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Danish Foreign Policy Review 2025

DIIS · DANISH INSTITUTE FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

Danish Foreign Policy Review 2025



DIIS · DANISH INSTITUTE FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

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Preface

We are pleased to present the 2025 edition of the Danish Foreign Policy Review (DFPR). The annual review covers key topics of relevance 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 2025 Review includes four peer-reviewed, scholarly articles written by experts in their fields.

Each year, the Danish Foreign Policy Review aims to publish rigorous and insightful academic articles that focus on key foreign policy issues and tendencies that have characterised the past year, 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. In this year's review, we have included articles that examine topical issues and recent developments in international affairs from the perspectives of Denmark and Scandinavia, and across institutions of vital importance in Danish foreign policy, namely NATO and the European Union. The abstracts of the articles are available in both English and Danish and can be found at the beginning of the volume.

In his contribution, 'The transatlantic vacation is over: in security and defence, Denmark must rethink where it belongs', Professor at the University of Southern Denmark Sten Rynning describes how the breakdown in transatlantic security relations, which began in February 2025, compelled Denmark to rethink its national security. Thus, Denmark can no longer solely rely on an American security guarantee, and must therefore revive the long-neglected practice of strategy. The same can be argued about Denmark's more than 50 years' membership of the European Union, which has until recently been characterised by ambivalence and a certain degree of pragmatism.

In the following article, 'To the core? Have current geopolitical changes driven EU-sceptic Denmark closer to the center of gravity in Europe?', Professor

Marlene Wind of Copenhagen University takes a retrospective look at the difficult journey Denmark has had with European integration over the past 50 years. In the article Wind suggests that the rapprochement we are currently witnessing from the Danish government is driven less by idealism or a new Europeanism, than by Denmark's own security concerns. In this regard, Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the new American administration and the broader geopolitical turmoil have transformed Danish policy towards the European Union.

Moving from the European Union to a feature characterising three Scandinavian countries, Professor at Aarhus University Anne Mette Kjær, together with Managing Director at the Expert Group for Aid Studies Jan Petersson and Senior Researcher at Chr. Michelsen Institute Elling Tjønnelund, take a comparative look at development policies in Denmark, Norway and Sweden. In their article, 'Ukraine and Africa: the influence of geopolitics on Scandinavian development policies', the three authors compare and analyse how the war in Ukraine and evolving geopolitics have impacted Scandinavian aid policies and disbursement priorities. The impact of geopolitics is notable. It can be seen not only in a significantly larger share of Overseas Development Assistance to Ukraine, but also in a new strategic focus on Africa – and a wish to be visibly present on the continent vis à vis non-Western influence through political and economic cooperation, development assistance and private investments.

Associate Professor at Aarhus University Rasmus Brun Pedersen reviews Danish foreign policy debates over the years in his article, 'Business as usual? Assessing change and continuity in the Danish foreign policy tradition'. Brun Pedersen analyses how change and continuity debates have been difficult to settle and relate to the unreflected understanding of the nature of the Danish foreign policy tradition. Change and continuity continues to be a recurrent theme in Danish foreign policy debates. This includes questions about the status of the support for Ukraine, the militarised activism of the 2000s, the accommodation politics under Scavenius and Munch and the so-called Footnote politics of the 1980s, all of which have attracted significant academic as well as public interest. The article presents an overview of three patterns and demonstrates how scholarship has produced very different interpretations of change and continuity.

Finally, we present a selected bibliography of scholarly books, articles, and book chapters on Danish foreign, security, and development policy published in English, German and French in 2024. The present volume was edited by Head of Unit and Senior Researcher Cecilie Felicia Stokholm Banke and Senior Researchers Jessica Larsen and Mikkel Runge Olesen, assisted by Olivia Garde Flensburg. Jessica Lerche has copy-edited.

The Editors
DIIS, Copenhagen
May 2025

Chapter 1

Abstracts in English and Danish

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

The transatlantic vacation is over: in security and defence, Denmark must rethink where it belongs

Sten Rynning

The breakdown in transatlantic security relations that began in February 2025 compelled Denmark to rethink its national security. Denmark can no longer solely rely on an American security guarantee, and must therefore revive the long-neglected practice of strategy. Denmark has already begun this work when it comes to ways and means: the country has deep pockets and is offering impressive levels of aid to Ukraine with promises to seriously invest in the rebuilding of a capable national defence force. However, when it comes to ends, to the political context that enables strategy, Denmark has barely moved. The decisive challenge for Denmark, one that will define its level of national security for decades to come, will be the imagination of a greatly revamped transatlantic or simply a new European construction, to which Denmark's political leadership can credibly commit the country.

Splittelsen i den transatlantiske alliance, som begyndte i februar 2025, gør, at Danmark skal gentænke målsætningerne, midlerne og metoderne bag den nationale sikkerhed. Det er ikke længere nok at forankre landet i en amerikansk sikkerhedsgaranti, og derfor må Danmark genoprette en længe forsømt praksis for strategi. Danmark er allerede begyndt at gentænke sine strategiske midler og metoder: landet har en stærk økonomi og kan derfor støtte Ukraine på et imponerede højt niveau og samtidig finansiere en seriøs genopbygning af det nationale forsvar. Problemet opstår i forhold til den politiske målsætning, som i sidste ende er grundlaget for al strategi. Her er Danmark endnu kun i startblokkene. Den store udfordring, som vil tegne den nationale sikkerheds-situation i de kommende tiår, vil være at forandre den politiske forestilling om et sikkerhedspolitisk fællesskab – en væsentligt forandret transatlantisk alliance eller simpelthen en ny europæisk konstruktion – som Danmarks lederskab troværdigt kan binde landet til.

To the core? Have current geopolitical changes driven EU-sceptic Denmark closer to the centre of gravity in Europe?

Marlene Wind

The Russian illegal invasion of Ukraine, the new American administration and the broader geopolitical turmoil have quietly but firmly transformed the Danish policy towards the European Union. Denmark has become more emboldened when it comes to foreign and security policy, and the Danish prime minister, who was once seen as Denmark's most EU-sceptic with little sympathy for further European integration, now supports the idea of European strategic autonomy and the need for the EU to decide its own destiny. Looking back at the difficult journey Denmark has had with the European integration project over the past 50 years, the article suggests that in the rapprochement we are currently witnessing, reinforcing the EU's role as a geopolitical actor is driven less by idealism or a new Europeanism than by Denmark's own security concerns.

Den ulovlige russiske invasion af Ukraine, den nye amerikanske regering og den bredere geopolitiske uro har stille og roligt ændret den danske politik over for Den Europæiske Union. Danmark har fået en skarpere udenrigs- og sikkerhedspolitisk profil, og den danske statsminister, som engang blev betragtet som Danmarks mest EU-skeptiske med ringe sympati for yderligere europæisk integration, støtter nu ideen om europæisk strategisk autonomi og behovet for, at EU beslutter sin egen skæbne. Artiklen ser tilbage på den meget vanskelige rejse, Danmark har haft med det europæiske samarbejde de forløbne 50 år, og argumenterer for, at den ændring af dansk europapolitik vi ser nu, i mindre grad er drevet af idealisme eller en nyvunden EU-begejstring, men snarere er et forsøg på at sikre Danmarks egne sikkerhedspolitiske interesser.

Ukraine and Africa: the influence of geopolitics on Scandinavian development policies

Anne Mette Kjær, Jan Pettersson and Elling Tjønneland

This article compares and analyses how the war in Ukraine and evolving geopolitics have impacted on Scandinavian aid policies and disbursement priorities. We find that there are more similarities than differences among the Scandinavian donors who have all so far maintained their ODA at 0.7% of GNI or more, recognising humanitarian and development needs, and probably reflecting a political awareness of the international recognition this entails. The impact of geopolitics, however, is still notable and can be seen not only in a significantly larger share of ODA to Ukraine, but also in the new strategic focus on Africa and a wish to be visibly present on the continent with political and economic cooperation, development assistance and private investments. At the same time, increased aid for Ukraine has meant relatively reduced allocations for Africa. To some extent though, even in Scandinavia, strategic or geopolitical concerns seem increasingly to become more important than concerns for development effectiveness. Such change raises the need for a debate on what effective development cooperation means in the 2020s.

Denne artikel analyserer, hvordan krigen i Ukraine og det internationale geopolitiske fokus har påvirket de tre skandinaviske landes udviklingspolitik. Vi finder, at der er flere ligheder end forskelle mellem de skandinaviske donorlande, som alle har bibeholdt et bistandsniveau på eller over 0,7% af BNI. Dog afspejler geopolitikken sig eksempelvis både i en voksende andel af bistand, der bliver allokert til Ukraine, og i et mere strategisk fokus på det afrikanske kontinent, som indebærer et ønske om at være mere synligt til stede på kontinentet. Samtidig har den øgede bistand til Ukraine medført relativt faldende allokeringer til Afrika. I en vis grad synes strategiske og geopolitiske betragtninger at blive vigtigere end hensynet til at opnå et effektivt udviklingssamarbejde. Disse forandringer rejser spørgsmålet om, hvad et effektivt udviklingssamarbejde egentlig indebærer i 2020'erne.

Business as usual? Assessing change and continuity in the Danish foreign policy tradition

Rasmus Brun Pedersen

Change and continuity are recurrent themes in the Danish foreign policy debate. Debates about the status of the support for Ukraine, the militarised activism of the 2000s, the accommodation politics under Erik Scavenius and Peter Munch and the footnote politics of the 1980s continue to attract significant academic and public interest. Apart from the substantive content, the disagreements about the status of these periods highlight a more principled question of how we assess change and continuity in Danish foreign policy. One reason change and continuity debates have been difficult to settle is a lack of consensus on the nature of the Danish foreign policy tradition, which implies that we either overemphasise or neglect changes in both 'degree' and 'kind' terms in Danish foreign policy history. This article distils three understandings in the literature: a realist understanding that emphasises continuity in the country's adaptation to external pressure, and two variants of dualism that both identify different types of change and continuity. This article presents an overview of the three patterns and demonstrates how they produce very different interpretations of change and continuity. The question is crucial, as the different understandings of 'the tradition' ultimately offer different interpretations of 'who we were and what we are' as a small state.

Brud og kontinuitet har været tilbagevendende temaer i den danske udenrigspolitiske debat. Diskussioner om støtten til Ukraine, den militariserede aktivisme i 2000'erne, tilpasningspolitikken under Erik Scavenius og Peter Munch samt fodnotepolitikken i 1980'erne tiltrækker fortsat betydelig akademisk og offentlig interesse. Ud over det indholdsmæssige i debatten om disse perioders status, rejser uenighederne et mere principielt spørgsmål om, hvordan vi vurderer forandring og kontinuitet i dansk udenrigspolitisk tradition. En årsag til, at debatten om forandring og kontinuitet har været svær at afklare, er manglen på konsensus om karakteren af den danske udenrigspolitiske tradition. Det betyder, at vi enten overbetoner eller overser ændringer i dansk udenrigspolitisk historie. Artiklen identificerer tre forståelser i litteraturen: en realistisk forståelse, der

lægger vægt på kontinuitet i landets tilpasning til ydre pres, samt to varianter af dualisme, som begge identificerer forskellige typer af forandring og kontinuitet. Artiklen giver et overblik over de tre mønstre og demonstrerer, hvordan de fører til meget forskellige fortolkninger af forandring og kontinuitet. Spørgsmålet er i sidste ende relevant, fordi de forskellige forståelser af 'traditionen' giver os forskellige fortolkninger af, 'hvem vi var, og hvad vi er' som småstat.

Chapter 2

Ministerial articles

A strengthened Europe in global uncertainty

Minister for Foreign Affairs Lars Løkke Rasmussen

Introduction

2024 was the first full year under the government's Foreign and Security Policy Strategy of May 2023. Its headlines – security in Europe, global partnerships and a more resilient society - remained as relevant as ever. Brutal wars continued to rage in Ukraine, the Middle East, Sudan and elsewhere. Existing institutions and basic principles for international cooperation remained under pressure. And our own societies continued to be challenged by an increasingly complex threat landscape of political instability, hybrid threats, climate change and much more. As conflicts and uncertainty grew, the solutions too often remained elusive in 2024 – and not for lack of diplomatic efforts.

If the past two years as foreign minister have taught me anything, it is to expect the unexpected. 2024 was a case in point. We saw one of the biggest political comebacks in modern history with the election of President Donald Trump for his second term. We saw North Korean troops fighting on European soil. We experienced a number of cable incidents involving critical undersea infrastructure close to home in the Baltic Sea. And, as the year was coming to a close, we witnessed President Bashar Assad's long and brutal dictatorship fall in less than two weeks, creating the potential for a new beginning in Syria and the wider region.

Despite these developments, Russia's illegal, unprovoked and unjustified war of aggression against Ukraine remained the biggest threat to European and transatlantic security for the third year in a row. Despite the atrocities committed in Ukraine, Russia's illegal war continued to be made possible by Iranian drones, North Korean military supplies and boots on the ground. And without Chinese export of dual-use technology, Russia would not be able to continue the war at the current level.

In light of these developments and Russia's continuous attacks on civilian infrastructure, we witnessed a qualitative gearshift in the military support to Ukraine in 2024. The first F-16 fighter jets were delivered to Ukraine. Denmark, along with many of Ukraine's partners, provided security commitments that cover military and civilian support to Ukraine. EU and G7 countries agreed to a EUR 45 billion loan to Ukraine backed by the future revenues from immobilised Russian assets in the EU. Even though we have done a lot, we can and must do more. Urgently.

We witnessed the expansion of conflict in the Middle East that we had all feared and warned about. In Gaza the war continued for its first full year, continuing to impose enormous suffering on Palestinian civilians and Israeli hostages. Iran launched its first ever direct missile attack on Israel, prompting Israel to attack Iran in response. And in Lebanon, Israel responded to months of missile attacks by Hezbollah with a large-scale offensive before, ultimately, a ceasefire agreement reminded us of the potential of diplomacy. An important reminder when diplomatic solutions seemed difficult to achieve elsewhere.

For our global partnerships, a highlight in 2024 was the launch of the government's new strategy for strengthened Danish engagement with African countries. Denmark and Europe need to bring better offers, less moralism and more equality to the table. Europe must be the preferred partner for Africa. That is why Denmark opened three new embassies in Africa in 2024 while closing two missions where the space for dialogue had become too narrow. The longstanding partnership and potential for increased engagement was confirmed at the Nordic–African Foreign Ministers Meeting in Copenhagen on 2–3 May 2024 with 33 participating delegations.

We also reached out further, to countries across the Asia–Pacific region and Latin America, deepening our partnerships there. I opened a new Danish Embassy in Kuala Lumpur in December, and we agreed new action plans for our strategic partnerships with Vietnam and Australia. We also began work on a new strategic partnership with Brazil. Throughout our engagement, we also worked to strengthen the EU's partnership across both regions – from Mercosur to ASEAN.

Despite the growing challenges to a rules-based international order and their impact on global cohesion, stability and security, 2024 cemented the global

community's continued commitment to strengthening multilateralism. World leaders convened at the UN in New York in September for the Summit of the Future and adopted a comprehensive declaration – the Pact for the Future – to deliver on a reinvigorated multilateral system. The Pact renewed a long-aspired-for ambition to reform the UN Security Council and the international financial architecture, and it also included the first ever global agreement on an ambitious digital and technological future – the Global Digital Compact. But there is still a long way to go to deliver on these goals.

While many challenges remain, an overlooked story of 2024 was that of democracy and political change. In 2024 a total of 74 national elections were held globally with more than 1.6 billion ballots cast. A thought-provoking 35% of elections led to disputed results. But an equally noteworthy 32% – 16 elections – resulted in government turnover – an important indicator of democratic health. This included Botswana, marking the end of nearly 58 years of uninterrupted rule by the Botswana Democratic Party (BDP).

New institutional cycles also came to life in both Europe and the US. Re-elected President of the EU Commission, Ursula von der Leyen presented a wide-ranging and ambitious new policy framework to strengthen the EU's geopolitical foundation and strategic security interests at a critical time. And the incoming Trump administration presented a range of new ideas, many of which are certain to shake up the dynamics of international relations.

Across Danish government offices and departments 2024 was a year of intensive preparations for Denmark's diplomatic 'super-year'. In 2025 Denmark will take up its seat as an elected member of the UN Security Council in 2025–26, hold the Chairmanship of both the Arctic Council in 2025–27 and Nordic–Baltic (NB8) cooperation in 2025, and hold the Presidency of the Council of the EU in the latter half of the year. After years of planning, Denmark is as ready as we can be to help meet the challenges of our time in the UN, the EU, the Arctic Council, and in the Nordic–Baltic cooperation.

I will reflect on these – and more – developments from the year that passed in this chapter. A year which continued to present challenges to the international order, but which did not always deliver the desired solutions. With Denmark represented at the forefront of the international decision-making arena in 2025, we stand ready to do our part. Denmark will lead the way in ensuring

that the UN, the EU, the Arctic Council, and the NB8 group remain relevant global actors that can deliver results on the myriad challenges and conflicts we are currently facing.

Intensified security situation in Europe

In 2024 the war in Ukraine entered its third year. Fighting continued along the frontline with indiscriminate bombings, attacks against critical infrastructure and rising civilian casualties. Russia continued to directly target Ukraine's energy supplies as a means of forcing the Ukrainian population into submission. The humanitarian situation remained dire with nearly 40% of the population in need of humanitarian assistance. Ukraine continued its brave defence and prevented major breaches along the frontline. Russia progressed to some extent, occupying more territory, but paid a high price.

In the Black Sea Ukraine managed to continue to pacify the Russian navy, securing free passage of grain to the world and supporting the Ukrainian economy. Ukraine must be given the tools to defend itself in the most effective way. And international partners and allies agreed on the urgency of continuing support to Ukraine for as long as necessary.

As the European Union continued its support to Ukraine throughout 2024, the need for a strong, secure, and resilient Europe became even more evident. Russia's continued aggression against Ukraine underlined the need for Europe to take greater responsibility for its own security, transatlantic security, and the security of Ukraine.

Important steps were taken to shoulder this responsibility. A dedicated financial instrument for Ukraine was established to ensure predictable financial support of EUR 50 billion between 2024 and 2027 in support of Ukraine's reconstruction and path towards EU membership. The financial ceiling of the European Peace Facility was increased by EUR 5 billion and allocated to Ukraine by establishing the Ukraine Assistance Fund. In May the Council decided to use the windfall profits stemming from immobilised Russian sovereign assets to support Ukraine; and in October the Council established the Ukraine Loan Cooperation Mechanism ensuring loans of up to EUR 45 billion to Ukraine from the EU and G7 partners repaid by windfall profits from the immobilised Russian assets.

For the first tranche of windfall profits generated in 2024, Denmark acted as implementing actor on behalf of the EU for almost EUR 400 million donated to Ukraine through procurements in the Ukrainian defence industry. And in November 2024 the Council extended the important mandate of the EU Military Assistance Mission in support of Ukraine (EUMAM Ukraine) by two years.

In cooperation with allies and partners, Denmark continued its military support to Ukraine. With military support of more than EUR 2.8 billion in 2024, Denmark was the largest contributor to Ukraine relative to population size and among the biggest in absolute numbers. Denmark finished training the first Ukrainian pilots and handed over the first F-16 fighter jets to Ukraine's air force. Denmark co-established the Czech ammunition initiative together with Czechia and the Netherlands, mobilising EUR 1.6 billion from a total of 15 countries and ensuring highly needed ammunition for Ukraine. Denmark also pioneered military donations to Ukraine purchased directly from the Ukrainian defence industry through the Ukrainian government, now known as the 'Danish Model'. Finally, Denmark was among the first countries to agree to security commitments that cover military and civilian support to Ukraine, quickly joined by the Nordic and Baltic countries as well as many other allies and partners.

In terms of civilian support, Denmark continued its support of approximately EUR 709 million since Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022. This support includes humanitarian and acute support, reconstruction efforts, reform efforts, peace and stabilisation efforts, financial and private sector support, as well as health donations. Thus far, Denmark's reconstruction focus has been on social infrastructure and the energy and water sectors. The geographical focus of Denmark's reconstruction efforts is 60% to Mykolaiv and 40% to national efforts in Ukraine.

Denmark continued its diplomatic outreach efforts together with partners and allies to strengthen global support for a just and lasting peace in Ukraine, based on the UN Charter and international law. In June 2024 a Summit on Peace in Ukraine was hosted in Switzerland with more than 100 participating states, including 57 heads of state and government. Throughout 2024 Ukraine organised several meetings under their 10-point peace formula. Denmark was co-lead on a peace formula meeting on energy security, and continued to support and work for Ukraine's energy security. China and Brazil also presented a peace initiative for Ukraine, receiving more limited support of 13

countries signing a joint communiqué. At the same time Russia continued to show no interest in genuine peace talks with Ukraine and did not relax any of its maximalist demands.

The expanding international support for Russia's illegal war in Ukraine continued to have growing repercussions for global security in 2024. To fill its own gaps, Russia continued to rely on drones, missiles and artillery from North Korea and Iran. China's dual-use exports to Russia played a decisive role in enabling Russia to continue its war. Belarus continued to lend its territory to Russia to launch attacks against Ukraine and station soldiers. And, most blatantly, thousands of troops from North Korea were deployed to take active part on Russia's side in the war on Ukraine. These developments were a stark reminder of the need to continue addressing third country support to Russia's war of aggression.

Russia's continued war also renewed the significance of accountability for the crime of aggression, as provided by the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC). Denmark is working with partners to prosecute those responsible for Russia's war of aggression. And in 2024 Denmark decided to ratify the crime of aggression amendment to the ICC Statute. The decision was taken as part of a comprehensive update to the Danish criminal code through which the Rome Statute crimes and other relevant matters of international criminal law were implemented into Danish legislation. With this decision Denmark secured a robust legal framework for combatting international crimes and sent an important signal about the urgency of defending international rule of law.

The Danish Government's support to Ukraine was illustrated by 17 high-level visits to Ukraine throughout 2024, including by the prime minister, myself, the minister for European affairs, and members of parliament. Like in 2023, I also visited Odesa together with the Nordic Baltic ministers for foreign affairs.

In 2024 we celebrated NATO's 75th anniversary. An Alliance founded by the desire to avoid repeating the wars that had plagued Europe for centuries. Much has changed in the past 75 years, but one thing has remained constant: NATO and the transatlantic bond are still the cornerstones of our collective security. In light of the changing security environment, Allies have continued

to strengthen our deterrence and defence capabilities. European Allies in NATO collectively spent more than 2% of GDP on defence expenditure in 2024, amounting to an increase of 18% – the biggest increase in decades. Denmark increased defence spending even further to nearly 2.4% of GDP.

NATO Allies have also committed USD 40 billion of military support to Ukraine, established the NATO Security Assistance and Training for Ukraine (NSATU) and underlined Ukraine's irreversible path to full Euro-Atlantic integration, including NATO membership.

2024 was also the year when Sweden became a member of NATO, making it the first time in 500 years that all Nordic countries are part of the same defence alliance. And after ten years of successful leadership, Jens Stoltenberg handed over the torch to Mark Rutte as the new Secretary-General of NATO. The Danish government looks forward to continuing the excellent cooperation with Rutte after years of close cooperation in his capacity as prime minister of the Netherlands.

Following the abolition of the Danish opt-out on defence in 2022, we also continued to strengthen our participation in the EU Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) in 2024. Concretely, Denmark maintained a presence in 10 out of 12 of the EU's civilian missions by seconding staff across Europe, the Middle East and Africa. Denmark contributed to the EU's military assistance mission to Ukraine, EU Force ALTHEA in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the EU Naval Force ASPIDES in the Red Sea. These contributions helped to maintain the international rules-based order and strengthen the capacities of partners, thereby supporting long-term stability and peace in fragile contexts.

We also continued our participation in the Permanent Structured Cooperation and European Defence Agency. An important step was taken when the European Commission launched its first ever European defence industrial strategy and a proposal for a European defence industry programme. The aim is to ensure a European defence industry that can secure supply, mobilise investments, and deliver quickly and at scale. This will also be a focus area for the Danish presidency of the Council of the EU in 2025. Member states must spend more, better, together, and European.

Enlargement continued to be an area of focus for the EU in 2024. Accession negotiations were formally initiated with Ukraine and Moldova with the first negotiation clusters to be opened in 2025. There was also progress in the Western Balkans, especially in Montenegro, Albania and Serbia. For Kosovo and Serbia, progress in the normalisation dialogue will be crucial for their EU aspirations. In Georgia, democratic backsliding led the EU process to be put on hold. It was important to clearly signal that the actions of the Georgian government had consequences, while also keeping the door open for Georgia to return to a track towards EU membership.

Enlargement requires major reforms – both in the candidate countries and of the EU institutions. It is not a question of whether this will happen, but of when and how.

2024 was a pivotal year when it comes to hybrid threats. We saw intensifying hybrid campaigns targeting European states through influence campaigns, sabotage, cyberattacks, instrumentalisation of migration, and other disruptive actions. The Danish intelligence and security services assessed that Russia is increasingly willing to use hybrid activities to undermine Western cohesion and resolve. Moreover, the Centre for Cybersecurity raised the threat of destructive cyberattacks from 'low' to 'medium'.

Denmark continued to work closely with its allies and partners to counter hybrid threats. In the EU and NATO, 2024 brought an increased focus on systematic information-sharing on hybrid activities and developing comprehensive preventive and response options. In May NATO condemned Russia's cyberattacks, acts of sabotage and other malign activities carried out against Czechia, Estonia, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and the United Kingdom.

In parallel, the EU established a new framework of restrictive measures in order to target Russia's global destabilising and hybrid activities. In late 2024 we witnessed a number of damaging attacks on pipeline and telecommunications cables in the Baltic Sea region. This underlined the urgent need for enhanced surveillance and protection of critical undersea infrastructure. Furthermore, it highlighted the need for increased cooperation in the Nordic and Baltic Sea region in particular, and across the EU and NATO in general, to increase our

resilience. Unfortunately, there are no indications that hostile hybrid activities will decrease in 2025. On the contrary, we can expect that Russia is willing to escalate this course and use hybrid means even more aggressively.

Denmark's sanctions policy remained unchanged during 2024 as we continued to advocate for the toughest possible sanctions against Russia that the EU can agree upon. With our strong push, the EU reached agreement on three additional packages of sanctions in 2024. Among the many measures introduced, particularly anti-sanctions circumvention measures and new maritime measures to counter the Russian shadow fleet should be particularly highlighted. For the first time the EU also introduced sanctions against Chinese and other entities supporting Russia's continued aggression against Ukraine. Last but not least, the EU agreed on two new sanctions regimes against Russia: one targeting human rights violations in Russia in response to the tragic death of Alexei Navalny in February 2024, and another addressing Russia's global hybrid threats.

As more sanctions against Russia have been introduced during 2024, Russia increased its efforts to circumvent these measures, relying on multiple networks and third countries to access restricted goods and financial services. The EU has introduced several measures including new sanctions to combat circumvention. Also, Denmark set up a task force to enhance cooperation and information sharing between relevant authorities and support our common efforts against sanctions circumvention.

The Russian shadow fleet continued to cause deep concern in 2024 as it remained one of Russia's primary tools to circumvent sanctions and the G7 oil price cap. The shadow fleet also remained a risk to the environment and maritime safety. About a third of the Russian government's revenues and two-thirds of total exports were oil and gas-related. Russia continued to sell oil above the G7 oil price cap on the world market, primarily to China, India and Turkey, but longer transport routes also meant higher costs. Since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, China and India have become the primary importers of Russian oil and gas, while China replaced the EU as the largest exporter of goods to Russia.

In June 2024 the EU adopted the 14th sanctions package against Russia, which included innovative and substantial measures against the shadow

fleet, including designations of individual vessels. Further vessels were listed in the 15th sanctions package against Russia in December and a total of 79 vessels have now been designated by the EU. In December Denmark and six other countries announced an additional joint measure related to insurance to further counter the shadow fleet. Furthermore, the EU and 46 countries adopted a 'Call to Action' against the shadow fleet in July at the EPC meeting in the UK.

Sanctions are an important reason why Russia's economy is increasingly under pressure. While Russian official figures cannot be fully trusted, most indicators continued to show signs that Russian economic growth peaked in mid-2024 and is expected to slow down in 2025. The labour market lacks about 1.5 million skilled workers. Moreover, nominal wages are rising leading to rising inflation. Production in non-military industries has stagnated, while production in war industries has more than doubled since 2022. As the Russian Central Bank has raised interest rates significantly to curb rising inflation, the civilian part of Russia's economy has been hampered. Economic collapse is unlikely in the short term, but the economic imbalances are increasingly affecting Russia's economy and future growth prospects.

The Arctic is also affected by increased geopolitical competition and tension. Russia seeks to demonstrate its power through military build-up and aggressive and threatening behaviour in the Arctic. This results in a greater risk of escalation, even though the war in Ukraine has made it more difficult for Russia to fulfil this ambition. At the same time, we must be clear-eyed when it comes to China's long-term strategic interests in the Arctic, and vigilant in the face of China's military cooperation with Russia in the region. The developments in the region call for increased efforts, and we will continue to work closely with our allies and partners to advance our interests in the Arctic.

NATO has increased its focus on the Arctic and High North in recent years. We welcome this course within NATO. NATO can do more to its vigilance in the region to deter aggression and respond effectively to emerging threats and challenges in the region. The Washington Summit Declaration of July 2024 emphasised that the historic accession of Finland and Sweden to the Alliance makes NATO stronger – not least in the High North.

Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine caused a fundamental change in the international cooperation on the Arctic. In the Arctic Council, Norway has steered the organisation through challenging times as Chair since May 2023. A main priority was to safeguard the Arctic Council without re-engaging in political cooperation with Russia. In February 2024 the seven like-minded states of the Arctic Council, including the Kingdom of Denmark, agreed to allow the Council's working groups to resume their work in online meetings. Within the Kingdom of Denmark, Greenland, the Faroe Islands and Denmark made preparations throughout 2024 for the Kingdom's Chairmanship in 2025. Making sure that the Arctic Council is vibrant and relevant through increased activities at the project- and working group-levels is a central priority.

In the Middle East, the Israeli–Palestinian conflict intensified dramatically in 2024, worsening the humanitarian crisis in Gaza and creating instability across the broader Middle East. The humanitarian situation in Gaza reached catastrophic levels, with 1.9 million people displaced and the death toll exceeding 45,000 – most of the casualties being women and children – since the outbreak of hostilities following Hamas' terrorist attack against Israel on 7 October 2023. Denmark significantly increased its humanitarian aid, allocating an additional DKK 277 million in 2024 to humanitarian efforts through UN agencies, the ICRC, and Danish civil society organisations in addition to existing core contributions. Yet access for humanitarian aid in Gaza remained perilously restricted.

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) itself faced growing challenges in 2024. Israeli allegations regarding ties to Hamas culminated in legislation adopted by the Knesset on restricting the agency's operations in the occupied Palestinian territory. Denmark, alongside the EU, condemned any attempt to abrogate the 1967 agreement between Israel and UNRWA, or to obstruct its capacity to operate its mandate.

In the West Bank violence intensified in 2024 including an increase in settler violence against Palestinians. Denmark was highly supportive of EU sanctions targeting extremist settlers. In Palestine, a technocratic government under the Palestinian Authority (PA) was formed. Prime Minister Mohammad Mustafa presented a plan for reform of the PA in various sectors. Denmark played an active role in promoting support for Palestinian reform efforts by the EU,

underscoring the importance of PA reform and capacity building for achieving a two-state solution.

The International Court of Justice (ICJ) issued an advisory opinion deeming Israel's continued presence in the occupied Palestinian territory unlawful. The ICJ also ordered a series of provisional measures against Israel in a case brought by South Africa concerning alleged violations of the Genocide Convention. In parallel, the International Criminal Court (ICC) issued arrest warrants for leaders from Israel and Hamas for crimes against humanity and war crimes.

The conflict's spillover into the wider region escalated tensions in 2024. Hostilities between Israel and Iran, previously confined to proxy confrontations, erupted into direct military exchanges in April with Israel carrying out an airstrike on the Iranian consulate in Damascus and an Iranian missile attack on Israel. In Lebanon, the conflict between Israel and Hezbollah escalated further, culminating in a ground offensive in southern Lebanon in October and airstrikes against Hezbollah strongholds in Beirut and elsewhere. The conflict caused widespread displacement and destruction of critical infrastructure.

By November a long-awaited ceasefire between Israel and Hezbollah brought substantial de-escalation. This was a welcome development seen as a crucial step towards regional stability.

In Syria, the collapse of the Assad regime in December ended more than 54 years of brutal dictatorship and marked the beginning of a new chapter for the country. An interim government signalled willingness for reform and reconciliation, but much work remained to be done. Denmark and the EU responded through open dialogue with the new leadership, but also asked for concrete and visible results.

The Red Sea maritime security situation deteriorated further in 2024. The Houthis carried out more than 100 attacks on commercial vessels, sinking two ships and killing four crew members. A major environmental disaster was only narrowly avoided following the attack on the oil tanker MV Sounion, due to a salvage operation by the EU operation Aspides. Throughout 2024 Denmark significantly contributed to military maritime efforts in the region, including with frigate and staff officer contributions to Aspides and the US-led, offensive coalition to protect critical global trade routes and ensure maritime stability.

Global partnerships and building alliances

The importance of forging partnerships with countries beyond Europe and the US only increased in 2024. More than ever, Denmark's foreign policy interests in 2024 relied on successfully sustaining and expanding partnerships and alliances with the Global South. Denmark and the EU must be a preferred partner for most countries if we want to remain geopolitically relevant in an increasingly fractured world. Strong cross-regional partnerships have become a prerequisite for defending and developing a world order based on international law and multilateral cooperation, maintaining the international pressure on Russia and addressing global challenges such as climate change and irregular migration. Moreover, global partnerships remain crucial for entering new markets and developing new engines of growth, ensuring Danish wealth and prosperity in the long run.

This has been the analysis underpinning my emphasis on promoting more equal and multifaceted partnerships, particularly on the African continent, but also with partners with whom we share values and interests in Asia, Latin America and the Pacific. It also served as the backdrop for an overall strengthening of our diplomatic footprint in Africa, where we decided to open three new Danish embassies in Tunisia, Senegal and Rwanda respectively.

The new Danish strategy for strengthened engagement with African countries released in August 2024 marks a strong wish to engage more with African partners. In 2024 I visited the African continent extensively to enhance genuine dialogue and to engage actively and equally with African partners who expect Denmark and the EU to deliver and listen more.

When we listen to our partners we realise that many of Denmark's traditional development partners yearn for a relationship extending beyond traditional donor–recipient roles and towards more diverse, and above all *equal* partnerships. Luckily Denmark has a lot to offer them, as a trading partner, in sector-based government cooperation, as a development partner and as a reliable foreign policy ally. It is neither Denmark's nor Europe's job to dictate the future of our partners. This year, I aimed to be more upfront, honest and above all pragmatic in identifying areas of overlapping interests, thus creating more resilient partnerships based on common ground.

