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The Danish Experience. Denmark in NATO, 1949-1999

When discussing the costs and benefits of alliance membership for small states, it is easy to forget the main questions concerning the overall functioning of the alliance in the international system and its effects on international relations: Does it provide for peace and stability in the system? Does it provide security to the member states? These problems pertain to the general dimension of alliance membership. Considering the potentially catastrophic consequences of a 'no' to these questions about the potential benefit, the costs of membership to individual members is on some accounts a question of second rank.

Here, for the purpose of this article, this important general dimension is left aside in order to focus on the more limited issue of country specific costs and benefits of alliance membership in the light of the Danish experience in NATO. In the country specific dimension the cost/benefit equation has to do with the room of manoeuvre within the alliance, including the question of infringements on Danish sovereignty as a possible consequence of alliance membership

This will be explored by trying to identify a few 'watershed' events in the history of Danish NATO membership.

Since 1989 alliance politics have changed in a fundamental way. Thus, it is necessary to distinguish between two periods in the history of NATO: 1949-1989 and 1990-1999.

Glenn Snyder's theory of alliance behaviour

Glenn Snyder's theory of alliance behaviour is based on game theory and the security dilemma concept. According to this theory, alliance politics are played out in two games, the alliance game and the adversary game. The alliance game refers to politics within the alliance, while the adversary game concerns politics between opposing alliances and nations.¹

1 Snyder, G. (1984), 'The Security Dilemma in Alliance Politics'. *World Politics*, Vol. 36, No. 4, pp. 461-95). For the period 1989-1999 adaptation theory, originally developed by James Rosenau, is also applied in order to shed light on the EU-NATO dimension of the Danish security and defence policy (cf. Petersen, N. (1998), 'National Strategies in the Integration Dilemma: An Adaptation Approach'. *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 36, No. 1, March 1998, pp. 33-54). (Petersen, N. (1999), 'Denmark's 50 Years with NATO'. *Paper for International Academic Congress on NATO- The First Fifty Years, Brussels and Bonn, May 19-22, 1999*. Department Of Political Science, University of Aarhus, 30 pp.). I am in debt to Professor Nikolaj Petersen, University of Aarhus, on whose articles this contribution relies heavily.

The alliance game contains a cooperation strategy (C strategy) and a defection strategy (D strategy). In the adversary game, C stands for conciliation, whereas D denotes deterrence, cf. fig. 1.



Fig. 1. Glenn Snyder's theory of alliance behaviour

The alliance game

The primary 'good' of a C strategy is security through protection by the alliance.

The primary 'bad' of a C strategy is entrapment, that is losing freedom of action to the alliance (and potentially less security).

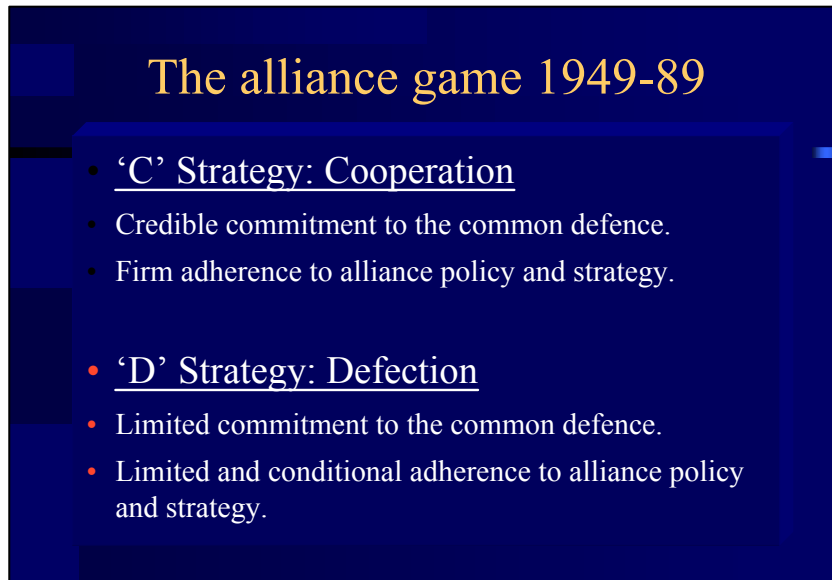


Fig. 2

The 'good' of a D strategy is relative independence (and potentially more security).

The 'bad' of a D strategy is abandonment, i.e. withdrawal of protection (and thereby potentially less security).

