts, particularly those implying a global hierarchy among countries, have however fallen out of use. Is the Global South, then, a description of actual changes in international relations? Or is it rather, as claimed by some, a political agenda promoting 'an idea and set of practices, attitudes, and relations (…) a disavowal of institutional and cultural practices associated with colonialism and imperialism'? (Grovogui 2011: 177).

Similarly, questions about which countries are part of the Global South and which are not may have implications for how and with whom to forge partnerships. Geographically, there is no strict logic behind the designation of countries as being part of the Global South. The formation of BRICS in 2010, initially made up of Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa, has been seen a part of the same challenge to the hegemony of the West by the Global South (Gray & Gills 2016). A criterion used by more scholars is that Global South countries are former colonies (Grovogui 2011; see also Wiegratz et al. 2023). Here, however, a former empire like Russia that is part of the BRICS hardly fits. A former colony like South Korea is sometimes categorised as part of the Global South and other times not. Irrespective of criteria for being part of the Global South, the increased use of the term does signify changing geopolitical realities at a moment in which the world has become less unipolar.

For countries in the Global South there can be an interest in highlighting such alternatives, which provide decision-makers with more strategic autonomy and may help bring concessions from Western partners. The scale of the challenge to the West in terms of economic and military might is, however, debated (Brooks & Wohlforth 2023; Shifrinson et al. 2023). There can be little doubt that the bigger emerging economies to a larger extent can pursue their own goals just as they can wield bigger influence over smaller countries. For smaller Global South countries the situation may be different. In whose interest is it to group together countries as diverse as China, Seychelles and Tanzania, under a Global South umbrella? China is in fact now involved in bailouts and debt restructuring that previously was a 'privilege' of Western countries and institutions and it has not proven any more accommodating (Horn et al. 2023; *Le Monde* 2024). Examples of countries adopting a hedging strategy towards China also exist (Cabestan & Chaponnière 2016). It has indeed been suggested that the world order has become more promiscuous regarding the choice of partners, which is decided more *ad hoc* and by the terms that

potential partners offer than by ideology and stable alliances (Andersen 2023; see also Rose 2024).

In sum, from a developing country perspective, the emergence of alternatives has provided more room for manoeuvre. From a Danish and Western point of view the scale of the challenge posed by China and the emergence of the Global South is up for debate. First, the unique strength of China compared to other countries raises questions about the degree of shared interests in the Global South. Many lower-income countries are unlikely to be interested in replacing dependence on Western countries and institutions with a new dependence on China. Secondly, new strategies to counter China deployed by Western countries and by other emerging powers vying for the mantle of speaking on behalf of the Global South may already contribute to undermining the fragile coherence among countries. In 2023 the African Union became a permanent member of G20, a move proposed by India's Modi (Reuters 2023). Finally, there will be room for looser forms of cooperation around shared global challenges that do not follow traditional geopolitical logics. The UNFCCC processes around climate change in which China also takes part is just one example (Keohane & Victor 2016). Naturally, these developments have implications for the terms under which partnerships are sought under a pragmatic idealism agenda.

Pragmatic idealism and the Global South

What are key challenges if an approach based on pragmatic idealism should enable partnerships and alliance building with countries in the Global South with the purpose of strengthening a rules-based world order? In this section we address three challenges that a new Danish foreign policy must consider, namely: its normative stance; representation and influence of the Global South in international institutions; and resource processing and technology transfer to the Global South.

Denmark's normative stance in foreign and development policies has changed significantly over the years. When Denmark began providing official development assistance in the early 1960s, its primary purpose was to support the independence and economic growth of former colonies and economically poor countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America. It was only by the late 1980s

that specific values entered Danish development cooperation, which in the subsequent two decades was characterised by three cross-cutting concerns related to democratisation, environment, and gender equality in addition to the overall objective of poverty reduction (Engberg-Pedersen 2016). As noted above, freedom and human rights have been other values emphasised in more recent strategies. Also, the foreign and security policy strategy from 2022 was described as values-based, underlining human rights, democracy, equality, safety, freedom, climate, sustainability, welfare and justice (Danish Government 2022).

Many of these values are not extraordinary and can be found in documents like the 2030 Agenda adopted in 2015 by all governments in the world. There are, however, two problems associated with a values-based foreign policy. One is that certain actors may in certain situations describe them as Western (Mende 2021). This may very well be for specific political purposes that have little to do with the values themselves, but it is challenging to look for allies and partners based on a set of ideas that may be associated with a significant divide in the contemporary world. Moreover, the criticism of the values-based position may speak to the widespread perception of the hypocrisy of the West, given that it often emphasises certain values but not others. For instance, the widespread lack of priority given to economic and social rights within the human rights paradigm is an obvious concern (Moyn 2018) – particularly from the viewpoint of relatively marginalised and poor countries. Thus, idealism in terms of a pronounced normative position is not likely to be conducive to cooperation in a world with diverse views and concerns.

The second problem with a values-based foreign policy is that it is easily associated with more than 30 years of external interference through development assistance. The move in donors' understanding of development around 1990, from economic progress and political independence to all-encompassing social change mirroring their own societies, may reflect the best of intentions but it had intrusive and disempowering consequences. Aid-receiving countries have for years tried to offer – at least on paper – what donors like, and this has been to the extent that studies have documented an inability of many governments to drive the development of their own countries (Whitfield 2009). With increasingly self-assertive political leaders in many countries in the Global South, partly due to economic growth, partly due to the existence of alternatives to the traditional OECD donors, a partnership with a

country insisting on an agenda closely associated with this troublesome past may not be very attractive.

With the emphasis on listening more, the FSPS has taken a step away from the parochial assumption that Denmark can decide the policies of other countries, but it still insists on a set of values which may push governments away. This could be for domestic political reasons, as the public and many politicians may not realise that the world is not all ears when Denmark speaks. There is recurrent criticism of Danish governments for providing development assistance to countries with poor human rights records, for not pinpointing China's wrongdoings sufficiently, or for not breaking diplomatic relations with countries after military coups. The implicit assumption behind a firmer normative stance in these situations is that it would change policies and practices in other countries. There is, however, very little evidence of that taking place. Depending on circumstances – and the US may be rather more persuasive than Denmark – political pressure by donor organisations rarely achieves the desired objectives. Even the policy suggestions by a resourceful organisation like the IMF do not seem to fulfil their intentions (Demir 2022).

Regardless of the erroneous assumption that Denmark can change the policies of other governments against their will, it is difficult to argue in favour of a change of the normative stance. There is widespread international support for it, it expresses central values of Danish society, and in a world characterised by fundamental struggles and geopolitical competition the values seek to advance the rights and conditions of vulnerable, marginalised and exploited people. Thus, the crucial question is how to promote such values without pushing certain other governments away? A distinction can here be made between bilateral cooperation and international cooperation. While it is important to find common ground in both cases, strong cooperation in the former must focus on common interests whereas there is more room for 'give and take' in the latter, where countries accept that other countries pursue their particular concerns. Some may argue that international negotiations and cooperation do not strengthen human rights, democracy, etc. at the country level, but there is an emerging literature emphasising the power of international agreements (Kelley & Simmons 2020). Thus, it may not be overly pragmatic of the idealist to turn down the normative stance when seeking bilateral partnerships with countries in the Global South while still promoting different values in international negotiations.

The challenge will undoubtedly be to convince the Danish public that this is a reasonable approach. For the last 10-15 years Danish politicians have largely succeeded in convincing the public that taking risks and accepting the possible loss of tax money are necessary elements of development cooperation. However, as the politicians have also emphasised Danish ideas, values and solutions in development cooperation, it may be difficult for the ministers of foreign affairs and development cooperation to now strengthen a pragmatic approach in bilateral cooperation, and a crucial condition is that the Danish public and numerous values-based private organisations come to realise that Denmark can achieve more by cooperation than confrontation.

The second challenge concerns the representation and influence of the Global South in international institutions. Overall, this is a central interest of the Global South although, as noted, there is a considerable divergence of interests within this group of countries as well. China and India are not on the same page given that, for instance, China is one of the five permanent members of the Security Council and India is not, and many other characteristics in terms of size, vulnerability to climate change, integration in the world market, colonial history etc. are likely to influence the interests in global representation and influence of specific countries. Accordingly, pragmatic idealists will have to approach different countries in different ways on this point, but they will also have to undertake relatively fundamental considerations of the world order since the end of World War II if they want to enter into partnerships and alliances with countries in the Global South. There are several examples of tensions around international representation and influence where the lines of disagreement follow the lines between the Global South and the Global North. One is the competition between the Green Climate Fund and the Climate Investments Funds (Skovgaard et al. 2023), and another is the dispute over which institution should host international tax negotiations: the OECD or the UN (Agyemang 2023). Such tensions clearly impede international cooperation and risk undermining a rules-based world order.