Eleven of the world's twenty fastest growing economies in 2024 were located on the African continent. In line with the strategy, we worked to bring Danish business more into play as a key agent when we engage with partners. With the new strategy, the Danish government will also allocate additional funds to the export and investment fund of Denmark (EIFO) and the investment fund for developing countries (IFU) to help Danish companies seize new opportunities on the African continent. Together with a targeted effort to enhance cultural and knowledge exchange, the ambition is to broaden both the scope and the depth of our relationships with partners.

Equal partnerships are a two-way street. 2024 also saw the establishment of the Alliance of West African States (AES) by Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger. Dialogue was complicated by this decisive move away from constitutional order, a rejection of the regional organisation ECOWAS by the central Sahelian states, and the continued rapprochement with Russia and hostile rhetoric towards EU member states. Over the course of 2024 all three central Sahelian states also saw a shrinking political and civic space. This development severely impeded the prospects for meaningful cooperation with European partners, including Denmark. As a consequence, Denmark decided to close our embassies in Ouagadougou and Bamako, focusing our attention and diplomatic clout on bilateral relationships where Danish involvement mirrors partner interest and willingness to engage constructively.

The new political reality urges a more interests-based approach to Danish foreign and development policy. Using tools from foreign, security, trade and development policy must ensure a 'whole of Denmark' approach as a way of thinking about partnerships.

In December 2024 Egypt's president Sisi visited Denmark, marking the first state visit by an African country since the launch of the Africa's Century strategy, as well as the first non-European country received by the new King and Queen of Denmark. Egypt and Denmark signed a strategic partnership agreement, including the launch of a bilateral Business Council. Egypt is an important partner for Denmark and the EU, among other things in relation to migration, renewable energy production and regional stability.

Much akin to the Danish approach, new winds have also refreshed the EU's partnership approach. In line with the Global Gateway Strategy, the EU has

shifted its focus away from traditional development aid and towards an integrated approach that combines development and humanitarian aid with investments, trade and security aspects. The EU must position itself to become the preferred partner for more countries in Africa, Latin America and Asia. As neighbours, Europe and Africa need each other to pursue joint opportunities and solve shared challenges stemming from instability, pressure from irregular migration, and climate change.

By December 2024 Denmark was engaged in more than 20 Global Gateway investment projects around the world, and I have personally pushed for Danish companies to engage in Global Gateway initiatives related to the green and digital transition, energy, transport, health systems and education in the Global South. To facilitate this work we have earmarked an additional DKK 295 million from the 2025 development aid budget to Global Gateway projects on the African continent and allocated DKK 73.5 million in support of a new trust fund in the European Investment Bank assisting the least developed countries with technical assistance and capacity building.

In an uncertain world we must keep our friends even closer. In 2024 I participated in a number of joint Nordic visits, including a visit to Ghana by the five Nordic foreign ministers, where I participated in the opening of the ship-in-a-box initiative, a great example of Nordic–Ghanaian cooperation. The trip illustrated the high degree of trust and cooperation between the Nordics, while also demonstrating the unique Nordic brand and its potential impact when cooperating with African partners.

The shared Nordic ambition to strengthen cooperation with African partners also served as the backdrop when Denmark successfully hosted the 21st edition of the Nordic–African Foreign Minister’s meeting (NAFM) on 2–3 May 2024. The meeting gathered 33 delegations, including 16 African and all five Nordic foreign ministers, for substantial discussions centred around multilateralism, peace and security, and increasing trade and investments. As a result, the African–Nordic Business Forum was institutionalised as a part of the NAFM to further strengthen the focus on business, trade, and investment promotion between African and Nordic countries. Denmark consolidated the results in a Chair’s summary of deliberations, focusing particularly on the multilateral track, including UN Security Council and IFI reforms.

2024 was also a year of significant developments in a number of African conflicts. In the Horn of Africa, we strengthened Danish engagement, particularly our humanitarian assistance to Sudan, where the ongoing conflict between the Sudanese armed forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RFS) continued unabated. At the end of the year more than ten million people were internally displaced, and around 2.3 million people had fled to neighbouring countries. Around 25.6 million people – approximately half of the Sudanese population – were food-insecure and famine was identified in five areas. The country was de facto divided between SAF, RFS and other armed groups, and a number of external actors continued to fuel the conflict, protracting the hostilities and destabilising the region.

In Somalia, the UN Security Council formally adopted the new AU-led peacekeeping mission, AUSSOM, replacing ATMIS. Ongoing discussions in the Security Council, on which both Somalia and Denmark will serve in 2025, pertained to the prospects for UN funding of the mission, recalling UNSC resolution 2719 (2023) allowing UN-assessed contributions to finance up to 75% of mission costs.

In June 2024 Denmark was elected to the UN Security Council for the period of 2025–2026. I was present in the General Assembly during the vote and clearly felt the strong sense of confidence – and responsibility – entrusted in Denmark as we received 184 votes – the highest number of votes of the five newly-elected members. Our priorities on the Council reflect longstanding Danish focus areas, including international law, rethinking crisis responses, addressing the effects of climate change on peace and security, and implementing the women, peace and security (WPS) agenda. Above all, we vow to work constructively with fellow members to help the Security Council function and achieve results, even under difficult conditions.

And conditions are difficult. Throughout 2024, the Council remained challenged by great power rivalry and global mistrust, especially in relation to the wars in Ukraine and Gaza. Yet the Council was not paralysed. It continued to act in response to crises and conflicts across the world, including many that receive only scarce media attention such as those in Central African Republic, Haiti, Libya, Somalia, Sudan and South Sudan. Even in response to Gaza, one of the most divisive topics on the Council agenda, the Council agreed on a number of

resolutions. The fact that the majority of those resolutions were spearheaded by elected members highlighted the bridge building role played by elected members in the current geopolitical climate.

While the Security Council remained indispensable as the only forum that enables the US, China, and Russia to meet on a regular basis, the Council also remained in dire need of reform. Its composition reflects the world of 1945 rather than the 21st century. In 2024, the longstanding debate on Security Council reform gained new momentum as leaders from Africa, Asia and Latin America heightened their demands for better representation on the Council. I fully understand these demands, which Denmark has supported for a long time as part of our efforts to futureproof the multilateral system.

In September the annual opening of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) took place against the backdrop of a UN system under increased pressure. I participated in the high-level week and met with counterparts from across the globe, including colleagues from Benin, Brazil, China, Ethiopia, India, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine, Saudi Arabia and Sierra Leone. During many of the meetings the need for reforms of global governance institutions emerged as a unifying theme.

During UNGA world leaders also gathered for the Summit of the Future, where they managed to adopt a political declaration on a reformed multilateral future. The negotiations leading to the declaration – the Pact for the Future – were tough but illustrated that the vast majority of UN Member States want a multilateral system better equipped at delivering on our collective aspirations. Once again Russia ended up isolating itself in the UN as it tried to sabotage the summit's adoption of the pact, falsely portraying it as a Western imposition. On the contrary, future-proofing multilateralism is an agenda that brings together partners from across Europe, Africa, Asia and Latin America.

Having heard the calls of our African partners in particular, we boosted Danish efforts to advance reform of the international financial architecture – a system that remains far from equal and representative and that does not sufficiently deliver solutions to today's challenges, including financing the Paris Agreement and the Sustainable Development Goals. As African heads of state called for an ambitious replenishment of IDA, the World Bank's fund for the poorest countries, we increased Denmark's contribution by 40%, urging other countries to follow our example.

Bringing global cooperation into the 21st century also implies addressing challenges related to tech and digitalisation. During UNGA Denmark also co-hosted a multi-stakeholder dialogue under the banner, 'Closing digital divides – the road to an inclusive & rights-respecting digital future', to commence the adoption of the Global Digital Compact. In recent years, we have witnessed a shrinking of the democratic space and a concerning rise in authoritarianism across the globe. This tendency has been particularly visible in the digital arena, where human rights and civil society activism are under pressure. An ambitious way forward has now been set forth in the Global Digital Compact to ensure a responsible, safe and rights-respecting digital future for all. Denmark continues to support civil society partners around the globe in building digital resilience, countering disinformation and protecting information integrity and accountability.

Our approach to China emphasises the need for an engaged, clear-eyed and realistic approach. In 2024 our work focused on implementing the joint green work programme launched in August 2023 by myself and my Chinese counterpart, Foreign Minister Wang Yi. Moreover, Denmark and the EU continued pushing for an even playing field in our trade relations with China in light of persisting challenges of unfair practices targeting European companies. I expect such efforts will – if necessary – continue in 2025.

On foreign and security policy, China's strategic partnership with Russia remained a strong concern and, in many ways, became a prism shaping our views on China. In particular, China is a decisive enabler of Russia's ability to continue its war of aggression against Ukraine. I met with Minister Wang Yi in New York on the margin of UNGA in September and expressed our serious concern, encouraging China to use its influence in Moscow to stop the war. Action must follow words, and, in December 2024, the EU introduced restrictive measures against Chinese and other entities. We will remain focused on the challenges to regional and global economic security and stability, as we defend our values in cooperation with partners and allies.

While doing so, we will also cooperate with China where it is in our clear interest to do so. This includes global issues like climate change. 2025 marks the 75th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Denmark and the People's Republic of China and I expect to visit China in 2025 to mark this milestone.

2024 was also an eventful year in north-east Asia and the Indo-Pacific. A new government was formed in Japan, South Korea underwent political turmoil and proved to have a resilient and strong democracy, while tensions on the Korean peninsula increased. Denmark has enjoyed close and longstanding partnerships across the Indo-Pacific region, including with the IP4, but the push for renewed partnerships also extends to ASEAN and to the Pacific Island states, including through strengthened ties to the Pacific Island Forum.

In June 2024 India re-elected Narendra Modi as prime minister, making him only the second leader in India's history to have secured a third term. Under Modi's reign India has remained among the world's fastest growing large economies and become an increasingly important actor in global economic governance. India has continued to pursue an active foreign policy while maintaining its longstanding policy of 'strategic autonomy'. This framework pitches India as a bridge between competing blocks. Modi's visits to Moscow, Warsaw and Kyiv in 2024 reflected a broader geopolitical balancing act, carefully positioning India as a peacemaker and potential mediator between Russia and Ukraine. This year confirmed India's willingness to engage more with both Denmark and the EU. In the context of broader geopolitical disruptions, we cannot afford not to seize this opportunity.

The BRICS summit in Kazan in October 2024 was a symbolic victory for Russia, even though the gathering confirmed that BRICS remains a loosely organised group, mainly focusing on shared economic interests. Having said that, it seems evident that BRICS attracts an increasingly diverse group of countries with a common ambition to adapt the existing global order in favour of stronger representation of non-Western countries.

2024 also brought political change to Latin America. New presidents set a fresh course for Mexico and Argentina, while Nicolas Maduro declared himself the winner of a sham election in Venezuela. Along with my EU colleagues, I called out Maduro's blatant disregard for democratic legitimacy and adopted new measures in the Council of the EU.

With the motto 'building a just world and a sustainable planet', Brazil chaired the G20 in Rio de Janeiro on 18–19 November. Brazil placed social issues such as hunger and poverty at the centre of the G20 agenda and deliberately worked

to integrate the G20 outcome with relevant UN-led processes, including the upcoming COP30 in Belém, Brazil. Denmark joined a new 'Global alliance to end hunger and poverty' as a key achievement of the Brazilian G20 presidency and participated actively in the three working groups (climate & environment, energy transition and digital economy) as well as a task force on mobilisation against climate change.

A more resilient society

In 2024 Denmark continued to face a complex threat landscape, where energy, communication, health, food, research and the development of new technologies were increasingly intertwined with our foreign and security policy. Denmark and the EU must increase our ability to think across the board to deal effectively with these complex threats and make our society more resilient. Seen from this perspective, it was promising that several new policies and initiatives were launched in 2024 to further strengthen our societal resilience, including the establishment of a new Danish ministry of resilience and preparedness.

The Niinistö report published in 2024 reflected on the new reality for the EU and its member states. It outlined a new threat landscape characterised by increasing uncertainty driven by mutually reinforcing parameters such as climate change, Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and increasing strategic competition. The Niinistö report rightly underlined that the EU needs to take more strategic ownership of the security agenda in Europe. We must work for a comprehensive preparedness that builds on an all-hazards approach in order to prepare for worst-case scenarios. This work should build on a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach, involving all relevant parts of society. The importance of civil and military preparedness has been further underlined by the cable incidents in the Baltic Sea in 2024, involving damage to critical infrastructure.

The agenda for economic security continued to grow in 2024 to address the security risks caused by increased geopolitical tensions, geoeconomic rivalry and profound technological shifts. Building on the EU strategy presented in 2023, the European Commission presented a package to improve a number of tools related to the agenda. These included initiatives to strengthen research security and the screening of foreign direct investments. Additionally, the

package contained white papers on further export control measures for dual-use products, strengthened research for dual-use technologies, and a possible mechanism for monitoring of outbound investments.

Another two important reports were delivered by Enrico Letta and Mario Draghi. In Letta's report, 'Much More Than a Market', he argued that economic security is pivotal to the future of the single market. The key conclusions of Letta's report were that we must strike a balance between competitiveness and strategic independence and that we must effectively address economic security. In addition, Draghi's report reflected on the future of European competitiveness. It envisioned an EU with reduced dependencies and increased competitiveness, linking it to the challenges presented by Niinistö. Evidently, this perspective will be central to the EU's political agenda for years to come.

In light of a geopolitical landscape increasingly characterised by competition and uncertainty, the EU Strategic Agenda 2024–2029 sent a strong signal that Europe must reduce its harmful dependencies, secure strategic supply chains and build up its own capacity in sensitive sectors and key technologies. The newly established portfolio for a Commissioner for Trade and Economic Security will lead the work on implementing the strategy and work together with the High Representative to develop an EU foreign economic policy that focuses on economic security, partnerships and an ambitious trade agenda.

Open markets have historically served us well, and part of the ambitious trade agenda is to build resilience and counter critical dependencies in our supply chains. Hence, the EU continued to diversify its network of trade agreements and strengthen economic and technological cooperation with trusted trading partners. This includes the bilateral trade and technology councils with the US and India. In 2024 the EU free trade agreement with New Zealand and the economic partnership with Kenya both entered into force, and negotiations on a trade agreement with Mercosur were concluded. Furthermore, the EU concluded new raw materials partnerships with Rwanda, Norway, Uzbekistan, Australia and Serbia. A number of trade negotiations are ongoing, including with India, Indonesia and the Philippines. As part of its open, robust and strategic trade policy, the EU stands prepared to defend its own interests against unfair trade practices and economic coercion when needed.

For the climate, 2024 was a year of further ominous records. Not only was 2024 the hottest year ever recorded, in which the world also breached 1.5 C° of global warming for the first time; the upper limit set by the Paris Agreement. It was also a year of escalating climate-related disasters in both developed and developing countries, highlighting the urgency of accelerating global efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and increase adaptation efforts, in particular in the most vulnerable developing countries. At the same time, the election of Donald Trump pointed to a second withdrawal of the US from the Paris Agreement and a general rollback of climate policies in the US.

Against this backdrop world leaders gathered for COP29 in Baku, Azerbaijan. Denmark played a key role in the preparation of the COP29 negotiations by hosting the Copenhagen Climate Ministerial for the third year in a row, gathering ministers and chief negotiators from 30 countries in Denmark in March.

The outcome of COP29 met our expectations to a reasonable degree, although progress on the follow-up to the global stocktake decision of COP28 was less than desirable. After long and intense negotiations an agreement was reached on a new finance goal that would give a clear direction for a significant scale-up of climate finance for developing countries. It included an overall goal of increasing international investments in climate efforts in developing countries to USD 1.3 billion in 2035. To achieve this objective all countries must work together to improve global and national framework conditions for both public and private climate finance.

Developed countries must take the lead by contributing at least USD 300 billion annually in climate finance for developing countries by 2035. Denmark's financing is already well underway. Denmark launched a number of new initiatives to mobilise more climate finance from private sources through IFU. Danish climate-related official development assistance (ODA) reached more than DKK 5 billion in 2024, with a particular emphasis on adaptation finance for the most vulnerable countries.

2024 was also a year of significant advancements in artificial intelligence (AI). The rapid pace of scientific breakthroughs solidified AI's central role in reshaping economies, security and the geopolitical landscape. The race for AI supremacy has started. Public sector initiatives such as the European

Union's establishment of AI factories highlight governments' recognition of AI's potential to catalyse economic growth. 2024 also brought ambitious national strategies to integrate AI into the public sector, boost research efforts, enhance supply chain resilience and bolster national security.

AI's integration into daily life continued to give rise to discussions on ethical implications, risk mitigation and regulatory frameworks. In 2024 global AI governance took significant strides, including the EU AI Act, which established comprehensive regulations to ensure responsible AI development and use. The UN Global Digital Compact also laid an important foundation for broader international efforts in this regard. Furthermore, the integrated partnership between Global Partnership on Artificial Intelligence (GPAI) and the OECD strengthened international cooperation in shaping AI policies that promote innovation and ethical considerations.

Throughout 2024 the open-source AI movement continued to challenge proprietary systems, democratising access to cutting-edge technologies. This shift, while promising for smaller actors, raises debates on security, intellectual property and post-deployment oversight. The global digital divide remains a challenge, and yet increased global access to leading AI models also has the potential to bridge inequalities and broaden access to AI's benefits. Looking ahead, global collaboration to manage AI risks and opportunities must remain a top priority.

In 2024, the world was reminded that the risk related to infectious diseases remains and needs continued international attention. In August 2024 the Africa Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC) declared the Mpox outbreak a Public Health Emergency of Continental Security (PHECS), marking the first such declaration by the agency since its inception in 2017. The World Health Organisation also declared the upsurge of Mpox in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and a growing number of countries in Africa a public health emergency of international concern (PHEIC), their highest level of alert under international law. As of 12 January 2025, 21 countries have reported 15,094 confirmed cases, including 64 deaths, since 2024.

The Mpox outbreak was a stark reminder of the importance of ensuring that countries have strong health systems in place and are able to respond to health

risks. Denmark contributed with DKK 10 million to the Mpox outbreak response, focusing on joint efforts against the disease on the African continent in full support of the joint African Mpox response plan led by Africa CDC and WHO. As one of two global Mpox vaccine manufacturers, Danish pharmaceutical company Bavarian Nordic worked closely with international partners to coordinate vaccine procurements and donations. Denmark continues to have a cross-cutting focus on strengthening health systems and enhancing societal resilience based on the WHO as the foundation of the international health framework.

Conclusion

2024 was another tumultuous year. The political stakes were high. Threats became more pronounced. Adversaries increasingly assertive, and the immediate solutions remained elusive. Indeed, the world became increasingly uncertain and unpredictable.

We saw increasing polarisation between and within states. The international order remained under pressure. And multipolarisation and fragmentation continued to increase the risk of disorder and conflict, which in turn threaten to undermine cooperation and global partnerships.

With competing and increasingly incompatible visions of international order, it became more and more difficult to find global solutions to shared problems. The world can be a brutal place and the use of raw power to obtain political goals is gaining currency.

We must brace ourselves for a turbulent period characterised by realpolitik and strategic competition that demands careful consideration about how to navigate in the safest way possible.

This calls for a reorientation of Denmark's – and the EU's – position and approach to the world. We need to be prepared for long-term confrontation, competition and contestation.

NATO remains the cornerstone of our collective security and we must continue to strengthen our deterrence and defence capabilities. We must work to ensure

that the vital transatlantic bond is preserved, also in the event of cross-Atlantic ripples.

At the same time, we – as Europe – must do more. We must step up our spending on defence, preparedness and investment. This includes, not least, critical technologies and the European defence industry.

Europe must stick together and strengthen the EU as a geopolitical actor with the ability to stand in its own right. We must respond actively and strategically to global developments; work together with partners – on equal terms – to solve shared challenges like wars, terrorist threats, irregular migration and the climate crisis. And leverage our partnerships and reach out more vigorously to countries and regions throughout the world; to Asian, African and Latin American countries. And to China.

Finally, we must continue to work to ensure that Russia does not emerge strengthened, victorious and hungry for more, from its illegal war of aggression and blatant disregard for human life and international law in Ukraine.

The challenges are daunting. But with Denmark's coming diplomatic super-year we stand ready to play our part in the EU, the UN, the Arctic Council and in Nordic–Baltic cooperation. If we dare to think boldly and act pragmatically, we can move the needle closer to solutions that, for years, have proven elusive.

A geopolitical landscape in constant change

Defence Minister Troels Lund Poulsen

Introduction

Europe stands before the most severe security situation in decades. We find ourselves in a new geopolitical landscape, marked by upheaval and division with profound changes to the world as we know it. It has become evident that Europe must assume greater responsibility for our collective defence and security. We must intensify our efforts and accelerate our actions, as the overall threat landscape facing Denmark is more severe than it has been for many years.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine remains the most significant and direct threat to both NATO and European stability and security. In February 2025 the Danish Defence Intelligence Service, DDIS, published an updated threat assessment on the threat from Russia against the Kingdom of Denmark. The updated threat assessment is very concerning; the DDIS assesses that the military threat from Russia will increase in the coming years.

Since 2022 Russia has been engaged in rebuilding and reforming its armed forces while continuing its war of aggression in Ukraine. Russia views itself as being in conflict with the West and is preparing for a possible war against NATO. Currently Russia wishes to avoid actions that could trigger NATO's Article 5, but its willingness to take risks against NATO will likely increase if the balance of power shifts. This might occur if Russia's conventional military strength grows while the West does not expand its own military capabilities at the same pace. The assessment underlines the need for Europe to act with urgency.

DDIS further assesses that the concrete military threat from Russia is dependent on developments in the war in Ukraine. It is unlikely that Russia would be able to wage both the war in Ukraine and a war against one or more NATO countries simultaneously. Hence, the assessment underscores why

supporting Ukraine continues to be one of the highest priorities for the Danish government. Denmark should be proud of the donations and training provided to Ukraine so far, not a least of being a frontrunner in the innovation of support with the launch of the 'Danish Model', bridging the gap between the huge production capacity in the Ukrainian industry and the available funding. But more can and needs to be done.

While the war in Ukraine puts immense pressure on Russia, the DDIS assesses that Russia's willingness to use military force in a regional war against one or more European NATO countries will be greater if it perceives NATO as militarily weakened or politically divided. This risk will be particularly high if Russia assesses that the United States is either unable or unwilling to support its European NATO Allies in a conflict. Recognising that the transatlantic relationship is changing, and that unity within Europe cannot be taken for granted, it has become inevitable that Europe must act. We must spend more, invest more and innovate more to create a credible deterrence profile in Europe. Enhanced cooperation with our close neighbours and Allies has become even more vital and will be a guiding factor when moving forward. A safe Europe depends on the decisions we make today.

The DDIS assesses that if the war in Ukraine ends or reaches a frozen state, Russia will be able to free up significant military resources, thereby increasing its ability to pose a direct threat to NATO. In that case, and if the United States is not involved and NATO does not simultaneously strengthen its military capabilities at the same pace, DDIS assesses that Russia, within:

- approximately six months, will be able to wage a local war in a country bordering Russia,
- approximately two years, will constitute a credible military threat against one or more NATO countries and thus be prepared for a regional war in the Baltic region,
- approximately five years, could be ready for a large-scale war on the European continent.

As a result it has become pivotal to increase our defence spending and speed up our acquisition of capabilities; a process we have embarked upon with the Danish Defence Agreement 2024–2033 and which will continue to be a key priority in the years to follow. Thus important decisions lie ahead, including

on rapid investments in fighting capabilities that will strengthen the Danish Defence as well as new, significant investments aimed at strengthening defence and security in the Arctic and North Atlantic.

The Baltic Sea region and Nordic cooperation

As the security situation continues to evolve, safeguarding the Baltic Sea has become increasingly critical. In recent years this region has become the subject of significant attention. According to the DDIS updated threat assessment the region is particularly vulnerable to Russian warfare if the war in Ukraine ends, underlying the need for enhanced vigilance and presence in the region. Russia is likely to become more willing to challenge NATO countries with military means as well as hybrid tools. Consequently, close defence cooperation in the Baltic Sea region remains crucial.

A close historical bond exists between the Nordic and Baltic countries (NB8), and with Denmark's geographical location as the gateway to the Baltic Sea, Denmark has a strategic interest and remains committed to securing the Baltic Sea region. Recent incidents damaging critical undersea infrastructure in the Baltic Sea have underlined the urgent need to increase our joint efforts and to improve intelligence-sharing and operational cooperation. Denmark is supporting NATO's Baltic Sentry and is contributing with affiliated national assets, is closely monitoring the Danish Straits and safeguarding the main entrance to the Baltic Sea.

Furthermore, Russia's shadow fleet presents risks to the environment, maritime safety and security, international seaborne trade, as well as to international maritime law and standards. In addition, it works to circumvent sanctions and soften their impact. Denmark is working closely together with regional partners within the NB8 framework to take coordinated steps to disrupt and deter Russia's shadow fleet. To that end Denmark, along with the United Kingdom, Sweden, Poland, Finland and Estonia, is requesting relevant proof of insurance from suspected shadow fleet vessels as they pass through the English Channel, the Danish Straits of the Great Belt and the Gulf of Finland.

In 2024 Denmark deployed a battalion to the Danish Camp Valdemar in Latvia on a rotational basis. The battalion forms part of the NATO presence safeguarding our Baltic allies and deterring further Russian aggression.

In 2025 Sweden will send a battalion to the Danish Camp Valdemar, further illustrating the historically strong Nordic cooperation and its strong contribution to the security of the Alliance. With Finland and Sweden's accession to NATO, it leaves Russia as the only non-NATO country along the Baltic Sea. These developments are strengthening Allied presence in the region and thus changing the dynamics of the Baltic Sea.

With the deteriorating security situation the Nordic countries play a particularly important role and they are acting, united and swiftly, to meet the many challenges that we all face, together. As all the Nordics are now members of NATO we are increasingly able to improve our security by cooperating operationally and with our military capabilities to the benefit both of our own region and of Europe. This illustrates a historic and positive development, in which Nordic defence cooperation with our Nordic allies has never been stronger. It is a strong priority for Denmark to continue to strengthen the Nordic cooperation even further.

Our continued efforts in 2025 build on an already strong foundation. In 2024 Denmark chaired the Nordic defence cooperation (NORDEFECO). Under the Danish chairmanship, significant progress has been made in further strengthening our cooperation in support of NATO's collective deterrence and defence. The Nordic defence ministers signed a new NORDEFECO Vision for 2030 and thereby marked a new era of Nordic defence cooperation.

A key element of the NORDEFECO Vision is the ability to conduct military operations between the Nordic countries seamlessly and effectively. To this end, the Nordic Chiefs of Defence signed a new Nordic Defence Concept in 2024, which enhances the coordination of the respective national plans of the Nordic armed forces and their ability to operate together in the framework of NATO.

The Vision has since been followed up by many important initiatives, including bolstering operational cooperation between the Nordic countries, as well as strengthening military mobility in our region. We have also commenced work to increase the production of ammunitions in the Nordic region, benefitting both our own security and in order to maintain our continued commitment to support Ukraine.

NORDEFECO has fostered closer cooperation on donations to Ukraine, and compared to our size, the Nordic countries are among the largest contributors to Ukraine. At the NORDEFECO autumn Ministerial in Copenhagen in November, the Nordics met with the Ukrainian Defence Minister, Rustem Umerov, and emphasized the Nordic commitment to continued and enhanced support to ensure Ukraine's ability to defend itself, restore its sovereignty and uphold its territorial integrity.

The many substantial Nordic actions speak for themselves. In 2025 we will take our cooperation to new heights together, to the benefit of the collective deterrence and defence of the Alliance as a whole, and for the security of our region.

The Arctic and North Atlantic

The deteriorating security situation cannot solely be confined to the eastern parts of Europe. Great power rivalry has impact in the Arctic, where geopolitical tensions between Russia, China and the United States have spilled into the Arctic region. Both Russia and China are increasingly asserting strategic interests in the region, recognizing its immense military and strategic significance in the event of conflict. According to the DDIS threat assessment, Russia is continuing its military buildup in the Arctic, increasingly demonstrating its power through aggressive and threatening actions, thus heightening the risk of escalation in the region. Meanwhile, China is preparing to bolster its presence in the Arctic, advancing plans to develop military capabilities for operations in the area.

The Kingdom of Denmark, in collaboration with NATO and our close regional allies, remains steadfast in its commitment to upholding the shared objective of preserving stability and sustaining peace and security in the region. The Arctic and North Atlantic are of paramount importance to the Kingdom of Denmark, and the Kingdom of Denmark will shoulder its responsibility to fortify security in the region.

In the coming years the Kingdom of Denmark will increase its investments in the Arctic and North Atlantic. The parties behind the 2024–2033 Defence Agreement, including the Government of the Faroe Islands and the Government

of Greenland (Naalakkersuisut), recognize the urgent need for investments, necessary to strengthen the Kingdom of Denmark's ability to assert sovereignty and respond effectively to the evolving security challenges in this strategically important region.

As a first step, the Kingdom of Denmark took decisive action in early 2025 with the first agreement on the Arctic and North Atlantic under the 2024–2033 framework. The first agreement acknowledges the need for enhanced surveillance, maritime presence and situational awareness to address emerging security threats. Thus, it has been decided to invest in new Arctic patrol vessels, long-range drones and improved intelligence gathering.

More is needed however, and further investments in security and defence in the region will be made. A second agreement on the Arctic and North Atlantic will follow later in 2025 with new investments.

The changing dynamics in the region also call for more robust and structured cooperation, not only with our Arctic allies but also within the Kingdom of Denmark itself – between the Faroe Islands, Greenland and Denmark. Therefore, it is essential that all future decisions regarding security and defence matters are made collaboratively. New initiatives will be developed and carried out in close partnership with the government of Greenland and the government of the Faroe Islands, ensuring the efforts are locally grounded and beneficial to civil society. An important initiative to highlight with regard to this is the Arctic Basic Training which opened in May 2024 in Kangerlussuaq. The first cohort has had a promising start, with young people in Greenland getting the opportunity to train in military and preparedness skills. The course is similar to the Danish Defence basic education course but adapted to account for the harsh weather conditions of the Arctic. The purpose of the Arctic Basis Training Education is to create an enhanced awareness of how to act in an increasingly unstable security situation, with the goal of strengthening skills amongst the Greenlandic populations related to preparedness and emergency services.

With the growing strategic importance of the Arctic, the Kingdom of Denmark is committed to ensuring that the strengthening of defence and security in the region is pursued in close coordination with the United States and other Arctic allies, ensuring that our efforts are aligned and effective.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine

We are still witnessing a war of attrition with extensive fortification and World War I like scenes of trenches as well as heavy mine-laying along the frontline. The extensive use of drones has been a game-changer, allowing both sides to carry out deep-strike missions. However, the Russian attacks are not only aimed at military structures; Ukraine's critical infrastructure also suffers damage from the Russian aggression. Although the Ukrainian people bravely continue their fight for freedom, Russia continues to slowly conquer territory with significant human and material losses in its wake. Despite some Russian advances, Ukraine overall manages to repel the attacks and stand their ground on the frontlines.

As mentioned, the threat from Russia is not only aimed at Ukraine. DDIS assesses that the Russian military threat against Europe as a whole depends on the development of the war in Ukraine. It is unlikely that Russia will be able to maintain the war in Ukraine while also engaging in a war with one or more NATO countries.

We are experiencing a Russia that is more willing to conduct hybrid aggressions against NATO. The level of risk Russia is willing to take is increasing with the build-up of Russian military strength and we must therefore expect that the threat from Russia will grow in the coming years. The best way to counter the Russian aggressions is to continue supporting Ukraine while building up our own defence.

Hence, supporting Ukraine continues to be one of the highest priorities for the Danish government. In 2024 Denmark decided to donate infantry fighting vehicles, several air defence systems, artillery systems, drones, ammunition and much more.

In addition, the first F-16 fighter jets were delivered to Ukraine, marking a historic milestone in our support. Within the Air Force Capability Coalition we continued our work on developing the Ukrainian F-16 capacity with training of pilots and ground personnel. Looking forward, the coalition will also focus on developing the Ukrainian Air Force as a whole, including further airborne capacities.

We continued Danish training efforts in 2024, whereby Danish instructors trained approximately 2.100 Ukrainian soldiers. This included contributions to international training activities such as the British-led Operation Interflex as well as a number of training activities in Denmark and in other EU countries. In 2024 the Danish Defence conducted a total of 34 courses of which 21 were within the framework of the EU military assistance mission in support of Ukraine (EUMAM UA). Denmark also took part in the build-up of NATO's Support and Training for Ukraine (NSATU) with staff officers.

Last year Denmark was a frontrunner in the innovation of support with the launch of the Danish Model, whereby financial contributions in 2024 amounting to approximately EUR 587 million funded purchases of military equipment directly from the Ukrainian defence industry. There is a huge production capacity in the Ukrainian industry but a gap in the available funding. To bridge this gap Denmark and several partner countries have made financial contributions allowing Ukraine to produce artillery systems, drones, anti-tank missiles and systems, as well as anti-ship missiles domestically.

In 2024 Denmark acted as implementing actor on behalf of the European Union ensuring procurements through the Ukrainian defence industry for EUR 390 million stemming from the proceeds of immobilised Russian assets. This effort will remain one of our top priorities in 2025 and, with significant contributions from a number of partner countries, Denmark will once again be the implementing actor on behalf of the European Union. Our work with both the Danish Model and the newly established defence industrial hub in Kyiv also aims to integrate the Ukrainian defence industry in the European industry benefitting both Ukraine and ourselves in the years to come.

Although immense military support was delivered to Ukraine in 2024, there is a need for more in 2025. In particular, the lack of air defence, artillery and long-range ammunition has challenged Ukraine on the battlefield. The urgent Ukrainian need for military aid puts pressure on the defence industry in the West, where a rapid increase of the production capacity is essential if we are to step up the support to Ukraine. We need to ensure even more support to Ukraine – both from Denmark, and from our Allies in NATO and the European Union – to put Ukraine in the best possible position going into possible peace negotiations.

The Danish view on negotiations for a peace deal or ceasefire is clear: ‘nothing about Ukraine, without Ukraine’. Ukraine must have a seat at the table and any negotiated deal must be acceptable to Ukraine. Furthermore, European involvement is crucial as the war in Ukraine directly impacts European security.

It is increasingly clear that the Russian strategy is one of attrition with the aim that Ukraine and its allies will lose hope and give up fighting. We and our partners must therefore step up and stay united in our support for Ukraine and their freedom.

Defence Agreement

In light of the deteriorating security situation, a broad majority of the Danish Parliament presented a new ten-year framework Defence Agreement in June 2023. The Agreement reaffirms Denmark’s commitment to contribute to peace and stability around the world, in our neighbouring area to the east, and in the Arctic and North Atlantic region. The Agreement marks a reorientation of Denmark’s foreign and security policy, with a stronger focus on deterrence and defence of the territory of the Kingdom of Denmark. To this end NATO continues to be the cornerstone of Danish defence and security policy.

