

REPUTATION AND STATUS IN DENMARK'S STRATEGIC CULTURE

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The primary objective of the article is to evaluate the significance of status and allied reputation within Denmark's strategic culture. Amongst Danish international relations scholars, there is a well-established notion that one of the key motivations for the use of military force in Danish foreign policy was the aspiration to cultivate special relations with the United States and achieve the status of a privileged ally. This status would confirm guarantees for Denmark's national security, provide the country with an opportunity for distinctive influence in decision-making and agenda-setting in NATO, the EU, and transatlantic cooperation. A qualitative content analysis of the 2017–2018, 2019–2020 and 2022 Danish foreign policy strategies was carried out to determine the effect of such expert perceptions on the texts of the guiding foreign policy documents. The analysis highlighted and confirmed the 'super Atlanticism' tendencies in Denmark's contemporary strategic culture, revealing its close ties with the Danish perception of the US as the safeguard for the liberal world order and associated multilateral institutions. Denmark's value-driven militarised foreign political activism in the post-Cold War era is thus not only pragmatic but also ideological as it seeks to promote liberal values, democracy and human rights under American leadership. The article concludes that factoring in status and reputation in strategic culture studies may complement the explanations of security community formation, alliance strategies and the dynamics behind relations within different types of alliances.

Keywords:

Denmark, strategic culture, USA, NATO, EU, reputation, special relations, alliance, Northern Europe, Arctic

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Introduction. Expert discussion on status and reputation in Denmark's strategic culture

As a small power incapable of ensuring national security unaided, Denmark has historically been preoccupied with relations with key allies and the country's reputation amongst them. In this respect, Denmark seems to prove the thesis about the deep concern of small states over the issues of status sovereignty, and formal and informal equality with other participants in international relations, chiefly larger and influential countries [1]. A vivid illustration of Nordic Europe's close attention to status and place in the international hierarchy is the criticism of the G20 member list, which does not include any of the Nordic countries, from Norway's former Minister of Foreign Affairs Jonas Gahr Støre.¹ Previous research has linked such criticism to the Nordic states' attempts to gain membership in the forum and thus expand their influence in world politics. The same motivation for raising the status and building a reputation of a reliable and never-failing ally was spelt out in 2014, when Sweden stated its commitment to a 'feminist' foreign policy, and in 2003, when Denmark took part in the invasion of Iraq [2]. It has been mentioned in the literature that the modest position of the Nordic states in the international hierarchy prompts them to compete for a status that can be described as 'good power'. Improving a country's status within this paradigm requires adopting a value-driven approach and creating an image of a dependable partner in relations with leading powers or in the framework of multilateral diplomacy and international organisations [3].

When considering some general issues of small states' security, Nikolai Kaveshnikov writes in a similar vein that the position of these countries has historically been governed by 'the impossibility to ensure their security' due to the scarcity of resources. Therefore, they face the choice between three principal behaviour strategies: 1) finding equilibrium amongst powers; 2) seeking security guarantees, defence mechanisms or protectorate status from a great power; 3) increasing the cost of gaining and retaining control of their territories [4]. Nordic Europe's sensitivity to matters of status leads one to suppose that Denmark would opt for the second strategy in its dealings with NATO, the EU and the US. The Danish case is a good candidate for investigation as no other Nordic country seems to be such a staunch advocate of using military force and participating in international military operations as a tool to build up a reputation and raise visibility in the eye of the US. This is evidenced by Danish casualties in Afghanistan reaching 44 (37 service people died in action; 7 of diseases and in accidents),² which is more than in all the other operations and missions where the country

¹ Ertel, M. 2010, Norway Takes Aim at G-20 "One of the Greatest Setbacks Since World War II", Spiegel, URL: <https://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/norway-takes-aim-at-g-20-one-of-the-greatest-setbacks-since-world-war-ii-a-702104.html> (accessed 26.03.2023).

² Jensen, L. B. 2021, Efter 20 år i Afghanistan: Det har krigen kostet i liv, kræfter og kroner, *Altinget*, URL: <https://www.alinget.dk/udvikling/artikel/efter-20-aars-krig-i-afghanistan-det-har-den-kostet-i-liv-kraefter-og-kroner> (accessed 10.03.2023).

took part after WWII. Overall, 53 members of the Danish armed forces died in international operations between 2002 and 2018,¹ whilst Norway lost only 10 service people during its years in Afghanistan.² Major General Gunner Arpe Nielsen, the Chief of the Royal Danish Army, stressed when discussing Denmark's military involvement in the Global Coalition To Defeat ISIS:³ 'We have a group of employees who have undertaken an extraordinary effort. We engaged in Iraq in October 2014 and have flown more than 4,000 hours, more than 410 missions, and have dropped more than 350 bombs. We cannot continue to do this.⁴ This leads one to conclude that Denmark endeavoured to make a contribution that would make it stand out amongst the US-led allies, no matter how much these efforts exhausted the country's defence capabilities.

A study of Denmark's track record fits the context of growing research interest in investigating the strategic culture of medium-sized and small states striving to fill a distinctive unique niche in the international system [5]. Another area of interest is the militarisation of the country's foreign policy after the end of the Cold War. This line of policy replaced commitment to UN peacekeeping, mediation and promotion of international law. In our analysis of Denmark's strategic culture, we build on the findings of the third-generation researchers of the phenomenon as the country's use of military force is closely linked to its vision of world order, democratic values and its role in the Euro-Atlantic community, these three elements comprising 'national optics' [6].

The thesis about the allies attaching great significance to status and reputation when it comes to restating and reinforcing security guarantees has been proven conclusively by Danish IR scholars. For example, Kristian Søby Kristensen, head of the Centre for Military Studies at the University of Copenhagen since 2022, describes Denmark as an 'entrepreneurial ally' seeking to increase its relevance in the eyes of the key ally, the US. He identifies three factors behind this. The first factor is the strategic considerations: close ties with the US translate for Denmark into influence, a privileged position among other allies and firmer security guarantees. The second factor is moral concerns: Denmark has historically felt indebted to the US for its contribution to the victory over Germany in World War II and the Nordic country's security during the Cold War despite Denmark's problem behaviour in NATO, particularly during the *fodnotepolitik* [footnote policy]

¹ Karkov, R. 2023, Tre blev dræbt af vådeskud, ti omkom i ulykker, de fleste døde i kamp — ny kortlægning af udsendte soldaters død, *Berlingske*, URL: <https://www.berlingske.dk/samfund/tre-blev-draebt-af-vaadeskud-ti-omkom-i-ulykker-de-fleste-doede-i-kamp-ny> (accessed 10.03.2023).

² Veum, E. 2021, Døde de forgiveves?, *NRK*, URL: https://www.nrk.no/urix/dode-de-norske-soldatene-i-afghanistan-forgiveves_-1.15591861 (accessed 11.03.2023).

³ ISIS has been designated as a terrorist group and banned in Russia.