One consideration is what constitutes just representation and influence. The existing world order was largely decided by the winners of World War II with many noble intentions of preventing war and supporting the common good, but evidently also with an Anglo-American bias in terms of country influence over its institutions. At the time military might was decisive for international influence, and this remains, of course, important. Today, the size of a country's

economy has a growing significance as has, from a democratic perspective, the size of its population. In a humanitarian sense, one may consider a country's fragility. Small, island states in danger of disappearing due to sea level rise or economically poor countries with few means to deal with the consequences of climate change could be entitled to a larger say in climate negotiations. Pragmatic idealists must consider these and other ways (regions, identities, species etc.) of determining fair influence as a basis for engaging with the Global South, because this group of countries expect change. Business as usual is not an option so in order to maintain a rules-based world order, changes in representation and influence have to happen.

Another consideration has to do with the consequences of changed representation and influence. So far, the response from the Global North to calls for a fairer international cooperation has been rather conservative in the hope of preserving as much as possible of the existing world order. This is evidently not enough, but what are the more and what are the less important elements of the current order? From a Danish perspective – and this will probably be shared by many countries in the Global South – the principle of 'one country, one vote' is important, so as to avoid that large powers suppress the views of small states. Another and more disputed concern is to maintain the humanitarian values shaping the UN system where individuals and their rights are a fundamental platform on which negotiations take place. The dispute between slogans such as 'leaving no one behind' promoted by human rights advocates and 'leaving no country behind' recently promoted by China exemplifies that values such as human rights and democracy are contested. Changed representation may also challenge the role of the market. Leading echelons in the Global North have benefited substantially from globalisation and market expansion, but the benefits do not always reach poor people and countries. The organisation of the WTO, many trade agreements, and instances of regional economic cooperation do not favour the economic integration of poor economies in the world market, and this is repeatedly mentioned by leaders in the Global South.

The issue of representation of the Global South in international institutions is also delicate given Denmark's membership of the EU. Evidently, Denmark can try to push EU policies in line with ideas of pragmatic idealism, but the EU neither moves quickly, nor does it necessarily adopt Danish proposals. Thus, the question is, rather, how much Denmark can and is ready to do outside

the EU. In certain situations an active, independent Danish foreign policy may undermine common initiatives within the EU, but it may also explore opportunities in ways that the EU has difficulties in doing. Bilaterally, Denmark may more easily express new views on the representation and influence of the Global South, but in international institutions it is likely to be more difficult to hold opinions independent of the EU position. A similar distinction can be made between general views claiming that the Global South is entitled to better representation and more influence, and discussions of specific issues such as the distribution of voting power on the board of the World Bank. Thus it is necessary to strike a balance, but as long as foreign policy is an intergovernmental issue within the EU there should be room for manoeuvre to push independent views.

A third challenge is how to forge partnerships and cooperate around supply chains. In the FSPS the need to 'strengthen Denmark's and Europe's resilience' is highlighted, not least when it comes to secure supply chains that involve the materials that are critical to energy security and energy transitions. In this respect, too, Russia's invasion of Ukraine has demonstrated our vulnerability as has China's growing control over critical minerals, and over the manufacturing of clean energy technologies. Geopolitical competition for resources has indeed come to encompass new forms of rivalry. The notion of energy security thus increasingly includes renewable energy as the transition to cleaner forms of energy is fueling competition over the control of intellectual property rights, advanced technologies, production capacity, and critical minerals (Criekemans 2021; Newell 2021). China as well as Western actors have launched initiatives to reach out to countries in 'the Global South'.

A potential entry point for building partnerships is the long-held wish of countries in the Global South to capture a bigger part of the value from supply chains and extractive minerals. Not only does this have the potential to contribute to their economic development, countries in 'the Global South' also have their own concerns about energy and supply chain security. As buyers of energy equipment and producers and exporters of critical minerals these countries may also be interested in reducing their reliance on China. It has indeed been noticed that their trade with China often mirrors traditional North–South trade in terms of the import of commodities and export of manufactured goods (Cabestan & Chaponnière 2016: 48). Both the EU and the USA have shown some interest in 'friendshoring', that is moving production from China

to countries with which they are politically more aligned. Potentially this could serve the dual purpose of securing supply chains and contributing to building partnerships.

When partnerships are about industrial and trade policies, a small country like Denmark will struggle to make a difference. In such matters it is the big blocks that make the rules we have to follow. However, we are a member of the EU and may seek to make our voice heard more strategically in the Union. The European Union's Global Gateway can potentially help contribute with financing for projects and thereby build partnerships. It was launched in 2021 and aims to provide an alternative to China with a strong focus on infrastructure finance but with a bigger emphasis on social and financial sustainability (Meredith & Chen 2023). As an example of what this may imply, the EU, together with the USA, has signalled support for the development of an infrastructure corridor from Zambia and Congo, two African mineral-producing countries, for transport of minerals through Angola to the Atlantic Ocean (Bloomberg 2023). It has also entered a partnership with Namibia on developing green hydrogen, sustainable raw materials, and associated infrastructure, and has more underway (EC 2023).

This does not mean that we should ignore the challenges. Realism is important. Historically, particularly African countries are rife with examples of failed industry projects. Similarly, the EU should be careful to avoid undermining its potential through unilateral measures, for instance in trade and taxation. The EU's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) with tariffs on energy-intensive materials produced outside the Union has caused consternation in many Global South capitals. They fear that their potential for more export-oriented production of low-carbon minerals and products may get undermined (Africa Confidential 2023; Oguntoye et al. 2023). The initiative was taken without much prior dialogue. The same was the case with the US Inflation Reduction Act with its massive subsidies for domestically-produced technologies. In other words, forging partnerships around supply chains may require more willingness to reform the governance of industrial policy and trade together.

In any case, the pragmatic idealist needs to consider this issue. As noted, one of the issues highlighted in the FSPS is the need to integrate security concerns into production processes and supply chains. Thus, it is no straightforward

matter to externalise critical production, but possibly a necessary risk to take in order to achieve the goal of strengthening multilateral cooperation and a rules-based world order.

Conclusion

Whereas the concept of pragmatic idealism suggests compromising on ideology and values when, for instance, security concerns, commercial interests or social cohesion require doing so, it is, as noted, not easy to pin down. We still don’t know what pragmatic idealism exactly means, nor how it will be operationalised into practice in Danish foreign policy, if at all. Pragmatism is less developed than idealism in the new Foreign and Security Policy Strategy. It may indicate that the means are less important than the ends and will differ from one situation to another: that commercial and other initiatives should be used to promote a liberal world order. Conversely, it may also indicate that certain principles and ends are adapted given the circumstances: that ideals of democracy, human rights and gender equality will be downplayed in favour of, say, migration management interests. Time will tell.

In any case, this article concludes that if the purpose is to strengthen a rules-based world order, a foreign policy based on pragmatic idealism will have to revisit Denmark’s traditional normative stance, the views on the representation and influence of the Global South in international institutions, and widespread ideas about securing supply chains as purely market-driven processes. Although the extent to which the notion of the Global South reflects material changes in the world or increasing frustration with the current world order is not clear, there is little doubt that the three above-mentioned themes are important to many low- and middle-income countries. Thus, if a major objective of Danish foreign policy is to muster support for multilateral cooperation and a rules-based world order through partnerships and alliance-building, it is not enough only to listen more and to try to understand the views of others better. It will also be necessary to revise some of the positions that Denmark has held for years.

Furthermore, it is necessary to clarify the meaning of partnerships and alliances. While having positive connotations, these terms are used for cooperation between all sorts of actors, with substantially different purposes and

instruments. At least with respect to the objective of creating support for rules-based multilateral cooperation, a clearer understanding of what partnerships and alliances entail is required. One thing is that bilateral cooperation around commercial interests, development challenges, technological issues etc. may not lead automatically to cooperation around a rules-based world order. Clearly identified common interests regarding the latter are required to achieve such partnerships and alliances. Another point is that Denmark cannot expect countries in the Global South to support a rules-based world order without demonstrating a willingness to reform how it is or should be governed. Many of these rules are biased in favour of the West, so a future rules-based international cooperation may look quite different from what we are familiar with.

On a positive note, this article also concludes that the Danish ministry of foreign affairs has a long history of engaging pragmatically with other countries, not least in development cooperation. Though not defined, the partnership approach has been highlighted in all development policy strategies, and Danish development cooperation has often managed to approach partners in a pragmatic and flexible way. The decentralisation of aid management to the embassies has enabled engagement with local actors given changing conditions, and this experience may be a valuable basis for turning pragmatic idealism into reality. Thus, one may argue that the ideas in the FSPS are not new. The strategy for development cooperation in 2000 even emphasised that partnerships could help strengthen the UN system, and the increasing global strategic competition was noted in the 2010 and 2012 strategies. However, if seriously operationalised, the pragmatic idealism of the FSPS has the potential to break with the Danish foreign and development policies of the last ten years and their wildly exaggerated assumptions about the international influence of a small state.

Notes

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2 The quotation marks denote that the notion is difficult to define and is used in different ways as we shall see. They are left out in the rest of the article.

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Gradually, then suddenly. Explaining Sweden and Finland's path to NATO

Juhana Aunesluoma[1]

European security recast

The membership of Sweden and Finland in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) is without a doubt a major landmark in the evolution of northern Europe's security architecture.

Their decisions to seek NATO membership following Russia's full-scale aggression in Ukraine in February 2022 represent a rupture in the long-term trajectories of both countries' foreign and defence policies. With NATO now enclosing the Baltic Sea and covering the whole of the Nordic region, security arrangements of Europe's north have been recast in a way not seen after NATO's enlargements in 1999 and 2004.