The first partial agreement involved a number of investments considered prerequisites for the buildup of the Danish Defence. Investments also included military capabilities such as very short-range air defence systems for the Army Brigade to increase protection against air threats, and long endurance drones for surveillance and intelligence gathering in the Arctic and North Atlantic. Further investments included close air defence missiles for Navy frigates, torpedoes for Navy frigates and Airforce Seahawk helicopters. The agreement also allocated funds for more Danish Defence personnel, with a number of initiatives aimed at strengthening recruitment, retention and increased training of personnel.

It is a key priority for Denmark that we shoulder our share of the responsibility for the collective security in NATO. Hence, investments in the second partial agreement included the build-up of a heavy infantry brigade which include the acquisition of Infantry Fighting Vehicles, acquisition of land-based air defence systems, and advanced acquisition of both the Navy’s anti-submarine warfare capability as well as the naval short-range air defence.

We have also reached an agreement on a new Danish model for conscription. The new model included an increased conscription period (from four to eleven months), a higher number of conscripts (from approximately 4,500 up to 7,500 yearly), as well as full gender equality. Finally, the new model entails a stronger focus on conscripts performing operative tasks.

Danish veterans have fought bravely throughout the world and contributed to the level of freedom and security that is paramount to us. Hence, a third partial agreement focused on our obligation to look after those who have looked after us. As a result, veterans will be met with greater trust in the Danish system and veterans and their families will have increased access to various forms of compensation for their service.

In 2024 the Ministry of Resilience and Preparedness was established, focusing on emergency preparedness. Urgent needs in relation to state-level emergency response and strengthened cybersecurity were addressed, with an agreement in January 2025.

Pace and progress is paramount when implementing these agreements. We need to show much greater speed in terms of the way we acquire, implement and reach full operating capability of military capabilities.

Conclusion: an ever more complex security landscape in the years to come

The evolution of the security situation in 2024 has once again demonstrated that the geopolitical landscape as we knew it before Russia's invasion of Ukraine is a relic of the past. Furthermore, it has shown that international stability regrettably remains exceedingly fragile.

Against the grim backdrop of war on European soil and the imminent threat of an aggressive Russia towards the West, we stand before a new geopolitical reality that demands urgent action for the years to come. We will engage in this by continuing our support to Ukraine, strengthening our alliances, shouldering a larger burden in the EU and NATO, and adjusting and enhancing our defence in response to the emerging multi-complex threat landscape we face today.

Supporting Ukraine will be among our highest priorities throughout 2025. It is vital that Denmark and our partners step up to ensure that Ukraine will prevail. The result of the war in Ukraine will impact peace and security in Europe. We cannot and will not allow Russia to dictate the future of Europe.

As the Russian invasion continues to disrupt international stability, the importance of our alliances has never been clearer. The Nordic countries remain among our most important allies, and the Nordic defence cooperation is stronger than ever before. Furthermore, we will strengthen the cooperation with the Nordics and the Baltic countries to fortify our response to the threats in the Baltic Sea.

In 2025 NATO should demonstrate credibility and resolve by continuing to accelerate military adaptation, enhancing fair burden-sharing, investing more in the capabilities needed, and by strengthening the industrial base of our collective defence. Denmark will continue to do its part and strengthen its contribution to NATO's deterrence and defence by investing further in capabilities that are needed in the Alliance and the Kingdom as a whole.

The series of initiatives under the Defence Agreement mark a historic and monumental buildup of Danish Defence. Still, more work is needed. The safety of our citizens throughout the Kingdom of Denmark is our most important priority.

We will continue our contributions to our common security in NATO and the Arctic region in order to enhance our ability to act in the increasingly complex security landscape. Like the rest of the NATO Allies, Denmark expects to be asked to contribute more to our common security through NATO capability targets. Although the exact level of investments needed is yet to be decided, it is certain that we need to prioritise defence and security even higher – both financially and politically.

For years, the Danish military focus has been on expeditions abroad, in support of our allies and the international community as a whole. As we rebuild our forces to focus on collective security in Europe, we must still keep an eye on the world. Instability in Africa and the Middle East will not disappear overnight, and Denmark will continue to do its part to ensure that the international community remains a strong and rules-based order, whether that is by aiding our allies

in the Baltic, defending the freedom of navigation in international straits, or helping build local capacities in global hot spots.

Furthermore, as the strategic importance of the Arctic is growing, Denmark will continue to uphold its commitment to strengthening defence and security in the region in close cooperation with our Arctic allies. Likewise, new initiatives will be developed and executed in close partnership with the government of Greenland and the government of the Faroe Islands, ensuring collaborative and locally-grounded efforts as we work to maintain stability in the Arctic region.

With a constantly changing threat landscape, the EU has set out on an ambitious trajectory for defence and there is a strong resolve across Europe to step up and take greater responsibility for European security. The challenges that we face can only be effectively dealt with through a firm and united response. In 2024 the EU undertook several significant initiatives to enhance its defence readiness and defence capabilities. The European Commission launched the European Defence Industrial Strategy (EDIS) in March 2024, which has as its overarching goal to strengthen the EU's defence industrial base by fostering greater European collaboration on defence procurement, innovation and production. As the first legislative proposal to implement EDIS, the European Commission proposed the European Defence Industry Programme (EDIP), providing EUR 1.5 billion for 2025–2027 to support increased defence industrial readiness. The EU also continued to be fully engaged with supporting Ukraine through various EU instruments. The European Peace Facility (EPF) was replenished with an additional EUR 5 billion during 2024, specifically allocated to support Ukraine's defence capabilities, demonstrating – amidst ongoing conflicts – the EU's commitment to supporting partner countries in crisis situations. All these initiatives reflect the EU's concerted efforts in 2024 to enhance a durable, collaborative development in defence and security during a deteriorating geopolitical situation.

The war in Ukraine has also underlined the importance of strengthening efforts on innovation and technologies to maintain a competitive edge. The EU as well as NATO are both accelerating efforts within these domains to better face the evolving threat landscape. Denmark remains committed to supporting efforts within the EU and NATO, as well as working nationally towards ensuring that technological advancements directly support defence capabilities. European

defence will continue to take centre stage throughout 2025, and Denmark remains fully engaged in this – not least when we take over the presidency for the Council of the EU.

Although it is evident that Europe must step up, keeping the US engaged in our shared transatlantic security remains an important priority for the years to come. Denmark will continue to work for a close partnership with the US based on solidarity and fair burden-sharing.

Lastly, Denmark is facing an increasingly complex and unpredictable threat landscape, also in the cyber and space domains, as well as attacks on critical infrastructure. Denmark focuses on strengthening resilience to the persistent threats of hybrid and cyber-attacks. This is accomplished through an enhancement of security and defence cooperation in the EU and NATO. Furthermore, the need for resilience and civil preparedness is vital to safeguarding our society, and the new Ministry of Resilience and Preparedness will be instrumental in this effort.

In sum, Denmark is facing ever more complex challenges to our security. 2024 has shown that Denmark can, and will, face this challenge through enhanced efforts nationally and with our Allies. As such, 2025 will be yet another historic year in Danish defence policy.



Chapter 3

Scholarly articles

The transatlantic vacation is over: in security and defence, Denmark must rethink where it belongs

*Sten Rynning*¹

The breakdown in transatlantic security relations that began in February 2025 brutally pushed European states to realise that either they become the masters of power politics, or they will be devoured by it. As long as the United States led NATO, European states could invest primarily in community-building in Europe, notably the European Communities and later the European Union. Now that the US security guarantee is at risk, it is for these states to redefine their community and build a collective defence. The challenge is monumental. For Denmark, it requires nothing less than a completely revamped political mindset and the building of a national security state capable of managing a protracted continental power contest.

To do so, Denmark must rediscover and invest in the practice of strategy. At one level strategy is about the use of all available means to further political objectives. It sounds simple enough but is tremendously challenging: it is economically and politically costly to mobilise resources for defence and to do so for the duration. But in an age of geopolitical uncertainty, strategy gains an additional quality, some would say a grand strategy quality, of having to define the future context for actionable plans (Strachan 2011). For smaller nations like Denmark, unable to amass sufficient force on their own, it is about identifying the partners who can be trusted with national security. For decades this has been the United States but now, because the United States is shifting its priorities, it also needs to involve a combination of big European countries. There is a lot of uncertainty involved in this shift, so any future context is hard to define. But this uncertainty has to be dealt with; Denmark must resist the temptation to muddle through, to see what happens. If Denmark is serious about taking its destiny into its own hands, it must define long-term political objectives that raise strategy above the improvisations of day-to-day policy.

Denmark is not well prepared for the challenge. In the recent past the Danish debate has been centred on whether to be a small, liberal state vested in a

global order beyond power politics, or whether to align with the patron, the United States, in its struggle to defend order. While Denmark chose the former in the 1990s, from 2001 on it chose the latter, becoming a 'strategic actor', defined by its willingness to fight the enemies of the current order (Rynning 2003). But the battlefield alliance with the patron did not last: the Afghanistan war experience was excessively brutal and taxing. In around 2012–2013, defence expenditure began a dramatic decline, and political attention returned to the realm of rules-based order. Not even Russia's territorial aggression against Ukraine in 2014 could shake this retreat from strategic engagement. Although the government did commit to NATO's 2014 Defence Investment Pledge to bring defence expenditure up to 2% of GDP by 2024, it hedged the commitment with reference to parliamentary politics, and it limited defence budget increases to an almost imperceptible amount. Symptomatically, the stated priorities of the new government in 2019 were climate, youth, welfare, immigration and economic reform, with not a single reference to NATO, Russia, Ukraine, defence or military issues.²

Denmark and its European partners are now overwhelmingly challenged to imagine their own collective defence, and this is a rude awakening for a country that has dedicated only limited thought to it. Denmark, like other European countries, wants a continued US commitment to Europe's defence essentially for political reasons: the US security umbrella has removed distrust and enabled European cooperation. If Denmark cannot trust a US-led future, then which future should it imagine and trust? While Denmark is experiencing a nostalgic revival of Nordic–Baltic cooperation, the truth is that Denmark's national security depends on a political construction that will increasingly be in the hands of an embryonic collective of some, or all, of Europe's leading countries: France, Germany, Britain and Poland, and possibly also Italy. How this will unfold is a big unknown, but it is in this Europeanised collective defence leadership, even if within a continued transatlantic context, that Denmark increasingly must invest its imagination, trust and leadership.

Two things are certain. The United States will not contribute to the political imagination. To Team Trump, Europe is not important: hemispheric defence and China are what matter. With President Biden, Europe experienced the last US president steeped in Euro-Atlantic thinking and experience. Another certainty is the lacuna in the European Union when it comes to matters of collective defence and strategic competition. The EU's Common Security and

Defence Policy (CSDP) has lost its lustre in just the few years since Denmark reluctantly joined it (Schmidt 2024. See also Rynning & Van Ham 2022). The EU has notable strengths, but the organisation and command of military force is not among them. Nor will it be. The two most capable European powers, France and Britain, orchestrate Europe's defence efforts, while Germany, Poland and Italy are aiming to join them. None of them intend to hand capability and decisions to the EU. For Denmark it is a dead-end to imagine the EU as a new, long-term, security objective.

Denmark is just a few months into this geopolitical awakening. When Russia launched all-out war on Ukraine in February 2022, a full three years ago, Denmark took an insouciant approach to the war's implications for Danish defence for as long as the United States led Western affairs. Denmark deposited its proclaimed will to act in a distant future: the July 2023 defence agreement set a ten-year framework for the development of a robust and appropriate defence, allocating only initial and comparatively small investments to deal with 'accumulated challenges', a euphemism for years of neglect. Earnest defence renewal had to wait. Denmark did offer significant military aid to Ukraine, as we shall see, but by driving down stocks, not by investing in defence industrial capacity. In short, the real strategic shock to Denmark was not Russia's war but the re-election of President Trump.

Denmark's defence renewal thus now hinges on the political imagination of a future in which defence leadership is not primarily American. Denmark's extended transatlantic vacation from strategic thinking is over. Will Denmark rise to the occasion and craft a strategy to guide policy? History is not encouraging, but nor is history destiny.

Denmark's struggle to belong inside a NATO Europe

Initially NATO's Cold War mission was – in words attributed to the Alliance's first secretary general, Lord Ismay – to 'keep the Americans in, the Germans down, and the Soviets out'. The quip has an unmistakable ring of geopolitics to it. Clearly, after two world wars instigated by Germany, Europe could not be run from its centre; it had to be run from the Americas. Building a solid and reliable defence bridge across the Atlantic became NATO's collective defence mission.

Denmark was a founding member of NATO and thus subscribed to this mission. However, its subscription was half-hearted in the sense that the Danish government would have preferred another security option, a Scandinavian defence union that was either non-aligned or Western-oriented. Unlike Norway, Denmark signed the so-called 'Stockholm memo' in early 1948 that intended to secure the freedom of the three Scandinavian countries outside any grouping of other powers. This was at a time when Britain, France and the Benelux countries negotiated their Brussels Treaty for the purpose of drawing the United States into a security arrangement in Europe. Norway was on this page as well, but Denmark sought to place its trust in Sweden and non-alignment (Petersen 1979). It was only when Norway's insistence on transatlantic alignment made a Scandinavian union impossible that Denmark budged, joining the North Atlantic Treaty negotiations mere months before they concluded.

Denmark thus bought stocks in an alliance that had a distinct political mission in addition to its collective defence mission. This political mission sprang from an American conviction that Europe's balance of power politics, which had defined the continent since the rise of the sovereign state in the 16th and 17th centuries, was antithetical to peace. America's inspiration was its hemispheric experience that it was possible to build a regional community in which war was unthinkable. US Senator Arthur Vandenberg, whose June 1948 Senate Resolution enabled NATO negotiations, firmly believed in the international relevance of this experience. Vandenberg had negotiated the United Nations Charter provisions for regional security arrangements, enabling the United States to negotiate the 1947 Rio Treaty for the Americas. Next, Vanderberg endorsed North Atlantic Treaty negotiations, seeing in this overseas engagement a case of 'collective security' in line with America's desire to build communities at peace (Rynning 2024).

The gist of the idea was foreign to Europe's governments, and the allies, Denmark included, took time to digest it. The United States had made clear in the Marshall Plan programme, that later evolved into the Organisation for European Economic Cooperation, that Europe had to do the heavy lifting of community building. The same principle was brought to bear on NATO where the United States, with all its global responsibilities, wanted Allies to do the heavy conventional force lifting. Canada had done its best during the treaty negotiations to promote a broad transatlantic community that would make

of NATO a wide-ranging political-economic-cultural-and-military community, but the United States was not on board, preferring community-building to be mainly for the Europeans. This US insistence set off a scramble for influence and privilege, especially by Britain and France. France sought to take the lead on integrating the Federal Republic of Germany into Western institutions, but the idea of a European defence union hit the bedrock of sovereignty concerns in the French parliament. Britain then engineered the FRG's inclusion in NATO but failed to join the new forum for Franco-German reconciliation, first in the coal and steel community and then in the European Economic Community (EEC).

Denmark did not navigate this ocean of UN and Rio Pact-inspired OEEC, NATO and European community politics smoothly. Trade considerations led Denmark to align with Britain in opposition to the EEC but mostly as a hopeful measure to open the common market to Denmark, Britain and the rest of the so-called 'outer seven' – Norway, Sweden, Austria, Switzerland and Portugal. When the common market remained closed, the outer seven established a European Free Trade Agreement (EFTA), but again for the purpose of prying open the coveted common market. Denmark mobilised its Nordic partners behind EFTA, playing up the theme of EFTA solidarity, but also making clear that it would aim for EEC membership with or without its regional partners (Krosby 1966). In 1973 Denmark, alongside Britain and Ireland, joined the EEC, leaving its Scandinavian and Nordic partners on the outside.

In the tortuous process of arms negotiations and East–West détente that began in the mid-1970s and continued to the late 1980s, Denmark once again struggled to define its own political mission. The government sought solidarity with Allies, but the opposition imposed reservations for the sake of East–West détente. The Atlantic community and the continental community were at odds, and Denmark retracted from the former to promote the latter. The misery began with Soviet force deployments and NATO's 'double-decision' to deploy new US nuclear weapons to Europe in retaliation while simultaneously offering arms reduction talks. The conservative government of Paul Schlüter that came to power in 1982 found that its powers were limited on the issue. The centrist Social Liberal party backed the government but not on arms issues, enabling the political opposition to dictate reservations to Danish NATO policy. A bruising decade culminated in general elections in 1988 fought over NATO and nuclear issues (Doeser 2011). The right wing prevailed because the

Social Liberal party flipped, but Denmark's political direction had suffered from conflicting emphases on NATO, the Nordic region, and the frustrated détente promise of the 1975 East–West Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE). The Social Liberal party, inheritor of a small state tradition and adherent to the CSCE promise of continental reconciliation, held the decisive votes but had no popular appeal. The party was, in the apt words of one observer, a 'mixture of a masonic lodge and a religious sect, very closed to the outside world and very fervent in the conviction of the righteousness of its own views' (Bjørl 1986).

How Denmark defined a new mission but overextended

The end of the Cold War offered Denmark an opportunity to move beyond such masonic politics and to support a continental order guaranteed by NATO through a political commitment broadly anchored in parliament. NATO's role as the enabler of all-European cooperation became a point of consensus in Danish politics, allowing the former opposition parties in particular, including the Social Democratic party which headed the government from 1993, to turn their back on the divisions of the 1980s. However, the War on Terror and the decision, now by a right-wing government, to go to war, broke the consensus. Once again, Denmark learned the hard way that strategy is not first and foremost about assigning defence forces to a mission but about committing credibly and sustainably to a political future.

Key decisions made in 1990 set NATO up for a role as Europe's collective security guarantor, namely: the US–German decision to seek German unification inside a NATO framework, the decision with Soviet leader Gorbachev to allow every European country to pursue the security arrangement of its choosing, and NATO's collective decision to begin a profound political transformation of the Alliance. It all happened within a few months, and it made for a new political order and a great shift within NATO. NATO scaled down its collective defence command structure, its forces and their readiness, and its reliance on nuclear deterrence. Instead, NATO prioritised collective security investments. It began with partnerships with former Eastern adversaries and a renewed emphasis on NATO's political role in advancing values of democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law across the continent. Partnerships grew into a Partnership

for Peace programme when conflict in the former Yugoslavia pressed a crisis management role upon NATO, whereby individual partners, Russia included, would be activated to join NATO in managing crises. The final piece in NATO's collective security toolbox became NATO enlargement, which began with Germany's unification in 1990 inside NATO and then, after a pause for reflection and negotiation, led to a decision in 1997 to undertake enlargement with Central European countries.

NATO had a circle to square in this respect, which was reconciling Russia to an enlarged NATO. NATO Allies soft-pedalled the issue in the short term, allowing both US President Clinton and Russian President Yeltsin to run for re-election in 1996 free from any controversy related to NATO enlargement. But the decision had taken shape and was put on the table as soon as the 1996 elections had been held. To square the circle, NATO proposed a special partnership whereby NATO and Russia would 'share the goal of overcoming the vestiges of earlier confrontation and competition and of strengthening mutual trust and cooperation' (NATO 1997). In this deal NATO would continue its political transformation and minimise its military footprint, and Russia would continue to build its democratic society and realise its political and economic transformation. The two parties signed a 'Founding Act' in Paris in May 1997, just months prior to NATO's decision to enlarge. It was a clear recipe for collective security in Europe organised by a bigger and softer NATO. Denmark invested in this new security order, focusing its energies on supporting US policy and laying the groundwork for inclusion of the Baltic countries in NATO (Eyal 1997). In a Europe 'whole and free', as President George H.W. Bush had articulated the new American vision in 1988, Denmark's sometimes incompatible engagements in the Nordic region, Europe and the Atlantic area could thus come together.

The War on Terror provoked by the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 unsettled both NATO and Denmark. The Alliance leader, the United States, did not place tried and tested Allied relations front and centre of a new mission to fight international terrorism, instead wanting the mission to determine the coalition. NATO Allies thus had to transform and prepare for expeditionary warfare. It unsettled Denmark because this new mission was connected not only to crisis management operations, which enjoyed support in Denmark, but a 'war on terror'. One was UN-anchored and intended to do good; the other was a mission of self-defence to eradicate a threat. NATO's Afghan mission,

which steadily grew from 2002 on, was always linked to a UN Security Council mandate and a security assistance mission. NATO was not at war. But for individual Allies, such as Denmark, who deployed to the most dangerous parts of Afghanistan, it felt like war, and it took a commitment to fight a war to stay on in Afghanistan. And Denmark committed, becoming a 'strategic actor' within the core coalition of fighting Allies (Rynning 2022; see also Jakobsen & Rynning 2019).

The exhaustion that was about to set in in Danish politics also left a mark on NATO. In effect, it was difficult to be fully invested in a taxing Afghan mission, and to contain the diplomatic damage of an equally taxing coalition mission in Iraq, while tending to Europe's geopolitics. In Europe, NATO was to grow big and soft for as long as Russia continued its path to democracy. Early on, in 2000, Vladimir Putin had won the presidency in a 'reasonably free and fair' election, according to US diplomats at the time (Savranskaya, Blanton & Sherman 2024), and for a moment things seemed promising: President Putin agreed to further NATO enlargement, now including the Baltic countries, and did not react harshly when the United States abandoned the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, a cornerstone of strategic deterrence. But as things started to change NATO failed to adapt. Putin won the 2004 elections in a landslide and, in 2007, berated NATO at the Munich Security Conference, claiming 'NATO expansion' represented 'a serious provocation' and amounted to the imposition of 'new dividing lines and walls' (President of Russia 2007). President Bush's view was that a potential threat from Russia was an argument for supporting Ukraine and Georgia's applications for NATO Membership Action Plans (MAPs), a stepping-stone to membership. Conversely, German Chancellor Merkel and French President Sarkozy thought that NATO should step back from the risk of conflict with Russia and deny MAPs to Ukraine and Georgia (Bush 2010). The outcome was NATO's infamous decision to deny MAPs but to agree, vaguely, 'that these countries will become members of NATO' (NATO 2008).

Russia's reply in the shape of a war on Georgia did not rally NATO consensus but instead led to a contest among Allies, big and small, for influence over events; a contest that blinded the collective to unfolding trends (Kauffmann 2023). Once Allies began to fold their Afghan combat mission at the tail end of President Obama's surge, in 2011–2012, their concern was to come home, not to rethink relations to Russia. By 2014, when Ukraine's pro-Russian leadership fell and Russia reacted by annexing Crimea and stoking civil war in

Ukraine's Donbas region, NATO Allies were too exhausted, too prone to see the affair as a post-Soviet adjustment of borders, to forcefully react. Some Allies engaged forces in the fight against Islamic State, but NATO reacted timidly to continental events. NATO did enhance certain military dimensions of its collective defence posture, but only in a manner compatible with the spirit of the 1997 Founding Act: with enhanced reaction forces and a limited rotational presence in Eastern Europe, which for Denmark entailed an enhanced focus on the Baltic states (Theussen 2023). But NATO's politics stalled, marked more by Afghan exhaustion and then the divisions caused by Brexit and the first Trump presidency than by any collective outrage at Russia's aggression.

The Danish foreign policy 'activism' that had been so prevalent through the years of War on Terror now plateaued, its origins and momentum increasingly contested (Kristensen & Larsen 2017; Pedersen 2018). Denmark continued to support NATO's order, and was part of the core coalition fighting Islamic State, but it did not ramp up defence spending, in spite of its Defence Investment Pledge, and it did not address core problems with Europe's security order, especially as it related to Russia's designs on its neighbourhood. While proclaiming an activist profile, Denmark de facto began sliding back into a small state role, downgrading hard power means and privileging the diplomatic pursuit of international consensus.

Russia's war, NATO's return to collective defence, and Denmark's split priorities

Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, which began on 24 February 2022, jolted NATO. It was now beyond doubt that NATO could not return to a collective security role but would have to mount a collective defence response while supporting Ukraine. When the war broke out NATO was in the midst of negotiating a new Strategic Concept, a roadmap of priorities for the Alliance. The Allies knew that their 2010 Strategic Concept was outdated, but in the late 2010s they had kicked the can down the road in the hope of rewriting it under a successor to President Trump. President Biden's bona fide as a transatlanticist offered momentum, but there were still many interests and priorities to reconcile. Russia's choice of war made it easy for the Allies to choose: collective defence had to be a clear first.

NATO's Strategic Concept designates Russia 'the most significant and direct threat to Allies' security and to peace and stability in the Euro-Atlantic area' (NATO 2022). It was a far cry from the Founding Act's assurance that 'NATO and Russia do not consider each other as adversaries' (NATO 1997), and a clear sign that the security landscape had fundamentally changed. Interesting, also, to note is the Strategic Concept's dual emphasis on the Alliance's own security and the wider stability of the Euro-Atlantic area. As a collective defence alliance, NATO is set to protect only the territory of Allies. The wider concern with Euro-Atlantic stability is thus a legacy of NATO's collective investments in crisis management and cooperative security. It remains important but now increasingly as a facet of collective defence. Revealingly, the Strategic Concept's section on 'NATO's core tasks' dedicates a full fifteen sections to collective defence, five sections to crisis prevention and management, and seven to cooperative security.

NATO Allies thus faced a difficult dual challenge of defending the territory of the Alliance and securing the wider Euro-Atlantic area. The former was a 'window of opportunity' for the Alliance's defence authorities to 'drive the transformation of the Alliance strategy' for deterrence and defence purposes (LSE Ideas 2003, 6). This drive would inevitably demand greater Allied investment in the military forces assigned to defend the territories closest to Russia, but it entailed more than that. Resilience had become a first line of defence, touching on virtually all sectors of society, from the security of healthcare provision to energy and communication infrastructure. Moreover, NATO Allies committed to counter – to contest and deny – Russian aggression in all domains, including cyber and outer space. In short, it was a call for an unprecedented, wide defence mobilisation of societal resources.

The wider Euro-Atlantic area remained important, and it concerned essentially, but not only, Ukraine. The country was a formal NATO partner and Europe's largest country, save for Russia. In the past, Allied leaders had had reservations about Ukraine's ability to overcome corruption and become a trustworthy partner: Chancellor Merkel and President Sarkozy invoked these concerns in 2008 when opposing Ukraine's NATO candidacy. In 2016 the Netherlands, then led by NATO's current Secretary General, Marc Rutte, rejected a Ukraine–EU treaty on closer relations in a referendum. War clarified matters. In June 2022 the EU granted Ukraine the status of candidate for accession to the EU and by June 2024 accession negotiations were underway.

NATO was slower off the mark with respect to Ukraine, and for a good reason. NATO Allies directed military and financial aid to Ukraine in their individual capacities, and they coordinated this assistance in the Ukraine Defence Contact Group run out of the US Ramstein Air Base in Germany, as well as through various other formats including, notably, G7 summits. They held back on NATO, though, in order not to provoke a confrontation between the Alliance and Russia. It took until April 2023, more than a year from the onset of war, for NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg to be given the green light to go to Kyiv and demonstrate Alliance support for Ukraine. Months later, at NATO's Vilnius summit, Allies refused Ukraine's entreaties to open the path to NATO membership. Ukraine's President Zelensky threatened to cancel his participation in the summit and labelled the lack of a membership timetable 'absurd' (Sabbagh 2023; Sky News 2023), but NATO only repeated its formula that 'Ukraine's future is in NATO' (NATO 2023).

The Allies were treading a fine line between assisting Ukraine and avoiding escalatory behaviour vis-à-vis Russia that could set off a wider war. 'For as long as it takes', was their mantra, which was notably different from 'As much as it takes'. Data shows a notable wave in the level of US support for Ukraine, peaking in the spring of 2023, and then declining dramatically in late 2023/early 2024 when Congress was unable to decide on renewed assistance (Kiel Institute n.d.). It was a fraught moment: Ukraine's summer offensive of 2023 had failed, Russia was pouring in new troops, and Ukraine's forces were short on rockets and shells (Entous 2025). It inaugurated a new phase of serious attritional land warfare. American support did kick back in, reaching a high point in December 2024 when outgoing President Biden approved a final, grand batch of support, while Europe's more stable levels of military support had remained in place. However, it highlighted how limits to the level of Western support exposed Ukraine's most precious capability, its manpower, to grinding war. Allies have also hesitated to deliver armaments that could allow Ukraine to either strike deep into the rear of Russian forces or contest Russia's use of air power. Things changed somewhat in late 2024, when Russia launched a Kharkiv offensive from within its own territory. But from a Ukrainian perspective, and that of critics, Allies were not managing to walk their fine line: Allies were in fact self-deterring, wanting to punish Russia but only to a degree, unwilling to risk a Ukrainian victory (Michta 2023; Continetti 2023; Erlingsson & Jonsson 2023; Ohryzko, Sohn & Gic 2024; Sweet & Toth 2024).

Denmark developed a particular profile in this sea of change, offering impressive levels of assistance to Ukraine but struggling to put together real contributions to NATO's renewed deterrence and defence posture. Denmark initially argued that Russia must pay a heavy price for its armed aggression (Frederiksen 2022), and it exacted this price by stepping forward to offer Ukraine assistance. In terms of overall bilateral donations to Ukraine, Denmark vies with Estonia for top place with contributions totalling around 2.2% of GDP – with Germany, France, Spain and Italy donating 0.4%, 0.18%, 0.12% and 0.11%, respectively. Denmark's military assistance totals EUR 7.54 billion, which is close to the total levels of military assistance offered by the United Kingdom (EUR 10.07) and Germany (EUR 12.61), though far from the level of assistance offered by the United States (EUR 64.13). Denmark was the first country to donate F16 fighter aircraft to Ukraine, and it has delivered more tanks to Ukraine than the United States as well as its full stock of CAESAR artillery (Kiel Institute n.d.; Forsvarsministeriet 2025a). In February 2024 Denmark was the first of the Nordic countries to enter a bilateral 'Agreement on Security Cooperation and Long-Term Support' with Ukraine for the duration of ten years, which represented a 'strategic choice' (Statsministeriet 2024).

The small Ally added to these impressive figures with a willingness to invest directly in Ukraine's defence industry in what has become known as 'the Danish Model'. Helping to build Ukrainian defence industrial muscle by way of both direct financial contributions and joint ventures was a way to deliver on the ten-year commitment, explained Danish Minister of Defence, Troels Lund Poulsen (Forsvarsministeriet 2024a). Larger European Allies such as Germany, Britain, France, Poland and Italy have since taken inspiration from this model and set up similar initiatives. By late 2024 Ukrainian President Zelensky took enthusiastic note of a new investment of around US\$1 billion in Ukraine's defence industry (Ritzau 2024). In early 2025, when the war had worn on and President Trump, without Allied consultation, kickstarted peace-probing diplomacy, setting off great concerns in Europe to which we shall return, the Danish Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lars Løkke Rasmussen, cautioned European Allies not to get ahead of themselves in peacekeeping planning. What Ukraine needs, Rasmussen said, was more defence investments along the lines of the Danish Model to build Ukrainian strength for a lasting settlement (Ritzau 2025).

Although Denmark had both foresight and muscle in the case of supporting the mission of securing the Euro-Atlantic area and thus Ukraine, it was peculiarly unable to deliver on its national defence contributions to NATO's territorial collective defence. In late 2022 a routine NATO Defence Planning Capability Review of Danish defence leaked, exposing serious deficiencies and Allied criticism of Denmark's lack of air defence systems, its slow approach to the armoured upgrade of the core formation of the Danish army, the First Brigade, its general lack of capable units and limited ammunition stocks, and its generally slow pace of defence investment (Ritzau 2023). It was agreed in 2017 that by 2024 the First Brigade should be fully equipped as a medium heavy brigade, capable of deploying to the Baltic countries within 180 days. By 2022 when NATO reviewed the situation, the brigade was far from ready and Russia's war had, in the meantime, resulted in a need for faster and heavier forces.

To amend matters Denmark entered a new defence agreement in July 2023. It was not designed as a fixed solution but an ongoing process whereby the government would, in steps, adjust both the level of assistance to Ukraine and investments in Danish defence. It proved a wise approach in that it enabled political leaders to ramp up commitments in response to deteriorating events. A first adjustment came in November 2023, a second in April 2024, while a separate agreement to strengthen Danish defence in the Arctic intervened in January 2025. The first adjustment mainly added funds for Ukraine. The second adjustment was more serious in terms of capacity building, outlining investments notably in the First Brigade, air defence and anti-submarine warfare (Forsvarsministeriet 2024b).

Still, allocating money was only part of the solution to the problem of diminished Danish defence capacity. Observers tended to agree that the basic organisation and its management needed reform. Recruitment and retention were big challenges: too many troops left the armed forces and too few signed up. The reasons for this crisis of recruitment and, especially, retention, were many, but all linked to pay and work conditions within the organisation (With & Traantoft Rasmussen 2023; Krog 2023; Just & Lindegaard 2024). Relatedly, because Danish decision-makers tend to employ Danish defence personnel for a wide variety of international tasks ranging from anti-piracy missions in Africa to collective defence deployment in Europe, defence leadership is faced with the near impossible task of organising for the unexpected and building a

culture of commitment to it. All this becomes more difficult when economic times are hard: from a 2001 high of 1.9% of GDP, defence expenditure declined to 1.1%–1.2% of GDP in the latter half of the 2010s. In terms of budgets, at least, the exhaustion from expeditionary missions in Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya was obvious. Though Russia had started its war in Ukraine in 2014, Danish defence was asked to get by as best as possible.

To rescue Danish defence, multiple critics argued, politicians must invest, of course, but also restrain themselves in terms of mission creep. Moreover, politicians must empower the defence forces to build the best possible force. Again, critics felt that the Chief of Staff had been neutered by a 2012 reform that reduced his authority to bolster the force by placing areas of competence such as personnel management, infrastructure management, and research and acquisitions in separate organisations (Jørgensen 2025). The logical effect of this division of the defence structure was to enhance the authority of the ministry itself, which is where all the coordination and decision-making would take place. The reform reflected a degree of exhaustion from the Afghan and Iraq campaigns, insofar as their sustained and dangerous character tended to enhance the role of the Chief of Defence vis-à-vis the ministry. The reform changed this local balance of power by asserting civilian control. It also reflected a belief that the security environment was not dangerous and that defence affairs could be run pretty much like any other ministerial business.

Geopolitical upheaval

The November 2024 election of Donald Trump augured ill for transatlantic relations. As a candidate, Trump had signalled his impatience with the war in Ukraine, promising to end it in 24 hours. He also repeated on multiple occasions his criticism of Europe's economies and trading practices, stating that Europe had been taking advantage of his country. Still, the full extent of the challenge would become apparent only about a month into his presidency, and it went to the heart of the NATO collective defence commitment.