⁴ Schaub, G. Jr. 2015, Denmark: Defence Woes In the Little U. S. Ally That Could, *War On The Rocks*, URL: <https://warontherocks.com/2015/08/denmark-defense-woes-in-the-little-u-s-ally-that-could/> (accessed 08.03.2023).

period of 1982–1988 [7]. The third factor is cosmopolitanism, i.e., the idea that the US and its European allies use military force as a tool to promote the values of liberal world order and human rights and to achieve universal welfare for all [8].

During the Cold War, Denmark's behaviour within the alliance rendered it a difficult ally. Although this prevented forging special relations with the US, Washington did not attempt at 'punishing' the unreliable ally. Remarkably, towards the end of the Cold War, Denmark had acquired the nickname *Prügelknabe* [whipping boy] within the alliance. This sobriquet was given to Denmark due to its low military expenditure throughout the Cold War from 1949 to 1989: it was well below the alliance average, fluctuating between 2 and 3% of the country's GDP to exceed 3% briefly in the 1950s and peak in 1955 at 3.5%. To compare, the NATO average was continually above 3% and even 4% until the early 1970, reaching the maximum of 6% in 1953. Denmark's military expenditure was much more modest than that of countries of similar economic capacity, such as Belgium, the Netherlands and Norway. This line of behaviour, however, was a product of steps that did not fit within the framework of alliance or bloc solidarity, such as support for the USSR's proposal to convene the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe or the criticism of the NATO Double-Track Decision [9]. Low defence expenditure, a refusal to host American military bases and nuclear weapons (with the exception of Greenland, the location of an airbase and Thule Site J, the latter remaining a crucial element of the US missile early warning system, and the Project Iceworm, which was terminated in the late 1960s), an attempted ban on the entry of American ships carrying nuclear weapons into Danish ports and discussions about non-nuclear zones in Northern Europe collectively created a conflicting and unfavourable image of Denmark within NATO and in the eyes of the US. However, in reality, they had little to no adverse effect on the practical activities of the alliance [10]. Researchers from the Danish Institute for International Studies reached similar conclusions in their comprehensive four-volume report on Denmark's foreign policy during the Cold War (1945–1991), which appeared in February 2005.¹ The report concluded that, during the Cold War, Denmark, labelled as an 'ally with reservations' both in formal terms and in the perception of Washington, was nevertheless becoming increasingly integrated into NATO's political and military structures. Denmark's allies also viewed the country as a loyal member of the alliance.

Later, the Danish government's ambition to improve this adverse image led to what is known as Denmark's 'super-Atlanticism', which entailed a 'militarised' foreign policy, steadfast support for American ideology and overseas initiatives and notably close relations with the US. As a 'super-Atlanticist,' Denmark wholeheartedly supported the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, joining the Coalition of the Willing, whilst other smaller NATO members, such as Belgium, Norway, and Greece, voiced criticism of the operation [11]. In this respect, Hans Mouritzen notes that, despite competition between Copenhagen and Stockholm for informal

¹ Danmark under den kolde krig — den sikkerhedspolitiske situation 1945–1991, 2005, *DIIS*, URL: <https://www.diis.dk/publikationer/danmark-kolde-krig> (accessed 05.03.2023).

leadership in the Baltic region, as well as for the status of the principal advocate of the Baltic States' Euro-Atlantic integration to the US in the 1990s, Sweden's and Norway's commitment to peacekeeping and UN institutions proved more persistent than that of Denmark [12].

Denmark leaned towards a strategy of aligning itself with the US. It consistently reduced defence spending, supported the transformation of NATO's functions and objectives, facilitated the Baltic States' accession to NATO and joined major ad hoc coalitions created by the US and its European allies in 1990–1991 during the Gulf War, in October 2001 during the operation in Afghanistan and in March 2003 during the intervention in Iraq [13].

After the Cold War, Denmark went beyond the minimum NATO membership requirements, striving to forge unique ties with the US, which could once meet the American-British benchmark. This partly accounts for the country's disproportionately high troop numbers, operational spending and casualties per capita in US-led and NATO operations. An acknowledgment of Denmark's successes was the appointment of the former Prime Minister of the country, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, as NATO Secretary-General (2009–2014) and the Danish Chief of Defence, Knud Bartels, as the Chairman of the NATO Military Committee (2012–2015). In early 2013, during a visit to Washington, a British delegation was even privately advised to emulate the Danish model [14].

Denmark's participation in US and NATO interventions in the Balkans, Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, and Syria was driven not so much by objective national security interests as by the desire to enhance its visibility and prestige as seen by its American ally. Even the format of Denmark's involvement in these operations was subservient to this goal, along with the choice of regions for deploying Danish contingents, the composition of the units, financial and material expenditures, and many other aspects. The conditions for Danish participation in operations are deliberately designed so that the country stands out in the eyes of its allies. It is not that the Danish military considerably influences the course of combat operations: Danish policymakers are well aware that the military contingents and resources they provide are too insignificant for this purpose. However, the Danish do not impose any additional restrictions and reservations, participating in combat in particularly hazardous areas and executing high-risk operational tasks.

In practice, this manifested itself in Denmark providing fighter aircraft and special forces for the Afghanistan operation even before an official request from the US. Furthermore, the country was:

- one of the five US allies in the coalition involved in the initial phase of the invasion of Iraq in 2003;
- one of the six NATO members that provided military contingents for deployment in Southern Afghanistan in 2006;
- one of the eight NATO members involved in the bombing of Libya in 2011;
- the only country except France to have supported the US threat of airstrikes in Syria in 2013;
- one of the six NATO members to have participated in airstrikes against ISIS in Iraq in 2014–2015 and in Iraq and Syria in 2016;

— one of the few participants in the ground operation in Syria in 2017 that provided special forces units.

Moreover, as it was revealed by Edward Snowden in 2013, Danish intelligence agencies assisted the US in spying on European politicians, prompting the NSA to involve Danish military intelligence, *Forsvarets etterretningstjeneste* (FE), in the activities of the Five Eyes.¹

The aspiration to have Danish activities recognized and appreciated by key allies was evidenced in the fact that Danish F-16s deployed 11 % (821) of all the bombs used by NATO members in the Unified Protector operation. In the initial period of Operation Odyssey Dawn, Denmark was second only to the US in the number of bombs released (102). During the Libyan operation, Denmark, one of the first countries to deploy ground contingents, struck 17 % of the air targets.² In 2014—2015, Denmark deployed more bombs (503) in the course of the coalition operation against ISIS in Iraq than the aircraft from the United Kingdom and France [15].

Military spending, which was systematically reduced throughout the 2000s and 2010s (until the 2018—2023 defence agreement), extensive expenses related to participation in international operations, a shortage of experienced technical and military personnel, and NATO and the US returning to the priority of containing Russia and strengthening the defence capabilities of European countries at the NATO summits in Wales and Warsaw in 2014 and 2016, significantly complicated Denmark's task of maintaining its reputation as a reliable and dependable ally. In March 2022, persistent difficulties in equipping the Danish armed forces led the country to adopt a plan to reach the NATO target of defence expenditures at 2 % of GDP by 2033. In December 2022, the new Danish government shifted the deadline to 2030.³ This is still a long-term timeframe and Danish military analysts are concerned that the country may face criticism from NATO for increasing its defense expenditures too slowly, especially considering that almost ten years have passed since the NATO summit in Wales in 2014, where the target was approved, and given that combat operations are ongoing in Ukraine.⁴ Earlier,

¹ Antonov, M. 2021, V tsentre shpionskoy pautiny: Daniya podslushivala soyuznikov dlya SshA [At the heart of a spying network: Denmark intercepted allies' conversations for the US]. *Vesti.ru*, 31 May 2021, URL: <https://www.vesti.ru/article/2569154> (accessed 05.03.2023).