By entering NATO, Sweden and Finland have relinquished long-lasting, societally rooted and widely popular traditions of military non-alignment. Besides the increased involvement of NATO's leading military powers in the defence of northern Europe, the uniting of forces of all the small and medium-sized states in the area reaching from Iceland in the west to the Baltic states and Poland in the east, is historically unique.[2]

Russian President Vladimir Putin's call for the revision of Europe's security architecture has been heeded, but not in the way he called for in 2021 when he ramped up his criticism of NATO's eastern expansion and Ukraine's westward drift (Troianovski 2021).

Russia's war of aggression has not only mobilised a broad front of nations in Ukraine's defence; it has also propelled Finland and Sweden to join the Northern Atlantic Alliance, thereby extending its presence on Russia's doorstep

in north-east Europe. While seeking to push the Alliance back, Russia's border with NATO has more than doubled in length. Furthermore, it is facing not only an enlarged but also a more consolidated Alliance that is updating its tasks and investing in its capabilities. A rearmament drive is in motion among its member states, spearheaded by the Nordic, Baltic, and Central East European countries, where the feeling of threat emanating from Russia is most acute.[3]

The article summarises the process through which the governments of Finland and Sweden – in that order – decided to seek NATO membership in the spring of 2022 and, despite some delays in the ratification process, managed to secure a relatively speedy accession into the Alliance in April 2023 and March 2024 respectively. Taking stock of the literature and an emerging debate on the topic, the article analyses the motivations and contributing factors behind the policy change in both countries and the short-term significance of their entry to the Alliance.

Following the basic narrative, the article places the realisation of their NATO memberships in a broader historical context. It discusses the extent to which Sweden and Finland's NATO accession should be seen as an entirely new phase in the long-running trends of their foreign and security policies, and as representing a U-turn in their fundamental orientation towards military alignment. This view is supported by the fact that in neither country has there been any real movement towards full NATO membership before Russia's attack came in 2022.

Alternatively, their decisions could be seen as a confirmation of choices already made earlier, whereby they have grown gradually closer to NATO since the 1990s and have increasingly relied on international defence cooperation as a critical component of their security. According to this view, instead of making a U-turn, by taking one more leap forward they have reached the finishing line. NATO membership is therefore seen as a logical and natural outcome of long-running trends in Swedish and Finnish foreign and defence policies since the end of the Cold War and their membership of the European Union in 1995. This view, that uses a highly selective reading of recent history to legitimise current policies, has become increasingly popular among political leaders who, prior to February 2022, were well known for their principled opposition to NATO membership, such as Finland's Sauli Niinistö (President in 2012-2024).[4]

In the last part, the article evaluates how their NATO memberships impact the geostrategic situation in the Nordic and Baltic Sea regions, and what influence this may have on the structures and practices of Nordic and Baltic Sea cooperation.

A war with surprises

To understand Finland and Sweden's accession to NATO and its implications it is necessary to bear in mind the sequence of events following the tightening of Russia's rhetoric towards Ukraine and NATO in 2021 leading to the all-out attack in February 2022, and to Ukraine and its Western supporters' response. While it may sound obvious, it is nevertheless useful to keep in mind the manner and the context in which they joined NATO. The fact that it happened relatively rapidly during an all-out war in their vicinity and was in itself part of a crisis response from them and their prospective allies, stands in stark contrast with NATO's previous rounds of enlargement. While NATO's post-Cold War enlargement was a contentious issue in Russia–West relations, it nonetheless took place in a less conflictual environment in Europe.

Russia's offensive in Ukraine on 24th February 2022 was not unexpected, but its scale and multiaxial nature came as a surprise. The sounding of the alarm by the US of an imminent attack in the weeks and months before it eventually came, was taken seriously in Finland and in Sweden (Nurmi 2023; Crowley 2021; Mahlamäki 2022). The analysis of the military realities on the ground, however, pointed more towards a strategic strike aimed at occupying Kyiv, replacing the regime there and achieving control of other strategic locations, than to a massive ground offensive with forces that did not really exist on the Russian side (Aholainen 2022). What was expected was a demonstration of strength or an assault with a political purpose rather than a sweeping offensive aimed at the military occupation or full subjugation of all of Ukraine. It may well be that this original Western assessment of Russia's limited war aims was the most accurate analysis of Putin's intentions in February 2022.

As the scale of the attack sunk in, a second surprise followed. Already in the first days of the offensive it became apparent that while the Ukrainian defence forces had to cede large swathes of land to the invaders, they were ultimately able to hold off the attack and inflict significant losses of personnel and

materiel on the Russians. As the rapid takeover of Kyiv failed, and Ukrainian security services foiled Russia's attempt to capture and replace the Ukrainian political leadership with its cronies, Russia's attempted *blitzkrieg* ground to a halt.

It was during this brief moment, from the start of Russia's aggression to the first signs of its successful repulsion a couple of weeks later, that the process that would take Finland and Sweden into NATO, got into full swing.

With, but not of NATO

After the news of Russia's invasion broke, events leading to Finland and Sweden joining NATO unfolded quickly. The prime mover was Finland, bringing Sweden swiftly along in its wake. That they should suddenly have such an interest in joining NATO was yet another surprise following the Russian onslaught. Before war came, political leaders in both Finland and Sweden had repeatedly stressed that no changes in their countries' established policies towards NATO were to be expected. On the eve of the attack President Niinistö urged caution in approaching NATO, as a membership bid would in any case 'be a drawn-out process' (Huhtanen 2022). In an interview with Reuters in January 2022 Prime Minister Sanna Marin stated that Finland's NATO membership was 'very unlikely' while her government held office, that is until at least spring 2023.[5] The drive towards NATO, starting more or less immediately after the attack, was for that reason an unusually quick policy shift, largely explained by the exigency of war in Ukraine, arousing deep seated fears of Russian revanchism elsewhere along its western border.

Finland and Sweden had collaborated closely with NATO since 1994 when they joined the Partnership for Peace programme.[6] Both countries participated in NATO-led crisis management operations and trained regularly with NATO forces in the Arctic and in the Baltic Sea area. In 2014, following the opening of hostilities in Ukraine, they became NATO Enhanced Cooperation Partners, with an intensified joint training and exercises schedule (Pesu & Iso-Markku 2022).

Over the years technical standards were harmonised with NATO. Utilising in part US weapons systems and technology, Finland modernised its defence forces, one branch after another. While relinquishing conscription in 2010,

Sweden continued to invest in a technologically advanced and mobile defence force, best suited for crisis management operations and surveillance tasks. By 2022, both countries had achieved a high degree of interoperability with NATO, expediting their way into the Alliance when the time came (Pesu & Iso-Markku 2024).

Besides cooperation with NATO, Finland and Sweden had actively developed their bilateral defence cooperation (Ojanen 2022). A particularly intensive phase began in 2015, largely reflecting the resumption of traditional threat scenarios placing a resurgent and revisionist Russia at the top of their military and hybrid security concerns. Joint exercises, planning and regular consultations between defence ministers and military personnel built the bilateral relationship into a deep partnership, while it lacked the final step of mutually binding security guarantees and fully integrated military structures.

Relations with the existing Nordic NATO members became closer in the Nordic Defence Cooperation (NORDEFCO) established in 2009. What initially began as a multilateral framework for seeking increased efficiency and synergies in defence procurement and materiel development, gradually took an increasing role in enhancing 'smart defence', interoperability and capacity to act in the Arctic and Baltic Sea Regions (Saxi 2019; Dahl 2021). Significant impetus was given to the cooperation after Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, when the Nordic countries were driven from 'economic to threat-driven defence cooperation' (Saxi 2019; Dahl 2021). The cooperation was, however, limited to developing purely national capabilities and it did not involve joint command structures, or anything that would appear as steps towards actual military alignment.

Even though progress was made in pragmatic and practical cooperation, and a notable convergence of threat perceptions and views of the foreign and defence policy elites in all Nordic countries, aligned or nonaligned, took place (Haugevik et al. 2022), towards the end of the 2010s NORDEFCO appeared to have hit the limits of its substantial development and deepening. Despite convergence of views, national idiosyncrasies remained (Dahl 2021; Mouritzen 2019). In 2017 Sweden and Finland, again in step with one another, joined the UK-led Joint Expeditionary Force, also known as the JEF cooperation. Ultimately, none of these arrangements questioned the fundamentals of their policies of military non-alignment.

In both countries leading centre-right parties had adopted a pro-NATO membership stance early on, but neither pursued it actively.[7] In Finland the Coalition Party (Kokoomus) adopted a pro-NATO position in 2011. In Sweden their political counterpart, the Moderate Party (Moderaterna), had gradually moved towards a similar, if somewhat more lukewarmly expressed stance from 2007 onwards.[8] Similar pro-NATO views were widespread in the defence policy elite and among the ranks of the militaries, although it must be noted that in the wider Swedish–Finnish foreign policymaking community attitudes were generally more reserved.[9] In Finland the possibility of joining NATO was included in official policy formulations as a 'NATO option', whereas in Sweden no such even vaguely stated intent existed.