In a turbulent couple of weeks through February 2025, Team Trump abandoned NATO consensus in a number of ways. First, President Trump declared that he did not support Ukraine's membership of NATO, and this after he held a phone conversation with Russia's President Putin on 10 February. NATO had

envisioned Ukrainian NATO membership since 2008 and, following Russia's war of 2022, had come to declare the movement towards it 'irreversible'. The Alliance had, moreover, frozen all relations to Russia as part of its coordinated campaign to punish it for aggressing Ukraine. Next, Secretary of Defence Pete Hegseth announced that American troops would not be on the ground to secure Ukraine after a ceasefire deal, and to the NATO Allies he added that the extended American security guarantee would not be forever. With these blows to Allied Ukraine policy and the longstanding Alliance partnership it was left to Vice President Vance, a couple of days later at the Munich Security Conference, to declare that the real threat to Allies came not from Russia or China but from 'within'; from Europe's free speech and immigration policy. It was an added blow aimed at the heart of the Alliance on values espoused by both sides of the Atlantic since the Second World War.

This veering off the transatlantic course had been preceded by a series of presidential statements that (now former) National Security Adviser Tim Waltz summarised as a 'Monroe Doctrine 2.0'. In this regional outlook President Trump sought to regain control of the Panama Canal, subsume Canada into the United States as the 51st state, and gain sovereignty over Greenland, which formed part of the Kingdom of Denmark. The Danish government took the matter very seriously but responded with a campaign that, although intense, was kept behind the closed door of diplomacy, and was reasoned in public. Not picking a public fight with President Trump seemed a wise choice: Ukraine's President Zelensky fell out of President Trump's graces by refusing to concede to Trump's demand for ownership of Ukraine's rare earth riches and by insisting that Putin cannot be trusted. Trump proceeded to dub Zelensky a 'dictator' and then, on 27 February, to boot him from the White House following an unprecedented public dispute between Zelensky on the one hand and Trump and J.D. Vance on the other.

The acute security challenge to Denmark and other Allies thus grew worse. It demanded a coordinated European response that could rapidly build a Europe capable of assisting and protecting Ukraine in addition to itself, as well as a reinforced leadership that could lend deterrent credibility to this growing force. All this, of course, required time, and so there could be no rushing into a break with Trump's United States. The speed at which President Trump moved threatened to destroy relations entirely, and Europe's interest was thus to slow the President down.

The Danish government moved fast to build up its national defence capability. On 22 February, within two weeks of the transatlantic storm breaking, the government announced an 'acceleration' fund for Danish defence. As if inspired by Chancellor Scholz's 2022 promise – and funding of – a *Zeitenwende*, a paradigm shift, the Danish government offered DKK 100 billion to build real military muscle. This money was to be spent in 2025–2026, with an additional DKK 70 billion to be added during the seven following years to reinforce and sustain the build-up (Forsvarsministeriet 2025b). The Danish paradigm shift was triggered by President Trump's deviating priorities and then also by the assessment offered by the Danish Defence Intelligence Service that Russia was likely to rebuild its force and become a menace to the Baltic Sea countries, Denmark included, within 2-5 years. Ominously, the service concluded that if the war in Ukraine were to halt, and if NATO Allies did not arm at the same speed as Russia (i.e. still investing but falling behind), then a regional war in the Baltic region within two years, in 2027, was a credible threat (Forsvarets Efterretningstjeneste 2024).

In a nod to critics the government undid parts of the 2012 reform that had neutered the Chief of Defence. The government sought to broaden the Chief of Defence's portfolio of competence by putting personnel management and defence real estate under his authority, and by mandating his decision-making in defence acquisitions outside the usual legal requirement for open tenders. If the Chief of the Defence wanted military hardware it was his to buy, essentially. The government could override EU legislation on public purchases with an appeal to vital national security interests. However, the Danish parliament balked at this, and in a compromise, parliament gained a say in the acquisition of major defence systems, which the opposition felt was best anchored in a political decision. The sum total, as an astute observer noted, was not a paradigm shift: the central authority of defence planning had not suddenly become the Chief of Defence; it remained the ministry (Christensen 2025, 4).

As Denmark sought the means to move fast in terms of its own defence, the European scene posed its own challenges. And here was the rub: Denmark was now part of a group of allies – European allies and Canada – that wished to protect and support Ukraine, but which now had lost the ally most capable of offering this protection: the United States. Add to this the American desire to build a new working relationship with Russia in the hope of wresting its allegiance from China, the main geopolitical rival of the United States, and

European allies were confronted with an unprecedented challenge. Would they be able to uphold the Ukraine-first policy they had come to espouse, or would they cave in to the logics of power, seek to settle East–West relations by accommodating Russia and, essentially, sacrifice Ukrainian interests?

History suggested they would cave in. The security order built by NATO since the end of the Cold War to create a Europe ‘whole and free’ was a quintessential American vision. The US experience and US leadership were behind the ambition to blend collective defence against the Soviet Union with a collective security ambition for the Euro-Atlantic area. Outside US leadership, unity has historically escaped a continent organised for plurality. Historically, France, Germany and Russia have sought and failed to realise an imperial ambition, and so Europe’s history has remained one of plurality, not unification. If unification has succeeded in the EC/EU, it is on the basis of the security guarantee offered by the United States in NATO.

Some international relations theory suggests Europeans have a fair shot at unification now that Russia has gone to war: threats engender cooperation. However, this simple view is problematic on several counts. First, European cooperation in the EU was never about deterring war; it was about building a new normative order, a peace project. When it comes to war, it is not fit for purpose. Moreover, time is of the essence. European countries have disinvested so severely in defence that they will be vulnerable for years to come. Also, the perception of threat is not unanimous: a slice of Europe’s political opinion is opposed to continued support of Ukraine’s war and would prefer an arrangement with Russia. Hungary is the most notorious outlier. However, this softness toward Russia is found on the political flanks of most countries. Revealingly, in Germany’s general elections in February 2025 the Alternative for Germany, a pro-Russia party, came in second, beating the Social Democrats. The challenge comes from both ends of the spectrum where the extreme right bonds with President Putin’s proclaimed anti-woke values and the extreme left is opposed to military effort.

It is thus against history and from a beleaguered political centre that the leaders of France and Britain seek to lead European defence change. The two countries are determined to create a European-led coalition of the willing to secure Ukraine once the fighting halts. Political and military discussions in various formats, but always led by these two countries, have taken place

variously in Paris, London and also Kyiv. President Macron and Prime Minister Starmer have both made their way to the White House to try and persuade President Trump not to give up on Ukraine and to serve as a backstop to a European security force in Ukraine. Prime Minister Starmer in particular has been unequivocal about the need for such a US backstop: 'US security guarantees', Starmer said in February, are 'the only way to effectively deter Russia' (Philips & Pike 2025).

The enormity of the task that confronts Denmark and its European partners is best illustrated as a layered challenge. A security force for Ukraine is the first layer. It must offer Ukraine security on land, in the air and at sea, just as it must bolster Ukraine's military training and defence industrial growth. Even if such a force does not operate at the frontline of a ceasefire, which is not the suggestion, it will have to be significant in size and comprehensive in terms of land, air and sea assets. And while it will be a coalition effort led by France and Britain, it will have to connect to NATO's command and control organisation, through which the United States might offer some level of backstop support (Foy, Fisher & Hall 2025). To join it, Denmark will have to deploy robust forces and align closely with the coalition leaders.

A second layer is introduced by the wider need to placate President Trump's misgivings about an unbalanced transatlantic partnership. In short, European Allies will have to take charge and show that they are serious. The first test will come at NATO's Hague summit in June 2025. The summit will raise the defence spending ambition, likely to around 3.5% of GDP. More critically, it will involve some sort of statement of intent or a sketch of a roadmap for the organisation of greater European leadership within NATO's structures that lessens the defence burden on the United States. Denmark alongside Britain, France and Germany is reportedly among the Allies developing these plans, as other Allies are reluctant to push too far in this direction (Foy & Hall 2025). However, all Allies must weigh how far to go in such burden-sharing without risking a military decoupling, which would not need to involve the United States leaving NATO but that could happen if it relinquishes supreme military command in the Alliance.

The final layer consists of the politics of building continental defence and deterrence, European-style. Even if the United States and Allies agree to a new NATO deal that shifts the burden, it is clear that Europeans will have to

do defence in their own manner. They cannot simply copy the ability of the United States to design war plans on the basis of an expeditionary force backed by a rich variety of strategic enablers (intelligence and communication systems, air defence systems, transportation etc.) as well as a large and, in terms of numbers and capabilities, sophisticated nuclear force. Europe lacks in all respects. Western Europe has too few expeditionary forces that could come to the aid of Eastern allies, and European allies simply do not have the strategic enablers to replace American ones. Trust in European solidarity is not an option when capabilities are running low: the Baltic countries are building a 1,000 km fortified defence line replete with 1,000 concrete bunkers, anti-tank ditches, ammunition depots and shelters to halt Russia, and Poland is investing upwards of 5% of GDP to become Europe's leading land warfare ally, and even then Prime Minister Tusk stated in March 2025 that in the 'race for security' Poland 'must reach for the most modern capabilities, also related to nuclear weapons' (Cleave 2025; Cienski & Kosc 2025).

Europe's challenge is to build a coordinated force that will prevent national fear from taking control. Western European forces will have to be deployed forward, backed by capable reaction forces in all domains (land, air, sea, cyber and space). Although politically divisive, nuclear deterrence is an inevitable component hereof. France's President Macron has played up the European dimension of France's nuclear deterrent, but France does not have the force numbers nor the doctrine to simply extend deterrence to its neighbours. For sixty-five years, France has tailored its force and doctrine to a massive retaliation strategy in defence of the national homeland. Britain, with fewer nuclear weapons, likewise has no history of offering extended deterrence (though its nuclear forces are assigned to NATO). The call of Germany's new Chancellor, Friedrich Merz, for the extension of French and British deterrence to Europe is a sign that Germany is moving beyond the half-hearted defence reforms of former Chancellor Scholz but, in a parallel to the NATO organisation debate, Merz's adamant criticism of President Trump's policies has provoked concern that he might inadvertently be pushing the United States to decouple from Europe.

Given this three-layered defence challenge, there is no serious prospect of Europe leaping into defence unity. An abrupt departure, even if only partial, of the United States from Europe's defence will provoke a degree of security competition in Europe, not a unified response via either NATO or the EU. The

competition is modest for as long as the United States remains in NATO while sending mixed signals: European countries build up their national forces while shoehorning their way into the coalitions that form right and left, though mainly centred around Paris and London. Denmark is firmly anchored in the tightknit web of cooperation in the 'NB8' format – the Nordic-Baltic community consisting of Denmark, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. It is regularly augmented with Poland and Germany (completing the allies involved in the Baltic Sea), to become NB8++. But it should be clear that this NB8 anchoring and flexibility is just one facet of the coalition-phase Europe is presently going through. NB8 is a political feat yielding real defence capability, but in the scheme of continental order it is just a stepping stone for efforts that must involve Britain and France and their close allies.

And so, as Danish defence investments are about to take off after years of neglect and easy confidence in the transatlantic partnership, Denmark is confronted with the critical political question of where it belongs. Ultimately, it is the answer to this question that will generate the most military effect. Denmark can invest in its defence regardless, of course, but Denmark on its own is a pawn: it must team up with the big players. Currently, this seems to be a collective of northwest European allies, say France and Britain, alongside NB8++. It is a start, but not more than that. The uncertain and potentially fraught relationships between this core and its 'peripheries' – meaning other Eastern European allies, the European South worried about other types of threats, as well as the United States and Canada – will be decisive for whatever political order comes next.

To belong, Denmark must choose

In this context of strategic fluidity Denmark cannot return to a small state mindset of building bridges and defending rules; it will have to step forward with conviction and courage and make a new Europe its strategic objective. If Denmark does not define such a political destiny, it cannot meet the strategic challenge of its time. Its strategic practice will then be reduced to the tergiversation of day-to-day policy adaption.

Remain actively opposed to Russia's Hot War on Ukraine and Europe. At the time of writing, ceasefire negotiations led by the United States are stuck, and Russia is pushing its advantages along the frontline. In a move that has left its allies

incredulous, the United States has promoted two limited ceasefires – one on energy infrastructure and one in the Black Sea – that relieve pressure on Russia. Ukraine had, with ingenuity, built the capacity to push Russia's fleet out of its main port, Crimean Sevastopol, into a retreat to the port of Novorossiysk, just as it had proven able to conduct effective long-range strikes against Russian energy infrastructure. An endgame to the war thus promises to be long. Even in the case of a general ceasefire, there will be considerable risk of armed skirmishes and loss of life (estimated at around 14,000) that characterised the situation in the Donbas in 2014–2022. With its track record of being at the very forefront of international Ukraine assistance, Denmark is set to continue its opposition to Russia's war. However, it will have to be continued at a time when European countries are unable to funnel their support into institutional agreements, meaning assistance must be cobbled together in a marketplace of evolving commitments (Faurby 2025). This does not bode well for Europe's ability to build a revised political order beyond the war.

Prepare for a Cold War confrontation with Russia. Even if the United States backs a ceasefire and a line of disengagement inside Ukraine, the cost of this insistence on denying Russia the spoils of war will fall on Europeans. France and Britain have begun to conduct reconnaissance and air superiority missions over the Black Sea in a sign of what is to come: a European mission to secure Europe. But the costs of securing Ukraine and the frontier of Europe's political order will be felt beyond a security mission in Ukraine. Once the heroic phase of military resistance is over, the tedious struggle to rebuild Ukraine, to rid it of corrupt practices, and to offer it market access to the EU countries will begin. The political flanks in Denmark are already, even if in small ways, mobilising in opposition to this prospect and the costs of sustained opposition to Russia and Euro-Ukrainian integration. This opposition promises to grow stronger. To counter it, the political centre must define a commitment that deepens the existing ten-year commitment to Ukraine and embeds it in a Danish vision for European security cooperation. How to bolster their Ukraine consensus and how to avert a slide into Russia-first thinking remains a key challenge for the government.

Prepare to submit to defence leadership in Europe. In the longer run, once a European-led coalition has formed a security mission in Ukraine, the challenge will be to translate the reality of this mission into sustained defence leadership. Considering Europe's plurality, a European army will not happen. What Europe's

reality calls for is tight integration into allied frameworks. Preferably, this should remain NATO. But even if the United States remains in NATO, it will be in a reduced way, compelling Europeans to augment their cooperation. Platforms and equipment should then be harmonised and rationalised, preferably at a European-wide level and if not, then at the regional level of the JEF. Hitherto, Danes have been comfortable adapting their defence to NATO, having no qualms about the fact the United States held the keys to it. Who should now hold these keys? Denmark has a historical affinity for tight cooperation with Britain, as we have seen, and this relationship will no doubt once again be central to the revival of regionalist (NB8) Danish activism. But such a construction would need to be tied to Poland, Germany and France, countries that Denmark has no tradition of entrusting defence leadership to. There is significant uncertainty and flexibility in this emerging construction. For Denmark, staying engaged is critical. This will require diplomatic manpower and leadership muscle, where the political challenge will be to step out and front the popular imagination and begin to shape the national interest around a deepened (northwestern) European engagement.

Prepare to strike a deal with the United States and Greenland. Greenland is a vast expanse, far from Denmark, thinly populated, and coveted by President Trump. Its exposure is partially self-inflicted: despite the Arctic emerging in the late 2010s as a region of strategic competition, Denmark has been slow to reinforce its military presence in Greenland, adding only minor improvements in spite of promises made under President Trump's first presidency (Olesen & Sørensen 2019). As mentioned, one of the follow-on defence packages of the 2023 defence agreement concerns the Arctic and thus Greenland, but this comes after years of adopting a cost-effective approach to the Arctic region (Strandsbjerg & Dahlberg 2024). For now improvements are a plan, not a capability. Greenlandic political opinion is not in favour of a US takeover, but neither is it favourable to Denmark. If they could afford it, it seems, the Greenland population would vote for independence. And this is another issue for Danish political leaders: the home rule law adopted in 2009 enables Greenland to choose independence, irrespective of the geopolitical concerns the United States may have (Kjærgaard 2025, 6). Reaching agreement with the Greenland home rule government and the US government has thus become the most urgent challenge of the Danish government. It seems appropriate for Denmark to organise a 'track 1.5' approach in support of its diplomatic aims, meaning a sustained dialogue involving both government representatives (of

Denmark, Greenland and the United States) and non-governmental experts (think-tanks and academics along with retired officials). The advantage of such an approach of mixed participants is its ability to run candid discussions that map national perspectives on, say, Chinese and Russian activities in the Arctic as well as Greenland's economic development opportunities, and is able to sketch joint responses that leave wiggle room for official (so-called 'track 1') diplomacy. There is a lot to discuss – from China's growing footprint in the region to Russia's considerable presence, US interests in space tracking as well as collective NATO interests in anti-submarine warfare, notably in the Greenland–Iceland–United Kingdom gap (Splidsboel 2025; Weisko 2025). Getting the dialogue to focus on such issues rather than sovereignty is a vital Danish interest.

Invest significantly in Denmark's national security state. National security state must be understood to mean the ability to think in terms of strategic competition, alliances, military power, arms races and measures to control such races. For all Denmark's assistance to Ukraine and its ability to sustain contributions to US-led operations, such as in Afghanistan, Denmark's policy has been about contributing to continuity, to the tried and tested NATO framework, more than the building of a capacity to think and plan under conditions of volatile strategic competition (Olesen & Schmidt 2024). Denmark's contributions to US missions have by and large been a question of building the right military tool to demonstrate Alliance solidarity. For a while, as mentioned, Denmark joined America's fight because its leadership believed in the cause, making Denmark a strategic actor ready to go to war. Today, Denmark must once again consider joining a fight, except that now it is on a grander scale, involving Russia and an alliance framework at risk. To cope, Denmark's political leaders and senior civil servants must support a policy process centred on national security interests and, as mentioned, the practice of strategy. For the past ten to fifteen years, the idea of a type of crosscutting national security council to formalise national strategy-making has marked the Danish debate, not least as a lesson learned from the Danish decision-making in the Kosovo, Afghanistan and Iraq wars (Mariager & Wivel 2019). But clearly, there is no political appetite for such a formal mechanism of coordinated strategy-making. It is all the more important, therefore, that recruitment to the highest offices in national security policymaking is based on national security experience. If this sounds intuitively right, one should recall that for thirty years career pathways have been built around other issues, such as globalisation, trade, human security

and European integration. War and confrontation in Europe, all of which promise to be enduring, must now take their place as a privileged career path and a rewarded experience. How this is to be done is the question, but given political will the central administration is fully capable of shaping such career paths. As an added layer to support this intellectual landscape, parliament should fund a richer landscape of think-tanks and policy specialists who can be involved in a sustained 'track 1.5' policy process at home. The purpose of it all will be the same as the one that drove General Dwight D. Eisenhower to set up a NATO Defence College for the Alliance: to build up a body of officials and civilians conversant with the parameters of national security. The cost of this intellectual effort will be minimal compared to that of building of a capable national defence force, but, reflective of the saying that 'culture eats strategy for breakfast', it could be the most difficult part.

Conclusion

In early 2025 Denmark stood robbed of the political certainties that had guided it through decades of security and defence policy: that NATO guaranteed Euro-Atlantic security, and the United States guaranteed NATO; that the EU was protected and could generate the European community that generally enjoyed American support; that Denmark could flexibly build coalitions with various European countries in support of EU reform and policy; and that Denmark could target its defence budget at just the right level where it would not be singled out for criticism.

All these certitudes are now at risk. Perhaps transatlantic security cooperation can get back on track after President Trump's wrecking of it, but there can be no return to yesterday. President Trump's term runs until January 2029, and one of his ideological apprentices might then carry the flame as the next president. Such uncertainty compels national leaders to act in the interest of national security: Denmark cannot and does not ignore this need for action.

Denmark is confronted with the challenge not only of deterring Russia but of changing the pulse of history in Europe. Europe's history suggests that, on its own, Europe's plurality will lead to the type of balance of power order that NATO was meant to end. As an order, it is dynamic and precarious: in Europe's history, it has sometimes held out against, but has also ultimately and consistently

given way to, major war. A continued transatlantic partnership is obviously in Europe's interest, as is the urgent building of a Europeanised NATO backed by the United States. Like many Allied partners, Denmark is fast learning the high cost of neglected defence and insufficient strategic thought in the shape of political wrath in the United States and political revisionism from Russia.

A new world beckons and therein lies the primary strategic challenge for Denmark. The country has deep pockets and a solid political centre, which has allowed it to step out in front when it comes to aiding Ukraine. Denmark is good at devising ways and means of supporting certain political ends. The new world demands more of Denmark though, not a plan but a broader, farsighted political engagement that can define the context within which such plans can be developed. In grand strategic affairs, where the most precious currency remains political imagination, the enduring challenge for Denmark is to reimagine the revamped transatlantic or European construction to which Denmark would like to belong.

Notes

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- 2 Politisk forståelse mellem Socialdemokratiet, Radikale Venstre, SF og Enhedslisten (2019), 'Retfærdig retning for Danmark', https://legacy.altinget.dk/misc/Retfærdig%20retning%20for%20Danmark_2019-06-25_ENDELIG.pdf.

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To the core? Have current geopolitical changes driven EU-sceptic Denmark closer to the centre of gravity in Europe?

*Marlene Wind*¹

In 2018 the Berlin-based think tank European Council on Foreign Relations concluded that Denmark's close friends in the EU were few and far between.² The study surveyed around 700 top diplomats, EU experts, media professionals and academics in the EU Member States and found that no other EU Member State considered Denmark to be its closest ally. Two years later the ECPR repeated its study and little had changed. Denmark was still not high on the radar of other Member States and had only moved up two places in the internal popularity contest among the 27, from a 14th place in 2018 to a 12th place in 2020. 'Denmark is still not the preferred partner for any country', Rafael Loss, the coordinator of ECFR's mapping of European alliance patterns, emphasised (Albrechtsen 2020).

The ECPR analysis was obviously disturbing for a country like Denmark, which has a small open economy and has built its wealth and welfare state on trade and international cooperation. But also politically, being seen as a non-core Member State of the EU that few others would rely on to build alliances represents in many ways a genuine Danish foreign policy blunder and misunderstanding of how best to protect Danish interests in the European Union that we joined more than 50 years ago.

Today, in 2025, the picture is gradually transforming, however. The EU-sceptic ugly duckling may finally be turning into a light blue European swan. Or so it seems. That the gradual reorientation towards the European core in light of current geopolitical shifts represents a genuine reorientation of Danish foreign and EU Policy remains perhaps less likely. There is little doubt, however, that geopolitical shocks like the Russian war in Ukraine and the behaviour of our so-far closest friend and ally, the US, under the new Trump administration – not least its provocations against Greenland and thus the Danish Kingdom,

have loosened Denmark's strong Atlanticist ties and pushed Denmark closer to the EU. Other things have also played a role. The negative experience of Brexit, for instance, but also closer Nordic cooperation, now in NATO, together with US threats to leave NATO altogether, have also triggered the reorientation. However, as will be argued in this article 'the drive to Europe' has not been instigated by idealism or a new 'EU-phoria' but is – it seems – primarily motivated by Denmark's search for an alternative security structure – a plan B in case of full American withdrawal from Europe after 80 years of partnership. In this article I argue that the hesitancy can be explained by looking into just how deep Danish EU scepticism has been over the past 50 years, and at how it cuts to the bones of the Danish democracy, constitutional structure and conception of sovereignty. The analysis of Danish foreign policy and EU policy presented here, therefore, sets itself apart from more traditional foreign policy analysis by taking a deeper, constitutional perspective. It will demonstrate that the way in which Denmark organised itself and its constitution (in 1953) after the Second World War has had tremendous implications for Denmark's ability to cooperate with other nations and international organisations and may, at a deeper level, impact negatively on any full embrace of the European project.

Denmark's Eurosceptic course

On 1 January 1973 Denmark became a member of the European Communities (EC). Together with the UK and Ireland, Denmark had tried to join earlier but President de Gaulle of France was opposed, particularly to British membership. In many ways, therefore, finally joining the Community in 1973 was a big step (Olesen 2021; Olesen 2022). Though EC membership for Denmark was primarily about market access as our then-largest, British, market wanted to join, it also signalled that Denmark was ready to delegate specifically defined parts of national sovereignty to an 'intergovernmental authority', as it was referred to in Section 20 of the 1953 Constitution (Danielsen 2023). Section 20 in the Constitution was an add-on that Denmark inserted into the only slightly amended 1849 Constitution in light of the post-Second World War desire for nations to work more closely together to preserve peace. Nevertheless, despite this attempt by the involved politicians and government lawyers to modernise the old Danish Constitution and update it for a new world where sovereignty should take a back seat, the new section 20 still rested on the idea that international cooperation is a zero-sum game where sovereignty can only

be transferred [*overladt*] 'to a specific and closely defined degree' [*nærmere bestemt omfang*]. This meant that in the Danish constitutional philosophy, what was transferred to any 'international organisation' could also – potentially – be withdrawn again if need be (Danielsen 2023). This has implied over the years that Denmark – the only EU Member State never to change its constitution to adapt to EC/EU membership – had already since 1953 been living with the narrative that what was transferred to a supranational body or organisation outside the state was somehow 'lost' at home (Danielsen 2023; Wind & Knudsen 2023). Or to put it differently, the zero-sum logic, that Europe somehow takes something away from Denmark every time we integrate further, ended up haunting Danish EU politics and debates for 50 years and made several things much more difficult. In particular, of course, treaty changes and several fiery Danish referendum debates. First of all, the Danish 'logic of sovereignty' has made it hard to handle the special nature of the European Union – which is not a state, nor an ordinary international organisation. As the late Jacques Delors – former head of the European Commission – was famous for saying, the European Community (as it was then called) – is a UPO: an unidentified political object. One of the things that was dramatically new when Denmark became a member – and incomprehensible, even to lawyers – was the qualitative difference between the legal basis for the Community compared to that of classical international cooperation. The fact that European law (unlike international law) took precedence *vis-à-vis* national law of the Member States in cases of conflict between the two, and could be strongly sanctioned by a European Court, made it both very effective but also radically different from anything seen previously.³ In traditional international law it is always up to the national government/parliamentary majority to say 'yes' or 'no' to any new piece of international law which, accordingly, can be annulled and made void by later-adopted, contradictory, national law. European law was different by not only having immediate effect in national law,⁴ but also by having a supranational court which could set aside contradictory national legislation if it clashed with the court's interpretation of the treaties and secondary EU law (de Burca & Craig 2008). While European law was, in this way, much more efficient compared to the complexity and inefficiency of traditional international law, (Wind 2001) it was simultaneously a challenge for a so-called 'dualist' Member State like Denmark, which insisted on a strict separation between national and international law (Wind 2001). The new European 'order' was thus in many ways much closer to the law seen in federal states and very much in line with the new German constitutional structure established after the War. This is also

why the Germans (as compared to the Danes) never saw further European integration as being in opposition to the German federal legal order. As the Union evolved, where the Danes saw more and more powers being transferred away from the nation state, the Germans just saw the Union as an extra layer that would strengthen the state and not something that would take anything away from it.⁵ What was also new and different for Denmark was, as mentioned above, the entire idea of a 'Community' (and later 'Union') with a 'Court' that could strike down national legislation if it wasn't in accordance with European law. Over the past 50 years this has caused a lot of stir in Danish political circles, exactly due to our dualist structure, conception of sovereignty and to the way Denmark amended its constitution in 1953.⁶ After the War, almost all other European Member States acquired new constitutions with elaborate human rights guarantees and strong national courts to protect them. So for most other EU Member States the EU construction was just a reflection of the postwar insistence that parliaments should always be constrained and checked by national – and later international – courts. The aim was, of course, to prevent a new Nazi takeover, which partly happened due to an unchecked Weimar Parliament in the 1930s. Denmark, however, did not acquire (or even debate) a constitutional court, judicial review, a new elaborate constitution with strong human rights nor the need for a constrained parliament after the War. It remained a majoritarian democracy with a reticent role for the national courts and only slightly reformed its constitution (in 1953) and without introducing judicial review (Wind forthcoming). This choice has had fundamental consequences for Denmark's 'way of being in Europe'. As opposed to the majoritarian position of the Danes, most other European states – including new Member States over the years – became 'constitutional democracies' (as opposed to majoritarian)⁷ with strong courts, elaborate rights and judicial review (Wind, *ibid*). In majoritarian democracies, voting in elections and the forming of majorities are still today regarded as the most important elements of democracy. 'Counting to 90' (mandates in parliament) is the ultimate definition of democracy in Denmark; not constitutions, extensive rights, and courts to protect them. In Denmark the parliament speaks for the unconstrained 'people' and the parliament is therefore the most important body in society that no other institution is 'over or above' (Føllesdal & Wind 2009, 131-141). A good example of the continuous anti-constitutionalist stance towards the EU system with a strong supranational court that can set aside conflicting Danish legislation is Justice Minister Nick Hækkerup's outburst in 2021 in the Danish Parliament. He was commenting on whether Denmark should follow the

European Court of Justices' logging case law forbidding national authorities from tapping citizen data. He called it madness that Denmark should follow the Court's decisions and pointed out:

They are just judges. Why should they be allowed to decide what is law in Denmark? Why should anyone without democratic legitimacy be allowed to decide what Danish law is? I simply don't get it. (Wind & Knudsen 2023, 257)

Why mention this here? Because it says something deeper about the Danish approach to international courts and international/European law and may also explain the recurrent desire of political parties in Denmark to question international conventions.⁹ In a majoritarian democracy, a political majority, once elected, is considered to be almost unlimited and should not be challenged by courts (Rasmussen 1996). It is the politicians rather than the courts which protect individual rights. This is obviously very different from the German conception of democracy after the Second World War, which became the constitutional role model for the rest of the world after the War, where the emphasis on the protection of the individual against the state through the courts, and its 'eternity clause' were central. Germany is interesting for several reasons in this context because it is Denmark's next-door neighbour and yet acquired such a fundamentally different view of what a democracy should look like and what it means 'to be in Europe'. A good example is the possibility of banning right-wing parties to protect democracy which, in Denmark, is seen as highly controversial, exactly because once elected no one should question a party's legitimacy. To put it differently, once you are elected by 'the people' no one should be allowed to decide that you are unfit for office. This is very different from the German approach to democracy after the Second World War, as something which has to be explicitly defended against extremes of both right- and left-wing parties – and this protection is explicitly mandated to the courts. It is thus often argued that Germany has a 'substantive' democracy conception while Denmark has a 'formal' one where what the people vote for is always 'right' and should never be challenged (Wind forthcoming; see also Ross 1946). As the famous Danish legal theorist Alf Ross said in his influential book 'Why democracy' after the Second World War, you cannot 'impose democracy against the will of the people' – and 'the will is here the pure 'majority principle' as he puts it (Ross 1946, 125). This may explain why it caused outrage in Denmark when Germans have discussed excluding the legitimately elected

AfD due to its encroachment on the German Constitution and Nazi references, and now further underscored by the analysis by the German Verfassungschütz.⁹ In majoritarian democracies nothing is above or alongside 'the elected people', and any kind of restrictions placed on those elected are seen as problematic.¹⁰ This also means that 'politics' and majorities matter, whereas courts are relegated to a position as the *bouche de la loi*. And with no *national* tradition of courts vetoing legislation in parliament (it has only happened once since Denmark got its constitution in 1849),¹¹ it was not that surprising that Denmark has had an almost existential struggle with the European Union which was built as a copy of the postwar German constitutional order combined with a French-inspired bureaucracy. While it has rarely been in focus in the public debate in Denmark, nor in Danish integration history (which has largely left out the legal aspect), civil servants, national lawyers and judges have had to juggle these different models of democracy on a day-to-day basis over the past 50 years (Wind & Knudsen 2023).¹²

In other words, law (rather than power politics) was in the European Community (later Union) DNA. This has meant that institutional balancing, a common legal realm with a strong authoritative court, and the privileging of small states vis-à-vis larger ones are key to the EU's playbook. As in the case of the United States, tiny states like Luxembourg, Belgium and the Netherlands (and later Denmark and many others) were given equal voices in the Council together with the Community's large Member States such as Germany and France.¹³ The same was secured in the European Parliament and for its directly elected members in 1979. Small Member States are hugely over-represented in this body in terms of the number of seats compared to inhabitants and voting powers.

When qualified majority voting was introduced in 1986 with the Single European Act at the Amsterdam Treaty, it was in many ways another 'silent' revolution that transformed the way of cooperating, at least for countries like Denmark, whose point of departure was still the classical sovereignty conception (Weiler 1991, 2403-2483). As majority voting was introduced, countries could, in effect, now be voted down if a qualified majority of Member States (and later the European Parliament when co-decision was introduced), decided to go ahead with new legislation. Even if a Member State had voted against, the Member State in question would still have to implement the laws that were

decided by the majority. This was not a normal way of doing things in the classical world of sovereignty and intergovernmentalism, where Denmark was (and still is) located. The overall idea was, however, clear. In order to make the EU able to act efficiently as more and more members entered the Union, majority voting was a necessity. We have all seen what happens in the areas (foreign and security policy), where unanimity is still in place. For instance, when Hungary has again and again threatened to block sanctions against Russia during the war in Ukraine. Moving from unanimity to qualified majority voting was therefore in many ways a no-brainer in the majority of EU policy areas (though not in foreign and security policy) in 1986. If all Member States could veto new legislation while the EU expanded – both in members and in policy areas – the EU would quickly become as weak as most other international law treaties that rely on unanimity. Avoiding the EU ending up with such a loose structure was exactly what most political leaders wanted when the Community was established after the War. By making companies able to rely on *one* (and not six, fifteen and later twenty-eight or twenty-seven) different legal orders, where decisions could be taken relatively quickly was also what distanced the Community from classical sovereignty conceptions and similar intergovernmental organisations.

Although these innovations were a precondition for the internal market to flourish, diffuse Danish EU scepticism was prominent in those years on both sides of the political aisle, although Denmark did ratify – in a referendum – the Single European Act in 1986. The referendum was called by Prime Minister Poul Schlüter as he could not get the treaty through parliament. He however, simultaneously said that ‘The Union was stone dead’ as he put it in a speech in the Danish Parliament (Olesen 2021). As so many times before during Danish EU membership a politician conveyed to the public that no further integration steps would be taken beyond the one currently in question – just as there would be no giving up of additional sovereignty transfers (Olesen & Jensen 2000). Promising the Danes that the Union was (still) only a market, based on ordinary international law and not a political union (or even worse – a state in the making) has in many ways, been the most dominant common trait in Danish political communication on Europe over the years.