² Malmvig, H. 2019, Through Thick and Thin: Will Danish Military Engagements with the U. S. Endure in the Middle East?, *Foreign Policy Research Institute*, URL: <https://www.fpri.org/article/2019/08/through-thick-and-thin-will-danish-military-engagements-with-the-u-s-endure-in-the-middle-east/> (accessed 09.03.2023).

³ Krog, A. 2022, Ny regering: Forsvarsbudget skal udgøre to procent af BNP i 2030, *Altinget*, URL: <https://www.altinget.dk/artikel/ny-regering-forsvarsbudget-skal-udgore-to-procent-af-bnp-i-2030> (accessed 08.03.2023).

⁴ Lomholt, A. 2023, Danmark skal investere milliarder i Forsvaret — men snart kan regningen blive endnu større. *TV2*, URL: <https://nyheder.tv2.dk/samfund/2023-01-31-danmark-skal-investere-milliarder-i-forsvaret-men-snart-kan-regningen-blive-endnu> (accessed 08.03.2023).

in October 2022, Denmark was reprimanded in a NATO report for multiple failings in the preparation of an armoured brigade, radio intelligence and means of anti-submarine warfare.¹

Danish experts on national foreign policy and strategic culture, while arriving at a consensus that the country has started to employ armed forces more extensively, gaining greater legitimacy and effectiveness in the eyes of the political elite, differ in their views regarding the reasons and outcomes of this transformation in foreign policy. There is also some uncertainty about the balance between Atlanticism and Europeanism in Denmark's alliance relations. The table below provides an overview of the findings of leading Danish experts on the transformation of foreign policy and strategic culture in the country.

**Denmark's foreign policy and strategic culture after the end of the Cold War,
as seen by Danish international relations scholars**

Aspect of analysis	Hans Mouritzen [16]	Mikkel Vedby Rasmussen [17]	Peter Viggo Jakobsen [18]
Causes and factors of transformation	The state's contemporary geopolitical situation and historical geopolitical experience — the disappearance of the Soviet threat, the need for US involvement in European security, the prevention of the dominance of the Franco-German dyad, and the loss of influence due to the expansion of the EU and NATO — have led Denmark to embrace the historical lesson of the duty to 'fight for freedom and peace' instead of letting others do it for them	Denmark's strategic culture is defined by the alternating division and consensus in Denmark's domestic politics between proponents of 'cosmopolitanism', who believe in Scandinavian uniqueness, moralism, and non-military foreign policy tools, considering military force as useless, on the one hand, and advocates of 'defencism', who hold that even small countries have to develop military forces alongside other European states. In the early 1990s, these factions united under the banner of 'activism', replacing Denmark's Cold War-era concept of 'containment' and incorporating the use of armed force into the cosmopolitan discourse	Military activism in Denmark has been influenced by three key factors: the state of the international environment (including the nature of threats, opportunities for cooperation, and the international demand for the use of military force), political will (domestic political consensus), and the capabilities of the Danish armed forces. Central to Danish 'activism' is that it promotes the country's interests and values only in situations where national security and survival are not at risk

¹ Belukhin, N. E. 2022, Kopengagen peresmatrivaet priority natsionalnoy bezopasnosti [Copenhagen reviews national security priorities], *Russian International Affairs Council* 28 March 2022, URL: <https://russiancouncil.ru/analytics-and-comments/columns/europeanpolicy/kopengagen-peresmatrivaet-priority-natsionalnoy-bezopasnosti/> (accessed 09.03.2023).

The continuation of the Table

Aspect of analysis	Hans Mouritzen [16]	Mikkel Vedby Rasmussen [17]	Peter Viggo Jakobsen [18]
Atlanticism/ Europeanism ratio	After the Cold War, Denmark shifted from a restrained form of Atlanticism to its standard version, and, from 2001 onwards, it embraced 'super-Atlanticism'. This entailed close cooperation with the US and a strong commitment to American foreign policy ideology. The national defence policy exhibited limited Europeanisation due to the opt-outs from the EU's CFSP/CSDP	A member of both the EU and NATO, Denmark was more receptive to changes in the international order than other Northern European countries in the 1990s. This prompted the country to see military force as an extension of European unity and integration, the latter being a peace project. Danish Euroskepticism may have further contributed to the militarisation of the country's foreign policy. Initially linked to the pursuit of special relations with the US, 'activism' could potentially spill over into other contexts	An instrument of Danish foreign policy since 1920, ¹ the country's 'activism' is not directly associated with its NATO membership or the position of the US as a global leader. The end of the Cold War gave an additional impetus to these long-standing traditions. Yet Denmark's involvement in Afghanistan and Iraq aimed to enhance its reputation in the eyes of the US and attempt to build special relations with it [19]
Benefits acquired, evaluation of transformation success	Exchange of confidential information, a higher status in the eyes of Washington compared to other European countries, and privileged relations with the US ensure Denmark's greater influence on NATO reforms and the transformation of transatlantic relations	Transformation and modernisation of the Danish armed forces, their evolution from a means of national defence into a tool for power projection; military force is now seen as a legitimate and effective instrument for responding to global threats	Washington now sees Denmark as a country of greater influence and prestige than before. Yet the US perception of the country depends on Denmark's continuous ability to provide effective contingents for long-term participation in international operations

¹ The Danish had to become part of the League of Nation's contingent supervising the 1920 Vilnius referendum. This mission, however, was abandoned. Peter Viggo Jakobsen links the beginning of 'activism' to Danish participation in a unit of the Non-Intervention Committee stationed at the French-Spanish border in 1937–1939.

The end of Table

Aspect of analysis	Hans Mouritzen [16]	Mikkel Vedby Rasmussen [17]	Peter Viggo Jakobsen [18]
Negative consequences of the transformation	Mounting contradictions in domestic politics, clashes with the common identity of Northern European countries (the Norden space), competition with other EU members (primarily the Netherlands and Poland) for Washington's favour, and the risk of Denmark being perceived as a satellite and proxy of the US within the EU	Internal political debates and contradictions regarding 'true' and 'false' activism are intensifying, and the use of military force is no longer linked to the European peace project and European integration; all this could lead to new divisions	Depletion of Denmark's armed forces, the need for their fundamental modernisation and renewal, especially in the context of NATO's return to a policy of containment and confrontation with Russia. The desire to continue the 'activist' course is at odds with the actual capabilities of the country's armed forces

Commenting on Denmark's unique position within the EU, Lyudmila Babykina writes that the abolished defence opt-outs have negatively affected not only Denmark's political status but also its defence and affiliated industries. She notes that the country could still participate in essential areas of cooperation not directly related to the EU's CSDP, such as military mobility or combating cybercrime and hybrid threats, thus creating 'grey zones' in the application of the opt-outs. Danish international relations scholar Ole Wæver believes that Denmark should place greater reliance on Europeanism in its foreign policy to ensure better alignment with its national interests.