In the political field, and among the people at large, joining NATO remained therefore a minority view. The basic arguments for and against membership remained the same largely from the 1990s to the 2010s (Forsberg 2023). Traditionally strong social democratic parties were clearly against it, but there were also other political forces who were sceptical about joining NATO. Both countries had redefined and narrowed down their traditional policies of neutrality in the 1990s to military non-alignment, to fit the requirements of their European Union memberships and their participation in the EU's joint foreign policy and security and defence policies. As this allowed for participation in EU- and NATO-led crisis management operations and did not bar them from practical collaboration with NATO, short of entering binding security guarantees, this policy enjoyed broad political and public support.

Furthermore, in Finland, a very popular president at the helm of the country's foreign and defence policy, Sauli Niinistö, was known for his spirited opposition to joining NATO, sharing these views with his even more critical predecessor, Tarja Halonen (2000-2012) (Penttilä & Karvinen 2022: 80-94, 163-69, 236-38). In Sweden, well-known NATO advocates and political heavyweights in the Moderate Party (Moderaterna) such as Carl Bildt and Fredrik Reinfeldt were not willing to expend political capital to further the cause, and in any case felt that Sweden should make its NATO decision in tandem with Finland, if a moment of decision ever came.

Putin hardens his voice

In sum, in neither country, despite some significant proponents for NATO membership, was there serious movement or momentum towards NATO membership prior to February 2022. Pro-NATO views, that undoubtedly existed, were private views. Technical and functional cooperation could be developed bilaterally and multilaterally, but in the absence of a political decision to accept the obligations of a full alliance, these amounted to not much more than enhanced national defence.

This persistence of the traditional views is even more noteworthy since President Vladimir Putin had not only changed his rhetoric and overall tone towards Ukraine earlier in 2021, but also sharpened his message about Russia's general aims to reconfigure the existing European security order.

Without arousing much of a public response from Finland or Sweden, Putin had explicitly demanded that NATO should not expand any further to the east and withdraw its forces to the positions they occupied in 1997.[10] This effectively would have meant an end to NATO's open-door policy to new members, established in the mid-1990s. It would have signalled an acceptance of a Russian veto over its western neighbours' sovereign right to choose their alignment or non-alignment and defence arrangements as they themselves preferred.

Given the weight of the matter it was remarkable how little public interest it prompted in Finland and Sweden at the time of delivery. It appears that, like Putin's bombastic rhetoric in general, it was seen as being directed against Ukraine and the US, and only indirectly touched upon the position of other European non-NATO countries such as Sweden and Finland.

In Stockholm, Putin's demands seem to have passed without much notice, although from what we know about deliberations in Helsinki, they did cause real alarm among the Finnish security policy elite. Decision-makers in Helsinki had already come around to a view put forward by the US intelligence agencies, that Russia's attack on Ukraine was imminent. According to Finnish journalist Lauri Nurmi, who bases his account on extensive interviews with President Niinistö as well as other key decision-makers in Finland and in Sweden, this

was when the balance in the internal argumentation towards joining NATO began to shift in the top leadership in Helsinki, if not quite yet in Stockholm (Nurmi 2023).

As the prevailing opinion was that the two countries, not least due to their existing bilateral defence collaboration, should march in lockstep on the question of NATO membership, this tied the hands of the Finnish leadership, especially when it came to their public utterances. Whatever the concerns and considerations may have been, they were carefully concealed from the wider public on both sides of the Gulf of Bothnia.

Therefore, no indications of a policy shift were visible in either country before the end of February, rather to the contrary. The responses of the decision-making elites were muted and remained along familiar lines. A broad framing of the matter was to see Russia's grievances as directed primarily towards Ukraine and its main Western supporters, the United States and the European Union, and not individual countries such as Finland or Sweden, or even the Baltic republics.

This corresponded with a broadly accepted view that Russia's annexation of Crimea and the beginning of the hostilities in Donbas in 2014 had only an indirect bearing on the security situation in the Baltic Sea Region. While relations with Russia had turned increasingly sour and the general systemic stability had obviously weakened, there was no sense of an immediate or a significantly heightened military threat from Russia. On the Nordic plane, how each country dealt with Russia, remained a strictly national level issue, while Russia did its best to drive wedges between the Nordic states (Mouritzen 2019). Alarming as Putin's demands in December 2021 were, this fundamental view was maintained as the default position until the war intensified in 2022.

Conjoining these views a strong emphasis, by Finland in particular, was put on nurturing its bilateral political and economic relations with Russia and the maintenance of dialogue at the highest level, irrespective of how tense the overall situation was (Arter 2022). While Sweden engaged with Russia relatively less than Finland did after the annexation of Crimea in 2014, the policy of constructive engagement with Russia remained firmly in place in Finland until January 2022, when contacts on the political level came to an end (Mikkola 2023).

Finland and Sweden's aspirations to maintain political contacts with Russia and do whatever was in their power to seek détente should not be confused with a policy of appeasement. On the contrary, both countries, and Finland in particular, made significant investments in their regional and territorial defence capabilities after 2014. When war came in 2022, this allowed them to deliver substantial amounts of defence materiel to Ukraine while maintaining a high degree of readiness in their own areas.

However, even in the changed circumstances following the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the opening of large-scale hostilities in 2022, the perception of a direct threat from Russia in northern Europe was only moderately elevated. A larger risk was perceived to arise from scenarios of either an uncontrolled escalation of the war in Ukraine or a total collapse of its defences. In any case, it was estimated that it would take years, at the least, for Russia to build up its military capabilities on its north-western flank. Whatever conclusions Sweden and Finland might be drawing from the events, they would not be making their decisions at gunpoint.

The wind changes

The first signs that a change in the Swedish and Finnish positions might be imminent came from opinion polls conducted in Finland in the immediate aftermath of the February 2022 attack. The first polls, published only days after the Russian attack, showed a strong increase in the popularity of NATO membership. For the first time ever in an opinion poll conducted on the issue, a majority (53%) of Finns supported NATO membership.[11] Even though analysts had already identified a certain weakening in the Finnish public opinion of views that were strictly against joining the Alliance, the polls published after the attack removed any doubt about which side the people were on in the issue (Weckman 2023). Compared to earlier polls, the intensification of tension in February and finally the opening of full hostilities nearly doubled the support for joining the Alliance in a matter of weeks.[12] In later polls the support for NATO membership grew even higher, peaking at nearly 80% in May and June 2022 after the applications of Finland and Sweden were formally handed in and the accession processes were underway.[13]

A similar, if more muted, trend is visible for Sweden.[14] In spring 2022 some 60% of Swedes on average supported joining NATO, with a little less than 20% remaining against. Swedes, nonetheless, seemed by and large more agnostic over the issue than the Finns were. Levels of support for NATO membership had over the years remained clearly on a higher plane in Sweden than in Finland, where the change of heart in winter–spring 2022 was more dramatic (Wiberg 2023).

The views of the political elites and opinion leaders, as well as most of the media in both countries, tracked the overall trend in opinion polls. As views of the desirability of joining NATO warmed up quickly, it is not easy to ascertain the role of popular opinion in the decision-making on the issue. Despite having become a popular feature in the emerging literature on the topic, the case made for a direct influence of public opinion on decisions made by a select group of elite actors is a tenuous one.[15]

It may simply be that a variety of actors, from the general public to the holders of the highest offices of state, drew the same conclusions from the events in Ukraine and about Russia's behaviour for all practical purposes simultaneously, as part of the same trend. With better access to classified intelligence information before Russia's attack came, some elite actors may have turned in favour of joining NATO already earlier. There is also some evidence that elite perception of the necessity of joining NATO had gradually been growing stronger in both countries as tension increased in late 2021, which is also supported by the almost complete absence of elite opposition to the policy shift after February 2022 (Nurmi 2023).[16]

Given the strength of the swing in opinion, in Finland in particular, it is unlikely that relatively well-informed political or other elite actors would have drawn altogether different conclusions from the escalation of Russia's aggressive behaviour. It is more likely that the conduct of everyone involved resembled herd behaviour, movement without centralised direction and clear-cut causal relationships.

The way the herd moved in the spring of 2022 led both countries decisively towards NATO membership. As it moved, it was clear that public opinion did play some kind of a role in the process, which is in itself a remarkable feature

when it comes to foreign policy decision-making on such a sensitive, strategic issue. As a Finnish political scientist Tuomas Forsberg has stressed, occasions where public opinion has played such an integral part in the decision-making process are not only rare in Finnish and Swedish political history, but also internationally.

Be that as it may, in neither country was public opinion any longer a hindrance to making a favourable decision about joining NATO. As the figures in the polls left little room for doubt, foreign policy leaders and political parties could proceed relatively safely to the preparatory stage of the talks with NATO countries. Earlier talk about the need to hold a referendum on the issue in Finland, something that President Sauli Niinistö had repeatedly stressed as a precondition for joining the Alliance, was promptly removed from the agenda.

It is also noteworthy that what changed was not only the popular perception of NATO membership; what was more important was how the overall perception of Russia as a 'lost cause' consolidated itself. In both countries policies towards Russia had traditionally stressed the maintenance of as friendly relations as possible, as long as there was any hope of a positive turn in Russia's internal development and engaging it with the international community.