European champions

Despite the recurrent political narrative about Europe being just 'ordinary international politics' and that no further integration would follow, it wasn't long before the exact opposite happened. Soon, the increasing blurring of *national* and *supranational* boundaries re-entered the agenda and challenged the Danes' rigid conception of sovereignty. The Maastricht Treaty signed in 1992 a few years after the fall of the Berlin Wall was a wake-up call in this respect, turning the Community into a full-fledged Union. Most European politicians thought that integration had to deepen further in order to be able to handle the new challenges with the breakup of the Soviet Union. The Danes did not see the need, however, and it resulted in a fierce Danish 'no' to the Treaty in the 1992 referendum (50.7 against and 49.3 for). One year later Denmark was given the ultimatum of either leaving the Union or adopting four opt-outs on the monetary union, defence cooperation, EU citizenship and justice and home affairs with the so-called Edinburgh Agreement. However, 1992 was also the year that Denmark surprisingly won the European Championship in football, and when the exceptionally pro-EU foreign minister Uffe Ellemann Jensen – after the match – delivered his famous phrase: 'If you cannot join them, beat them'. The Edinburgh Agreement and the opt-outs thus saved Denmark from being kicked out of the Union altogether but also for the first time introduced *permanent* opt-outs by an EU Member State to the EU's *acquis communautaire* (Jensen, Martinsen & Wind 2017). Several other Member States have acquired *temporary* opt-outs over the years but for the first (and last) time, a Member State (Denmark) was now allowed to stay out of important policy areas with *no time limit* for when the exceptions should be terminated. That nationalism was still strong in Denmark at the time, and that it went far beyond the so-called 'ordinary people' and EU-sceptic politicians, became clear when the Danish Supreme Court surprisingly allowed a group of citizens without any personal stake in the case to challenge Denmark's final acceptance of the Maastricht Treaty.¹⁴ The citizens argued that the government's adoption of the treaty challenged section 20 in the Danish Constitution by the Danish government not having clearly defined what powers were transferred to the Union. Even though the Danish Supreme Court, in its final verdict from 1998,¹⁵ concluded that it did not find the Danish Government in violation of the Constitution by adopting the treaty, the court – in line with the German Constitutional Court's infamous Maastricht decision of a few years before¹⁶ – argued that it still saw Danish law as supreme (*vis-à-vis* EU law) and that it therefore had a right to

reject any future EU law or decision by the European Court if it considered it to go beyond the sovereignty transferred to the Union by the Danish Constitution. The scepticism of the Union and its constitutional foundation thus ran (and probably still runs) much deeper than just among those citizens who rejected the Maastricht Treaty on 2 June 1992.¹⁷

It was no doubt a huge international shock that Denmark had voted no to an EU treaty in 1992 – even despite the later adoption of the Edinburgh Agreement that made it possible for Denmark to stay in the Union and for the other Member States to continue their work as planned. Many international scholars accordingly started to write long articles and books about how the Danish ‘no’ represented a broader anti-European phenomenon and might be interpreted as a sound reaction expressing general dissatisfaction with the EU’s so-called democratic deficit (Weiler 1999, 299-314). In plenty of the literature of those years Danish voters were presented as true heroes. Many other Member States did not have referenda, and ‘the people’ were rarely asked about European politics. For instance, the German voters were not asked about whether they wanted to give up the Deutsche Mark when the Maastricht Treaty was decided – something they clearly would have said ‘no’ to. The Danish ‘no’ to Maastricht (like the French and Dutch ‘no’ in 2005 to the European Constitution) was thus seen as representing a ‘no’ on behalf of many more European citizens than five million Danes. One of the consequences of the Maastricht revolt was thus for the political elites to try to work in a different way – and be more inclusive – in future treaty changes. In 2002 the heads of state and government therefore, established a convention followed by years of formalised discussions before a new constitutional treaty was finalised. A treaty that the French and the Dutch voters, as mentioned above, nevertheless ended up rejecting in two referenda.¹⁸ Because the treaty or ‘Constitutional Treaty’ as it was called in Denmark fell in the two aforementioned countries, it never reached the Danish voters in a planned referendum.

That the Danes wanted ‘more democracy’ and for that reason had voted ‘no’ to the Maastricht Treaty almost ten years earlier was, however, gravely misconceived. The Danes did not (like for instance, the Germans) want more *European* democracy in terms of more influence and power to the directly elected European Parliament. Quite the contrary. Rather, the Danes wanted power *returned* to the Member State-level to ensure that Danish law was still supreme, and that classical sovereignty was still in operation. Had the Danish

view won wider acceptance in 1992 – a view which is not that far from the Hungarian anti-European stance under Viktor Orban, or that of the British Brexiters – it would have meant a de facto disintegration of the internal market and probably the Union itself. In sum, had the sceptical Danish rhetoric continued and spread further after the Maastricht vote, it would have led not only to a Brexit and a Dexit some years later, but probably to the dissolution of the EU itself. That scepticism thus also continued to be strong in Denmark after the Edinburgh Agreement became crystal clear when the Danish social democratic government and the centre-right opposition parties in 2000 half-heartedly tried to get rid of the euro opt-out (acquired in the Edinburgh Agreement). They failed and the same was the case when Danish politicians, again half-heartedly, tried to amend the justice and home affairs exemption in 2015. The voters seemed to think: 'Why support a closer relationship to Europe, when not even the political leaders of the mainstream parties seem to support it?' 'You cannot feed the pig on market-day' was the parallel critique of David Cameron during the Brexit campaign in 2016, where Cameron, who had fiercely attacked and criticised the EU throughout all of his political career, all of a sudden wanted people to understand the positive aspects of the Union and vote remain. The Danish politicians were rarely convincing at 'selling' the European project and, across the board, came across as genuinely EU sceptical, perhaps with the exception of the aforementioned liberal foreign minister Uffe Elleman Jensen and the small social liberal party, Radikale Venstre.

International activism and EU scepticism under Fogh Rasmussen

The 'no' to the euro helped bring Anders Fogh Rasmussen to power as Poul Nyrup Rasmussen had to step down after losing the euro referendum one year earlier. Fogh Rasmussen ruled with a strong fist from 2001 to 2009, when he became Secretary General of NATO. However, these years also became another long period where Danish EU scepticism intensified markedly at the governmental level, as Fogh Rasmussen decided to build his majority on the extreme right – Danish Peoples Party – propping up the government in a tightly knit deal without formally joining it. The new EU scepticism was accompanied by a strong Atlanticism and very close ties to the US. The EU-sceptic and pro-American position was widely shared in the Danish Folketing after having put the 1980s so-called 'Footnote Policy' vis-à-vis NATO behind.¹⁹

The Danish opt-outs from the EU, where Denmark could not join the EU's defence (often peacekeeping) operations, led the government to a new foreign policy 'activism' following the US around the world. The pro-American bromance – strong personal relationship between George W. Bush and Anders Fogh Rasmussen in 2001 (9/11) after the terrorist attack on the Twin Towers, led Denmark to join the American-led intervention in Afghanistan. Denmark under Fogh Rasmussen also departed from its European partners, Germany and France when it followed the Americans into war in Iraq. While the Fogh Rasmussen (and later Løkke Rasmussen) governments were formally minority governments, they both had a solid majority when counting in their partner – the highly EU- and immigration-sceptic Danish People's Party. It was on their initiative that Denmark introduced Europe's strictest immigration policy and also, for almost ten years, were allowed (by changing right-wing minority governments) to voice the most explicitly anti-EU position since 1973. This seemed, however, in harmonious accordance with Fogh Rasmussen himself, who openly disliked Europhile 'globalists' calling them elitist *smagsdommere* ('arbiters of taste'). The EU-sceptic position that had long been a more or less tacit part of Denmark's DNA was already in those years (and still today) symbolically underscored by the complete absence of EU flags on display on government buildings or at official governmental press briefings. On Europe Day (9 May) the municipality of Copenhagen assertively put EU flags on Copenhagen buses, but everywhere else the symbolic circle of yellow stars on blue is nowhere to be seen in the Danish public sphere. When the Danish People's Party long-time leader and fierce anti-European Pia Kjærsgaard – supported by the centre-right parties – managed to acquire the top job as head of the Danish Parliament,²⁰ (the number two job in Denmark after the Danish King), she made sure that EU flags were nowhere to be seen. In particular, not on the Danish Parliament building. Not even on Europe Day (Larsen 2017). Most notable here is perhaps not Ms. Kjærsgaard's insistence on eliminating any sign of the European flag from public buildings – considering that she, while being President of the Danish Parliament in 2016, called the EU a 'rat's nest' (Pihl & Ellegaard 2011). It was more that no one else in the Danish Parliament objected.

Denmark held the EU presidency in 2003, when enlargement with eight new Central and Eastern European countries was negotiated. The Danish prime minister, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, was in charge and was personally strongly in favour of enlarging the Union. The Danish public was also positive, though

most agree that the Danish position aligned closely with the British, hoping that an enlarged European Union would slow down its integration speed and prevent the Union from moving in a federal direction (Jensen, Martinsen & Wind 2017). That continued anti-European sentiment came from a broad spectrum of Danish political life became clear during the enlargement negotiations, notably when both the Danish unions and the left-leaning 'Junibevægelsen' – a rather powerful EU-sceptical grassroots movement represented in the European Parliament from 1993–2009, issued a sarcastic poster saying 'Welcome to 40 million Poles' (Kragh 2004). Their message was clear: that letting the Central and Eastern Europeans into the Union would mean a loss of jobs in Denmark, lower Danish salaries, and lead to welfare tourism.

The centre-right government that took over when Anders Fogh Rasmussen became NATO Secretary General, and which was led by his 'next-in-command' Lars Løkke Rasmussen, also depended heavily on the Danish People's Party. On their demand, in 2011 the government introduced temporary border control on the Danish–German border, building a (false) narrative about an increase in immigration, Eastern European gangs and crime (Pihl & Ellegaard 2011).²¹ The government mainly used border control as a bribe to the Danish People's Party to vote for the yearly national budget while illegal migrants were nowhere in sight (as opposed to in 2015 when all of Europe experienced a migration crisis). Changing government constellations have up until this day, and thus long before and after the migrant crisis, used different types of excuses for keeping border control at the Danish–German border and thus violating the Schengen rules despite it being clearly against EU law (Grænseforeningen 2023).

While the social democratic, social liberal and socialist government of 2011–2015 signalled a more positive rhetoric vis-à-vis the EU, the new Bruges-educated first female prime minister, Helle Thorning Schmidt, didn't back down on the Danish government's 'frugal brand' and strong emphasis on wanting rebates from the EU budget. Moreover, Thorning-Schmidt surprisingly also skipped any mention of Europe in her final two New Year addresses while in government (Thorning-Schmidt n.d.). In her first two in 2012 (when Denmark held the EU Presidency) and in 2013, the EU did get a few defensive lines in the manuscript, but the more visionary, pro-European approach emphasising how Denmark might help develop the EU that many had hoped for never materialised. Despite the change of government from right to centre-left, the

Danish European mood was still quite sceptical despite the Socialist People's Party (SF), which had been the main party behind the 'no' to the Maastricht Treaty in 1992 and the Edinburgh Agreement the year after, having turned more and more pro-European. The Danish far right was still highly popular however, also on the EU scene in the European Parliament. The controversial figure Morten Messerschmidt, a fierce anti-European populist and current leader of the Danish People's Party, managed in 2014 to gain a record 465,758 personal votes in his European parliamentary campaign (FAKTA 2014), superseding in numbers more pro-European former Danish prime ministers.

Perhaps because Denmark likes to cultivate its image of being a staunch human rights defender, few are aware that the country today probably has the EU's strictest immigration laws, originally introduced by Fogh Rasmussen and later taken over by different constellations of liberal right and later social democratic governments and their supporting parties. The entire Danish parliament is behind this policy, with the possible exception of the far-left Unity List party (*Enhedslisten*). Danish immigration and asylum laws have often caught international attention (Bilefsky 2016). For instance in 2016 when the Danish Parliament adopted the so-called jewellery law, it provoked the following headline in the *Guardian*: 'Danish Parliament approves plan to seize assets from refugees. New law allows police to search asylum seekers to secure cash and valuables' (Crouch & Kingsley 2016). In Germany also, and up until the present day, fierce debates have flourished about whether Denmark, by letting mainstream parties 'copy-paste' right wing policies on immigration, has curbed the extreme right or not (Knight 2017). It was quite remarkable how the Danish People's Party crumbled and fell in popularity from around 20% to now around 5% after the Danish social democrats adopted their rhetoric and policies.²² While the conclusion to this question is still up for debate – also among populism scholars analysing the mainstreaming of right wing policies²³ – it is noteworthy that while the Danish People's Party lost in popularity, many other new, small, right-wing parties have popped up so that the number of voters voting for the extreme right in Denmark amounts to approximately the same percentage as before the strict immigration policies were normalised.²⁴

When current social democratic prime minister Mette Frederiksen suggested externalising immigrants to a third country (Rwanda) a few years ago – a proposal that so far hasn't materialised – it was described as yet another example of Denmark contemplating going solo on immigration in the EU

(Hivert 2024). The rhetoric and policy of wanting to scare migrants away as a deliberate strategy, leaving the immigration problem to Denmark's European neighbours, raised some eyebrows²⁵. The strategy was only possible due to Denmark's justice and home affairs opt-out (back from the Edinburgh Agreement) and now seems to have inspired other EU Member States and the Commission. At least, the idea of externalisation of asylum applications by handling them in third countries is now part of the Commission's new Asylum Pact adopted in 2024.²⁶ In many ways Denmark thus ended up turning its own policy into a common European policy.

For decades Denmark was a foot-dragging and sceptical partner with a very sticky conception of sovereignty. Denmark was also one of Europe's most frugal Member States, with successive left and right governments asking for rebates from European budget negotiations while refusing to allow the EU to acquire its own income, greater financial muscle or common debt. The thinking was that in order to win an election in Denmark – left or right – you had to be EU-sceptic and anti-immigration. We do not have to go further back than 2019 (repeated in 2020) to quote a Danish prime minister, still incumbent Mette Frederiksen, describing the EU's budget plan as completely absurd [*gak, gak*].²⁷

When Brexit happened in 2016 and the UK was finally out in 2020, the lack of Danish allies in the EU circle became abundantly clear. While many thought that Denmark would be the next country to leave the EU (Zillman 2016) – something that is still strongly encouraged by the Danish People's Party – the post-Brexit void was also a reminder (as the ECPR study suggests) that Denmark would have to rethink its EU policy. Not least because Brexit turned out to be an economic disaster with a loss of GDP of more than 5%,²⁸ but also to better exploit Denmark's lead and influence in climate and green transition policy. A few months after Brexit Trump entered the White House as America's 45th president. This tendency was further reinforced with Trump's re-election in 2024, where it quickly became abundantly clear that the American engagement in Europe and in NATO could come to an end pushing Denmark in a less Atlanticist direction. This 'move to Europe' only became clearer when Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022 and Denmark, in a referendum, gave up its 30-year-old defence opt-out.

A Danish (E)U-turn?

It took a Russian war in Ukraine to finally rid Denmark of its first opt-out, though the Danish prime minister's change of course mainly came in 2025, when the uncertainty around American security guarantees of Trump's second term became more and more apparent. There was a headline in the French newspaper *Le Monde* on 7 March, declaring 'Denmark's spectacular shift from Atlanticism to European defence' (Hivert 2025) suggesting – probably correctly – that the immense destabilisation of the transatlantic relationship was now pushing Denmark towards a stronger European engagement.²⁹ The fact that this 'turn to Europe' took so long and was primarily a result of a deteriorating Danish–American relationship under Trump (not least with his territorial threats against the Danish Kingdom) demonstrates how slow and difficult the Europeanisation process has been for Denmark. But it also demonstrated how vulnerable Denmark is, with its north-facing geographical location, if the American friendship wanes. For the Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen, who had also steered Denmark through the coronavirus pandemic, the ruthless attack on a former Soviet republic, now independent democratic country that sought closer ties with Europe, was no doubt a turning point. Today Denmark is one of the countries in Europe that has given the most economic and military aid to Ukraine, while the severity of the geopolitical situation has seen intensifying debate among politicians and in the Danish public sphere over the past three years (Hivert 2024). With the still ongoing dramatic break up of Euro-Atlantic relations under Trump 2.0, which as mentioned also includes a threat to Danish territory in the case of Greenland, Denmark is now for the first time radically turning to its European partners. It is however also clear that this 'turn to Europe' is mainly in security and defence matters.³⁰ A recent poll showed that Danes still have their reservations and do not want to abandon the other EU opt-outs to join the euro and the EU's justice and home affairs collaboration. The Danish change of policy – removing the defence opt-out and moving closer to its European friends and allies thus first and foremost suggests that Denmark, as a small vulnerable state in the international system, primarily navigates from a position of weakness – and presently is in search of alternative security structures (Archer, Bailes & Wivel 2014).

One of the first small steps out of the EU-sceptic corner happened already during the coronavirus pandemic when the Danish government, for the first time, accepted common European debt to overcome the economic downturn

(Porte & Jensen 2021). In December 2020, for the first time ever, the EU countries adopted joint 'sovereign debt'. Denmark gave it a thumbs up even though the Danish prime minister, in January of the same year, had repeated her threat to veto the coming EU budget negotiations if the budget was expanded and Denmark didn't get its rebate.

Committing to joint borrowing (Next Generation EU [NGEU]) was a huge leap not just for Denmark but also in the history of the European Union. Taking out loans and being jointly liable for them is not something international or supranational organisations normally do; it is usually state business. Several international observers talked about it representing Europe's own 'Hamilton moment' with reference to Alexander Hamilton's establishment of common debt in 1790 – de facto establishing the United States.³¹ The idea was perhaps more concrete and pragmatic – to exploit the EU's status III rating and collectively mobilise EUR 2.018 trillion,³² which was given out as loans and grants, provided the receiving Member States could justify the need. Because it was so controversial, Frederiksen's minority government was eager to stress that it was a one-off event – not something to be repeated. Denmark was in a state of emergency, it was argued, and once the pandemic was over, it was important to move quickly back to normal. Back to being frugal.

It seems, however, that common debt is slowly creeping back into the EU lingo and becoming the 'new normal' (Martuscelli 2025). The current (writing in spring 2025) social democratic, liberal and moderate majority government (SVM) has indicated that it is ready to accept more common debt to invest in the EU's common defence against Russia and to strengthen Europe's capabilities in light of the American government's retreat from Europe. But also to create a new energy union so that Europe's businesses have access to cheap energy, ending the embarrassing continuing European dependency on Russian gas.³³ As the prime minister put it:

All countries, and that includes a country like Denmark, which tends to be among 'the frugals', need to put away their automatic reactions and see what Europe's needs are. Then we need to get the economy to adapt to that instead of the other way around.³⁴

This was certainly news from a Danish perspective as it inevitably brings Denmark closer to a European destiny than the previous transactional

approach to integration Danes have been used to. It would also pave the way for a comprehensive shift in the EU's own economic policy if it decides to collectively invest its way out of the current crises. The new Danish approach to debt is also radical because it may be interpreted as a helping hand to indebted Member States like Italy, Greece, France and Spain, who have strongly encouraged common borrowing in order to make it possible to build a stronger Europe. The move seems equally to be supported by Germany where in March 2025 Friedrich Merz, the new German chancellor, even before he formally entered office managed to get a 2/3 majority to revise the country's debt break and thus invest the country out of its current economic crisis instead of the budget cut approach that has been the usual conservative solution. Likely, this national strategy will also spiral on to the European level leading – it is expected – to both his and other frugal Member States' support. It is therefore a big victory for Ursula von der Leyen. As Claus Kragh has put it:

The EU chief executive has declared that her new Commission 'must and should' be an investment commission: she wants to invest especially in collective security and in low-carbon energy to boost the EU's competitiveness.³⁵

With Donald Trump back in the White House and his refusal to meet or coordinate with the EU regarding the War in Ukraine but also the uncertainty that he and his administration have created regarding the future of NATO, the EU has clearly stepped up. On 6 March at an extraordinary Council meeting, Ursula von der Leyen launched her plan, 'ReArm Europe' which would mobilise close to EUR 800 billion for defence.³⁶

The plan seeks to transform the use of public funding for defence at the *national* level. Member States can now spend more – if the plan is implemented – as the Commission will activate the national escape clause of the Stability and Growth Pact ensuring that the excessive deficit procedure will not be triggered as punishment if Member States overspend by building up in the defence area. Secondly, the Commission will provide EUR 150 billion of loans to Member States for defence investment focused on coordinated spending. For instance, on 'air and missile defence, artillery systems, missiles and ammunition drones, and anti-drone systems; but also to address other needs from cyber to military mobility for example'.³⁷

Thirdly, the Commission also wants to let the Member States use the EU budget more flexibly so that they can use cohesion money for defence purposes and, finally, it suggests mobilising private capital through the European Investment Bank. So far, the Danish Parliament has given the thumbs up to the Commission's ReArm Europe plan and backed the idea of European defence bonds, a suggestion that is only now creeping into the Commission's in-tray. It has, as mentioned previously, been a prior no-go for many of the EU's frugal countries to go down that path, including Denmark. As we have seen above, already in the beginning of December 2024, however, the Danish prime minister suggested that common European borrowing for defence was probably a necessary next step (Bie 2024).

The new Danish position on common borrowing and defence may very well be on the agenda when Denmark takes over the EU Presidency on 1 July 2025, in particular if the geopolitical situation deteriorates, the Americans withdraw most of their assistance, and more weapons and help are needed for Ukraine. A lot depends on the new German Chancellor who as mentioned above has been willing to borrow money to increase defence spending at the national level. Denmark will have a central role in preparing the Union's next seven-year budget for the period 2028–2034. The new fiscal policy instruments are a quite remarkable leap in light of Denmark's past 50 years of sceptical EU policy. Common borrowing to finance a European defence build-up and massive public investments does not, however, automatically move Denmark closer to the eurozone, which continues to constitute the absolute core of the European Union. So even though Denmark has become a much more active European player over the past three years, nothing suggests that it will join the euro or the Banking Union, though it has agreed to support some version of Mario Draghi's³⁸ quest for better functioning capital markets, which will demand further financial integration.

Denmark's foreign policy and European strategic autonomy

On the 1 February 2022, just before Russia invaded Ukraine, Denmark issued a new foreign and security strategy (Winding & Green 2023). It was presented by the social democratic minority government which put the EU higher on the agenda than previously, and it contains the word 'EU' no fewer

than 150 times (Albrechtsen 2022). In the presentation of the strategy the prime minister emphasised that Denmark should be ‘at the heart of Europe’ (Albrechtsen 2022). The strategy made no mention, however, of the Danish opt-outs, a roll back of Denmark’s austerity policy, nor of any desire to call a referendum on the Danish defence opt-out. That only came after the Russian invasion.³⁹ Instead, the 2022 strategy emphasised that Denmark should ‘work for a stronger EU on the global stage and take the lead in the fight for values’ (Larsen 2023), stressing the EU as a climate union. Just one year later – with a new majority government consisting of the Social Democrats, the Liberals and the Moderates (SMV) – and a Russia that had invaded Ukraine, Denmark launched yet another foreign and security policy strategy.⁴⁰ It was even more EU-oriented, emphasising that ‘EU cooperation is the most important platform for Danish foreign policy and crucial for our prosperity, security and safety’. In the 2023 version, Lars Løkke Rasmussen – former prime minister who was now the new foreign minister, also stressed that instead of being too idealistic, Denmark should skip the ‘moral high ground’ and become more pragmatic in terms of whom to work with internationally. This was clearly inspired by the EU’s new foreign policy goal, called ‘principled pragmatism’, which was launched in the EU’s own Strategic Compass in 2022,⁴¹ reaching out also to the Global South, which had become increasingly important but was not necessarily willing to listen to Europe’s moralising on, for instance, human rights.

In its most recent strategy, the Danish government also has a strong focus on enlargement. Although enlargement has usually been a question of balancing between ensuring the cohesion of the EU on the one hand and ensuring stability on the other, Russia’s invasion of Ukraine has made geopolitical considerations much more important. Keeping countries like Moldova, Georgia, Ukraine and the Western Balkans close now has an even stronger priority. And while the focus when it comes to enlargement is primarily on Ukraine and the West Balkans, the geopolitical situation has opened discussions about how to launch a more sector-based enlargement process, integrating candidate countries’ policy areas and sectors more gradually. This more pragmatic approach also points to a move away from a strictly merit-based approach to enlargement. According to some analysts, enlargement has already now become ‘...a tool to fulfil the EU’s geopolitical goals, rather than to promote democratic and human rights values’ (Bosse 2024), though this is obviously not something the Danish government (or the EU) admits has become official policy.

One of the things we have learned since the Russian invasion of Ukraine is that everything is politics. This is also what lies behind the term 'strategic autonomy', which was first launched as a concept by the French president, Emmanuel Macron, in his Sorbonne Speech in 2017 (Perissisich 2022). Energy supply, environmental policies, industrial policies, development aid policy, enlargement and trade, just to mention a few areas, have now all become politicised. Every time a policy programme is decided and launched, looking forward, its political risks and collateral damage will have to be carefully considered. European industrial policy is also now being reconsidered but rather than building big, new industrial giants, the focus is on diversification and flexible 'open' free trade agreements. This is also emphasised in the most recent Danish foreign policy strategy where a Danish change of policy is clearly detectable. As one analyst puts it, it is remarkable to see how Denmark has gone from being one of the countries most critical of the EU's industrial policy ambitions to emphasising the importance of a 'robust trade and industrial policy in the EU' (Sørensen 2023).

The dependence on Russian gas is probably the prime example of how things have become 'strategic'. Something that we previously saw as just a question of acquiring the cheapest gas possible for our production, has now become 100% politicised as Europe seeks to decrease its dependency on Russian energy supplies – a strong focus area of the new Danish Commissioner Dan Jørgensen. Trump's new trade policy introducing tariffs as a punishment is another example of how an area we have normally – for the past 80 years – considered to be purely commercial and practical, has now turned into a potential security (strategy) risk.

2025–2026 will be extraordinary for Denmark. Both when it comes to holding the presidency of the Council of the EU and as a rotating member of the UN Security Council. With the Danish defence opt-out out of the way, the government can now, for the first time, play a more central and proactive role in the development of the EU's security policy (Sørensen 2023). This has already played out in the Danish prime minister's tough approach towards Russia and by Denmark being one of the largest donors to Ukraine, as well as in Denmark's innovative direct investments in Ukraine's own military build-up. This approach is now being copied by others and called 'The Danish model'. Being sandwiched between Russia on the east flank and a chaotic and much less reliable – even threatening – American administration on the other, has

no doubt been a driver behind this policy change away from Atlanticism and towards Europe. It should be noted, however, that Denmark still – rather surprisingly – continues to allow American troops on Danish soil (Vestergaard 2025) in a new agreement and also intends to continue buying F35 fighters and other weaponry from the US.⁴² It all indicates that while Denmark has become less Atlanticist, it wants to keep a window open for a normalisation of Danish-US relations.

Answering the question of whether events over the past three years have moved Denmark closer to the European core, it is probably safe to say yes but without suggesting that what is driving Denmark is idealism. Denmark's reorientation is first and foremost driven by its vulnerability in the international system due to the unreliability of the American administration. The surprising and unprecedented American threats to Danish sovereignty, the trade war and the US threat to withdraw from its European engagement in NATO have all contributed to this. It is thus rather unlikely that the Danish reorientation will spiral over into a call for new referenda to take Denmark fully into the core – i.e. the eurozone and the justice and home affairs area. As Associate Professor Henrik Larsen has pointed out in an analysis, it was first and foremost *security* that drew the Danish argument for a stronger EU (Larsen 2023). So while Denmark now seems ready to support the EU becoming a geopolitical 'player in its own right', no one still dares to ask what that may mean in terms of further European federalisation.

Most decisive for Danish EU policy looking forward is most likely to be the ongoing and developing crisis in Europe's relations with both Putin and the new Trump administration. In combination, the two former fierce enemies have over the past years and months jointly disrupted the world order, global institutions and respect for borders and territorial integrity. As regards the US, we are talking about 80 years of transatlantic relations with its Western allies. As a committed pro-Atlanticist this is not an easy situation for Denmark to navigate but it might convince Denmark to take even greater responsibility for regional security, stability and mean even deeper European integration looking forward.

Notes

- 1 Marlene Wind is a Professor in the Department of Political Science and the iCourts Centre of Excellence at the Faculty of Law at the University of Copenhagen.
- 2 ECFR 2018 and 2020 studies can be found at <https://ecfr.eu/special/eucoalitionexplorer/>
- 3 See Schou & Nymann-Lindegreen 2023.
- 4 Under EU law, regulations have direct effect in national law while directives are minimal laws that national parliaments often have to transform into national law through parliament. Both types are, however, binding and late or wrong implementation of both regulations and directives can be enforced by ordinary citizens (against national authorities). At first by national courts and, eventually, by the European Court of Justice. If a directive has been wrongly implemented or delayed, a Member State can be fined and ordered to immediately change national law to accommodate European law and treaties.
- 5 It should be mentioned, however, that on several occasions the German Constitutional Court objected to the transfer of power from the German state level to the European level. See Slaughter, Sweet & Weiler 1998.
- 6 See Messerschmidt 2020. On further details on this see Wind & Knudsen 2023.
- 7 This distinction was originally made by the legal theorist R. Dworkin in his 1997 book *Freedom's Law*, Harvard University Press.
- 8 For more on this point, see Christoffersen & Madsen 2011.
- 9 See 'Nach Klage: Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz setzt Einstufung der AfD als rechtsextrem aus - Video - WELT.' (n.d.); 'Presse.' (n.d.)
- 10 A good example was the so-called 'Støjberg case' where a Rigsret could only be established against the former minister, Inger Støjberg, when there was a parliamentary majority for it. She was later convicted for breaking international law (where she systematically and indiscriminately separated asylum couples where one of the parties was a minor). Had there not been a majority in favour she would never have been tried in court. When she was convicted and had served her sentence and was re-elected by 'the people' no one questioned her 'worthiness' as an influential party leader and even potential minister again.
- 11 The Tvind case in 1999.
- 12 U. Neergaard and K.E. Sørensen's 2023 book, *Danmark og EU gennem 50 år: En Milepæl*, is a brilliant example of this.
- 13 When the EU votes with qualified majority however EU countries are given different weights in voting according to the size of their populations. A qualified majority thus demands requires a majority of countries to vote in favor of the proposal. The general

rule is 55%. In an EU of 27 countries, at least 15 countries must be in favor of a proposal. This majority of countries must then represent at least 65% of the total EU population. This is approximately 291 million out of the EU's approximately 447 million citizens. This means that the principle of a certain number of countries favors the small countries, while the large countries are favored by the requirement that a certain proportion of the EU population is represented. In addition, blocking minorities must consist of at least four countries that together represent more than 35% of the EU population. See more at Folketingets EU-Oplysning's 'flertalsberegner' (2019).

- 14 On 6 April 1998, the Danish Supreme Court decided whether the Danish Government's adoption of the Maastricht Treaty (with the Edinburgh Declaration) had happened according to the Constitution's section 20, or whether it required an amendment to the Danish Constitution to adopt it (The Maastricht-verdict, UfR 1998 p. 800).
- 15 Judgment was handed down by the Supreme Court on 6 April 1998 (U.1998.800).
- 16 The German Maastricht decision.
- 17 The infamous Supreme Court Ajos case underscores a very sovereigntist position by the Danish Supreme Court vis-à-vis the EU. See the analysis by Madsen, Olsen & Sadl 2017.
- 18 The Danish voters never got to vote on the Constitution as the French and the Dutch had already rejected it in 2003.
- 19 In the years after 1982, the Schlüter governments wanted to support the NATO line on nuclear weapons. This was, however, not easy as the Danish Folketing's so-called 'alternative majority' consisting of the left-wing parties, the Social Democrats and the Radical Left were against it. They forced the government to distance itself from NATO, especially parts of the nuclear weapons policy, by inserting footnotes with Danish reservations to NATO decisions. This happened through the adoption of security policy agendas in the Danish Parliament. A total of 23 such agendas were adopted in the period 1982–1988.
- 20 From 2015–2019. See 'Pia Kjærsgaard ny formand', Folketinget 2015.
- 21 See also Wind 2012 for further documentation.
- 22 See DR's 'Meningsmåling' (n.d.).
- 23 See Barnils 2023. A more positive take was recently in *The New York Times*, see Leonhardt 2025.
- 24 The following parties are included: Nye Borgerlige, Dansk Folkeparti, Danmarksdemokraterne, Lars Boje Mathisen and partly Liberal Alliance.
- 25 See 'Hoping for zero: Danish externalization plans to Rwanda and a politics of deterrence', Oxford Law Blogs 2022.
- 26 See 'Pact on Migration and Asylum', European Commission 2024.

- 27 Speech at the confederation of Danish Industries 2019. See more at Nielsen 2019. That Frederiksen repeated the wording in 2020 can be found in Vestergaard 2020.
- 28 See Mayor of London, London Assembly 2024.
- 29 It should be mentioned, however, that the Union citizenship opt-out was made void when the Amsterdam Treaty was signed, as this treaty emphasised that Union citizenship would never replace national citizenship, which was what the Danes had objected against.
- 30 See 'Ny måling: Et flertal af danskerne vil bevare EU-forbeholdene', Tænk tanken Europa 2025.
- 31 Alexander Hamilton strengthened the young American federation in 1790 by consolidating the crippling debt of the individual states and creating federal bonds (Georgiou 2022).
- 32 See 'Recovery plan for Europe—European Commission'. European Commission n.d.
- 33 Data from 2005 suggests that the EU as a whole, even today, three years into the war in Ukraine, pays as much for Russian gas as it sends to Ukraine in support. See Crouch & Kingsley 2016.
- 34 Mette Frederiksen, as cited in Kragh 2024.
- 35 Mette Frederiksen, as cited in Kragh 2024.
- 36 As cited in 'Press statement by President von der Leyen on the defence package.' European Commission 2025.
- 37 As cited in 'Press statement by President von der Leyen on the defence package.' European Commission 2025.
- 38 'The Draghi report on EU competitiveness'. European Commission n.d.
- 39 The referendum on the abolition of the Danish defence opt-out was held on one 1 June 2022 with 66.9% of the votes to abolish it and 33.1% voting to keep it.
- 40 See Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark (n.d.).
- 41 See 'A Strategic Compass for Security and Defence | EEAS', European External Action Service (n.d.)
- 42 See Ritzau 2025.

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Ukraine and Africa: the influence of geopolitics on Scandinavian development policies

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Introduction

Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine, geopolitics has become an increasingly evident driver of foreign policy and, by implication, also of development policy. The gradual shift from unipolarity, which largely characterised the decades after the end of the Cold War to a multipolar world means that states are re-emphasising their own interests and pursuing goals that have to do with state sovereignty (Klingebiel 2023). This may have significant implications for development cooperation. During the heyday of globalisation in the immediate post-Cold War period, geopolitics declined in importance. As influential scholars observed at the time, the end of the bipolar world marked a shift from state-centric geopolitics to a more global politics in which transnational and international organisation played an increasing role in areas such as international trade or global governance (Held & McGrew 2002).

Although the extent of abandonment of state interests could always be questioned and was frequently debated, the post-Cold War globalisation wave did arguably free development cooperation from considering donor-governments' national interests to some extent, and did enable them to be able to consider what could be in partner countries' best interests (see e.g. Klingebiel 2023). One reflection of this was the development and agreement of the so-called 'aid effectiveness principles', negotiated and refined during high level meetings in Rome (2003), Paris (2005), Accra (2008), Busan (2011), and since 2012 formally organised as the multi-stakeholder implementation supporting Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation (GPEDC). Subsequently, Agenda 2030 – the UN Sustainable Development Goals – has become the global framework for mobilising resources for development and poverty reduction.