As already mentioned, by concentrating on a few 'watershed' events or periods, this paper will take a closer look at the costs of adherence to each of these strategies respectively, or to a mix of the strategies.

The adversary game

The C strategy 'good' is low tension, more freedom of action (and potentially more security).

The C strategy 'bad' is that you risk being cheated by the adversary (thus potentially less security).

The D strategy 'good' is more security.

The D strategy 'bad' is high tension (thus potentially less security).

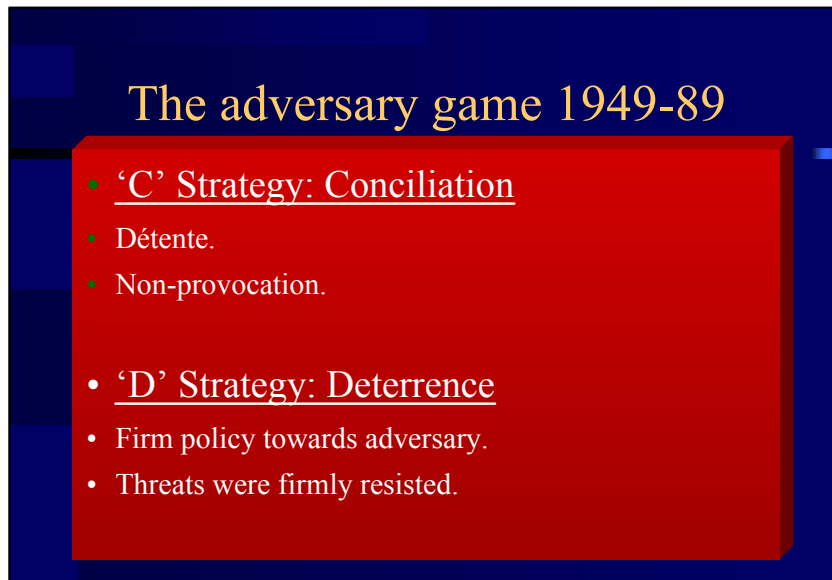


Fig. 3

The alliance game and the adversary game combined

A firm C strategy in the alliance game will in principle result in high deterrence value in the adversary game.

A D strategy in the alliance game may result in conciliation in the adversary game.

Both strategies are concerned with 'more security' but based on different assumptions about the adversary.

The balance sheet 1949-78

Low Danish defence budgets were grudgingly accepted and it is hard to point at any specific cost of this 'defection'. Military assistance from the United States and Canada even continued until the mid-1960s when it came to a halt.

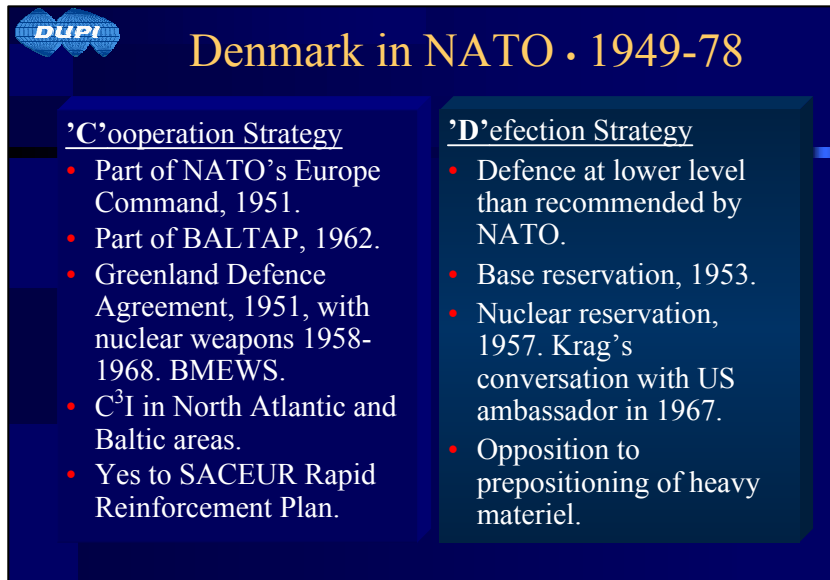


Fig. 4.

The base reservation came to life when a NATO plan to station some 150 American tactical aircraft on Danish airfields was presented in 1952. In terms of the alliance game, the fear of entrapment became decisive. In the adversary game, non-provocation played a role in the thaw after Stalin's death in April 1953. The base reservation was accepted by NATO, presumably because it did not apply to Allied participation in exercises in Denmark and to preparations for the introduction of Allied reinforcements in crisis or wartime.