The main motivation for Finland to remain outside of NATO since the 1990s had been concerns over Russia and its reactions. In Sweden, the equation had involved a similar appreciation of Russia's but also of Finland's position. The maintenance of the regional *status quo*, where Finland and Sweden remained militarily non-aligned, yet functionally integrated with the EU and other Western organisations, was in Finland known as 'stability policy'. Maintaining constructive relations with Russia and avoiding antagonising it was by far its most important component (Penttilä & Karvinen 2022). However, to function properly, 'stability policy' required Russia to accept the *status quo* in the north as well. If it wanted to see Finland and Sweden as non-aligned countries in the future, it could not try to interfere in their decision-making and it could not exert pressure on them. With Putin's demands in late 2021, followed by the attack on Ukraine and the strengthening of Russia's imperial claims towards its old western borderlands, all that collapsed.

Finland steps forward

From the available record, it is apparent that the train towards NATO's northern enlargement was earnestly set in motion during President Niinistö's visit to the US in early March 2022 (Nurmi 2023). This was, however, followed by a visit from Sweden's head of government, Prime Minister Magdalena Andersson and long-serving Defence Minister Peter Hultqvist to Helsinki (Andersson 2024). While the full details of their conversations with President Niinistö and Finnish Prime Minister Sanna Marin in Helsinki are unknown, it is likely that a basic roadmap for the realisation of their NATO memberships was then laid out. A crucial part of the understanding was that both countries should approach NATO simultaneously and enter the Alliance 'hand in hand'.

Before the Swedish–Finnish powwow in Helsinki, Niinistö travelled to Washington DC, where he met President Joe Biden in the White House on 4 March. According to the public coverage of their meeting the Finnish president explored possibilities for bolstering US support for the defence of Finland through material support, and that Finland 'was offered a process' through which explorations of a possible joining of NATO could be made. We now know from President Niinistö's own account than an understanding was then reached with President Biden that if Finland applied for NATO membership, it would be taken into the Alliance in an expedited manner (Nurmi 2023). Even though all the members of the Alliance would have to accept and ratify their entry, the decision of the *de facto* leader of the Alliance was what mattered the most.

After a famous telephone call from their meeting in the Oval Office to Prime Minister Andersson to sound out Swedish views, and undoubtedly to inform the Swedes about President Biden's decision, the process of securing the agreement of the other NATO countries to their membership got underway. Despite hesitation among some existing members regarding the advisability of opening accession talks with prospective members as war was still raging in Ukraine, it soon became public information that NATO's doors were indeed open for Finland and Sweden.[17]

A related question was what interim security guarantees would be possible in the critical phase, when they had expressed their wish to join the Alliance but before it was realised. As no-one knew how long it would take before they

would become members of the Alliance, the question of security guarantees was pressing. With uncertainty reigning also about where Russia's war in Ukraine would lead, and what the unpredictable Russian leader would do next, a palpable fear of escalation of the conflict existed. The question of interim security guarantees was resolved in quick order, as the UK government and the US President, and then the other Nordic countries offered unilateral security guarantees to Sweden and Finland, to be replaced by NATO's Article 5 obligations when their memberships would be completed.

The case to join NATO

In both countries domestic decision-making was relatively straightforward when the NATO train was finally moving. Given the widespread reluctance in both countries to even discuss NATO membership earlier, this is in itself remarkable. It shows the full impact of Russia's behaviour in Ukraine, but also the significance of other factors.

First there were the thinly veiled threats to use nuclear weapons, and the display of Russia's new hypersonic missiles that emerged quickly in Moscow after the first military setbacks in the offensive. Even though not making an explicit threat, Moscow's bombastic rhetoric was taken in the West as nuclear scaremongering. In the non-aligned countries Russia's rhetoric underlined their vulnerability. As they were not covered by the security of NATO's nuclear umbrella – and the Alliance's Article 5 security guarantees – they were vulnerable to nuclear blackmail. As events in Ukraine later proved, this blackmail did not really work, but it did leave a lasting impression. However, in spring 2022 when Ukraine's Western supporters were still hesitating to deliver heavy weapons to Ukraine for fear of escalation, there was a general feeling that the Russian pressure campaign was effective.

What also entered the debate now were the claims made by Putin in December to not only halt NATO's eastward expansion but also to roll back its forces to the 1997 positions. While Putin had not directly addressed Finland and Sweden, it was understood that Putin's claim for a veto on NATO expansion applied to them as well. What is remarkable is that, at this crucial moment, there were no diplomatic or political messages from Moscow disputing this reading of Putin's statements. As Russia had consistently maintained earlier,

Finland's and Sweden's foreign and defence policy choices were their own matter. This apparent change in Moscow's attitude weighed heavily in favour of joining NATO as soon as possible. Russia was no longer apparently content with the positions it had had towards the non-aligned countries, but was now attempting to include them in a restored Russian sphere of influence. In light of Putin's demands, to choose to remain militarily non-aligned would therefore also be a significant decision, but a negative one. It would be a decision that would place the non-aligned countries in a grey zone between Russia and NATO, indirectly acknowledging the legitimacy of Russia's claim for an exclusive security sphere.

Not surprisingly, that was unacceptable in Sweden and in Finland. Putin came uncomfortably close to strong-arming them. His strategy was to put Sweden's and Finland's backs to the wall and force them to show what their true colours were. Which they did.

Russia's attack on Ukraine awoke painful historical memories in Finland. The parallel between Stalin's unprovoked attack on Finland in 1939, and Putin's on Ukraine in 2022, were obvious. The lessons of Finnish history spoke strongly in favour of seeking further security guarantees from the West. While Finland had fought for its survival in 1939-40, and narrowly escaped Soviet occupation, the historical lessons of the so-called Winter War were that Finland, let alone any other country, should never be left to face Russian aggression alone (Arter 2022). In 1940 Finland's defences had been on the brink of collapse and only Stalin's wider strategic considerations had prevented him from pushing the offensive to the end. The same had happened in 1944, a second narrow escape for Finland in the end game of World War II. If there was one lesson of history that chimed in Finland in 2022, it was the lesson of never being left alone again (Rentola 2023). According to this line of thought, any possible countermeasures from Russia resulting from Finland's NATO membership could not offset the benefits of having added security guarantees from the West.

Therefore, as the process moved on, a plethora of motivations drove both countries towards NATO.[18] While Putin had generally been assumed to be a rational actor, his decision to attack Ukraine with such poor planning, and faulty intelligence and advance preparations showed how difficult it would be to predict Russia's behaviour as long as he remained in office. His propensity

to take risks seemed uncomfortably high, reminding observers of a Soviet leader from a bygone era, who decided to try to blackmail the US in 1962 by sending missiles to Cuba. Putin's brinkmanship meant that while an attack on Finland or Sweden, not to speak of NATO countries, was unlikely, from this point on it had to be taken account of more seriously. His language, as well as that of other actors in the Russian ruling elite, calling for restoring Russia's power position, also needed to be taken at its word.

The driving forces in both countries were largely similar, but the case for NATO membership was made more strongly in Finland, where there was also more urgency in the matter. What was notable was the way in which the Finnish government showed its willingness to take the lead, and also, if push came to shove, move towards NATO without Sweden. As it happened, there was no need to explore that alternative seriously, but a psychological preparedness existed for it.

In Sweden, Finland's willingness to take the initiative and lobbying for a simultaneous 'hand in hand' approach to the Alliance, helped to tilt the balance in favour of NATO membership. While it is not easy to assess how Finland influenced Sweden's decision-making, its behaviour simplified the equation of pros and cons of joining NATO in Sweden.

Sweden had maintained its military non-alignment in the EU era largely because it served its own interests, just as its neutrality policy had served it during the Cold War. However, concerns over how Sweden's decisions and choices would affect Finland had always been a part of the assessment of Sweden's national interest as well. Had Sweden joined NATO in the Cold War, as the so called *Finlandsargument* went, it would have led to countermeasures by the Soviet Union in Finland. That would then have removed a useful buffer state between itself and the Soviet Union/Russia. Hence, by remaining non-aligned, Sweden helped Finland to manage its relations with the Soviet Union/ Russia, and it gave Sweden the friendly and trustworthy eastern neighbour Finland never had.

It is noteworthy how strongly the *Finlandsargument* still appeared in Swedish foreign and security policy discourse in the 2000s and 2010s. There had been, and still were, concerns in Stockholm that a unilateral change in Sweden's stance towards NATO membership would force Finland's hand and pull the

rug out from under its policy of engagement with Russia. As it happened it was not Sweden, but Russia, that eventually put an end to the regional *status quo* in northern Europe and Finland's cherished 'stability policy'.

After February 2022 nothing but smouldering ruins were left of Finland's and Sweden's Russia policy. But if the former was now willing to move to NATO, alone, if need be, then what was the remaining case for Sweden remaining outside the Alliance?

Applications and …

By early April it was clear that an unusually broad consensus existed in the Finnish parliament in favour of joining the Alliance. In Sweden, the process took a little bit longer, but it closely followed Finland's timetable. If the crucial moment in the Finnish domestic political opinion formation was in March, in Sweden the same happened a few weeks later in April.