As a response to this geopolitical shift, old truths and principles, such as those of aid effectiveness, are being questioned, reframed and rethought (Brown 2020). Effectiveness is about the fulfilment of development goals and objectives. If goals and objectives change (i.e. to cater more to donor country priorities) so will means, modalities and principles. This is most strikingly evident in the volume of ODA and its geographical disbursements, but also in the expansion of objectives.

In terms of ODA volumes, the main bilateral European donors – Germany, France and the UK – have all announced aid cuts in favour of increased defence spending or national economic stimulus packages. In 2024 development aid from members of the OECD Development Assistance Committee fell by 7.4% in real terms compared to 2023 – the first drop after five years of consecutive growth (OECD 2025a). Since 2022 the donor countries have allocated major portions of their aid budgets to Ukraine and related purposes, including for refugees in donor countries. And in the US – accounting for nearly 30% of total ODA from OECD DAC countries – the Trump administration has suspended most ODA.

There is nothing new in development cooperation being affected by foreign policy and security policy concerns, even during this intermediate period. What is new is arguably *the extent* to which the reality is affecting development policies in countries which have been recognised for their ‘altruistic’ approach to development cooperation such as the Scandinavian countries (Lancaster 2007). Norway, Sweden and Denmark were once part of what was termed ‘Nordic exceptionalism’ because of their aid generosity and focus on aid for developmental rather than for diplomatic purposes, although increasingly in different ways and with varying emphasis on poverty reduction (Kjær et al. 2022). The countries have been considered model donors or even ‘overachievers’ (Oliví & Peres 2019). Thus, although it is probably not correct to speak of one unique Nordic model of development cooperation, the three Scandinavian countries have had similar approaches to development cooperation. A strong social democratic/centre-liberal tradition constituted a basis for showing international solidarity in the form of comparably high aid levels and by respecting, and even anticipating, the international principles of aid effectiveness.

On the other hand, we might not expect the three countries to make similar development policy decisions. Looking at the governments of the three countries at the moment of writing, Norway has a social democratic minority government, Denmark a centrist, and Sweden a centre-right coalition government, which could possibly affect development policy. Still, because of this recognition, and because all three countries, at the time of writing, still belong among the group of donors meeting the UN resolution of providing at least 0.7% of GNI as ODA, we could perhaps expect that there would be an incentive to maintain stable development policies in line with the ‘good aid principles’ and relatively unaffected by geopolitical considerations.

The question of how current geopolitics has impacted on aid policies and strategies towards the Global South, and Africa in particular, has not been fully explored, and exactly because they may be the least likely countries to adopt a more geopolitical development cooperation, makes the Scandinavian countries an interesting case. The purpose of this article is therefore to explore how geopolitics have impacted on Norway, Sweden and Denmark’s development cooperation and what the similarities and differences may be.

In the following we examine recent strategy papers and development policy statements as they are expressed, either when presenting the national annual budget in parliament, or in public speeches by relevant ministers. We look particularly at how the strategies and policies are framed, whether development or the principles of aid effectiveness are mentioned and in which context. We also draw on datasets from OECD and others, including national budget figures to establish whether the geographical focus has changed.

‘Geopolitics and aid’

Geopolitics has been on the rise as a concept in the international relations debate. Geopolitics as a term is used by policy actors, the media and academics alike, also when the focus is on development issues (Zabelin 2023; Tran 2024; Khan 2024). However, the exact meaning of geopolitics is unclear. The use of the term seems overall to be referring to the greater competition for power and territorial influence between nations rather than its original connotation of the interlinkage between politics and geography. As

Carsten Nickel (2024, 222) observes, 'The term appears to have become a sort of catchphrase for great power rivalries in a perhaps broadly realist sense, but intertwined with ideational considerations, economic arguments and at times even psychological observations'. However, the term evidently does have a spatial and an economic feature as it is associated with competition between different national powers over spheres of influence and access to resources. The return to great power competition may also imply an intensified competition for resources that can be extracted in the Global South, such as minerals and metals, or oil increases, although the quest for resources has always been present. The exchange between presidents Zelensky and Trump in March 2025 about joint development of Ukraine's mineral deposits can be seen an extreme illustration of this.

For the Global South, increased geopolitical competition and trade wars mean many things. It evidently offers greater leeway for heads of government in that it renders them less dependent upon 'Western' (however broad and in decline this notion is) donor aid or debt relief and gives them an option to cooperate with other actors such as China, India, Saudi Arabia and others. The fact that 'the West' must compete with other actors for influence could mean they become less insistent on principles of good governance and respect for human rights. This has raised a concern that geopolitics may negatively affect the struggle for human rights. As expressed in a recent OECD DAC (2023b, 49) report: 'polarisation and competition can lead countries to focus on narrow national interests or to pursue geopolitical dominance, neither of which aligns with human rights, sustainability, or the overall social and public good goals of development co-operation'.

More broadly, climate crisis, armed conflict and sustained poverty means that the global need for development finance for humanitarian as well as for development purposes remains (OCHA 2025; OECD DAC 2025b; World Bank 2024). As the Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development, set to take place in Seville in the summer of 2025, unrolls, it will take place in a situation with a widened financing gap for sustainable development, according to the OECD (2025b). There will be calls for new ways in which to increase finance for development and for humanitarian aid. This has led to new initiatives for mobilising private capital, including revisions of the OECD DAC guidelines for what can be reported as ODA (see e.g. OECD 2023).

The role of development assistance in this new era can be approached from (at least) two perspectives. One perspective is that development cooperation, its main goals, its use of different instruments, partnerships etc. is bound to change in the light of the new geopolitical situation. As Klingebiel (2023) observes, there was a long phase after the end of the Cold War, where the unipolar world freed donors from national interest concerns and allowed them to let development policy decisions to a greater extent be guided by how aid could be used most effectively to reduce poverty and in the partner countries' best interests. New realities give less room for such concerns, resulting in considerations of influence, alliance formation, migration and other foreign policy concerns gaining ground.

A second perspective, perhaps to be seen as a reaction to this, may be represented by a recent OECD report recommending 'ringfence(ing) official development assistance to protect its integrity' and to 'reaffirm core development co-operation effectiveness principles', such as country ownership, better co-ordination among stakeholders, a focus on measurable results and mutual accountability (OECD 2025b, 13). The fact that OECD DAC sees a need to reaffirm these principles alludes to the importance of examining how geopolitical concerns may contribute to weakening or even eroding such principles.

An overview of the Scandinavians' recent aid disbursements to Ukraine and Africa

Tables 1 and 2 summarise ODA to Ukraine and Africa in the 2020–2023 period as reported to OECD DAC. These tables include disbursements up to 2023 (last year of final reporting to the OECD) together with preliminary data for aid to Ukraine in 2024 as reported by OECD (2025a).²

The upper panel of Table 1 shows Denmark's allocations of ODA to Ukraine and Africa, respectively. 2022 marks a dramatic increase of aid to Ukraine, USD 151 million, up from USD 35 million in 2021. This increase is quite narrowly matched by a decrease in aid to Africa. In 2023 about 8% of Denmark's bilateral aid went to Ukraine, and 25% to Africa. An increase to USD 238 million is reported for 2024.

**Table 1. Scandinavian bilateral aid to Ukraine and Africa
(in current currencies and shares)**

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024(P)
Denmark					
Total bilateral aid to Ukraine (USD million)	17	35	151	171	238
Total bilateral aid to Africa (USD million)	578	693	483	533	
Total bilateral aid to Ukraine (DKK million)	111	220	1066	1178	
Total bilateral aid to Africa (DKK million)	3782	4358	3418	3670	
Share to Ukraine of total bilateral aid (%)	1.0	1.7	7.5	7.9	
Share to Africa of total bilateral aid (%)	34.0	34.4	24.0	24.7	
Norway					
Total bilateral aid to Ukraine (USD million)	24	19	551	753	838
Total bilateral aid to Africa (USD million)	749	820	806	968	
Total bilateral aid to Ukraine (NOK million)	226	159	5298	7946	
Total bilateral aid to Africa (NOK million)	7053	7049	7752	10223	
Share to Ukraine of total bilateral aid (%)	0.8	0.5	13.4	16.6	
Share to Africa of total bilateral aid (%)	24.1	23.6	19.6	21.4	
Sweden					
Total bilateral aid to Ukraine (USD million)	32	34	206	241	415
Total bilateral aid to Africa (USD million)	1178	1493	1120	1073	
Total bilateral aid to Ukraine (SEK million)	293	288	2082	2551	
Total bilateral aid to Africa (SEK million)	10852	12801	11317	11377	
Share to Ukraine of total bilateral aid (%)	0.9	0.9	5.9	72	
Share to Africa of total bilateral aid (%)	33.0	38.1	32.1	32.0	

Note: Volumes of aid in current USD and national currencies using the 'grant equivalent' method. Total bilateral aid to Africa (region codes 10001-10003 in CRS) includes both country allocated and regional ODA. Norway also provides significant aid to Moldova as part of its Nansen programme for Ukraine. This support is not included in the figures in the table.

Source: Own calculations from OECD-DAC's creditor reporting system (CRS) database (version 20241224, downloaded 22 January 2025). Preliminary data for from OECD (2025a), Table 3.

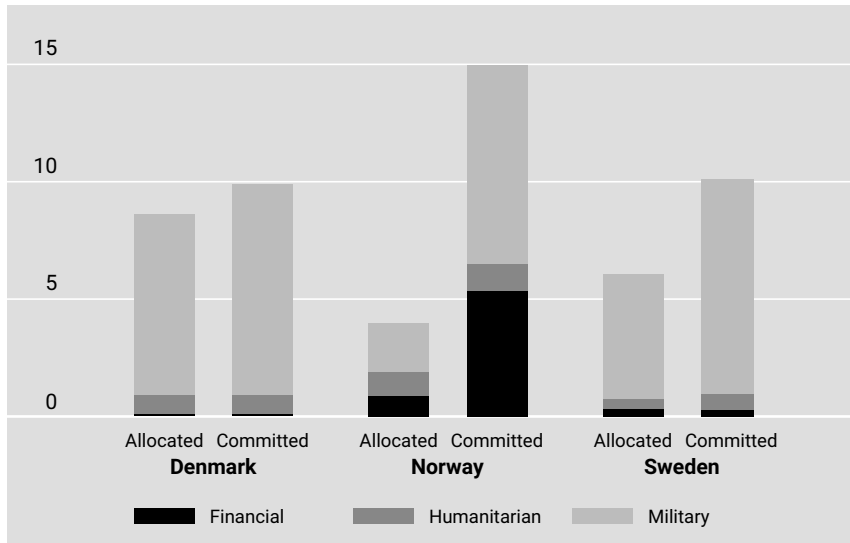
Even more substantial are Norway's contributions to Ukraine in 2022 and 2023 of USD 500 million and USD 750 million respectively, and a preliminary USD 838 million in 2024, an enormous increase from the previous support of about USD 20 million. At the same time, Norway's bilateral aid to Africa remained high, and even increased in 2023. In terms of relative priorities, Norway's aid to Ukraine in 2023, about 17% of total bilateral aid, is almost on a par with its aid to the whole of Africa (21%).

The lower panel of Table 1 shows Sweden's rapid increase of bilateral aid allocation to Ukraine, from about 1% of its total bilateral aid in 2020–2021 to 6–7% in 2022–2023, and increasing by over 70%, to USD 415 million in 2024. However, Sweden's total aid to Africa (at least until 2023) was not influenced to any larger extent, staying at over 30%.

Focusing on support to Ukraine, the Kiel Institute database 'Ukraine Support Tracker' lists and quantifies military, financial and humanitarian aid to Ukraine in the context of Russia's war against Ukraine (Trebesch et al. 2025).³ Figure 1 shows commitments as well as allocations (disbursements) made by Denmark, Norway and Sweden from 24 January 2022 to 28 February 2025. The three countries have made similar commitments in terms of military support (Norway EUR 8.49 billion, Denmark EUR 9 billion, Sweden EUR 9.14 billion). Norway has made by far the largest commitments in financial and humanitarian support (EUR 5.36 billion and EUR 1.14 billion, respectively). By 28 February Denmark had allocated on average 87% of its commitments (from 85% of military commitments to 106% of its commitments in humanitarian support). Sweden stands at 60% and Norway at 26%, allocated total aid in relation to their commitments made.

Table 2 presents the respective countries' five largest partner countries in Africa for the years 2020–2023, together with the respective countries' share of the country-allocated aid to Africa.⁴ With seven countries belonging to the largest five in any of the years, Denmark shows stability in terms of its largest partner countries, and with the five largest countries receiving over 62% of its country allocated aid to Africa, Denmark stands out as focused regarding the total number of partners as well as the prioritisation of its largest partner countries. Sweden's aid is less concentrated. Of Sweden's aid allocated to individual countries in Africa, 41% is allocated to the five largest partner countries. With such thinly spread aid, relatively small changes in aid volumes can change

Figure 1. Support to Ukraine, committed and allocated, 24 January 2022 – 28 February 2025



Source: Trebesch et al. (2025). Data updated (and downloaded) 15 April 2025.

the ranking of countries, and eight countries have been a top five recipient in at least one year during 2020–2023. Norway, on the other hand, appears very stable in its prioritisation of partner countries. The same five countries have been the largest recipients in each of the four years. Allocating around 50% of its ‘African aid’ to the largest five, Norway places itself somewhere between Denmark and Sweden.

Furthermore, the last row for each country reports the total volume of aid directly allocated to individual countries in Africa, as well as the total number of recipient countries in a specific year. In a Scandinavian context, Denmark has the lowest number of recipient countries in Africa, varying between 35–39 countries. Norwegian aid tends to end up in around 43 African countries, whereas Sweden is the Scandinavian donor that has the largest number of recipient countries in Africa, between 49–53 countries during 2020–2023.

In terms of sectors supported in the three countries’ aid to Africa, Table 3 presents the respective countries’ five largest sectors in 2023 (in bold). For

Table 2. Five largest recipient African countries, volume (USD million) and share of country-allocated aid to African countries

	2020			2021			2022			2023		
	Recipient	USD million	Share	Recipient	USD million	Share	Recipient	USD million	Share	Recipient	USD million	Share
Denmark	Uganda	68	15	Mali	90	17	Ethiopia	68	18	Ethiopia	96	23
	Kenya	62	13	Ethiopia	66	13	Kenya	54	14	Kenya	52	12
	Somalia	55	12	Uganda	64	12	Uganda	54	14	Somalia	51	12
	Ethiopia	54	12	Kenya	53	10	Somalia	37	10	Burkina Faso	42	10
	Mali	49	11	Tanzania	51	10	Tanzania	34	9	Mali	32	8
	Largest 5	288	62		324	62		247	64		274	65
	Total aid/recipients in Africa			523/39			386/35			421/37		
Norway	Ethiopia	78	13	Ethiopia	88	14	Ethiopia	90	14	Ethiopia	80	12
	South Sudan	68	11	South Sudan	71	11	South Sudan	70	11	South Sudan	78	11
	Somalia	65	11	Somalia	61	10	Somalia	67	10	Somalia	72	10
	Malawi	52	8	Mozambique	60	9	Mozambique	51	8	Mozambique	57	8
	Mozambique	49	8	Malawi	54	8	Malawi	50	8	Malawi	52	8
	Largest 5	312	51		334	52		329	51		339	49
	Total aid/recipients in Africa			643/45			646/45			685/43		
Sweden	Somalia	94	10	DRC	115	9	DRC	86	9	DRC	91	10
	Mozambique	80	8	Somalia	110	9	Somalia	81	9	Ethiopia	77	8
	DRC	75	8	Mozambique	91	7	Ethiopia	77	8	Mozambique	77	8
	Uganda	73	7	South Sudan	86	7	South Sudan	74	8	Somalia	74	8
	Tanzania	73	7	Ethiopia	85	7	Mozambique	71	8	Sudan	60	7
	Largest 5	394	40		488	40		389	41		379	41
	Total aid/recipients in Africa			1229/53			940/52			921/52		

Note: Five largest African recipient countries for respective donor and year; the registered volume of aid and its share of the donor's total country allocated aid to Africa. 'Total aid' only includes aid reported to individual countries in Africa, not regional aid. 'Total recipients' are the number of African countries with a reported positive amount of bilateral aid in the OECD DAC CRS database (numbers differ only marginally if countries that only receive humanitarian assistance (sector code 720 in CRS) or only receive aid through multilateral organisations (i.e. multi-bi, parent channel code 40000-49999 in CRS) are excluded).

Source: Authors' calculations from the OECD-DAC CRS database.

comparison, the table also reports the shares in sectors that belong to any of the other Scandinavian donors' five largest sectors (for example, population policies, being the third largest sector for Sweden in 2023, was Denmark's fifteenth largest sector and Norway's eleventh largest sector). For all three countries, the three sectors of agriculture, humanitarian aid ('emergency support') and democracy ('Government...') were among the five largest sectors in 2023. Relative to the other two countries, Denmark allocates a large share to water supply and sanitation, Norway to education, and Sweden to population policies (see the table note for the 'other' and unallocated sectors). Allocating about 68% to its five largest sectors, Sweden has the least concentrated sectoral allocation of its aid, adding to the findings in Table 2 on the number of partner countries and their relative shares.

In short, while partner countries and sectoral allocations in the Scandinavians' ODA to Africa remained relatively stable up until 2023 (the most recent year of reporting to the OECD DAC) the major shift in all three countries in the period was the increase in aid to the Ukraine, with relative declines in aid to Africa, especially in the case of Denmark. In order to dig deeper into the more recent changes in strategies, priorities and allocations, we now address each country in turn.

Table 3. Bilateral aid to Africa – the largest five sectors per donor 2023 (%)

	Denmark	Norway	Sweden
Agriculture, forestry, fishing	7.9	17.4	6.8
Education	2.4	9.8	5.3
Emergency response	22.6	22.1	24.3
Government and civil society	23.3	15.9	23.2
Other multisector	3.2	11.0	5.7
Other social infrastructure and services	2.8	3.3	6.0
Population policies, reproductive health	0.6	1.7	7.4
Unallocated, unspecified	7.8	0.0	0.1
Water supply and sanitation	8.7	0.4	1.8
Sum of largest five	70.4	76.2	67.7

Note: Sectoral shares of all bilateral ODA (regional aid included) to Africa. Respective countries five largest sectors are given in bold figures. Sectors are 'DAC5 purpose codes' at two-digit precision (e.g. 110 for education, 26 sectors in total, including unallocated). Norway's largest support within 'other multisector' was to WFP, the World Bank and IRC, with focus on food insecurity. Sweden's support within 'other social infrastructure' was focused on social protection programmes. Denmark's support within 'unallocated' is largely grants (all below USD 2 million) to NGOs based in Denmark.

Source: Own calculations from OECD-DAC's creditor reporting system (CRS) database (version 20241224, downloaded 22 January 2025).

Denmark

Strategies and priority papers

Denmark's development cooperation is increasingly framed in the light of the new international situation with increased great power competition. Overall, and in the light of other countries' aid cuts, the government has remained committed to maintain ODA at 0.7% of GNI. In 2023 the Danish centre-government coalition launched a new strategy for foreign and security policy, in which three main priorities are presented. First, to increase focus on security in Denmark and Europe in the light of Russia's invasion of Ukraine; second, to establish new alliances with countries outside Europe and the West; and third, to strengthen resilience with regard to supply chains, energy and critical infrastructure (Regeringen 2023). Of particular relevance to development cooperation is perhaps the aim of pursuing new alliances. Hence, the following year, the government published a new strategy for Denmark's engagement with Africa. This strategy was very explicitly *not* a strategy for development cooperation, but one driven by foreign policy concerns and aligned with the foreign policy priorities publicised the previous year. In its foreword, the minister for foreign affairs and the minister for development cooperation start by pointing to Africa's geopolitical relevance, which:

...has never been greater; the populations are growing, the economies are growing, the assertiveness of the continent is growing. (Regeringen 2024)

Africa's increasing geopolitical importance is meant to guide Denmark's choice of partners and not least, partner countries, in Africa:

In light of the geopolitical changes, we must be present where there is a potential for strengthened dialogue and cooperation, and where we can yield the best results. Where we can make a real difference, have evident Danish interests, and have opportunities for trade and investments. In locations where the countries play a prominent geopolitical role. (ibid., 9)

The quote is illustrative of the multiple considerations in the strategy. The principles of 'being present where we can yield best results', 'have Danish interests', 'make a difference', 'have opportunities for investments' and where

the countries play 'a geopolitical role' may at times align well with each other. But there could be difficult trade-offs between the principles. For example, a country that is an important ally may not be a good place for investments. In addition, the principles may not align well with the OECD DAC principles of aid effectiveness, such as consideration for a country's development needs. It is not difficult to picture a situation in which Denmark chooses to initiate development cooperation with a country which plays a prominent geopolitical role and simultaneously has significant development needs. However, this may not necessarily be the case. If the Africa Strategy was to be implemented with funding not deriving from ODA, this would not be an issue. Since it most likely will be funded mainly with ODA, the question of whether the purpose of the Africa Strategy aligns fully with the aid effectiveness principles must be discussed.

The strategy acknowledges the value of longstanding development cooperation:

Our long-standing development cooperation has resulted in close, long-term partnerships. One could even say that Denmark and the other Nordic countries are a strong 'brand' in several parts of Africa. (ibid., 10)

But it then goes on to say that:

In a rapidly changing world, we must also use development cooperation to support new strategic initiatives, ... we must also view the cooperation from new perspectives. With a strengthened focus on foreign and security policy. (ibid., 6)

The quotes illustrate well how development policy is firmly subsumed and considered secondary to the pressing foreign policy concerns. At the same time, the quote tellingly emphasises the importance of new initiatives, particularly increasing trade and investments, especially green investments on the continent, investing more in student exchange and in sector cooperation. The focus on investments and on mobilising private capital arises from a concern that China is taking up more space economically. Thus, the minister of foreign affairs repeatedly emphasised this in public and even wrote an opinion piece to a leading newspaper with the headline: 'Why we should be concerned when we see the Departure signs in Addis Airport' (Politiken 2024) (they were with destinations to Chinese cities). Equal partnerships in all

types of collaboration are emphasised in the strategy, particularly the sector cooperation between Danish sector authorities and partner institutions in Africa. The strategy argues that:

When employees of Danish ministries and municipalities work together with sister organisations in African countries on specific projects, doors are opened for relations between the countries that extend far beyond the individual project. These types of partnerships are in high demand, as they are equal, involve a high level of expertise, and are solution-oriented (Regeringen 2024, 11).

While sector cooperation in itself is not new, it is to be scaled up considerably over the coming years. Finally, climate and migration have their own sections in the strategy. The strategy also outlines a number of priority areas and initiatives in the area of diplomatic presence in Africa. While many of these ideas and initiatives may be positive and yield good results, they could risk interrupting the long-term partnerships which the strategy praises, and which the OECD DAC highlights as a key feature of equal partnerships. Finally, it should be noted that the EU, and EU presence in Africa, receives timely attention in the strategy.

Development cooperation must align with these listed priority areas, but it is notable that Africa's development challenges, such as for example food security, the need for rural infrastructure, or access to energy (other than a mention of green Danish energy solutions) are not mentioned. Likewise, democracy, governance and human rights do not take up much space in the strategy, although it is emphasised that aid also needs to go directly to peoples in countries with poor governance.

Allocations

The national budget of 2025 was the first budget to reflect the new priorities as they were expressed in the foreign policy strategy as well as the Africa strategy.⁵ In the budget priorities (Udenrigsministeriet 2025) Denmark remains well above the 0.7% of GNI target. Ukraine clearly receives most attention. The foreword starts with the following two sentences: 'Denmark is and must remain among Ukraine's closest partners. For this reason, Ukraine is a main priority in Danish development cooperation'. Out of a total of DKK 17.6 billion, which constitutes all Danish ODA for 2025, 1.7 billion (or about 10%) is intended

bilateral aid for Ukraine (of which some is multi-bi aid). Expenses for in-country refugee costs are DKK 700 million in the proposals for the finance bill but was in March of 2025, when the final budget was made public, raised to DKK 1.3 billion due to inflows of refugees from the Ukraine (Udenrigsministeriet 2025).

In the budget priorities Africa gets attention too, in line with the direction set out in the Africa strategy. The priority paper argues that 55% of all Danish ODA is for Africa. However, this includes Denmark's earmarked multilateral donations. When looking at bilateral aid alone, DKK 1.96 billion is allocated for *all* African developing countries with whom Denmark has cooperation; an only slightly larger amount than the total aid for Ukraine. Out of this, most is directed to very few countries (Udenrigsministeriet 2025). Also, out of the DKK 1.96 billion, DKK 450 million is designated for new initiatives to implement the Africa strategy. Danish aid for other regions in the Global South has declined and in 2025, DKK 450 million is set aside for developing countries in Asia, the Middle East and Latin America (Udenrigsministeriet 2025, 11). The fact that a declining share of aid is channelled bilaterally to partner countries, and more aid to other initiatives, may risk impeding the establishment of the longstanding partnerships that the Africa strategy also aims at reinforcing, simply because it allows for less of the kind of long-term bilateral country-to-country collaboration which underpins that type of partnership. Also notable in the priorities is DKK 1.7 billion in 2025 for various private sector investments, including green investments through the investment fund for developing countries.

As for country choice, in 2023 and 2024 the Danish government decided to *not* close (as had been planned) the embassy in Tanzania, although still phasing out development cooperation funding. Also, the opening of new embassies in Rwanda and Senegal was announced in connection with the launch of the strategy, while missions in Mali and Burkina Faso would be closed following the deteriorating security situation in the Sahel. Some development assistance will, however, still be directed to the Sahel even without missions there. It is debatable whether these choices of where to be present reflect geopolitical concerns, migration concerns, or concerns for development effectiveness. The choice of Senegal may be to substitute for the closure of the missions in the Sahel. The decision to open an embassy in Rwanda may reflect a wish to pursue the plan of processing applications for asylum in Denmark in a third country outside of Europe. However, the decision has become more

controversial after Rwanda's support for the M23 militia in Congo has re-emerged as an issue. Where to be present in Africa given limited budgets for missions, as well as for development cooperation is of course no easy choice. However, given the OECD DAC principles of choosing countries with some respect for human rights, it could be debated whether Rwanda lives up to this principle.

Norway

Strategies and priorities

The conservative party-led coalition government was replaced by a labour party/centre party coalition following the 2021 parliamentary elections (in early 2025 the centre party left the government). Their government platform signalled several new initiatives and commitment to maintaining ODA at 1% of GNI and linked to the advancement of the UN Sustainable Development Goals, climate targets and advancement of human rights (Hurdalsplattformen 2021). This included increased allocations to food security in Africa, new efforts to combat climate change and support energy transition, to reduce irregular migration and to facilitate and mobilise private capital for investment in developing countries. Subsequently this led to the formulation of several new strategy documents and action plans. This included a 2022 strategy for improving food security leading to several new initiatives in selected African partner countries (Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2022). A new climate investment fund was launched – managed by Norfund (the Norwegian development finance agency) that provides loans and equity for renewable energy and targets middle-income countries that rely on coal-fired power plants (Norfund 2025). New instruments were also developed to mobilise private capital – primarily through an application-based guarantee scheme for Norwegian and international companies investing in developing countries (Norad 2024a).

Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine led to major changes in Norwegian development aid policies. In 2022, all parties in parliament agreed to a five-year Nansen programme of NOK 75 billion. NOK 15 billion in military and civilian aid was provided annually to Ukraine and (civilian aid only) to Moldova. All civilian aid is allocated from the aid budget with the distribution between military and

civilian aid decided annually. The Nansen programme has since been extended to 2030 and the volume has increased each year.

Norwegian aid has had a strong emphasis on global goods – especially related to global health and climate issues – and corresponding weakening of country focus and strategies. This has also implied decreasing emphasis on disbursements to low-income countries (Tjønneland 2022). The government appointed a committee of experts to assess future aid, including the relation between aid disbursements to global goods and to poverty reduction. It reported in 2023 and recommended, *inter alia*, a split in the aid budget between aid for poverty reduction and aid for global goods (Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2023). This recommendation was not adopted by the government, but it has highlighted the tension between pursuing poverty reduction and other objectives.

In 2024 the government also released a major new Africa strategy which seeks to provide a platform for a more comprehensive Norwegian engagement with African countries (Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2024a). The aim was to strengthen political and economic co-operation through partnerships based on equality, mutual interests, knowledge and understanding. The strategy notes that:

African countries are playing an increasingly important role in the global economy and international politics. In order to safeguard its future interests and relationships vis-à-vis Africa, Norway needs to strengthen and adapt its relations to the changes that are taking place. This requires clarity around Norway's interests and the potential benefits of cooperation. It also means that Norway and African countries need an accurate understanding of one another's analyses, points of view and priorities (ibid., 5).

To safeguard Norwegian interests, the strategy seeks to provide a platform for further strengthening and developing relations between Norway and Africa as the world changes. As the strategy formulates it in its section on peace and security:

Norway, with its focus on international law, multilateralism, democracy and good governance, has a security policy interest in seeking co-operation with African countries. Understanding, dialogue and co-

operation on global and regional security issues – and the significance of these for our respective countries and regions – will be of increasing importance (ibid., 11).

The Africa strategy emphasises that development co-operation and humanitarian efforts remain an integral part of Norway's relations with many African countries. It is also strong on identifying key development challenges facing Africa. However, it does not highlight the role of development aid as an instrument and aid is barely discussed at all. Most examples of Norwegian engagement with Africa mentioned in the document, however, are funded through the aid budget.

The strategy documents do not specify partner countries. The main recipients of Norwegian aid have remained fairly stable. So has the number of embassies. The embassy in Bamako, accredited to all Sahel countries and responsible for parts of the Norwegian aid to the partner countries Mali and Niger, was closed in 2023 and reestablished in Dakar in 2024 following the political upheavals and the security situation in Mali and the Sahel. The embassy in Kampala was closed with the embassy in Dar es Salaam assuming responsibility for managing aid relations with Uganda. This was justified by the need to reduce administrative costs in the foreign ministry.

Following the upheaval of the relocation of the embassy in Mali to Dakar the ministry of foreign affairs in 2024 released a new strategy for its Sahel engagement for the 2024–2030 period (Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2024b). It is aligned with the Africa strategy and sector strategies and commits Norway to continued Norwegian engagement politically and through aid. It updates and revises the previous strategy following the deterioration in the region as a result of military coups, geopolitical rivalries, anti-Western rhetoric and increasingly complex security challenges.

Allocations and countries

Norway's aid to Ukraine and Moldova through the Nansen programme has increased significantly in 2024 with further increases planned for 2025. In 2024, about NOK 10 billion was disbursed from the aid budget to Ukraine and Moldova.

Added to this are in-donor costs of refugees, which amounted to nearly NOK 5 billion in 2024. Most of these refugees are from Ukraine. This suggests that total aid disbursements related to Ukraine 2024 may amount to nearly one quarter of all Norwegian aid.⁶ Norway is by far the biggest Scandinavian provider of development assistance to Ukraine – both in volume and as share of total aid.

Norway has maintained the aid budget at 1% of GNI (or slightly above) since 2021. The main change after the Russian invasion of Ukraine has been the emergence of Ukraine as the biggest recipient of Norwegian aid. The large number of refugees from Ukraine also implied that Norway itself is the second-biggest recipient of Norwegian ODA. The relative share of Norwegian aid disbursed to the Global South has therefore declined. However, aid to sub-Saharan Africa has been maintained at the same level and been shielded from the cuts experienced in other regions and global engagements.

The distribution between channels has followed the traditional patterns with support mainly provided as earmarked multilateral aid through traditional organisations such as the World Bank and a range of UN agencies, but also through the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) and the Council of Europe (Norad 2025). The main disbursement is related to humanitarian issues and the energy sector.

There are no significant changes in the disbursement, channels and priorities in relation to Africa, but some important trends are emerging. Funding related to food security in selected partner countries has increased significantly following new government priorities. This also included a 2022 NOK 5 billion grant to compensate African and Middle Eastern countries for added food costs following the war in Ukraine. Funding for education – a priority of the previous government – has been reduced.

The new climate investment fund managed by Norfund has made its first loans and equity investments. In Africa, South Africa – an upper-middle income economy – is the only beneficiary of this. The fund targets middle-income countries that rely on coal-fired power plants.

There is also much more emphasis by Norad – following government instructions reinforced by the new Africa strategy – to mobilise private capital in sectors such as climate, energy, environment and oceans. This is most

advanced in relation to a new guarantee scheme for investments in renewable energy in developing countries. The first NOK 1.75 billion call came in November 2024 (Norad 2024b). Institutions and companies can apply for Norwegian state guarantees, including companies from abroad. Guarantee recipients are multilateral development banks (65% of the budget) and companies and financial institutions (35% of the budget).

Although the guarantees can be issued in any country that is eligible for ODA funding, priority is given to projects with substantial potential as regards poverty reduction, the cutting of greenhouse gas emissions, and contributions to national agendas aimed at boosting renewable energy. Up to 30% of the guaranteed budget can go to low-income countries.

Finally, it should be noted that the main growth in the number of refugees from Ukraine led to a drastic drop in the number of resettlement refugees (quota refugees).⁷ Norway decides politically how many Norway will accept. Pre-Ukraine/2022 it was usually a few thousand every year (and most were from conflict areas in Africa/Middle East). It was 3,000 in 2021, 1,000 in 2024 and for 2025 the government proposed 200 with parliament increasing this to 500.

Sweden

Strategies and priorities

After the shift in government following the 2022 parliamentary election, the Swedish government has decided on several strategies that have a bearing on Sweden's development cooperation.

The national security strategy (Government Offices of Sweden 2024a) establishes that the Government's most important task is to protect Sweden's freedom, peace and security, and lists development assistance as one of the foreign policy tools available:

... an effective security policy requires the coordination of a range of mechanisms, including diplomacy, strategic communications, development assistance, economic, legal and military instruments, as well as a resilient society (ibid., 28).

It gives credit to Sweden's development cooperation as a contributing factor behind Sweden's:

...strong global standing, partly as a result of our longstanding and generous development assistance, strong commitment to multilateral institutions, innovation capacity, deep international cooperation on research and development, and extensive trade (ibid., 13)

and notes that development assistance:

...is an integral part of the broader foreign policy and helps address global health threats, democratic backsliding and repression, armed conflicts, irregular migration and climate change. Global developments and security also affect Sweden. Thus, we can also help reduce direct and indirect threats to Sweden through strategic bilateral and multilateral development assistance (ibid., 31).