Danish researchers, for example, have pointed out that the conditions of Denmark's EU membership rendered its foreign policy increasingly inconsistent. For example, the abolished defence opt-out (Danish: *forsvarsforbehold*) hindered the pursuit of a value-based foreign policy (Danish: *værdibaseret udenrigspolitisk linje*). Tirne Flokhardt from the Danish Institute for International Studies maintains that Denmark has historically displayed a cautious attitude towards militaristic measures and anything resembling of 'great power' responses, favouring peaceful conflict resolution, bridge-building, assistance to development as a security tool, and initiatives for closer dialogue, democratisation and human rights promotion. In her view, the 'defence opt out' led to unforeseen consequences,

causing Denmark to deviate from its traditional foreign policy track. In addition, having embraced the concept of ‘activist’ foreign policy (Danish: *aktivistisk udenrigspolitik*), the country became a leading participant in international military operations, which would have previously been viewed as a militaristic gamble. Thus, the defence opt-out and activism in foreign policy, according to one group of Danish researchers (Flokhart, Nissen, Staur, Mouritzen, Olesen and others), created a rift between Denmark’s strategic culture and its actions on the international stage, especially evident amidst the expanding cooperation between the EU and the UN.

However, Martin Marcussen, Anders Wivel, Lee Miles and other researchers argue that the significance of Denmark’s opt-outs had diminished significantly after the early 1990s, and their preservation or abolition could not have a profound effect on the foreign policy of such a small country in the 2000s.

Their central argument is that, as globalisation progressed, Denmark had more important platforms for implementing its foreign policy than those provided by the EU, especially due to the country’s special relations with the US. Along this line of thought, European necessity is seen as having transformed into a global opportunity, and Danish foreign policy has shifted from an adaptation policy to active internationalism [22]. This perspective appears to reflect the state of affairs observed from 2000 to 2015. However, with the election of Donald Trump as President of the United States in 2016, the US adopted a strategic shift towards containing China. Furthermore, the abolition of the Danish defence opt-outs in June 2022, followed by Denmark’s participation in EU military operations and missions and defence cooperation within PESCO, led the country to pay significantly more attention to the European dimension of its foreign policy. This shift is evident in Denmark’s 2022 Foreign and Security Policy Strategy, where three sections dealing with national priorities within international organisations are dedicated to the EU. It emphasises that Denmark must be at the heart of the EU and should strive for a stronger EU on the global stage — a union that can lead the way in the international fight for values.¹ Yet, this new focus and Denmark’s ‘return’ to Europe can be seen as a mere attempt to meet US expectations for a more independent and stronger EU, especially in matters of defence.

The main differences in expert assessments of Denmark’s foreign policy transformation concern the specific benefits the country gained through its special relationship with the US. Another point of divergence is the external structural and internal factors behind modern Danish activism. For instance, Jacobsen and Wivel [23] see it as a historically rooted method of Danish for-

¹ Udenrigs- og sikkerhedspolitik strategisk strategi. 2022. Udenrigsministeriet, 2022. URL: <https://um.dk/udenrigspolitik/aktuelle-emner/udenrigs-og-sikkerhedspolitik-strategi-2022> (accessed 09.03.2023).

eign policy that merely assumes various forms depending on the interplay of the three factors featured in the table. Danish activism as a distinctly modern phenomenon, attributable to factors like the end of the Soviet threat, the acceleration of globalization, the emergence of new challenges, and the adoption of humanitarian interventions. Furthermore, some analyses underscore the significance of Minister of Foreign Affairs Uffe Ellemann-Jensen, who played a key role in the decision to deploy HDMS Olfert Fischer to the Persian Gulf for its involvement in enforcing UN sanctions against Iraq [24], along with Prime Minister Rasmussen. There are three key perspectives on the correlation between transformation and continuity within Denmark's decision to join operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, i.e., whether such decisions can be considered a departure from the ideals of peaceful northern internationalism towards more aggressive diplomacy and interventionist practices. Firstly, contemporary Danish activism is seen as a continuation of the policy of adapting to the conduct of great powers and superpowers, pursued by Denmark during the Cold War. Secondly, it is viewed as a foreign policy transformation consisting of a departure from the national traditions of internationalism, with the country metamorphosing into a strategic player and an active participant in armed conflicts. The difference is stressed between activism and the adaptation policy pursued during the Cold War and the 1990s. Thirdly, Danish activism is considered both a radical deviation from the adaptation policy of the Cold War period and a continuation of traditional Danish and Scandinavian internationalism [25].

When examining the specific advantages Denmark gained from its activism in its relations with the United States, Danish experts tend to concur that these benefits could have been much more substantial if Danish diplomats had made systematic and strategic use of these new opportunities. In practice, they often operated on an ad hoc basis. US support for the candidacy of Rasmussen as NATO Secretary-General can be attributed not so much to the desire to reward the Danish ally for its willingness to participate in operations in Iraq and Afghanistan but to the Americans' perception of Rasmussen as an advocate of Washington's vision for NATO reforms and strategic development. Generally aligned with the American worldview, he was willing to make unpopular and challenging decisions when necessary. Interestingly, it was the Obama administration, not the Bush administration, that endorsed his candidacy during the crucial stages of negotiations within NATO, despite Rasmussen's close personal contacts with the latter [19].

One way or another, the research consensus regarding Denmark's strategic culture after the end of the Cold War is that the country has departed from primarily humanitarian diplomacy, mechanisms of official development assistance, reliance on international law, peacekeeping, and multilateral cooperation within the framework of the UN. Moreover, during the bipolar confrontation, Denmark

strived to head assistance to the global South, allowing itself to criticise US interventions in Vietnam and the Third World. It has transitioned to a more militarised foreign policy, with the country participating in all major US operations in the former Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, North Africa, and the Middle East. In all these cases, Denmark's primary motivation was to please the United States and build special relations with Washington.¹ However, the official Danish rhetoric and the national media portrayed these actions in an idealistic light — as measures to prevent atrocities, human rights violations, and the promotion of democracy, freedom, and the rule of law. This viewpoint was effectively conveyed by Prime Minister Rasmussen in his speech on 29 August 2003 to mark the 60th anniversary of the end of the occupation administration: 'The lesson from 29 August 1943, is that if you genuinely stand for our core values like freedom, democracy, and human rights, you must be willing to actively contribute to their defence, even when it means making unpopular and risky decisions'.² Whilst likening Denmark's cooperation with the Germans during the occupation and the opt-out policy of the 1980s to national and moral betrayal, Rasmussen compared Denmark's participation in the invasion of Iraq to the courageous actions of Danish resistance fighters, who proved Denmark's unwavering support for the Allies in World War II [26].