The example of, and the pull from, Finland helped the Swedish Social Democrats to hasten their internal deliberations. Another factor at play was the reassuring role of NATO's Secretary General, Jens Stoltenberg, who as a Norwegian Social Democrat had very close contacts in the Swedish foreign and security policy elite and within the Social Democratic government. However, what was crucial to the success of Andersson's government pushing the potentially controversial question of NATO membership through the Swedish *Riksdag* was the fact that the main centre-right opposition party the Moderate Party (*Moderaterna*) had, for all practical purposes, been ready for it from 2015 onwards, if not earlier.

Speculation about alternatives, such as a possible Swedish–Finnish bilateral military alliance, or some kind of Nordic defence union, with guarantees from the West, were short-lived and were not pursued seriously (Korkki 2023). Both countries put a premium on synchronisation of their formal approaches to NATO, meaning their internal decision-making had to reach a final decision more or less simultaneously. The need for a 'hand in hand' approach was particularly strong in Sweden, where the Social Democratic party's rank and file had been traditionally rather sceptical about joining NATO. In a meeting in April in Stockholm between the premiers Marin and Andersson, they noted how the moment for handing in their NATO applications was coming closer, and indeed

how the 'hand in hand' approach seemed to be working at convincing also more reluctant party members to toe the line.

In mid-May 2022 the Swedish and Finnish applications were handed to NATO's Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg. The Alliance immediately fast-tracked their handling. A green light was given at the NATO Madrid summit in late June, and the practical preparations got underway on the official and expert levels of their integration into the Alliance's political and military structures. The ratification process began in the member states.

… ratifications

At this point an unpleasant surprise awaited the newcomers. Turkey refused to open the ratification process, accompanied by Hungary. The latter's motivations to postpone its ratification, by almost a year in Finland's case, and almost by two in Sweden's, were a mystery to outside observers all the way to the end. It was obvious that Turkey was engaged in traditional horse-trading.

While Turkey's behaviour caused anxiety in high quarters, Finland appears to have been a sideshow in the bargaining from the outset (Korkki 2023). Turkey did not manage to extract anything significant from Finland before its ratification. Finland subsequently became a member of the Alliance on 4 April 2023.

With Sweden, Turkey was more reluctant and started a complex game of seeking concessions not only from Sweden but also from the US, where Congress had stalled its request to buy F-16 fighters. After prolonged negotiations around several tables, where the exact nature of the concessions remained unclear, Turkey finally ratified Sweden's accession in February 2024, followed by Hungary in the next month. Sweden became NATO's 32nd member on 11 March 2024.

The prolonged ratification process stretched nerves, and caused consternation in Sweden in particular, but from the point of view of their political and military integration with NATO, it gave the entrants useful lead-time to prepare for the full membership.

From the get-go in February 2022, the membership train steamed ahead with breath-taking speed. Besides giving more time to sort out technical issues, the domestic political and public opinion required time to become accustomed to the changed geopolitical realities. A discussion on what the Alliance's implications were for their foreign and security policies slowly got underway. What also needed to be digested were the full implications of their NATO memberships not only for their defence plans, but also for how their strategic cultures might be changing. Nuclear weapons and NATO's nuclear strategy entered the public imagination with renewed force.

While accepting their militaries' involvement in international crisis management, general attitudes towards defence had in both countries traditionally emphasised national autonomy. Finland's and Sweden's defence forces had developed a strong culture of self-reliance. In Finland this was coupled with a deeply entrenched mission to defend the territorial integrity of the country itself, commitment to maintain large reserves and general conscription, with less focus on international defence cooperation. Symptomatically, the first responses to joining NATO stressed how little the giving up of non-alignment would change Finnish strategic culture and thinking. It was as if the two-way nature of NATO's security guarantees was not fully grasped.

In spring 2024, as the countries' technical and political integration into the Alliance proceeded, a deeper process of political and societal adjustment had barely started. On the level of identity and sense of belonging, not much more than relatively superficial platitudes about joining a group of nations where 'we have always belonged' were expressed.[19]

On the other hand, there were the first signs of serious thinking on what had just come to pass. As the first wave of accounts and analyses of the events of 2022-24 began to emerge, there were also indications of a debate on where NATO's northern enlargement had entered the realm of history. Different interpretations appeared on the motivations and the implications of the decisions, and on the interplay between change and continuity.

Related to this was a discussion about how the overall geostrategic conditions were changing in northern Europe, and what kind of adjustments were underway in the institutions of Nordic and Baltic Sea regional cooperation.

A U-turn or one more step on a road already taken?

Experts and scholars, as well as political decision-makers involved in the events of 2022-24, have started to provide first comprehensive accounts and analyses of the motivations and immediate consequences of the latest round of NATO's enlargement in northern Europe.

There is no doubt that in both countries the entering of the Northern Atlantic Alliance has been understood and framed as a significant historical turning point. However, opinions differ on whether their NATO decisions should be seen as fundamental and sudden breaks from longer historical continuities caused by a sudden crisis, or whether they should be seen as the culmination of incremental change that had been underway for a longer period of time.

The first view sees Sweden's and Finland's NATO accession as an entirely new phase, a U-turn in the long-running trends in their foreign and security policies where they have sought to maintain a degree of autonomy, capacity to act, and room for manoeuvre in the core areas of maintaining their national security.[20]

Together with the investment in and prioritising of their national assets and their autonomy, they have anchored their international position in either the rules-based institutional order and its multilateral institutions, or in the prevailing power of a balance system, whatever has been on offer at the systemic level. According to this view, defence cooperation between them and with NATO has served not only their immediate, but also their long-term needs. Before full-scale war in Ukraine came in 2022 there was no movement, and no perceived need to move, towards full NATO membership in either country. For example, days after Russia's attack came in February 2022, President Niinistö sought to temper the rising pro-NATO tide of opinion by highlighting that NATO membership alone would hardly be enough to guarantee the security of the country (Forsberg 2023). As is known, Niinistö too, changed his views on the matter with the growing pro-NATO tide. Therefore, in the absence of any dramatic changes in their external environment, their non-alignment could have served them well long into the future. Content as they were with their existing security arrangements, and the basic framework of their relations with Russia, neither country was about to join NATO in the foreseeable or even more distant future.

In the second interpretation, the events of 2022 should not be seen so much as a radical departure from earlier policies and patterns of thought, but as a critical juncture in a path-dependent process, that was already bringing the nations closer to NATO and its structures.[21] According to this view, the step to full NATO membership was not only a logical one, but also relatively short. As Robert Dalsjö has said, Sweden's 'long farewell to neutrality' began in 1990 with its decision to seek EU membership.[22] While, according to this view, there has been nothing predetermined in the process, earlier developments nonetheless created the conditions for their smooth elevation to full membership. Existing collaboration and harmonisation also meant, when the moment of decision came, that the outcome of NATO membership was considerably more likely than any of its alternatives.

A related discussion has emerged as to what extent both countries were, for practical purposes, already integrated into NATO structures in all but name before 2022. If not yet allied, then at least aligned, having effectively relinquished their statuses as military non-aligned countries as NATO's Enhanced Cooperation Partners since 2014 (Pesu & Iso-Markku 2024).[23] In this view, their decisions merely affirmed already existing developmental trajectories.

A sub-theme in the latter explanations has been whether the foreign and security policy elites, among whom support for NATO membership was widespread already well before the escalation of tension with Russia in 2022, merely waited for an opportunity to tilt the balance in the national discussion and press ahead with NATO membership when the opportunity came (Nurmi 2023). Most scholars, however, seem to subscribe to the view that the process of their entering NATO was a highly contingent one, an undetermined process, and difficult to explain with a small set of variables only (Pesu 2023).

While the importance of Russia's attack for their decisions to seek additional security guarantees in NATO is obvious, there is some variance in the existing explanations as to the significance of domestic factors, such as the role of public opinion, political parties, and the role of individuals and other political and security elite actors at crucial moments of the decision-making process. Another matter is the question of the extent to which Western countries, the US in particular, encouraged or created a 'pull factor' for them joining the Alliance. The pull factor thesis has by now become a staple of Russian propaganda,

that also discounts Finnish or Swedish agency in the process. All the available evidence, however, points towards a strong agency of both Sweden and Finland in determining what happened and how it did, the very agency Putin wanted to rob them of.

Counterfactuals about Ukraine's collapse

A separate, but no less interesting discussion has concerned the ways in which the external environment influenced not only Sweden's and Finland's decisions to seek NATO membership, but also the very feasibility of their realising this goal. The question of whether NATO's door really was initially open for them in March 2022 has been noted earlier, and it is widely acknowledged that within NATO, the decision-making on the matter was swift. It was conjoined with a wish that once they were in the process, they should be taken into the Alliance quickly.

Another matter that has aroused a plenty of speculation is the course of the war in Ukraine during spring 2022. As Ukraine's defence did hold, a discussion of alternatives and 'what might have happened', deals with counterfactuals. However, posing and addressing counterfactuals and what-if questions is a valid method of assessing decisions and their alternatives. In any case, posing these counterfactuals has been an important feature of public debate, especially in Finland, since spring 2022, among other things forcing President Sauli Niinistö to come vocally out in the open to defend his legacy (Nurmi 2023).