The Danish nuclear reservation of 1957 was accepted much in the same spirit, and the same goes for the Norwegian nuclear reservation. Seen from an American point of view, part of the trade-off, although never explicitly mentioned, may very well have been the secret Danish acceptance of nuclear weapons in Greenland. In 1957, US Secretary of State John Foster Dulles thanked Prime Minister H.C. Hansen for "the helpful arrangement that had been made for United States establishments in Greenland", i.e. the green light for nuclear weapons. However, in 1968 after the crash of a B-52 bomber with nuclear weapons at Thule, it was possible for Denmark to change the light back to red.²

No 'costs' or 'punishment' can be identified in the above cases. However, a 'watershed' event occurred in 1967. The foreign ministry had notified the American side that the approval of the 1967 programme for US naval visits in Denmark was given on the assumption that participating US vessels did not carry nuclear weapons. As a reprisal, the US ambassador, in a conversation with Prime Minister Krag, asked whether to stop the naval visits altogether. The

² Grønland under den kolde krig. Dansk og amerikansk sikkerhedspolitik 1945-68, København: Dansk Udenrigspolitisk Institut, 1997, especially chapters 11, 15 and 16.

Prime Minister backed out, and the issue was only mentioned again in 1988. This is one of the very few examples we have of a major ally implicitly threatening to withdraw its protection.

Danish support for the Soviet proposal of a Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe was initially met with frosty responses in alliance circles. No major ‘costs’ or ‘punishment’ for this conciliatory strategy can be identified.

Trade-offs between sovereignty and protection in Greenland

Trade-offs between sovereignty and protection are normal for alliance membership. In their more benign forms such trade-offs are negotiated and transparent. They can, however, also take the form of less clear-cut, opaque infringements on sovereignty.

Such examples are in evidence in Greenland in the 1950’s and 1960’s. Although US authorities applied for permission in a formally correct way to conduct those American activities that were not covered by the US-Danish Defence Agreement, the actual content and purpose of these activities often remained hidden for the Danish authorities. For instance, it was not disclosed to the Danish authorities that the real purpose of the Camp Century program was to investigate the feasibility of a giant nuclear missile basing system in northern Greenland, the so-called project “Icworm”.³

Neither was it ever disclosed to Danish authorities that in the 1950’s Thule airbase was used as a launching pad for highly classified, provocative overflights of the Soviet Union. The overflights constituted, of course, flagrant violations of international law. Such behaviour can hardly be deemed to have been in conformity with the assumptions on which the Defence Agreement was based.⁴

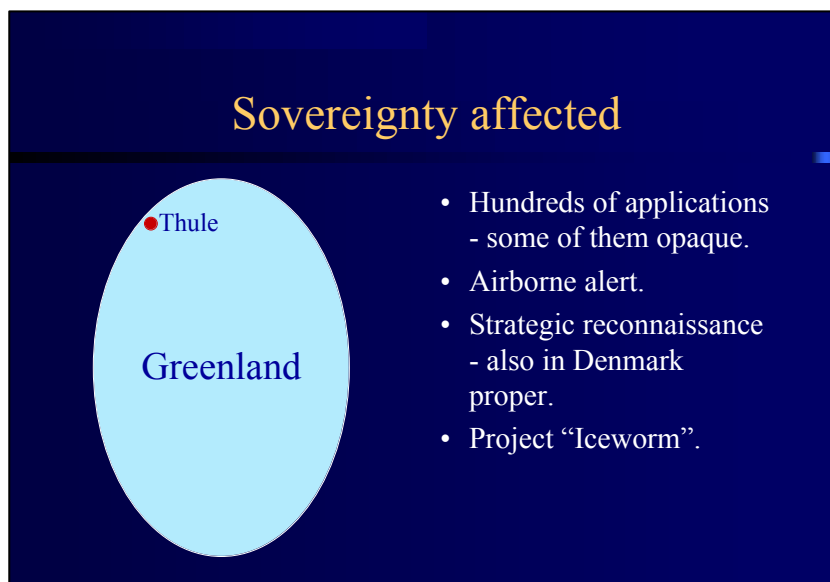


Fig. 5.

3 Ibid., pp. 319-25.

4 Ibid., pp. 232-33, 315-18.

The culmination of Danish defection, 1979-1988

The decade 1979-1988 marks the Danish defection par excellence from the alliance mainstream, cf. fig. 6.