The question remains unanswered — whether Denmark can still be considered a 'super-Atlanticist' or it is gradually moving towards moderate Atlanticism. Wivel, for example, believes that the continuation of 'super-Atlanticism' in Denmark's foreign policy is linked to significant challenges and uncertainties, because the US steadily encourages its allies to increase military spending for enhanced security in Europe. This especially applies to the Baltic Sea region, which is geographically close to Denmark. The country, however, continues to benefit from its special relationship with the US and its privileged access to American officials, which provides Denmark with a clearer picture of the US position on issues of national interest [12]. At the same time, Sweden and Finland are pursuing NATO membership and, like Denmark, are striving for a special status in relations with the US, having obtained security guarantees from it. Against this backdrop, maintaining the 'super-Atlanticist' status will call for tools and steps compared to what was required earlier. It will also demand significantly greater efforts to avoid being overshadowed by Poland, Sweden, Finland and the Baltic States.

¹ Malmvig, H. 2019, Through Thick and Thin: Will Danish Military Engagements with the U. S. Endure in the Middle East?, *Foreign Policy Research Institute*, URL: <https://www.fpri.org/article/2019/08/through-thick-and-thin-will-danish-military-engagements-with-the-u-s-endure-in-the-middle-east/> (accessed 09.03.2023).

² Læresætningen fra 29. August 1943 er, at hvis man mener noget alvorligt med vores værdier, med frihed, demokrati og menneskerettigheder, så må vi også selv yde et aktivt bidrag til at forsvare dem... Selv når der træffes upopulære og farlige beslutninger.

Much will depend on Denmark's belief that the United States is an effective guarantor of a liberal international order and the political landscape in the Danish parliament. There are growing trends in favour of stronger European defence cooperation and closer ties with France and Germany. Whilst Denmark still maintains a presence in the Middle East, its primary focus has now shifted to the military and political developments in the Baltic region and Eastern Europe. Additionally, the willingness of Denmark's political and economic elite to endorse a policy of containment towards China, or at the very least, reduce and limit engagements with the country, will play a crucial role.

An important question is whether the views and theses put forward by Danish political scientists are reflected in the country's foreign policy strategic documents and what place the concept of status occupies in its strategic culture. In this article, we endeavour to answer this research question by scrutinising Denmark's conceptual foreign policy documents to look at how attention to status and reputation defines its strategic culture.

Reputation and status in Denmark's foreign policy and security strategies

Studying strategic culture, foreign and defence policy, and national security issues through content analysis of conceptual documents, official speeches, media articles, and parliamentary debates is a time-tested and widely practised academic approach. Qualitative methods of content analysis are still prevalent, with earlier less popular quantitative tools gaining wider currency. For example, despite the earlier tendency for researchers to rely on qualitative methods, a recent work employs quantitative content analysis to understand similarities and differences between the defence policies of EU member states published from 1994 to 2018 [27], as qualitative analysis is not well-suited for extensive comparative studies involving a larger number of countries and long-time spans. Another study uses quantitative content analysis to analyse German socio-political discussions in the media regarding international operations and Bundeswehr missions. The authors note that, while remaining an unconventional and novel practice, utilizing such a method in investigating strategic cultures can complement the literature in the area [28]. As the conceptual documents suggest, the more common qualitative content analysis of strategic documents and official statements underpinned the identification of Russia's functional priority in foreign policy [29]. It was also used to assess the level of commonality in European foreign policy amidst recent international crises [30].

This article will use more traditional and common content analysis to examine Denmark's four foreign policy and security strategies covering the periods of

2017–2018,¹ 2019–2020,² 2022³ and 2023.⁴ The rationale for this choice lies in the relatively limited volume of the texts under consideration and the study's focus on a single facet of strategic culture, rather than pursuing a comparative research approach.

Denmark's first comprehensive foreign and security policy strategy was introduced in 2017, serving as a blueprint for the country's 'activist' foreign policy, the path followed for over 20 years after the end of the Cold War. Before 2017, direction was provided by regional and thematic strategies, as well as ad hoc discussions in *Folketing* committees [31]. Although these strategies, designed for short-term purposes, are a relatively recent and irregular practice, they merit scholarly attention as they represent the initial endeavours to organise Denmark's foreign policy priorities in the face of escalating global uncertainty and codify them into a unified conceptual document. Notably, 'super-Atlanticism' is a purely analytical concept and never appears in official government rhetoric [12]. This circumstance suggests that, when conducting content analysis, authors concentrate on the hidden, implied meanings of the strategies' provisions, effectively engaging in 'latent analysis' [32].

Danish academic literature frequently employs the notion of 'compartmentalisation' (Danish: *kompartmentalisering*) when examining the nation's foreign policy. This concept links the pursuit of core national interests (economic, security, ideological and value-based) to four main international institutions: the EU, NATO, the UN, and Nordic cooperation [33]. However, given that the concept of 'super-Atlanticism' was explored in the preceding section, and considering the effect special relations between the US and specific European nations have on foreign policy priorities, it seems appropriate to shift our attention towards the aspects of status and reputation in these relations [34]. What attaches additional importance to a detailed analysis of these facets is that security concerns, the emphasis on status and reputation, and the nature of Denmark's strategic culture comprise an integrated model of the country's militarised activism. The US is the main guarantor of Denmark's security, which leads the latter country to seek and maintain the status of a privileged, reliable and responsible ally. This, in turn, further binds the two states through common

¹ Udenrigs- og sikkerhedspolitik strateg. 2017–2018. Udenrigsministeriet, 2017. URL: <https://udenrigspolitik.dk/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Udenrigspolitik-og-sikkerhedspolitik-strategi-2017-2018-final-2.pdf> (accessed 09.03.2023).

² Udenrigs- og sikkerhedspolitik strateg. 2019–2020. Udenrigsministeriet, 2018. URL: <https://um.dk/udenrigspolitik/aktuelle-emner/udenrigs-og-sikkerhedspolitik-strategi-2019-2020> (accessed 09.03.2023).

³ Udenrigs- og sikkerhedspolitik strateg. 2022. Udenrigsministeriet, 2022. URL: <https://um.dk/udenrigspolitik/aktuelle-emner/udenrigs-og-sikkerhedspolitik-strategi-2022> (accessed 09.03.2023).

⁴ Udenrigs- og sikkerhedspolitik strateg. 2023. Udenrigsministeriet, 2023. URL: <https://um.dk/udenrigspolitik/aktuelle-emner/udenrigs-og-sikkerhedspolitik-strategi-2023> (accessed 09.03.2023).

practices in military-political decision-making and planning, Danish procurement of American weaponry and the defence of shared values. The aspiration towards the status of a privileged ally is reinforced by Denmark's activist and pragmatic strategic culture, which sees its goal in promoting traditional Northern European values of democracy and human rights, whilst taking into account the current needs of national security and the balance of power in international relations. This is particularly relevant in light of the US being the leader of the transatlantic community [35].