The crux of the matter is whether Finland and Sweden waited too long with their NATO applications, and what the risks were of having left the decisions until a real crisis – a full scale war – erupted in Europe. Would an earlier decision on NATO membership, say by 2021 at the latest, been a more diligent way to secure the safety and the interests of both countries? Did their leaderships engage in brinkmanship of a kind on their behalf?[24]

As scholars we can only speculate what the consequences might have been had Ukraine's defence collapsed in February–March 2022, and in particular if Russia's aim of removing the Ukrainian leadership in the first phase of the war had been successful. Even though they may seem far-fetched, these kinds of

speculations have, however, been rife in Finland since the war began. How likely would it have been that NATO either would have kept its doors open for new members, or that its leading powers would have provided additional security guarantees to Sweden and Finland, when Russian special forces took over Kyiv? How appealing would the alternative of a non-aligned buffer zone between the core areas of NATO and Russia's expanded security sphere have been then?

According to this view, the outcome of the first weeks of fighting in Ukraine was instrumental in creating the political conditions for Finland and Sweden's opening of their membership talks with NATO. Furthermore, Ukraine's success in fighting off the Russian onslaught created a breathing space for the Western countries, led by the US, to stabilise the situation, and to organise their financial support and materiel deliveries. They were also able to deal with the issue of Ukrainian refugees in an orderly manner. The same breathing space was used to open the potentially thorny question of NATO's expansion within the Alliance.

It is imaginable that in a case of a rapid collapse of Ukraine, diplomatic dialogue with Russia would have been resumed from where it was left in January–February 2022. German, French, British and EU leaders had been most keen to negotiate with the Russian leader Vladimir Putin all the way to the eve of the eventual offensive. No hindrances had existed to travelling to Moscow and hearing out Putin's concerns. While the atmosphere would have soured, it is possible that these talks would have been resumed, at least with the continental European leaders. But unlike before the war, there would have been new facts on the ground, possibly limiting even further the autonomy and freedom of choice for the non-aligned countries, not to speak of what may have been left of an independent Ukraine.

It is well imaginable that in these circumstances there would have been less appetite in NATO for a rapid enlargement along Russia's borders in the north. In this scenario, the talks with the aspiring members would have been postponed to a less turbulent future, meaning possibly a more turbulent present for them.

Another counterfactual is how Finland and Sweden would have reacted to a limited Russian offensive in the east of Ukraine in 2022, as was actually expected in many quarters in the West. Given the widespread scepticism

towards NATO membership in both countries prior to 2022, it is conceivable that this alone would not have tilted the balance towards NATO membership. According to this view, while other factors that had been accumulating over the years created the necessary conditions for NATO membership, they were not sufficient. The key ingredient in the mix, the *conditio sine qua non*, was the way Putin invaded Ukraine in February 2022. Without that both Sweden and Finland would have maintained their existing defence arrangements indefinitely.

History on the move

Even though the significance of their earlier cooperation with NATO and their defence forces' compatibility with the Alliance have been stressed, it is no wonder that the public sentiment in both countries has been imbued with a sense of momentous, historical change. This sense of change reaches several levels.

Whereas in the case of Finland its seeking of security guarantees to balance a menacing power in the east is a less novel feature in its security thinking than it may seem at first, in Sweden's case entering a full-fledged military alliance changes the way in which a long succession of governments in Stockholm have seen the country's geopolitical position and international role. By joining NATO, Sweden has not only cast away its policy of military non-alignment, but also the ideational remnants of its policy of neutrality that served as the anchor of its state identity and foreign policy in the era of World Wars and the Cold War in the 20th century, and arguably even earlier (af Malmborg 2001). On the other hand, joining NATO also reinforces a more pragmatic, *realpolitik* tradition in Sweden. In the Second World War Sweden adjusted its wartime neutrality first in favour of Hitler's Germany, and when the tide turned, in favour of the Big Three. During the Cold War, Sweden was involved in extensive intelligence cooperation and contingency planning with NATO countries (Aunesluoma 2003; Holmström 2011).

Allying itself militarily with countries bordering Russia: Finland, the Baltic states and Poland, Sweden has also re-entered the geopolitics of the eastern half of the Baltic Sea Region. Doing so means a departure from a principle established during the Napoleonic wars in 1812 that drew a sharp line against its strategic involvement or revanchist claims in the lands that once belonged

to the Swedish kingdom at the height of its might, but now were dominated by Russia, and subsequently contested by other European great powers.

Finland, on the other hand, has been no stranger to rapid and even dramatic geopolitical shifts and changes in its fundamental foreign policy orientation. It gained and entrenched its independence in 1917-18 by aligning itself with Imperial Germany. In the Second World War it first sought security from Sweden and its Nordic neighbours, and when that failed, from Germany. During the Cold War, its foreign policy, while aspiring to Swedish-style neutrality, was heavily influenced by the strategic interests of the Soviet Union. As a counterweight, it successfully sought Western recognition and support for its peculiar position as a neutral, liberal democracy, positioned in the Soviet Cold War sphere of interest. As the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, Finland wasted no time in seeking European Union membership and reoriented its neutrality policy towards a narrower interpretation of military non-alignment.

On one level the historicity of their decisions has been understood as a break with the countries' national pasts, where the historical significance of the events is seen in the context of their own, nationally formed, historical narratives. According to these views, by aligning themselves militarily both countries have left behind a long tradition of maintaining an arms-length distance to such alliances and a reliance on their own, independently organised and resourced defence. According to Minna Ålander and Sanna Salo, this reaches the level of identity in both countries, and therefore represents no mere foreign policy change (Ålander & Salo 2023).[25]

On another level, the historical import of their choice has been in how it reshapes their relations with each other, but also with Russia, the perceived main adversary. While Sweden and Finland's territories and resources are a real contribution to NATO's northern defence, their incorporation can also over time be expected to lead to countermeasures on the Russian side. This puts both countries back in their geostrategic place as Western outposts confronting an unstable and potentially threatening eastern power. This sense of a borderland identity is strong in Finland, and NATO membership is unlikely to change that. The positioning of Finland on the East–West fault line runs down centuries, while in Sweden it belongs to more recent, Cold War imaginaries. What remains to be seen is how a sense of increased Russian threat and military vulnerability will now change geopolitical imaginaries in Sweden.

In contrast, less attention has been given to the shifts both countries are now experiencing in their relations with the Baltic states and Poland. Insufficient attention has been given to how their NATO memberships not only have on impact on the Nordic region and the Arctic, but fundamentally also shape the security structures of the eastern and southern Baltic Sea littoral. In the case of Sweden, its contribution to the defence of the Baltic states is salient, but in Finland the focus on the country's own territorial defence, on the Arctic, and the guarding of its 1,300-kilometre border with Russia, has overshadowed its importance in the defence of the wider Baltic Sea Region. Finland's defence forces, including its air force and navy, will require significant adjustment and reform in order to create the operational capabilities for sustained and substantial missions outside the territorial boundaries of the country.

Bridging NATO's flanks

Lastly, some words about Sweden's and Finland's NATO entry from a regional geostrategic and institutional perspective.

The entry of two more Arctic nations into NATO has an impact on the high north's strategic outlook. As Sweden and Finland bring their assets and expertise in Arctic operations to the fold, they also add to the geographic depth of the region's defence.[26] Similarly, their presence and resources in the Baltic Sea area build on the Alliance's existing logistical and operational capabilities. Covering an area stretching almost 2,000 kilometres from southern Sweden to northern Finland, they close the gap between NATO's eastern and northern flanks, extending NATO's control of the Baltic Sea and its shores. With their sheer geostrategic weight, their membership strengthens the security of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania as well. While there are hopes that the region as a whole could represent an 'island of stability' in the increasing tension with Russia, there are also calls for stronger deterrence and increased NATO presence in Finland in particular.

The political significance of their entering the Alliance cannot be overstated. Besides influencing the geostrategic constellation of the Arctic and Baltic Sea areas, their joining of the Alliance opens opportunities for strengthening regional bonds and partnerships. Their military cooperation with Poland and the Baltic states is drawing the countries closer together politically, surpassing

historically rooted misgivings in Sweden and in Finland against alignment with countries in the Baltic Sea's eastern littoral, echoes of which have also been heard recently (Suomi 2023).

In Finland's case the already close relations with Estonia are now extended further south towards Poland. Sweden is also seeing a revitalisation of connections throughout the region. It can be argued that by allying themselves through NATO with Poland and the Baltic states, Sweden and Finland have taken an even bigger historical step than they have in their bilateral relationship or with their other Nordic partners. On the political level, however, the emphasis has been on developing further and deeper Nordic bonds.

While their defence posture, military capabilities and overall expectations regarding defence cooperation with each other and their Allies are unlikely to change in the short term, there are a variety of opinions regarding how the Nordic and Baltic Sea Region as a whole should be positioned and managed in the geopolitical rivalries of the 2020s and beyond.