The strategy is, as may be expected, largely focused on Sweden's nearby area. As such, Ukraine is mentioned 27 times, and Africa only twice.⁸

Unlike Denmark and Norway, Sweden has (as of yet) chosen not to present a separate strategy for its engagement in Africa.⁹ However, the government's ambition is to reshape the country strategies for development assistance that governs Sweden's aid to a specific country into strategies that include Sweden's full engagement in the country (Government Offices of Sweden 2023).¹⁰

The yearly statement of government policy on foreign affairs, delivered by the minister for foreign affairs to the parliament every year, has a section on development assistance, mentioning longstanding and current priorities, but in general does not mention Africa in a regional context (or hardly Africa at all, to be frank). The statement in 2025 announces the opening of the Swedish embassy in Senegal 'which will work to promote our interests in French-speaking West Africa and the Sahel'. The new embassy follows the closing in 2024 of the embassies in Burkina Faso and Mali and will probably have a higher leverage in terms of synergies in Sweden's overall foreign policy priorities and broader relations in the region.

In late 2022 the new government announced the development policy area to be reformed. In the budget for 2023 the 1% target was abandoned and

development research funding abolished. The new development cooperation policy, commonly referred to as the 'Reform Agenda', was published in December 2023 (Government Offices of Sweden 2023). A baseline study of the Reform Agenda by the Expert Group for Aid Studies (EBA 2024) identifies two overarching goals for Sweden's foreign aid in addition to the one decided by the Riksdag ('to create preconditions for better living conditions for people living in poverty and under oppression'): (i) Development cooperation shall be part of Swedish foreign policy, and help to promote and protect Swedish interests; (ii) Development assistance should focus on a long-term perspective, transparency and effectiveness. Related to the latter goal, it is stated that:

...[t]aking the principles of development effectiveness as the starting point, Sweden should be a good cooperation partner that supports and strengthens long-term development with broad ownership in partner countries through clear and realistic requirements (ibid).

An explicitly stated intention is to: 'work within the GPEDC for effective action with a focus on results, transparency, anti-corruption and evaluation'. It is also stated that EU development cooperation should be grounded in internationally agreed principles for effective development cooperation, not least local ownership in partner countries.

Although Swedish interests have been more or less explicitly included in Swedish development policy since its inception (e.g. Stokke 2019, chapter 7), there is a clear shift in emphasis towards, and a mainstreaming of, Swedish interests throughout the Reform agenda. In relation to its seven broader thematic goals, the agenda puts heavy weight on synergies between aid and trade and aid and irregular migration.⁷¹ The main geographic priority is stated to be 'support to Ukraine and the neighbourhood', and the number of bilateral partnerships shall be reduced to a maximum of 30. It is also stated that 'Sweden's engagement in the world will remain strong, not least in Africa, Asia and Latin America'. Apart from this, Africa is mentioned (once) as a region where development cooperation needs to act to increase domestic revenues and mobilise private capital flows.

Several development cooperation strategies have been introduced, renewed, and revised, since 2022.

The strategy for peace, security and stabilisation 2024–2028 (Government Offices of Sweden 2024b), is motivated as:

...wars and conflicts around the world also affect Sweden's security and prosperity. Accordingly, there are several reasons why Sweden should contribute to global efforts on peace and security (ibid., section 1).

The activities focus on protection of civilians, human security, the impact of Swedish priorities in multilateral organisations, and local ownership.

The strategy for Sweden's development cooperation on migration, returns and voluntary repatriation 2024–2028 (Government Offices of Sweden 2024d) states that Sida's activities shall contribute to enhanced conditions for increased return as well as enhanced capacity for migration and asylum management in partner countries. Of particular interest here is an ambition for Nordic cooperation:

...to the extent possible, activities should take place in collaboration with the other Nordic countries, not least with a view to strengthening local capacity and infrastructure for returns, e.g. return centres (Government Offices of Sweden 2024b, section 3).

The regional strategy for Africa 2022–2026 (Government Offices of Sweden 2022) was decided just prior to the previous election. Besides a brief revision, adding migration-related objectives (following the launch of the strategy for Sweden's development cooperation on migration, returns and voluntary repatriation), the strategy is now under (premature) revision, and changes in priorities from the current strategy are not yet known. However, the 2024 regional strategy for the Middle East and North Africa (Government Offices of Sweden 2024c) emphasises Sweden's strategic interest in the region from a perspective of stability, democratic development, and 'irregular migration and its root causes being combatted, the number of returns increasing, and voluntary repatriation being promoted' (Government Offices of Sweden 2024c, section 1).

Allocations

In the budget bill for 2023 the government abandoned the budgetary principle in place since 1975 that the target of Sweden's ODA amount to 1% of GNI.¹² The total volume of Sweden's ODA was set at SEK 56 billion per year for 2023–2025.

The budget bill for 2025 announced a decrease to SEK 53 billion in 2026 (equalling 0.73% of today's projected GNI). In addition, the ODA for 2025 of SEK 56 billion includes close to SEK 900 million in costs for Ukrainian refugees in Sweden who have been in Sweden longer than twelve months. These costs are not in line with the OECD DAC reporting requirements of ODA, so the total budgeted volume of Sweden's ODA 2025 amounts to about SEK 55.1 billion (or 0.8% of forecast GNI). Of this, SEK 3.5 billion are reserved for in-donor refugee costs. It may be noted that these changes are quite unrelated to geopolitics and, rather, made in order to finance domestic policy priorities.

In terms of focus on Ukraine, in July 2023 the government launched the Ukrainian country strategy amounting in total to SEK 9 billion 2023–2027. This, however, is only part of the ODA allocated to Ukraine. In the 2025 budget bill it is stated that at least SEK 5.6 billion per year shall be reserved for Ukraine during 2025–2028. The budget includes a reservation of SEK 1.5 billion in 2025 (and 1.7 billion for 2026 and 2027) for the EU facility for Ukraine.

However, the focus on Ukraine during the turbulent first part of 2025 led Sida to stop all new contracts (save humanitarian aid and aid to Ukraine) in early March 2025 and the government decided on 13 March 2025 on additional allocations to Ukraine. The total aid for 2025 is, as of March 2025, projected to total SEK 7.8 billion (14% of Sweden's total ODA).

Regarding Africa, the letter of appropriation to Sida for 2025 allocates SEK 5.15 billion for strategies in Africa (appropriation line 9). This is a substantial decrease compared with 2024 (SEK 6.3 billion), and 2023 as well as in 2022 (6.8 billion). However, this does not include humanitarian assistance or aid through global/thematic strategies (e.g. the strategies for steering aid through civil society, democracy and human rights, and climate, cf. Table 1). Since the increase of funding to Ukraine must be financed within an already set budget, and the Reform agenda is explicit on the priority of reducing the number of partner countries, a decrease in Sweden's total aid to Africa may be expected.¹³

Geopolitics and Scandinavian development policy

Based on the above, and as summarised in Table 4, it is certain that the new geopolitics have impacted all three Scandinavian countries' development cooperation. Some common patterns stand out: the three countries have so far maintained their ODA at 0.7% of GNI or more, recognising large humanitarian and development needs, and probably reflecting a political awareness of the international recognition this entails. The Scandinavian countries have long been recognised for aid generosity and have been seen to 'punch above their weight' in international forums exactly because of that. At a time when development aid is in decline internationally, it may still matter that Scandinavia stays at 0.7%.

Table 4. Summary table

	Denmark	Norway	Sweden
Strategies and policy priorities	<p>Increased focus on Ukraine.</p> <p>Africa strategy has an explicitly geopolitical and strategic focus.</p> <p>Increased integration of development assistance with broader foreign policy.</p>	<p>Increased focus on Ukraine.</p> <p>Africa strategy reflects development as well as geopolitical concerns.</p> <p>Increased integration of development assistance with broader foreign policy.</p>	<p>Increased focus on Ukraine.</p> <p>Africa not explicitly prioritised in foreign policy.</p> <p>Increased integration of development assistance with broader foreign policy.</p>
Allocations	<p>Ukraine largest single recipient of aid.</p> <p>Relatively smaller allocations to Africa, particularly with regard to bilateral country programmes.</p> <p>Less to the rest of the Global South.</p> <p>Stronger focus on ODA as catalyser for private investments.</p> <p>Aid to Africa is the most focused of the Scandinavian donors in terms of number of recipient countries, share to largest countries and sectoral allocation.</p>	<p>Ukraine largest single recipient of aid.</p> <p>Aid to Africa has been maintained at same absolute level, although relatively declined.</p> <p>Stronger emphasis on climate changes, including food security, and mobilisation of private capital.</p>	<p>Ukraine largest single recipient of aid.</p> <p>Decrease in country allocated aid to Africa. Phasing out of Burkina Faso, Mali and South Sudan.</p> <p>Aid to Africa least focused of the Scandinavian donors in terms of number of recipient countries, share to largest countries and sectoral allocation.</p>

However, even in Scandinavia the impact of geopolitics can be seen; not only in a significantly larger share of ODA to Ukraine, but also in the new and much more strategic focus on Africa and the explicitly recognised need to be visibly present on the continent with political and economic cooperation, development assistance and private investments.

While these general patterns are important, some interesting differences emerge. Denmark has most explicitly subsumed development cooperation under foreign and security policy concerns, and Denmark's strategy for the engagement with Africa is full of references to this. The Danish focus on how ODA can help promote private investments, for example, is very much framed in strategic terms as a way of having increased visible presence on the African countries vis-à-vis particularly China.

Norway's decision to draft an Africa strategy can also be seen in light of the recognition that Africa is geopolitically important. However, the Norwegian strategy has much more emphasis on Africa's development challenges. The strategy has, for example, an entire section on the challenges to food security on the continent. Sweden does not today have an Africa strategy, and the Swedish government seems to take a country-based rather than a regional approach to Sweden's engagement in Africa, over and above its ODA.

For all Scandinavian donors, Africa's share of total aid has declined as support for Ukraine, a middle-income country, has increased. In addition to the large share of ODA which the three countries spend on in-country refugee costs, it is fair to say that relatively less aid is allocated to low-income countries. For all Scandinavian countries, aid policies are increasingly integrated with broader foreign policy objectives. The increased geopolitical drivers of development policy risk, to some extent, crowding out concerns for development effectiveness. The OECD DAC guidelines with their key messages for consideration of country development needs and for a poverty focus appear to receive diminishing attention. That is certainly the case broadly in international development, but also in the Scandinavian donor countries. Norway, as the only Scandinavian country, has had an extensive debate on the potential trade-off between poverty reduction and global public goods provision such as reduced CO₂ emissions. In Denmark, the government has taken a more holistic approach to development aid arguing that it can achieve many objectives (poverty reduction, increased private investments and economic

diplomacy, and climate mitigation and adaptation) at the same time. The Swedish Reform agenda with its increased focus on links to Swedish interests probably represents the largest recent policy change.

All Scandinavian countries focus on 'broader relations' with Africa, on 'equal partnerships' either through regional strategies (Denmark and Norway), through 'all inclusive' country strategies (Sweden) and through mechanisms for political dialogue such as the annual meeting of Nordic and African foreign ministers. A potential risk is that ODA is used to fund all these broader priorities. We see it as a risk, since this would likely lead to either the use of aid budgets for non-DAC undertakings, or to renegotiations on the definition of ODA, and both would, contrary to the Scandinavian governments' positions, make aid less transparent. Adherence to the DAC principles is arguably one reason behind the Scandinavian countries' good standing on the African continent and in the Global South in general. The shift to a multipolar world, and an increasingly isolationist USA is arguably an opportunity for Scandinavia to solidify its standing on the continent by paying heed to partner countries' needs and by exploring how genuinely equal partnerships will look in the future.

Notes

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- 2 For allocations and planned disbursements in 2024 and 2025, see the individual country sections.
- 3 Financial and humanitarian aid in this database are, in principle, ODA, but differ in some respects from, and are therefore not comparable to, data reported by the OECD-DAC (see Trebesch et al. 2024, section 2).
- 4 Note that all country-allocated bilateral ODA is used, humanitarian support included. Also note that regional aid is excluded, so total volumes reported differ from the ones in Table 1.
- 5 During the year of 2025, a new development policy strategy paper is planned, which is to be aligned with the overall foreign policy and Africa strategy, and which is to be approved by parliament.
- 6 Total number of people from Ukraine with refugee status in Norway by end of 2024 was 92,000. In 2024 about 19,200 arrived. Refugees from other countries in 2024 were at around 4,000 (mostly arriving on family reunification and mostly from Syria) (UDI 2025).
- 7 Resettlement refugees are usually people who are registered as refugees by the UNHCR, but who cannot be offered a permanent solution in the country they are currently in and who are therefore offered resettlement in a third country.
- 8 Africa is only mentioned in the global trends section, when noting that Sweden's national security is affected by developments in the Middle East and North Africa (mainly in the form of conflict-induced migration flows), and that 'instability in the Middle East and Africa can also affect Europe through cross border crime, violent extremism and terrorism'.
- 9 The latest consolidated Swedish Africa policy was presented in 2008 (Government of Sweden 2008).
- 10 In addition to country strategies, Sweden's development assistance is governed by strategies at the regional and global/thematic level.
- 11 The seven priorities, reformulated into broader goals in EBA (2024) are: decreased poverty through job creation, trade and education; improved health for the most vulnerable; promoting freedom and fighting oppression; accelerate a global green climate transition; strengthen women's and girls' freedom and empowerment; reduce the number of irregular migrants and refugees and increase return and repatriation; to save lives and alleviate suffering.

- 12 While the 1% target had been deviated from several times before, these were for budgetary reasons and did not affect the 1% target as the normative determinant for the volume of aid (see e.g. Pettersson 2022).
- 13 During 2024 the country strategies with Burkina Faso, Mali and South Sudan have been ended.

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Business as usual? Assessing change and continuity in the Danish foreign policy tradition

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Introduction

How do we assess change and continuity in Danish foreign policy? A particularly curious aspect of the Danish foreign policy debate has been the strong tendency to focus on whether and how certain decisions or time periods fit into the country's foreign policy history (e.g. Jakobsen & Kjærsgaard 2017; Petersen 1986; Olesen 2018; Petersen 2004; Olesen 2022). Olesen and Schmidt, for instance, have recently analysed the Danish support to Ukraine, not only for its substantial content but also with the aim of assessing whether it represents continuity or change in the Danish Atlanticism (Olesen 2025; Olesen & Schmidt 2024; Schmidt 2024). The preoccupation with change and continuity has also been a recurrent focus in the academic debate on the Scavenius and Munch period from 1909–1943 (Wivel 2014); the so-called 'Footnote period' of 1982–1988 (Pedersen 2012; Petersen 2009), and the Danish participation in the US-led coalition wars in Afghanistan and Iraq (Lidegaard 2003; Petersen 2011; Pedersen 2017; Oma & Pettersson 2019; Jakobsen et al. 2018; Jakobsen & Rynning 2019; Pedersen & Ringsmose 2017; Schmidt 2024; Olesen & Schmidt 2024). The confusion about the status of these periods is most visible in the debate over militarised activism, where some suggest that it represents a departure from the Danish foreign policy tradition (Branner 2013; Wivel 2014; Lawler 2007; Knudsen 2004; Rynning 2003; Mouritzen 2007), while others consider it a continuation of a deterministic adaptive path in the country's foreign policy history (Mouritzen 2007; 2015; 2022; Villaume 2008a; 2008b; Dreyer & Nissen 2020). Others still see it as a continuation of internationalist tendencies in the Danish foreign policy tradition (Petersen 2009; Pedersen 2012; 2015; Knudsen 2014; Jakobsen 2015; Villaume 2008a; 2008b). Besides the substantial content of and disagreements in the change debates, the examples above also raise the more fundamental question of how we assess change and continuity in the history of Danish foreign policy.

'Change debates' in the wider foreign policy literature have traditionally focused on 'measuring' variations in foreign policy as a dependent variable that is used to address the degree of change represented by contemporary foreign policy decisions (Hermann 1990; Holsti 1991; Volgy & Schwarz 1991, 616–17; Rosati et al. 1994; Gustavsson 1999). A particular characteristic of the Danish debate is, however, that many scholars have implicitly assessed change or continuity based on an assessment of whether contemporary decisions 'fit' into a particular theoretical understanding of what is perceived to be 'the Danish foreign policy tradition' (Larsen 2017, 162–164). The analytical gist of such studies is that the foreign policy of a particular historical time period or doctrine is considered to represent the 'core' of the Danish 'foreign policy tradition'. While the criteria for elevating certain doctrines or periods in the country's history to the status of 'tradition' are often unclear (e.g. Branner 2013; Wivel 2014), the analytical consequence is that these 'canonised' periods come to serve as comparative reference points for the assessment of whether specific contemporary decisions or entire periods align with or depart from what has been identified as 'the tradition'. The analytical purpose then becomes to assess whether contemporary decisions fluctuate, deviate from, or challenge the identified 'tradition'. At present the analytical consequences of adopting different comparative reference points remains unclear and unexamined. Consequently, the interpretation debate about whether the policies of contemporary or past foreign policy periods can be considered 'business as usual' remains complex, unsettled and unsatisfactory.

Building on a 'meta-analysis' of the Danish academic literature this article identifies three central understandings of the tradition. It demonstrates the similarities and differences between these three interpretation patterns and shows how they produce different understandings of change and continuity among seven central doctrines in modern Danish foreign policy history (1909–2024). The aim is to present an overall review of the literature on Danish foreign policy history and show how central doctrines are interpreted and understood along different interpretation patterns. The article also illustrates how the tradition concept can be used as an analytical tool and how, differently used, can help us to identify both changes in continuity (differences in degree) and the continuity in the changes (differences in kind). Clarity is ultimately important, as these different interpretation patterns have produced wildly diverging interpretations of continuity and change in Danish foreign policy and doctrine'.

The article is structured as follows. The first section introduces the concept of foreign policy tradition and how it is used as an analytical tool to assess change and continuity. This is followed by a presentation of the singular, realist interpretation and the two dualist positions identified. How the different positions generate different types of tradition and continuity spaces is described next. Following this, the article demonstrates the analytical implications of each interpretation of change and continuity. Finally, the article discusses the utility of the 'tradition concept' as a tool to evaluate change, and what we analytically can learn from the concept.

Foreign policy tradition as an analytical tool

Foreign policy tradition can be understood as a concept that encapsulates a particular theoretical interpretation of a nation's interests, roles and opportunities, and how decisions are viewed as part of the country's political heritage (see Brodin 1972; Branner 2000; 2013; Wivel 2014). The most common way to use the tradition concept is to use it as an *ideal-typical* way to classify the core of Danish foreign policy. Ideal types are abstractions, defined to capture essential features or characteristics of a time period, phenomenon or a complex concept. This construction provides a theoretical reference point and serves as an analytical tool because it enables comparison of current tendencies and decisions against an ideal-typical, theoretical understanding of the past. Following a Weberian-inspired understanding, this helps us to highlight essential characteristics that can be used to uncover regularities or deviations in states' foreign policy compared to the theorised ideal (Farbøl 2012, 68; Mälksoo 2023). This is important as this reference point can be used to describe efforts by individuals, groups and states to foster or impose memory in the form of interpretations and commemorations of a country's past that basically specify 'who we are' compared to 'what we were'.²

In a Danish context the literature has approached 'the tradition' from two broad intellectual positions. One originates from a school of thought that has emphasised structural or exogenous factors as the main explanatory factor behind Danish foreign policy choices. Building on a realist understanding of foreign policy this approach promotes an adaptive, *deterministic* interpretation of the nature of the tradition, where the nature of the external pressure largely determines the behavioural trends and actions of countries' foreign policies

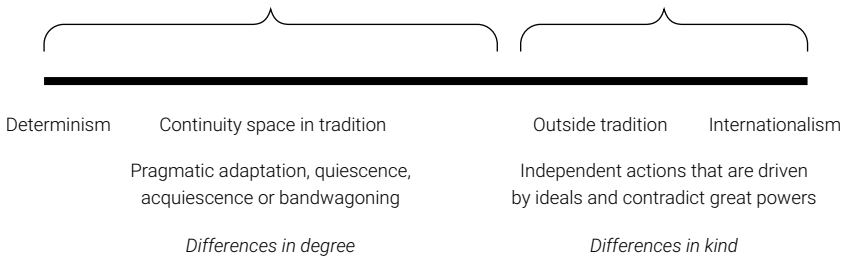
(Korolev 2019). Another position has argued for a broader understanding of the concept and argued for the inclusion of more domestically-driven factors, often expressed as liberal *internationalist* ideas, that are assumed to coexist or sometime compete with deterministic tendencies. This promotes a dualistic interpretation that manifests in the Danish literature as an exclusive (Branner 2013; Wivel 2014) and an inclusive variant (Petersen 1977; Pedersen 2015).

Realist interpretations

For many scholars, the deterministic interpretation is rooted in the small European state's experiences with the European order: the great power concert and the power politics that grew out of the Vienna Congress. The result of the congress gave rise to certain 'small state identities' which, in the Danish case, was forged in the defeat to Prussia and Austria of 1864 (Mouritzen & Olesen 2010; Mouritzen 2014; Struwe & Rasmussen 2014; Østergaard 2014). The realist starting point has often associated foreign policy decisions with pragmatic *realpolitik* adaptation to developments in the exogenous environment – which is used as a central prism to interpret the magnitude of change and continuity in small states' contemporary foreign policy decisions (Bjøøl 1968; 1972). This has often led to continuation interpretations, as the diplomatic responses of small states have often been associated with pragmatism, adaptation, acquiescence, neutrality and bandwagoning for protection; all terms that have been used to describe variations in the adaptational traits to the regional power distribution. Accordingly change and continuity are often interpreted as *changes in degree* rather than *changes in kind* terms. Change-in-degree changes refer to incremental or gradual changes within existing strategies. These changes are often small-scale adjustments or improvements that do not fundamentally alter the underlying strategy. Change-in-kind changes refer to more profound, transformative changes that represent significant movement in the existing strategy. These changes often involve a shift in the central principles or operations and are seen as fundamental foreign policy changes or reorientations. According to realist interpretations, if smaller states engage in concrete actions that are (*too*) bold, idealistic or internationalist this would analytically be considered a change-in-kind which is considered 'outside' the tradition,³ whereas changes in how small states accommodate to great power demands would be considered as changes-in-degree and thereby represent continuity.

The logic is illustrated in Figure 1, where it is possible to identify a relatively large continuity space (which represents continuity, and the range for changes in the continuity) as most actions and paths are associated with strategies of adaptation, acquiescence, bandwagoning etc. fall within the tradition. Norm-driven, idealistic policies that contradict great power interests and demands fall outside the tradition (Mouritzen 2022). In the Danish foreign policy literature these ‘outside tradition policies’ are often associated with internationalist or idealist foreign policy.⁴

Figure 1. The continuity space in the singular ideal-typical understanding of tradition

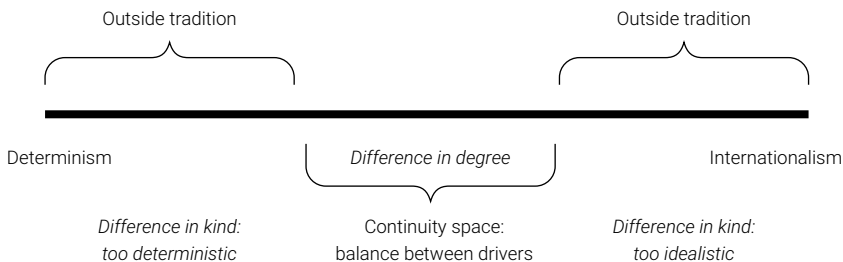


Exclusive dualist interpretation

Both variants of this dualism share the assumption that the Danish lesson of 1864 not only led to the formulation of the deterministic tendency but also gave rise to other, more internationalist, elements, and it is argued that the combination of these two underlying drivers constitutes the Danish tradition (Rasmussen 2005; Olesen & Villaume 2006; Branner 2013; Wivel 2014). The main difference between the two interpretations relates to how the relation between the underlying dimensions is understood. In line with broader trends of ‘opening the domestic black box’ in the foreign policy analysis literature, both approaches argue that developments in states’ foreign policies are better explained through the inclusion of domestic beliefs, values and identity-based sources that often come in the form of an internationalist tendency (or tendencies according to Gram-Skjoldager 2012). This emphasises elements that contradict great power interests (e.g. Kaarbo 1996; Eliasson 2004) rather than only considering structurally induced explanations. The dualism is visible in the academic literature interpretation that understands the Danish foreign policy tradition as representing a balance between these two drivers

(Branner 2013; Wivel 2014). This dualistic understanding opens for more complex interpretation patterns as change and continuity are evaluated based on whether ‘the balancing’ of deterministic and endogenous idealistic tendencies is successful. In short if foreign policies represent ‘balance’ between determinism and internationalism, policies belong to the tradition, but policies that are deemed ‘unbalanced’ fall outside. This exclusive dualist logic is illustrated in Figure 2, where foreign policies that fall within the boundaries of the continuity space represent continuity (often understood in differences of degree terms), whereas policies that are either *too* deterministic or *too* idealistic fall outside and represent a ‘difference in kind’ compared to the balanced ‘tradition’ (Branner 2013; Wivel 2014). Exactly where the definitional boundaries begin (and end) is often not fully clarified or justified, as it frequently entails an element of subjective assessment (Branner 2013) of the chosen historical reference points that are assumed to represent a satisfying balance between the two drivers (Wivel 2014). It is therefore unclear exactly what constitutes the ‘continuity space’ as the boundaries are often a result of a conscious or unconscious theoretical construction by the interpreter through the utilisation of theoretically defined ideal types of a truncated period that represent a particular variant of the balance between the drivers.

Figure 2. The continuity space in the exclusive dualistic understanding of tradition



Inclusive dualist interpretation

The other variant of dualism not only assumes that the underlying drivers might coexist but also considers them as competing drivers, where one of them can dominate under specific structural conditions. The logic is that the foreign policy of certain periods often contains elements of both tendencies, but that their degree of membership of either branch varies as a function of

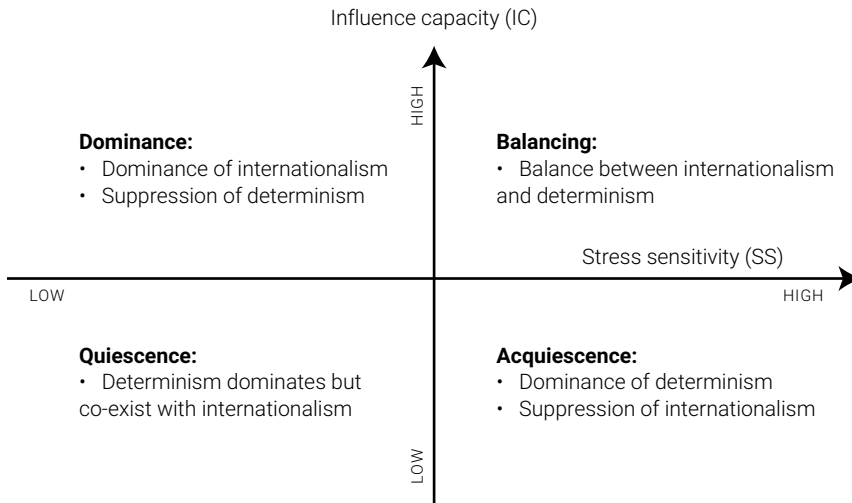
the structural and domestic opportunity structures, which opens for a wider interpretation of what is included in the tradition, as small states under less structural pressure can also pursue more independent and internationalist policies than normally assumed in the more realist dominated interpretation pattern. This understanding was introduced in the study of Danish foreign policy by the influential work of Nikolaj Petersen (Petersen 1977; 2000; Due-Nielsen & Petersen 1995, 14. See also Hansen 1974; Mouritzen 1988; Kelstrup 1993 for examples of applications).

Such an understanding of the tradition has led to interpretations based on the values of two master variables, namely influence capability (IC) and stress sensitivity (SS) (see Petersen 1977 for a more detailed operationalisation of the variables). A country's IC corresponds to its capability of influencing its salient environment, which depends on the character of the system and its internal capacity factors. In the same way SS is understood as the nation's susceptibility to external influence. The constellation of the overall master variables is important, as their values influence whether the deterministic and the internationalist tendency can co-exist, or whether one of them will dominate over the other. Accordingly in times of low SS/high IC it is more likely that internationalism will dominate, and in times of high SS/low IC the deterministic tendency will prevail. The original models presented by Petersen (1977) and his later action space model (2005) therefore allow for a rough prediction of the most likely overall foreign policy reactions of a country, depending on the values of the two variables, which fundamentally broke with the understanding of Danish foreign policy as one long history of adaptation.

Figure 4 illustrates how the combination of the two variables creates four different modes of foreign policy option that are available within a dualist foreign policy tradition. Periods with low IC/high SS leads to *acquiescence*, i.e. bandwagoning with the strongest force in the external environment. A situation with low SS/ low IC will lead to a less compromising strategy of *quiescence*, thus in effect signifies a policy of minimal external activity, designed to steer the country free from harmful contacts with the external environment. In periods of high IC/ low SS Denmark could in principle be allowed to follow what Petersen labelled *dominance*, aimed at shaping the external environment according to domestically generated values (Due-Nielsen & Petersen 1995, 15–16). Finally, Petersen suggests that the combination of high IC and high SS allows for a more *balancing policy*, characterised by a give and take approach towards international politics.

Building on Petersen's seminal work, Pedersen (2015) has argued for a broader understanding of the tradition concept which opens up for both change in degree and kind terms within the overall tradition (see also Pedersen 2012; 2017, Pedersen & Gram-Skjoldager 2015). Figure 3 illustrates how the overall, tradition-inclusive, dualist framework can be synthesised within the original adaptive framework (Petersen 1977) and the later arguments about the relations between the tradition concept proposed by Pedersen (2015). The figure illustrates how the different modes in the overall tradition represent different combinations of internationalism and determinism compared to Figure 3. A fundamental difference between this understanding and the exclusive variant is that the underlying drivers of determinism and internationalism are not only assumed to co-exist but also compete and dominate under different structural and domestic conditions.

Figure 3. The four modes of adaptive policy and their relations to drivers in the dualist foreign policy tradition



This inclusive understanding thereby adopts a very wide continuity space but at the same time also allows us to assess change and continuity in both differences in *kind* between different foreign policy modes (e.g. quiescence vs. balancing) but also between different *degrees* of change within the different modes (variations in balancing). In terms of measurement, the synthesis does not offer guidelines for the exact measurement or thresholds between the different modes.

Change and continuity interpretations of different doctrines

The section above identified the three different understandings of the foreign policy tradition in a Danish context. This section turns towards the analytical implications of their different understandings of change and continuity for central doctrines in the country's foreign policy and the relations between different tendencies, periods and policies. The purpose is not to give a detailed analysis of Danish foreign policy history over the past 120 years, but rather to highlight how the literature has identified change and continuity between foreign policy 'doctrines'.⁵ Doctrines are, in the following, understood as either formal or informal codifications of the broader set of general principles that were laid out in overall strategies. This is assumed to be rooted in the underlying perceptions of the country's role and position in the international system at certain periods that can transgress and operate across different government periods.⁶ Table 1 gives an overview of central doctrines in Danish foreign policy history.

Table 1. Doctrines in Danish foreign policy

Central actor	Dominating period	Main characteristics
Erik Scavenius	1909–1910 1913–1920 1940–1943	A neutralist doctrine that saw Denmark as a small state with no real options in the regional system due to geographical proximity to the regional great powers. Designed and practiced by Scavenius, who was minister of foreign affairs during the two world wars, and tried to develop a foreign policy that allowed Denmark to survive as an independent state by accommodating great power pressure and/or avoid dependence on one great power.
Peter Munch	1920–1940	A doctrine focused on maintaining sovereignty that included elements of opting in and out of the international system with the purpose of securing neutrality. Strategy designed to navigate the great power rivalry and to explore opportunities to utilise international organisations to secure small states neutrality.

Hans Hækkerup	1965–1990	A doctrine focused on how Denmark should pursue different interests in international organisations and alliances by following what was labelled a compartmentalised foreign policy, where Denmark could be active in certain organisations while following more adaptive strategies in others. Guiding principle for Danish foreign policy during the Cold War under shifting governments.
Anker Jørgensen	1982–1988	A doctrine that emphasised idealistic elements in defence and security. Denmark should work for non-proliferation and de-escalation between the great powers, raise criticism of Allies in NATO, and formulate Danish opt-outs in the form of footnotes. The politics were a result of a parliamentary situation, where the opposition parties were able to determine and influence the Conservative-led minority government's foreign policy.
Uffe Ellemann-Jensen	1990–2001	Emphasis on activist internationalism. Denmark should support and engage in international organisations and work for a norm-based and institutionalised international society. Strong emphasis on values but also on keeping the US invested in European security. Though formulated in the beginning of the 1990s, it became a guiding principle for the Social Democratic-led governments during the 1990s.
Anders Fogh Rasmussen	2001–2019	Associated with a militarisation of security policy, where military participation in international interventions under US leadership played a prominent role. Formulated in relation to the Afghanistan and Iraq wars, but remained relevant for the later Social Democratic-led governments.
Mette Frederiksen	2019–	Associated with the declining US interest in NATO, the Ukraine War and the rearmament of the armed forces and the donations to Ukraine. Danish activism should focus on balancing Russian influence.