Strategy 2022 stands out for the attention paid to status and reputation in relations with the US and the measures to secure them. It also articulates Danish claim to a special role in the transformation of the EU and NATO: '[w]e will be at the centre of an EU that delivers results for its citizens'; '[w]e will maintain Denmark at the core of NATO and strengthen the transatlantic bond'.¹ Probably, this ambition is linked to a change of administration in the White House and Denmark's desire to make up for the opportunities lost during Donald Trump's presidency. For example, Strategy 2017–2018 briefly mentions the US' intention to withdraw from the Paris Agreement, describing it as highly regrettable.² Similar concerns were voiced in Strategy 2019–2020, which reads: '[t]he United States of America (US) is putting "America First", raising doubts about its global leadership and its willingness to defend the world order that it was instrumental in building'.³ Many specific measures to maintain the special status of Danish-American relations seek to persuade the US to revert to the support of the international institution of the liberal world order.

Discussing defence cooperation, the 2022 strategy states that the UK remains Denmark's close partner, identifying active post-Brexit security cooperation between the UK and the EU as a major priority. The strategy also points out defence cooperation with France, which was formalised in a memorandum of understanding in June 2014. The memorandum particularised Franco-Danish cooperation in countering piracy, joint actions of Danish and French armed forces in Kosovo and Mali, emphasising the importance of sharing experiences by the Danish and French navies. During the signing of the memorandum, Defence

¹ Udenrigs- og sikkerhedspolitisk strategi. 2022. Udenrigsministeriet, 2022. URL: <https://um.dk/udenrigspolitik/aktuelle-emner/udenrigs-og-sikkerhedspolitisk-strategi-2022> (accessed 09.03.2023).

² Udenrigs- og sikkerhedspolitisk strategi. 2017–2018. Udenrigsministeriet, 2017. URL: <https://udenrigspolitik.dk/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Udenrigspolitisk-og-sikkerhedspolitisk-strategi-2017-2018-final-2.pdf> (accessed 09.03.2023).

³ Udenrigs- og sikkerhedspolitisk strategi. 2019–2020. Udenrigsministeriet, 2018. URL: <https://um.dk/udenrigspolitik/aktuelle-emner/udenrigs-og-sikkerhedspolitisk-strategi-2019-2020> (accessed 09.03.2023).

Minister Nicolai Wammen described Denmark as a ‘country with limited resources pursuing an active foreign policy’¹ striving to contribute to operations led by larger allies.²

When elaborating on the role of the US in global climate policy, Denmark’s strategy for 2022 mentions cooperation with several American states on eco-friendly water supply technologies and agriculture, stressing collaborations with northeastern states in the field of wind energy. The strategy underscores Denmark’s extensive export opportunities in the US market and the need to take an active part in the green transition in the US, which is depicted as a ‘goldmine’ for Danish companies. Interestingly, expert and research articles typically focus on the political advantages of Denmark’s special relationship with the US, tending to overlook the associated economic benefits. Strategies 2017–2018 and 2019–2020 also commonly disregard this aspect of Danish-American relations.

Denmark’s strategy 2022 creates a paradoxical impression that the country tries to double-hat as a super-Atlanticist and a super-Europeanist, with this impression reinforced by the hasty decision of the Social Democratic government to hold a referendum on abolishing Denmark’s defence opt-outs shortly after the start of the special military operation. The strategy refers to the EU as the ‘most important foreign policy platform’, whilst describing close relations with the US as decisive for advancing Danish interests and values. The importance of interaction with the US is emphasised in the context of multilateral institutions and collaborations with ‘other partners’: ‘[i]t is together with the USA, the EU, and our other partners that we must handle the pressure on the strong international institutions and the challenges that come from, among other things, China’s more self-assertive behaviour and Russia’s hybrid warfare and military escalation in our neighbouring area’.³ Denmark’s support for American leadership is thus closely linked to wider of multilateral cooperation ‘where common rules, democracy, and human rights are respected’. Moreover, strategies 2017–2018, 2019–2020 and 2022 stressed the centrality of the EU to Denmark’s foreign policy: ‘[f]or Denmark, EU membership is our best opportunity to influence the

¹ ‘Som et land med begrænsede resurser og en aktiv udenrigspolitik’.

² Frankrig og Danmark underskriver forsvarsaftale, *Forsvarsministeriet*, 2014. URL: <https://www.fmn.dk/da/nyheder/2014/2014/frankrig-og-danmark-underskriver-forsvarsaftale/> (accessed 16.03.2023).

³ Udenrigs- og sikkerhedspolitik strategisk strategi. 2022. Udenrigsministeriet, 2022. URL: <https://um.dk/udenrigspolitik/aktuelle-emner/udenrigs-og-sikkerhedspolitik-strategi-2022> (accessed 09.03.2023).

world around us’;¹ ‘[t]he EU is the essential platform for the promotion of Danish interests in Europe and globally’;² ‘American and EU value-based leadership are crucial — and they must have our support’.³

The ‘need for American leadership’ clearly articulated in strategy 2022, leads one to agree with the expert opinion that the primary goal of the document is to reiterate commitment to close relations with the US and loyalty to NATO.⁴ The 2022 text is more of a political manifesto than a strategy proper, apparently targeted at the domestic audience: it repeatedly mentions duty, responsibility and the aspiration to act on behalf of the whole world at the UN Security Council, whilst failing to set problems and propose solutions. The same pattern can be seen in the account of transformations in Danish foreign policy amidst global change given by the Danish Diplomat Kristian Jensen on 1 May 2016.⁵ The most detailed sections of the strategy are dedicated to economic diplomacy, particularly increasing Danish exports to the US and the EU. This might be considered as evidence of the strategy’s orientation towards a domestic audience, especially Danish business circles.

Strategy 2023, which was published in May 2023, declared ‘pragmatic idealism’ the guiding principle of Danish foreign policy. It was prepared by the new Social Democratic government, i.e., the liberal party Venstre and the centrist Moderates,⁶ who sought to depart from the ‘value-based idealism’ of the previous government and take into account the recent radical changes in European securi-

¹ [For Danmark er EU-medlemskabet vores bedste mulighed for at påvirke verden omkring os]. Udenrigs- og sikkerhedspolitisk strategi. 2017—2018. Udenrigsministeriet, 2017. URL: <https://udenrigspolitik.dk/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Udenrigspolitisk-og-sikkerhedspolitisk-strategi-2017-2018-final-2.pdf> (accessed 09.03.2023).

² [EU er den afgørende platform for dansk interessevaretagelse i Europa og globalt]. Udenrigs- og sikkerhedspolitisk strategi. 2019—2020. Udenrigsministeriet, 2018. URL: <https://um.dk/udenrigspolitik/aktuelle-emner/udenrigs-og-sikkerhedspolitisk-strategi-2019-2020> (accessed 09.03.2023).

³ Udenrigs- og sikkerhedspolitisk strategi. 2022. Udenrigsministeriet, 2022. URL: <https://um.dk/udenrigspolitik/aktuelle-emner/udenrigs-og-sikkerhedspolitisk-strategi-2022> (accessed 09.03.2023).