Russia continues to pose a dynamic challenge to the region and has announced significant increases of troops and equipment stationed in its north-western flank. While the troop increases will take years to be realised, Russia will be a major military force in the area. It will also be actively present in the Baltic Sea, which is a crucial route for its oil exports, which in turn are crucial for its export revenues and its overall economy. Despite overblown rhetoric, the Baltic Sea has not become and will not be a 'NATO lake' in the future.[27]

Growing uncertainty about the long-term commitment of the US to the defence of Europe, aggravated by the rising isolationism in the US Republican Party, has heightened a search for reliable allies among countries that have historically and geographically stood close to one another.[28] The Nordic countries see each other as natural allies, and similar bonds of understanding exist with the Baltic states as well. How this sense of regional belonging and being in a group of reliable allies will influence their foreign policies as a whole remains to be seen.

The membership of all five Nordic countries in the North Atlantic Alliance puts the question of the future shape of Nordic cooperation to the fore. As questions of military security and defence receive increasing attention at various levels

and branches of government, it influences expectations regarding traditional, institutionalised Nordic cooperation beyond the remit of existing bi- and plurilateral forms of defence cooperation, such as the NORDEFCO.

However, as political limitations have been lifted, there is now much more room for Nordic Defence Cooperation to develop into a real sub-regional defence constellation, under the remit of overall NATO planning. On a political level, this does not necessarily need to mean the creation of a Nordic bloc within NATO. Neither are the Nordic positions on all matters aligned (Ojanen 2023). However, already in its second decade of existence, Nordic Defence Cooperation can continue along functional and pragmatic lines. But as the political hindrances have now disappeared for Sweden and Finland's full engagement, the only remaining obstacles to deeper Nordic Defence Cooperation lie in national strategic cultures and entrenched thinking about the priorities of national defence. A way, nonetheless, has been opened to the development of a joint, Nordic, strategic culture over time, and to repurposing of their forces to defend the whole region in an integrated way.

As the agendas of the meetings of Nordic heads of government will be crowded with questions of security and defence, earlier foci of Nordic cooperation may be relegated to the background. This militarisation of the agenda of Nordic and Baltic Sea Region cooperation will have to be balanced with concerted efforts to pursue societal, economic, environmental, as well as cultural issues as its everyday substance matter. As Hanna Ojanen has stressed, the richness of the Nordic cooperation agenda may be a significant resource for the Nordic countries to raise their voice in NATO as the organisation focuses on the civilian and societal side of security.[29]

Still, both countries are newcomers in NATO. In Sweden, it looks like society has yet to follow the leadership in its mental adjustment to the era of alignment and that the full weight of the NATO membership is yet to be digested. In Finland, on the other hand, the significance of its Baltic alignment has yet to sink in. With so much of their attention on Sweden and the strengthening of *Norden*, the full implications of their NATO decision are becoming visible. Questions regarding stationing of troops from other NATO countries on their soil, the building of logistical hubs and NATO command or training facilities, have entered political debate, with the current conservative governments in both countries showing a pragmatic attitude, and more traditional left-wing opponents of NATO being

unenthusiastic. What practical role – if any – Sweden and Finland should play in the maintenance of NATO's nuclear deterrence and its logistics is yet to be determined. In his presidential campaign in 2024, Finland's President Alexander Stubb did not exclude the possibility of stationing nuclear weapons systems in Finland.

This all points towards a conclusion that while the steps taken in 2022 to seek NATO membership may have been short and logical ones, the consequences of their choices are more momentous than they first seemed. As the new geostrategic constellation of the Baltic Sea Region takes shape, their entering of the Northern Atlantic Alliance looks more and more like a U-turn; a very real and fundamental break with their national pasts, and what the region looked like before war came.

Notes

1 Juhana Aunesluoma, DPhil (Oxford, 1998), is Professor of Political History at the University of Helsinki.

2 Reference has been made to the Scandinavian union of crowns in the Kalmar Union (1397–1523), which however was a geographically more limited dynastic arrangement compared to the present-day situation, where Germany, Poland as well as the other Baltic and Atlantic – or Hanseatic – nations were united in one alliance. Gustafsson 2006; Harrison 2020.

3 *Madrid Summit Declaration.* Issued by NATO Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Madrid 29 June 2022. NATO – Official text: Madrid Summit Declaration issued by NATO Heads of State and Government (2022), 29 Jun 2022.

4 For example, President Sauli Niinistö's speech on 4 June 2022 where he said, 'Applying to NATO is not a big leap for Finland, but the next, natural step'. https://www.presidentti.fi/niinisto/en/speeches/speech-by-president-of-the-republic-of-finland-sauli-niinisto-at-the-finnish-defence-forces-flag-day-parade-in-helsinki-on-4-june-2022/

5 Privately PM Sanna Marin may have entertained a more positive view of NATO, but if she did, she hid it carefully from the public. 'Finland's PM says NATO membership is "very unlikely" in her current term'. *Reuters*, 20 January 2022. https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/finlands-pm-says-nato-membership-is-very-unlikely-her-watch-2022-01-19/. For the context of the interviews, see Nurmi 2023. Daniel Fittante has identified a generational shift among Finnish Social Democrats, with PM Sanna Marin's millennial generation as opinion leaders in the accession to NATO. Fittante 2023.

6 For a thorough overview of Finland's cooperation with NATO since 1992, see Pesu & Iso-Markku 2024.

7 On the lack of momentum in Finnish domestic politics towards joining NATO, see Penttilä & Karvinen 2022.

8 Traditionally the Swedish Liberal Party (*Svenska Folkpartiet*) in Sweden had been most clearly in favour of NATO membership, while the centre-right Moderate Party (*Moderaterna*) was more careful in its statements. Forsberg & Vaahtoranta 2001.

9 On the reluctance of Finnish foreign ministry officials to NATO membership before 2022, see Penttilä & Karvinen 2022.

10 Russia Demands NATO Return to 1997 in Security Treaty Proposals – BNN Bloomberg, 17 December 2021.

11 YLE poll published on 28 February 2022. Ylen kysely: Enemmistö suomalaisista kannattaa Suomen Nato-jäsenyyttä | Yle

12 Lauri Nurmi has highlighted a poll published by *Uutissuomalainen* in Finland on 3 February 2022, where 44% were in favour of joining and 24% were against. Those with no strong views of the issue had grown to 32%. While the poll may be an outlier, it indicates that the public mood may have been shifting well before the attack came, but that no majority existed yet for joining. Nurmi 2023.

13 HS poll published on 27 June 2022. https://www.hs.fi/politiikka/art-2000008903207.html

14 'Russian invasion of Ukraine forces Swedes to rethink NATO membership'. *Reuters*, 4 March 2022, https://www.reuters.com/business/media-telecom/majority-swedes-favour-joining-nato-poll-2022-03-04/

'DN/Ipsos: Majoritet säger ja till Nato om Finland gör det'. *Dagens Nyheter*, 31 March 2022. https://www.dn.se/sverige/dn-ipsos-majoritet-sager-ja-till-nato-om-finland-gor-det/

15 Interpretations that stress the significance of public opinion include Arter 2022 and Pesu & Iso-Markku 2024.

16 On the convergence of views, see Haugevik et al. 2022.

17 In contrast to what President Niinistö has said, Risto E.J. Penttilä, a well-connected and informed Finnish analyst writes that there was significant opposition to opening NATO's doors in March 2022 in policy-making circles and the expert community in Washington D.C..

18 A good account of the list of Finnish motivations to join NATO is the speech of Foreign Minister Pekka Haavisto on 22 August 2022 https://valtioneuvosto.fi/en/-/foreign-minister-pekka-haavisto-s-speech-at-annual-meeting-of-heads-of-mission-2022

19 Speech by Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson at ceremony in Brussels to mark Sweden joining NATO, Brussels, 11 March 2024. Speech by Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson at ceremony in Brussels to mark Sweden joining NATO – Government.se.

20 Examples of this view on Finland are Penttilä & Karvinen 2022.

21 Examples of this view on Finland are Pesu & Iso-Markku 2022, 2024, and Nurmi 2023. Matti Pesu has described Russia's attack in February 2022 as a 'transformative shock'. Pesu 2023.

22 Robert Dalsjö's presentation in Brussels, 23 March 2023.

23 For an earlier articulation of the so called 'aligned-thesis', see also Pesu & Iso-Markku 2022.

24 The Finnish president has taken a strong stand against this counterfactual in an account published by Lauri Nurmi. First, according to Niinistö, Ukraine was not about to collapse at any point and Russia did not have enough forces to occupy it. Second, if it did, it would not have had any influence on Finland's NATO membership process. Therefore, it was according to Niinistö completely safe to leave Finland's NATO

membership to the moment when Russia started a large-scale war in Europe (Nurmi 2023). All these propositions can be disputed, starting from Russia's general war aims to the effects of the various scenarios on popular and political opinion in Finland, Sweden and in NATO countries.

25 Pesu & Iso-Markku 2024 do not think identity change is relevant in Finland's case.

26 On the strategic dilemmas of NATO's northern flank before Sweden's and Finland's NATO accession, see Wegge & Keil 2018 and Wegge 2022.

27 On the rhetoric of the Baltic Sea as a 'NATO lake', see Milne and Hall 2024.

28 Views in US on the need for the Europeans to bear a larger share of the defence burden are not limited to the Republican right but are found also on the progressive left of the Democratic Party. Tausendfreund 2023.

29 Ojanen 2023.

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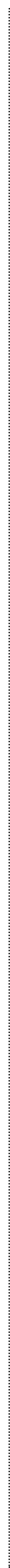

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