Realist change and continuity interpretations

In conventional determinist interpretations '1864' is the starting point for the Danish reactive pragmatism, which was later reinforced by the lessons of the period from 1870 and onwards by 'fear of national extinction and a lack of confidence in the willingness of the great powers of Europe to help maintain the territorial integrity of Denmark' (Holbraad 1991, 45; Struwe & Rasmussen 2014). The unification of Germany in 1871 altered the regional power balance

and further reduced Danish options and opportunities, which meant that the country's foreign policy is largely interpreted as appeasement of German positions to minimise the risk of armed conflicts and thereby increase the chances of survival (e.g. Lidegaard 2003). These lessons in the modern history of Danish foreign policy have sedimented into a deterministic and realist-inspired research position (Bjøl 1966; 1972; Petersen 1977; Wivel 2014) where the 'tradition concept' largely became associated with a vulnerable *small state identity* with a limited international action space. Denmark could neither deter nor balance great regional powers, which meant that the country had to follow a deterministic path and pursue a non-provocative, German-oriented policy, which suppressed internationalism by focusing on survival (Lidegaard 2003). In this interpretation, the neutrality under Scavenius can be seen as a functional expression of the modern Danish foreign policy tradition building on deterministic logic (Lidegaard 2003) where Scavenius pragmatically noted that the Danish 'foreign policy is determined by factors over which the Danish government and parliament can exercise little influence' (Scavenius 1948, 9). From the defeat in 1864 and until 1940 Denmark pursued what the small state literature terms 'a neutrality strategy' aimed at withdrawing from the power politics of international relations (Pedersen 2015). Realists' interpretations of the roots of the modern Danish foreign policy tradition reside largely in an understanding of the Danish role as limited by geopolitical realities, where the shadow of 1864 has continued to shape and form the content of Danish foreign policy strategies. Such an understanding of the tradition has led to interpretations of later trends and developments that largely emphasise pragmatic Danish adaptation to international developments, which in turn has produced continuity interpretations due to the long shadow of 1864 that cemented the country's lack of capabilities and consolidated its small state status. These implications are most strongly illustrated in the debate about the role of the militarised activism of the Fogh Rasmussen government (2001–2009). The realist-inspired literature following this understanding focused on the strong adherence to the American alliance and the militarisation of security policy as indications of Danish accommodation to great power pressure. This is explained by Denmark's willingness to contribute on the so-called 'output indicators' in NATO in exchange for the US security guarantee (Olesen & Schmidt 2024; Schmidt 2024). Mouritzen (2007) has offered a continuity interpretation and argued that the period represents a new example of adaptation to the great power in the international system expressed as Danish 'super Atlanticism', where the politics is considered a continuation of

the accommodations associated with the neutrality practiced by Scavenius. In fact, the period might represent an even more extreme variant of this, as one of the guiding principles of Scavenius was precisely not to become too dependent on one great power. In Mouritzen & Olesen's (2010) reading, participation was seen as a manifestation of the deterministic tendency seen in the period before the Second World War. Accordingly, the active Danish participation in the war coalitions in Afghanistan and Iraq should not be seen as 'independent, value-driven activism' but rather as active adaptation to American demands to take 'a stance in the fight against terror', which draws on the Danish small state experience. Danish foreign policy is seen through a deterministic lens that emphasises adaptation to great powers. A variant of this is found in the Alliance literature where Danish dependence on the US security guarantee promoted bandwagon-for-protection behaviour. To obtain the security guarantee, Denmark participated in US-led operations to 'pay' for protection and to enhance its reputation as a loyal and relevant ally. Logically, the militarised activism was interpreted as a continuation of the small state tradition where the bandwagoning of the activism of the Fogh Rasmussen period is seen as a new form of adaptation and accommodation to the great power(s) in the system (Jakobsen et al. 2018; Oma & Petersson 2019). Similar viewpoints are expressed by Rasmussen (2011, 136–37) and Lidegaard (2018, 96–97) who, despite working with a more dualistic understanding, argue that security dependency determined Danish coalition contributions. In their research on the Danish decision to join the Afghanistan war and the country's overall approach to participation in US interventions Schmidt (2021) and Pedersen and Reykers (2023) have shown how the Danish contributions were demand-driven and designed to accommodate US demands (see also Wivel & Mariager 2018). A variant can also be found in the literature on bandwagoning for status and prestige, where Jakobsen et al. (2018), Kristensen and Larsen (2017) have suggested that Denmark followed the US in order to reap the reward of status and prestige by acting as a useful ally to the US, rather than by seeking prestige and recognition in more multilateral fora (see also Wivel and Crandall 2019).

Villaume (2008a; 2008b) has argued that the period represents a continuation of adaptational elements in the country's foreign policy tradition. Participation in the coalition wars is seen as accommodation to great power pressure that reinforced adaptational tendencies from the Cold War. Denmark's engagement in NATO is also seen as a typical adaptational small state strategy, which

continued and perhaps even reinforced elements of the traditional Danish neutrality policy (Villaume 1995; see also Holbraad 1991).

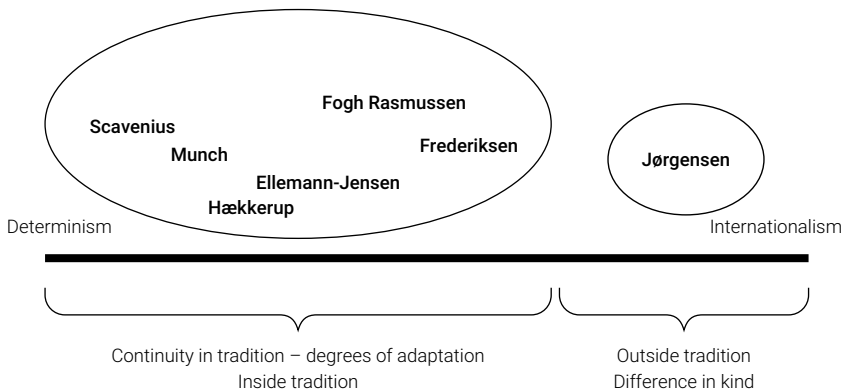
In the burgeoning literature on Danish foreign and security policy after 2014 and the invasion of Ukraine, Olesen (2025) and Olesen and Schmidt (2024) have argued that while the transformation of the Danish defence from an expeditionary force to a territorial defence structure and the increase in defence spending, the relatively large Danish donations to Ukraine and the abolition of the Danish defence opt-out, on the one hand represent change, they can also be seen as elements of a development that has been underway for a long time, due to the increased pressure from the US and NATO because of the decrease in demand for contributions to international interventions and stabilisation operations. In this interpretation the Russian invasion of 2022 cemented that the time where high output contributions could compensate for lower input was over. Denmark was thus quick to follow the new expectations, as the support for Ukraine reinforced already ongoing demand-driven tendencies, where the initial aim was to maintain the US engagement in European security in order to maintain the security guarantee. Schmidt (2024, 217) also highlights the continuation between the policies on Ukraine of the Frederiksen governments and of the Fogh Rasmussen period from 2001–2009 due to their strong Atlanticist orientation.

One central challenge to this overall continuity interpretation concerns the idealism of the 'Footnote period' (1982–1988), as the emphasis on idealism and critique of the major powers is assumed to challenge the established modus of (re)active accommodation. As noted by Wivel (2014) the Footnote Policy broke with the reactive elements in determinism and seemed to undermine the policies that would protect Denmark from the Soviet Union and provoke Denmark's most important ally, the United States, by emphasising too much idealism. At the same time it challenged NATO policy, which was against the normal conduct of Danish security policy. In the context of the Danish tradition, historians generally agree that the period represented a challenge to the official line, but they disagree about its viability, impact and consequences (see Mariager 2005/2006).

As illustrated in Figure 4, this perspective tends to emphasise a high degree of continuity in the country's foreign policy history. The figure demonstrates that almost all central tendencies and policies were perceived to be the result of a

deterministic tendency, driven by the Danish small state status, across different polarity constellations. Accordingly, most of the developments are considered differences in degree rather than differences in kind, as they all fall into the overall understanding of tradition. The only exception is the idealism of the Footnote Policy. The figure also illustrates that the most part of the tendencies can be considered to lie inside the tradition, but also that the conceptualisation fails to identify how they relate and what patterns of continuity exist between them, as there has been no effort to identify a more systematic presentation of the variations in the adaptation patterns.

Figure 4. The deterministic understanding of Danish foreign policy tradition



The exclusive dualist tradition

The comparative reference point for this interpretation does not originate in the neutrality of Scavenius but rather in the security thinking formulated originally by Munch and later in the compartmentalised foreign policy formulated by Hækkerup (1965), which express their ambitions to balance between pragmatic realism and internationalism (Branner 2013; Wivel 2014). Interestingly, the chosen reference point for their understanding is pushed forward in time to a period where certain internationalist tendencies had found their way into the official policy programmes (Karup Pedersen 1970; Hækkerup 1965). This significantly alters our understanding of the reference point, which in turn impacts our understanding of change and continuity. The post-World War II period in Danish foreign policy was characterised by departure and distancing from the neutrality of Scavenius with its emphasis on adaptation, and acquiescence to Germany became severely stigmatised in the public

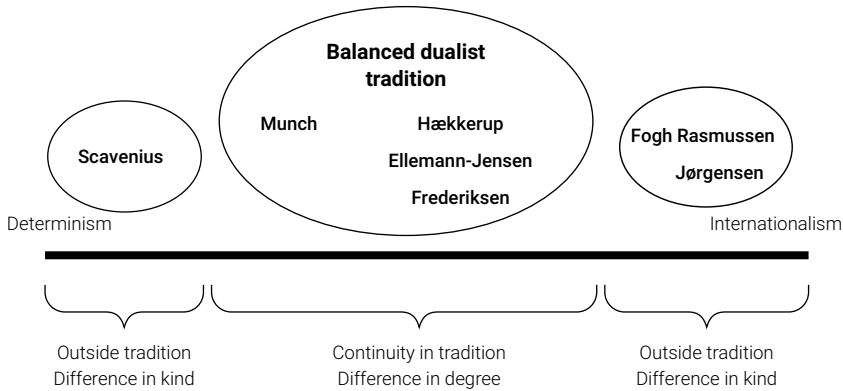
and academic debates. Although Denmark joined the UN and NATO in the 1940s, the country still found itself operating as a frontline nation. In February 1959 the newly appointed foreign minister, Jens Otto Krag, described the government's foreign policy as three-winged; divided between membership of the UN, membership of NATO and involvement in Nordic cooperation (Olesen & Villaume 2006, 15). This division of the Danish foreign policy strategy was visible from 1949 to 1961, but after the first Danish application to the EEC (later EU), Krag added the EEC as a fourth arena. The division was later codified in the publication *Dansk udenrigspolitik* by Per Hækkerup, who succeeded Krag as foreign minister. In this publication, the different dimensions are characterised as 'cornerstones' or 'columns' in the shadow of which ordinary bilateral diplomacy is pursued. The division was an expression of what has been called a functional compartmentalisation of the different aspects of general foreign policy (Hækkerup 1965) that in practice combined activist and more adaptational elements in the Danish foreign policy tradition. The Hækkerup strategy was designed to allow for some flexibility in Denmark's adaptation to the bipolar structure of the international system. Thus, the country could adopt a more passive and reactive stance in the area of security and be more active in other areas, such as the UN. As argued by Wivel (2014) Hækkerup's thinking can therefore be interpreted as a continuation of the dualistic security thinking of the Munch period that combined and balanced pragmatic realism and liberal egalitarian values, and thus as an example of the dualist tradition where the flexibility in the strategy allowed Denmark to operate within the 'continuity space' outlined in Figure 2. This dualism rests in the idea that the strategy allowed for both idealist and deterministic tendencies, but the overarching goal was Danish integration in world politics, which is different from the goals under Scavenius. The main contribution was – according to the interpretations in the literature – to emphasise some of the aspects of Danish state identity that were suppressed due to external constraints under Munch, and to reflect on the increasing globalisation of foreign and security policies as well as Denmark's increased action space. Furthermore, it can be argued that it facilitated a normalisation of Danish foreign policy, which came to include a wider range of participation strategies. The Hækkerup strategy was interpreted as representing an adjustment of Danish foreign policy thinking in terms of its continuation. It was perceived to be a consolidation of previous dualistic thinking, but it also codified a strong internationalist dimension in the foreign policy. The interpretation pattern points to a high degree of continuity as this tradition dominated the period before and after

the Second World War (Olesen & Villaume 2006; Branner 2013; Wivel 2014.) Following this logic, the Hækkerup thinking continued to cast a shadow over the post-Cold War period, which helped to shape Danish activism until the militarisation after 2001. Branner (2013) suggests that the militarisation after 2001 represented a break with the tradition as it forced Denmark to abandon its traditional order politics and moved *too far* away from the pragmatic elements in the dualist tradition. Branner (2013) directly questions whether the militarisation of Denmark's security policy can be considered a permanent characteristic of the country's foreign policy tradition. The increased use of military means after 2001 is considered a deviation from earlier practice as the priority changed from the international order to the alliance with the United States (Knudsen 2004; Holm 2002; Rynning 2003). Wivel (2014) argues that although the militarisation can be seen as a continuation of the Hækkerup 'realist embedded idealism', and there are parallels to the more adaptive policies under Munch, its ideational foundation can be seen as 'an idealist antithesis to the two dominating doctrines in particular, and to pragmatic power politics in general' (ibid., 129). On the rhetorical side, the idealism under Fogh Rasmussen was explicitly contrasted with the collaboration policy during the German occupation and with the restrained line in Danish NATO policy during the Cold War (Farbøl 2012). As Larsen (2017, 160) notes, the strong promotion of idealist liberal values on behalf of a pragmatic balancing of idealist and deterministic motivations under Super Atlanticism in particular (Fogh Rasmussen)(Mouritzen 2007), and also the Footnote period (Jørgensen) can be considered as attempts to depart from the dualist model. Wivel (2014) and Branner (2013) have therefore suggested that only Munch and the Hækkerup strategies from 1965 on qualify as doctrines that reflect 'the tradition'. In their reading, the Ellemann-Jensen strategy also falls within the overall logic of dualist-inspired thinking. According to their interpretation, both are influenced by a dualistic combination of 'pragmatic realism' and 'liberal values' but vary in structural context. One must assume that the 'pragmatic idealism' formulated under Løkke Rasmussen (Danish Government 2023) also are considered as a continuation of this thinking.

Wivel (2014, 129–30) points out that the idealistically motivated militarisation under Fogh Rasmussen and during the Footnote period can be considered 'logical next steps' in the evolution of Danish foreign policy. Both attempted in very different ways to move Danish foreign policy towards a more idealistic, small state policy, but both failed to make a lasting impact as they ignored the

pragmatic lessons of 1864 and thereby broke fundamentally with the tradition. This has led to a changed interpretation according to which this period and the Footnote period do not fit into the overall tradition, as the Footnote Policy is seen as making little sense in the context of Munch and Hækkerup's more pragmatic activism (see Figure 4). The Footnote Policy was aimed at undermining the policies that would protect Denmark from the Soviet Union and at provoking Denmark's most important ally, the United States. Contrastingly, according to Wivel (2014, 129) the principles of super Atlanticism were formulated as a Wilsonian-inspired idealist antithesis to the two dominant strategies and to pragmatic power politics in general, which accordingly became *too* idealistic and non-pragmatic to be included in the dualist tradition. Even though the recent donations and support for Ukraine have not been explicitly addressed in the academic literature yet, the Danish eagerness to stand out as one of the most contributing small states can also, from this perspective, be interpreted as an example of where the Danish foreign policy has become too idealistic and too unbalanced due to its bold nature (see Mouritzen 2022 on unbalanced small state strategies). On the other hand, the Danish reactions and responses have firmly been coordinated with European and American allies. Notably, as Schmidt remarks (2024, 420), Denmark's attempt to establish the closest possible bond with the US and prove a good ally is guiding Denmark's foreign policy (at least prior to the Trump 2 administration). This has, accordingly, led to a break with established policies by allowing American military personnel and material in Denmark, and, for the first time in modern Danish history, defence expenditure is meeting NATO guidelines. These changes occurred when it became increasingly clear that the post-Cold War period, characterised by a relatively peaceful relationship between the West and Russia, was definitively over, and the US security guarantee seemed more fragile than ever. The risk of abandonment outweighed the dangers of entrapment. Based on such an assessment, the Frederiksen doctrine can be interpreted as falling under the tradition. In a later analysis, Wivel (2020, 418) has also suggested that 'Denmark's military activism is robust' and a defining element in the Danish foreign policy in of the post-Cold War period.

Figure 5. Exclusive dualist interpretation of change and continuity in the tradition



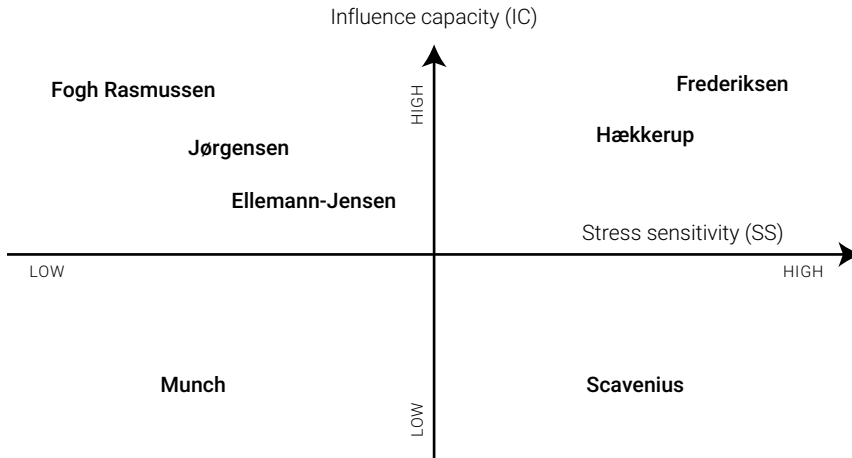
A more principal consequence of this argument, which is not explicitly addressed in the works of Branner, Wivel, or Olesen and Villaume, is the status of the foreign policies in the time periods that fall outside of the tradition. In the Danish case, this relates to the periods of Scavenius, Fogh Rasmussen, and of the Footnote Policy. Scavenius believed that Denmark – due to its position as a small, exposed state in the shadow of the regional hegemons Germany and Great Britain – should adapt to the power/political realities by adopting neutrality as its main reaction to external developments. The main task of Danish foreign policy is therefore to stay informed about these factors and their interplay and pick the right moments to exploit the situation. Denmark was therefore forced to adapt to German politics. Forming an alliance with Great Britain to balance German influence was not an option due to the lack of British interest in Denmark. Denmark had to live in Germany's shadow, accept practical political realities, and try to survive by insisting on Danish neutrality while maintaining good diplomatic relations with Berlin to avoid provoking or upsetting German decision-makers. While the Fogh Rasmussen and the Footnote periods are seen as failed challenges to the tradition, Scavenius represents a period where the neutrality practice swung too far in the deterministic direction as it gave priority to pragmatism and active adaptation, which is considered outside the tradition.⁷ The practice of neutrality of Scavenius thereby represents a difference in kind from the neutrality under Munch, due to its more singular nature, which is deemed outside the Danish tradition.

Inclusive dualist interpretation

This understanding typically adopts a comparative reference point rooted in the dualist foreign policy thinking of the 20th century, where the origin of the 'tradition' is associated with the dominance of different competing domestic factions in the political spectrum that either have emphasised internationalism or adaptation in conjunction with the constraints imposed by the international situation. Interpretations following the inclusive variant tend to emphasise an overall continuity in the sense that this continuation space is much larger as the tradition is assumed to include a much broader variation in foreign policy outcomes compared to the inclusive interpretation. This is because the external constraints and opportunity structures might allow certain drivers to dominate in certain periods, while suppressing them in others. Petersen and Due-Nielsen (1995) in their way of working with the tradition concept suggested that one way to nuance the analysis of change and continuity was to 'match' the different doctrines related to the values of the two master variables defined in figure 3. Accordingly, the Scavenius doctrine is considered the result of a period with low IC/high SS, which led to an acquiescent foreign policy under difficult structural conditions, where the country had to bandwagon on the strongest force in its external environment. Following this interpretation the action space under Scavenius was extremely limited during the two World Wars, which led to the accommodation policy under the Second World War that gave rise to the dominance of determinism. Accordingly, the Danish positions during the two World Wars is characterised as a period where SS/IC was low, which would allow Denmark to adopt the less compromising strategy of quiescence, thus in effect it signifies a policy of minimal external activity, designed to steer the country free from harmful contacts with the external environment, which in Danish is associated with staying put or 'ligge død'. According to Petersen, such a policy is closely associated with Munch, who argued that 'the first and last demand which we must make of Danish foreign diplomacy is that it shall keep quiet and do its utmost to secure that we may live as unnoticed as possible' (Quoted in Karup Petersen, 1970, 417). During the 1930s Munch tried to keep Denmark out of European great power politics and ensure the neutrality position by keeping a low profile, but in the end the pressure became too high and Denmark ended up in acquiescence to German demands and interests.

Petersen suggests that the combination of high IC/ high SS allows for a more balancing policy, which he argues became the dominant tendency in the

Danish post-Second World War policy, where Denmark's positions became far more internationalist and were characterised by a give and take approach where Denmark opted in to the system. In this reading both Hækkerup and Elleman-Jensen represented a clear departure from Munch, and the Scavenius period (Due-Nielsen & Petersen 1995, 16–17). In periods of high IC and low SS Denmark could in principle be allowed to follow what Petersen labelled 'dominance', aimed at shaping the external environment. Following this logic, and given an understanding of the nature of Danish activism as voluntaristic and internationally engaged, it has been suggested that the militarised activism might represent an attempt to exercise dominance, either by acting as a strategic actor (Rynning 2003), or because the engagement can be seen as an example where the internationalist ambition of opting in to the international system by the military supporting the US (Pedersen 2015) actively meant that there was a break with the traditional balancing policies associated with the activism of Hækkerup. The tendency in this interpretation frame is that it identifies long-term trends, generic tendencies and recurrent themes. In terms of interpretations of change and continuity this framework allowed for interpretations of change in both degree and kind terms, as policies could represent continuity within each of the modes but shifts in policy between the modes could be seen as a representation of change in kind, for instance between balancing and acquiescence. Compared to the exclusive dualist interpretation the greatest difference relates to the question of whether the international activism of Fogh Rasmussen and the active internationalism under Ellemann-Jensen continue or even reinforce certain elements from the internationalist trend in the country's foreign policy tradition but also bridge certain elements from the deterministic interpretation tradition. Continuity is here primarily interpreted in relation to the period after the Cold War. It especially highlights continuity traits from the Ellemann-Jensen period and how they developed and evolved under the Social Democratic-led governments in the 1990s due to the emphasis on opting into international organisations and/or allies. This interpretation of the continuity traits follows Petersen's (2009) argument about the introduction of a coherent liberal paradigm in Danish foreign and security policy that was visible in both strategic thinking and practice from 1990 to 2018. Following this rationale, the Frederiksen doctrine would differ from the other post-Cold War doctrines by its combination of real-political and value-based arguments. Accordingly, instead of identifying one single tradition, Petersen's work suggests that there are different traditions, or modes of foreign policy, at play in Danish foreign policy, depending on domestic and exogenous factors.

Figure 6a. Change and continuity in the inclusive dualist understanding

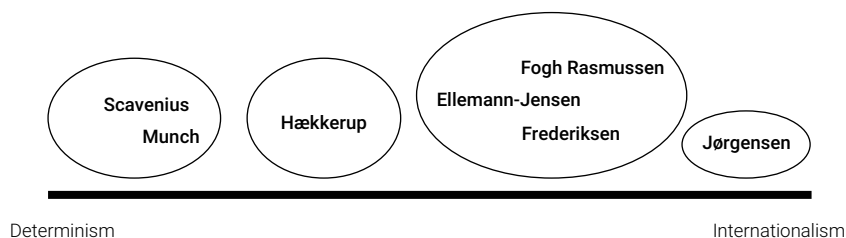
Source: Due-Nielsen & Petersen (1995).⁸

Pedersen (2012; 2015; 2023) does not utilise the original adaptation framework, but has in his work also suggested that there exist different traditions in modern Danish foreign policy. One tradition relates to the neutrality period, where Pedersen (2015) suggests that Munch and Scavenius' doctrines can be considered as one expression of a Danish tradition emphasising de-coupling from the international system. In this interpretation, the internationalism in the Munch doctrine serves as a factor to ensure neutrality and sovereignty, which differs from the Hækkerup doctrine. Contrary to the interpretations in Petersen, Pedersen thereby suggests that there are only differences in degrees between the Munch and Scavenius doctrine, and that differences to the Hækkerup doctrine represent a difference in kinds. The compartmentalisation associated with the Hækkerup doctrine therefore represents its own tradition. Pedersen also suggests that the period after the end of the Cold War has been characterised by a new coherent tradition. This new tradition can be encapsulated in the contested term of activism (Larsen 2024), where it is suggested that the period has been characterised by larger and more comprehensive international engagement together with the Danish allies and partners (so-called output contributions (Ringsmose 2010), who are either driven by US demands on the security area (Mouritzen 2007; Schmidt 2024; Olesen & Schmidt 2024; Pedersen & Reykers 2023), pragmatic adaptations to the new security situation in Europe (Pedersen 2023) or by more idealistic motives (Pedersen 2012; Petersen 2009; Knudsen 2014)).

This suggests that the 'activism' in the post-Cold War period represents a relatively coherent 'tradition' despite differences of degree between the 'activist internationalism' of the Ellemann-Jensen doctrine, the 'international activism' of the Fogh Rasmussen doctrine or the 'balancing activism' of the Frederiksen doctrine (Pedersen 2023). Pedersen (2012) has argued that there are numerous defining commonalities in the way activism was performed before and after 2001, which are centred on a full 'opt-in' strategy to international institutions and alliances (Pedersen 2015). The continuity is related to the introduction of (offensive liberal) value-based arguments and concerns for human rights, as well as explicit promotion of Danish national interests with a focus on securing the US security guarantee, and a good relation to Washington has been a guiding principle throughout the period. Pedersen (2023) has also suggested that this paradigm is visible in the more contemporary foreign policy of the Frederiksen doctrine, where the international activism and activist internationalism have been continued in a balanced activism aimed at promoting European security through an active balancing policy against Russia. This perspective emphasises a high degree of continuity in Danish internationalism after the end of the Cold War, since the closer alliance with the US is considered another way to opt into the international alliance system. This interpretation largely follows, but also modifies and updates, the dualistic understanding of changes in the unipolar system. According to this perspective, the militarisation of the Fogh Rasmussen period in some respects challenged the deeper dualistic nature of the Danish foreign policy tradition, which was visible in, for instance, the rationale that the alliance with the US helped transform Denmark from a small state to a middle power (Rasmussen 2006). This illustrates (at least on the rhetorical side) a fundamental break with the more reactive and pragmatic elements in the country's tradition, although this has been contested in both the public and the academic debate. On the other hand, the period did not completely break with pragmatism, as the activism under Fogh Rasmussen also emphasised the relevance of building a reputation as a loyal and relevant ally to secure the country's long-term security through its bandwagoning behaviour (Jakobsen et al. 2018; Ringsmose 2009; 2010. See also Mariager & Wivel 2018). This variant has interpreted the Rasmussen doctrine as an expression of adaptation and accommodation to the US and the militarised activism as a bandwagon for protection. Accordingly, the Rasmussen doctrine draws closer to or perhaps transgresses the threshold to the quiescence quadrant.

According to this interpretation, the idealism expressed in the Jørgensen doctrine represents its own tradition due to its idealistic nature and its critical stance on Danish commitments and engagement in two of the central arenas in the Danish Cold War strategy, namely NATO (Petersen 2011), but also its reluctant stance on further Danish engagement in the European Union, where the alternative majority also tried to block further integration under the SEA negotiations in 1985 (Pedersen 2013). The doctrine in itself cannot, however, be considered a complete break with the compartmentalisation of the Hækkerup doctrine, but clearly represents a much more idealistic approach to engagements in the various arenas, and in this sense challenges the balanced approach, which usually saw the UN (development aid) and Nordic cooperation as isolated sanctuaries for idealistic value politics that should not spill into the dynamics of the NATO or EU arena, where more realpolitikal concerns were dominant. The Footnote politics of 1982–1988 do in this respect also remind us, that different drivers or schools of Danish foreign policy not only coexist but also compete and can dominate as a function of the parliamentary and electoral dynamics. This implies that one school or tendency might dominate under specific domestic opportunities, as we saw in the 1980s. The logic is that the foreign policy of certain periods often contains elements of both tendencies, but their degree of membership of either branch varies as a function of the structural and domestic opportunity structures, which opens for a wider interpretation of what is included in the tradition, as small states under less structural pressure can also pursue more independent and internationalist policies than normally assumed in the more realist-dominated interpretation pattern.

Figure 6b. Inclusive dualist interpretation of change and continuity in the tradition



The analytical utility of the tradition concept

The analysis has demonstrated two central shortcomings in the use of the tradition concept that have relevance for interpretations of continuity in the debate about change and continuity in the Danish literature and beyond. The first is related to the measurement challenges of assessing change and continuity using ideal types. Realist interpretations suggest a high degree of continuity, as foreign policies are typically considered as continuations of or variations in adaptation to power balance and the greater powers in the system. The conceptualisation therefore has its strength in highlighting differences in degree, whereas differences in kind are harder to investigate, as these must break fundamentally with the tradition.

In contrast, the exclusive dualist understanding tends to produce change interpretations, as the ideal types are used to differentiate whether contemporary actions are outside or inside the tradition. Actions, trends or decisions that do not fit into the tradition are thereby considered deviations, which emphasises differences in kind rather than degree. Accordingly, this tends to promote interpretations of countries' foreign policy histories that are characterised by dramatic shifts rather than evolutionary, incremental and generic changes, which is implied in the inclusive dualist tradition, despite its challenges when it comes to precise conceptualisations and interpretations. This leads to another shortcoming of the exclusive variant, namely the analytical question of how we should classify the excluded periods that – for different reasons – are deemed outside the tradition. In the Danish case study, the excluded, 'non-traditional' time periods range from seven in the singular to twenty-eight years in the exclusive dualist interpretation of the past century. Interpretations following the exclusive dualist conceptualisation thereby paint a dramatic picture of the long-term trends in foreign policy history. On a more abstract level, the findings illustrate the more fundamental question of what these periods outside the tradition represent in the country's history and how we can classify 'grey zones' or hybrids. Can these excluded periods be considered as traditions in their own right? Or are they offshoots of general tendencies in the established tradition? Or simply adaptations of the old tradition to new structural or domestic conditions?

Some of these shortcomings are mitigated in the inclusive dualist interpretation that identifies different sets, or clusters within the overall tradition. This

interpretation tends, however, to emphasise continuity, but compared to the more Weberian-inspired interpretation pattern, holds a larger potential for emphasising generic and evolutionary developments (differences in degree) in the tradition over time, as the different doctrines contain various elements of the overall dimensions of the tradition. This moves away from the more binary understanding promoted by Wivel and Branner. The inclusive variants of the dualist tradition also tend to produce continuity interpretations but based on the idea that the Danish foreign policy tradition offers numerous different ways to react to the combination of external and internal opportunities and restraints. This suggests that the tradition is more holistic compared to the other two variants. This is not, however, to suggest that everything represents continuity, but rather that certain ideational factors can be allowed to dominate under different combinations of external and internal factors (see also M.R. Olesen 2012; 2022). A general challenge in the use of the tradition concept to assess changes and continuity, especially in the two ideal-typical variants, is that it requires very precise definitions and criteria for establishing the definitional boundaries (demarcation lines) for membership or non-membership. Such requirements are often problematic when studying variations in policy trends as the conceptualisation (e.g. balance between fundamental drivers, excessive use of military instruments etc.) lacks nuances and precision. Accordingly, it becomes difficult to account for variations or degrees of membership, and the identification of non-membership might be somewhat context sensitive. This becomes problematic when dealing with concepts that often exist or operate on a continuum, or when we are trying to capture nuances and evolutionary trends between doctrines, as there are many examples of 'boundary ambiguity' that can lead to a failed classification of 'hybrid' or grey zone examples. Another challenge is also that this concept type does not capture the rich patterns and relationships that exist within and between concepts because ideal types depend on clear and accepted definitions and interpretations. This is why analyses utilising this type of conceptualisation might fall short when dealing with more complex, multifaceted or evolving doctrines that operate under rapidly shifting (structural) conditions, as we have seen with the Frederiksen doctrine.

Conclusions

This article has contributed to the recurring debate on change and continuity in the Danish foreign policy literature. As the analysis demonstrates, the answer to the question of whether contemporary foreign policy decisions represent 'business as usual' or not is complicated, as it hinges upon our understanding of what we compare it with. The concept of 'foreign policy tradition' holds analytical promise and methodological advantages because it can help us identify when contemporary foreign policy directions and decisions deviate. However, the often-implicit use of ideal-typical conceptualisations of countries' 'foreign policy tradition' has two overlooked shortcomings that might produce biases in our assessments of change and continuity. The first relates to how different, theoretically driven, ideal-typical understandings of a nation's foreign policy tradition can produce very contrasting interpretations of change and continuity in contemporary foreign policy, as contemporary decisions either fall outside or inside, depending on the conceptualised tradition. The reason is that the conceptualisation of 'the tradition' is based on an often-implicit theoretical assumption about the role and nature of states' foreign policy roles and opportunities, which impact upon the interpretation of the status of contemporary actions. This will, in turn, produce either rather large – or rather small – 'continuity spaces', which either exaggerate continuity or paint a picture of pendulum-like changes in states' foreign policy. Such differences make it difficult to 'settle' arguments about change and continuity as it is often unclear what is being compared.

The second challenge is that the use of ideal-typical concepts helps to exclude, stigmatise, cancel, suppress – or normalise – certain historical periods or features in states' foreign policy history at the expense of tendencies in other periods. This raises a question of the status and relations between 'the tradition' and the excluded periods. Are they in fact new traditions, or are they offshoots of general tendencies in the established tradition that have simply evolved and been adapted to new conditions? The problem with ideal-typical conceptualisations is that nuances, gradients and hybrid policies are difficult to classify, which is unfortunate as the analyses often overlook generic continuity trends, evolution, or reinterpretations in the general foreign policies under shifting structural conditions.

To advance our understanding of change and continuity using the tradition concept, the article proposes that the literature needs to pay more attention to the role of conceptualisation. Methodologically this can be achieved through a change in conceptualisation logic, where foreign policy doctrines are considered elements of both strings in a dualist tradition. Such methodological logic has the potential to conceptually connect different dynamics and tendencies in a country's foreign policy history in a broader and more holistic understanding of traditions and foreign policy history. Accepting the risk of overemphasising continuity interpretations, the analytical benefit is that it becomes possible to identify long-term trends, tendencies and developments in the tradition by adopting a more evolutionary perspective on the developments in both degree and kind terms, without excluding or suppressing certain periods from the country's foreign policy history.

Notes

- 1 Rasmus Brun Pedersen is an Associate Professor at the Department of Political Science, Aarhus University.
- 2 See also Lustick (1996) and Møller & Skaaning (2021) who have urged scholars to reflect on their historiographic (or theoretical) school and its impact upon our interpretation of historical events.
- 3 See also Mouritzen 2022 for a discussion of the limits to the Nordic countries' idealistic foreign policies.
- 4 See Gram-Skjoldager 2012 for an excellent overview of internationalism in Danish foreign policy.
- 5 For an examination of the content of the different doctrines see Petersen 2004; Olesen & Villaume 2006; Lidegaard 2003, Pedersen 2015; 2023; Schmidt 2024; Olesen & Schmidt 2024).
- 6 It is not unproblematic to use doctrines to evaluate change and continuity, as doctrines are often active attempts by practitioners to frame and create their own narratives of contemporary events (see Larsen 2023; 2024). Rosanna Farbøl points to a strong tendency under Fogh Rasmussen to frame and promote a certain interpretation of Danish history in an attempt to legitimise the militarised activism (Farbøl 2011; 2012). Such public narratives may exaggerate the changes between different governments and administrations as they often emphasise ideology and values as central drivers of foreign policy (see also Wivel 2019 for a discussion of open vs. closed sources). This challenge is important for the Danish debate, as many studies have relied on public sources for their assessments of change and continuity. Utilising public sources therefore might facilitate change interpretations, as doctrines often highlight differences rather than commonalities between governments. However, this does not mean that they are without analytical value for evaluating change and continuity, as the representation of certain ideational traits often finds its way into the official representation.
- 7 Confirmed through personal correspondence with Wivel and Branner.
- 8 Authors interpretation of where the Ellemann-Jensen, Rasmussen, Jørgensen and Frederiksen doctrines would fit into Nikolaj Petersen's framework.

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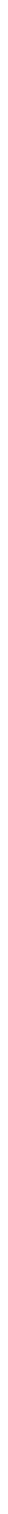
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Chapter 4

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