⁴ Stockmarr, L. 2023, Leila Stockmarr (EL): Regeringens udenrigspolitiske strategi fremstår i høj grad blot som en brandingøvelse og en genbekræftelse af Danmarks tætte relation til USA og NATO, *Ræson*, URL: <https://www.raeson.dk/2022/leila-stockmarr-el-regeringens-udenrigspolitiske-strategi-fremstaar-i-hoej-grad-blot-som-en-brandingoevelse-og-en-genbekraeftelse-af-danmarks-taette-relation-til-usa-og-nato/> (accessed 13.03.2023).

⁵ Barnekow, C. 2022, Der gik ikke en måned, før den udenrigs- og sikkerhedspolitiske strategi blev overhalet af virkeligheden, *Altinget*, URL: <https://www.alinget.dk/for-svar/artikel/der-gik-ikke-en-maaned-foer-den-udenrigs-og-sikkerhedspolitiske-strategi-blev-overhalet-af-virkeligheden> (accessed 13.03.2023).

⁶ This government was the first after 1978 to include the leading parties of the opposing ‘blue’ and ‘red’ political groups. C.: Hansen, M.V. 2022, Danmark har fået en ny regering, *Danmarks Radio*, URL: <https://www.dr.dk/ligetil/danmark-har-faaet-en-ny-regering> (accessed 01.05.2023).

ty. Remarkably, when presenting the text of the strategy, new Minister of Foreign Affairs Lars Rasmussen made a special mention of African countries, stressing that '[t]wo-thirds of the world's population live in countries that either remain neutral or directly support Russia's actions in Ukraine'. He emphasised that Denmark could no longer be as particular about its partners as it had been before.¹ Probably, he hinted at the intention to win greater support for the Euroatlantic position within the UN from the Global South. Amongst the first manifestation of the new Danish government's 'pragmatic idealism' one might mention the lifting of the arms embargo on Saudi Arabia and the UAE in March 2023, as well as Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen's visits to Croatia, Albania and Egypt in March 2023. During these visits, discussions revolved around undocumented immigration and potential Danish assistance in Egypt's green economic transition. Frederiksen emphasised the need to 'reach out, seek common solutions, and strengthen partnerships, especially with the Global South'.² At the same time, strategy 2023 is a continuation and expansion of strategy 2022's European allegiance, which was strongly reinforced after 24 February 2022, reflecting the country's ambition to exploit the 'super-Europeanism' niche amidst the European security crisis. Denmark's earlier scepticism about the EU enlargement was replaced in strategy 2023 by the statement of the need to prepare new members to accession: '[t]he prospect is an EU with well over 30 member states'.³ Rasmussen assistance to Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia in taking the 'European path' as the central foreign policy goal of the current generation (which calls to mind Denmark's support for the Baltic States during their integration into the EU and NATO in the late 1990s—late 2000s. He also welcomed Germany's proposal to establish an informal club of nations advocating the idea of broader use of majority voting in the context of the EU's CFSP/CSDP and especially associated restrictions.⁴ The first meeting of the group, which Denmark and Sweden joined as observers and Finland as a full member, took place in Brussels on 22 May 2023. However, the Danish government and parliament remain split over this issue. When commenting on the group, Rasmussen tends to resort to diplomatic phrasing, such as

¹ Eller, E. 2023, Danmark skifter kurs: Mindre høj hest — mere pragmatisme, *Danmarks Radio*, URL: <https://www.dr.dk/nyheder/politik/danmark-skifter-kurs-mindre-hoej-hest-mere-pragmatisme> (accessed 01.05.2023).

² Migration er på dagsordenen når Mette F. rejser til Egypten, 2023, *Nordjyske*, URL: <https://nordjyske.dk/nyheder/politik/migration-er-paa-dagsordenen-naar-mette-f-rejser-til-egypten/4160693> (accessed 01.05.2023).

³ Udenrigs- og sikkerhedspolitik strategisk strategi. 2023. Udenrigsministeriet, 2023. URL: <https://um.dk/udenrigspolitik/aktuelle-emner/udenrigs-og-sikkerhedspolitik-strategi-2023> (accessed 09.03.2023).

⁴ Kongstad, J. 2023, Putins invasionskrig fremtvinger et sprængfarligt dansk opgør med tabuer i europapolitikken, *Jyllands-Posten*, URL: <https://jyllands-posten.dk/international/ECE15818848/putins-invasionskrig-fremtvinger-et-spraengfarligt-dansk-opgoer-med-tabuer-i-europapolitikken/> (accessed 01.05.2023).

‘slightly more effective foreign policy’.¹ This question will probably become a subject of serious discussions regarding a new inter-party agreement to present Denmark’s endorsed positions on various aspects of European integration. This agreement is expected to replace that from 2008 and is scheduled for discussion in the autumn of 2023 when *Folketing* reconvenes after the summer break.

Our analysis shows that Danish ‘super-Atlanticism’ is closely linked to the perception of the US as a guarantor of the liberal world order, which should also reinforce the EU’s role in global governance and world politics. Denmark’s stance on the strategic autonomy of the Union remains ambivalent, with the first direct mention of the concept appearing in Strategy 2023, which emphasises the need to enhance European resilience in the face of crises by building an open strategic autonomy.² Strategy 2022 merely mentioned Denmark’s support for the development of ‘a European strategic compass’ and the emergence of a more independent EU capable of assuming greater responsibility for security and stability in neighbouring regions. The strategy placed emphasis on the regulatory and normative power of the EU, its influence on global trade and climate policy and the need to ensure the resilience of supply chains. The question of enhancing the EU defence capability is discussed mainly in the context of the interests of Danish companies. The text of the strategy reads: ‘Denmark must also take part in building up the European defence industry and in strengthening the engagement of our companies with regard to international collaboration for the benefit of our security, prosperity, and welfare’.³

Conclusion. The categories of reputation, significance and status in strategic culture studies

The analysis of Denmark’s foreign policy strategies highlights its ambition to be more than an ordinary member of NATO, to be part of the ‘privileged circle’ of US allies with a ‘special voice’ in making and promoting decisions within the alliance. This is in effect the case despite Denmark’s limited defence and economic capability. As for the long-term prospects and compatibility of the ‘super-Atlanticism’ and ‘super-Europeanism/ultra-Europeanism’ trends, it should be noted that Denmark does not view them as mutually exclusive. For example, Strategy 2022 has 150 mentions of the EU, although the US remains Denmark’s

¹ [lidt mere effektiv udenrigspolitik]. Albrechtsen, R., Lauritzen, T. 2023, Løkke vil drøfte EU-veto, men de fleste partier tøver: «Det korte svar er nej». *Altinget*, URL: <https://www.altinget.dk/artikel/loekke-vil-droefte-dansk-holdning-til-eu-veto-men-de-fleste-partier-toever-det-korte-svar-er-nej> (accessed 01.05.2023).

² Udenrigs- og sikkerhedspolitisk strategi. 2023. Udenrigsministeriet, 2023. URL: <https://um.dk/udenrigspolitik/aktuelle-emner/udenrigs-og-sikkerhedspolitisk-strategi-2023> (accessed 09.03.2023).

³ Udenrigs- og sikkerhedspolitisk strategi. 2023. Udenrigsministeriet, 2023. URL: <https://um.dk/udenrigspolitik/aktuelle-emner/udenrigs-og-sikkerhedspolitisk-strategi-2023> (accessed 09.03.2023).

most important ally.¹ This may be due to the perception of the EU as a broader platform for advancing Danish interests in areas such as migration regulation, climate norms, human rights, democracy, trade policy and others, whilst special alliance relations with the US are mostly mentioned in a military-political context. Strategy 2023, for instance, reiterates the thesis about the exceptional military-political role of American power: ‘The USA will continue to be Denmark’s most important security policy ally, and we must continue to strengthen the transatlantic bond. Together with the USA and our other partners, Denmark must stand by the fundamental principles of a rules-based international order’.² Nevertheless, Denmark’s ambition to secure a special role in relations with both the US and the EU testifies to the country’s willingness to make an exceptional contribution to a reform of transatlantic relations that would not affect American involvement in European security. Denmark seems to attach considerable significance to the risks associated with American isolationism and the US potentially deprioritising the European dimension. Statements about the special responsibility for security in the Baltic region and the EU’s expanding role in defence policy do not dispel these concerns. Recent events also demonstrate a continuity in Denmark’s approach, reminiscent of the strategies pursued by the country in the 1990s and early 2000s. For instance, it voiced moderate criticism of the US withdrawal from Afghanistan in August 2021. Furthermore, Prime Minister Frederiksen expressed her bewilderment at France casting aspersion on Australia over the cancellation of the submarine order, which followed the establishment of AUKUS. She warned against turning ‘concrete challenges, which will always exist between allies, into something they should not be’, commenting on France’s overly emotional response.³

Examining prestige, reputation, significance, friendship, influence and other related phenomena within strategic culture, collectively categorised as ‘status’, could add to our understanding of ‘special relationships’, security communities, strategic partnerships and alliance strategies. This is especially true since, for example, the emergence of security communities must be underpinned by shared values and a sense of mutual involvement. Even within formalised alliances, the communication dynamics and the distribution of responsibilities amongst allies have a crucial role after the formal agreements take effect [37]. Denmark, for instance, aimed to use unconditional and unrestricted participation in US- and

¹ Albrechtsen, R. 2022, Ny dansk udenrigsstrategi nævner EU over 150 gange, men USA er stadig regeringens vigtigste allierede, *Altinget*, URL: <https://www.alinget.dk/forsvar/artikel/ny-dansk-udenrigsstrategi-naevner-eu-over-150-gange-men-usa-er-stadig-regeringens-vigtigste-allierede> (accessed 01.05.2023).

² Udenrigs- og sikkerhedspolitik strategisk strategi. 2023. Udenrigsministeriet, 2023. URL: <https://um.dk/udenrigspolitik/aktuelle-emner/udenrigs-og-sikkerhedspolitik-strategi-2023> (accessed 09.03.2023).

³ Denmark Sides With U. S. Against French Criticism of Defense Deal, *PBS*, 2021. URL: <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/denmark-sides-with-u-s-against-french-criticism-of-defense-deal> (accessed 16.03.2023).

NATO-led coalition operations as an ‘excuse’ for not increasing defence spending. The country considers its contribution to operations advancing US interests, including military personnel losses, as more substantial input than complying with the requirement of defence spending at 2 % of GDP.¹ However, this also raises the question of the extent to which the significance of status depends on the structural characteristics of the alliance, particularly the number of participants and the distribution of capabilities. For example, Denmark, as a junior partner within NATO, is gradually adapting to the new rules of the game, realising that an essential characteristic of being a ‘good, exemplary ally’ includes meeting the required level of defence spending. Furthermore, US expectations from its allies and, consequently, their reputation are directly linked to their military capabilities. This underscores the importance of studying the connection between status and structural factors within a given alliance.

Nevertheless, Copenhagen continues to seek new ways to pander to Washington, including by taking measures to improve domain awareness systems in the Danish Arctic and Atlantic territories in the vicinity of Greenland and the Faroe Islands. This is evidenced by Denmark’s adoption in February 2021 of a special Arctic defence agreement totalling 1.5 billion Danish Kroner (220 million dollars), which includes the construction of radar installations in the Faroe Islands and the purchase of drones for Greenland. This move was a response to US concerns that, due to insufficient monitoring, Russian submarines and aircraft could operate unnoticed in the airspace and waters of these autonomous territories.² In June 2022, the US Embassy in Denmark announced that, along with the modernisation of the Thule base, the American, Danish and Greenland parties discussed the installation of new radars on Greenland’s coast pursuant to the declaration of intent regarding investment in Greenland’s defence system made by the US Department of Defence in September 2018.³ Probably, the Arctic.

The Arctic region is increasingly becoming a space where Denmark can enhance its status within NATO and in its relations with the US. However, this will require greater financial and material investment compared to Danish participation in operations in Kosovo, Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya and Syria. As NATO members declare the need to deter Russia in the Baltic region, Denmark’s defence investment in the Arctic and, consequently, its reputation as an ‘exemplary ally’ will be costly both in a literal and political sense. Therefore, the role of the

¹ Schaub, G. Jr., Jakobson, A. K. 2018, Denmark In NATO: Paying For Protection, Bleeding For Prestige, *War On The Rocks*, URL: <https://warontherocks.com/2018/07/denmark-in-nato-paying-for-protection-bleeding-for-prestige/> (accessed 07.03.2023).

² Nielsen, A. B., 2023, Det grønlandske trumfkort, *DIIS*, URL: <https://www.diis.dk/node/24842> (accessed 07.03.2023).

³ Sørensen, H. N., 2023, Danmark og USA: Flere amerikanske radarer kan være på vej i Grønland, *KNR*, URL: <https://knr.gl/da/nyheder/danmark-og-usa-flere-amerikanske-radarer-kan-v%C3%A6re-p%C3%A5-vej-i-gr%C3%B8nland> (accessed 07.03.2023).

Greenland factor in Danish reputation may increase, in terms of the Arctic's value to Washington and the autonomous Greenlandic government's desire to have its own diplomatic voice to negotiate independently with the US, a goal it has consistently pursued in recent decades. Currently, Greenland is preparing to publish its own foreign policy strategy, and until its adoption, Kingdom of Denmark's Arctic strategy will not be further developed. In May 2022, Greenland obtained written assurances from the Danish government that Greenlandic interests would be taken into account in the development of a new defence agreement for Denmark, which is planned to be presented in the summer of 2023.

In conclusion, based on the Danish experience, the research approach outlined in this study can be expanded and continued with a comparative analysis of how other small countries — EU and NATO members, as well as non-Western countries — understand and perceive the categories of status and reputation, strategic culture and alliance strategies. This can lead to achieving a higher level of generalisation regarding considerations of status, prestige and reputation in strategic culture and a broader understanding of the concept of 'special relations' beyond the American-British model [38]. Another promising topic for the study could involve comparing the category of status and the ways in which countries in different positions within the international system — great powers, middle powers, regional powers, rising powers, and small states — seek to elevate or maintain their status.

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