Strong alliance reactions to the Danish defection, dubbed ‘Denmarkisation’, could have been expected. Especially since the attitudes behind the defection were widely shared by the public in some other member countries. The reaction on the rhetorical level was harsh enough and may even have affected Danish influence adversely in some connections, but generally, no really tangible ‘costs’ or ‘punishment’ can be identified.

The exception is the discussion about a Nordic nuclear-free zone. In this area there were quite a few statements from allied powers to the effect that it would be very difficult to send reinforcements to Denmark in a crisis situation, if the reinforcements could not have access to nuclear weapons on Danish territory. The same kind of argument was used again when the question of nuclear port-calls resurfaced in 1988.

Concluding on the period 1949-1988, it is possible to point at only three examples where ‘defections’ brought with them clear political ‘costs’ or ‘punishment’ in the form of warnings of potential withdrawal of alliance protection: Prime Minister Krag’s conversation with the American ambassador in 1967, the reactions on the discussion of a Nordic nuclear-free zone in the 1980’s and the nuclear port-call discussion in 1988.

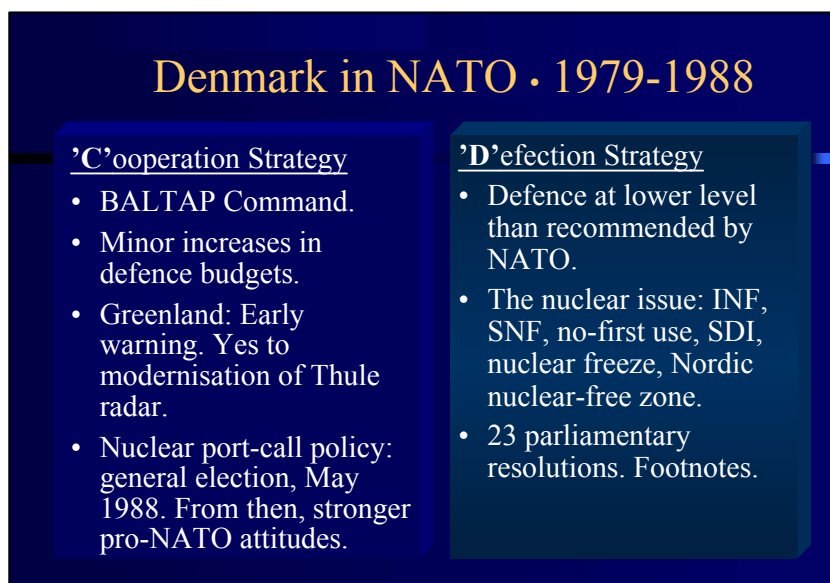


Fig. 6

Post 1989. The alliance game and the periphery game

After 1989 alliance politics and the games associated with it change considerably. In the alliance game, the defection strategy loses its political significance.

The adversary game changes completely and becomes a periphery game instead. The elimination of 'direct' security concerns after 1989 has obviated the need to balance the alliance and adversary games. The defection strategy has lost its meaning.

The Danish armed forces have been restructured. Territorial defence which used to be the defining defence task has been replaced by the concept of crisis management or "international defence", whether in a NATO, UN or OSCE context.

The alliance game 1989-1999

- 'C' Strategy: Cooperation
 - Credible commitment to regional/global security.
 - From 'direct' to 'indirect' security.
 - Stabilising and strengthening regional order.
- ~~'D' Strategy: Defection~~
 - ~~Limited commitment to the common defence.~~
 - ~~Limited and conditional adherence to alliance policy and strategy.~~

Fig. 7.

The most important change in alliance politics after 1989 is that the adversary game has been replaced by a periphery game, characterised by fewer risks and dilemmas than the old adversarial game.

It is, of course, debatable whether the adversary game has disappeared completely. Maybe it would be more correct to say that the adversary game still exists, but in a secondary role that is not determining alliance politics. One could also speak of a dormant adversary game.

Finally, it may be possible to distinguish between different versions or levels of the new 'D' strategy in the periphery game according to the political distance of a given country in the periphery from the centre.



Fig. 8.

The old risky oppositions between the alliance game and the adversary game have been replaced by safer one-way streets for co-operating with and influencing the countries in the periphery.

In the past decade, Denmark's relations with NATO have been more harmonious than at any previous time during the last half-century.

The traditional nuclear and base reservations have lost their political significance and one can find only potentially divisive issues to place in the D box.

The doctrine of humanitarian intervention might become such an issue, although it is far from certain. The Danish military participation in the Kosovo action was approved by all centrist parties and a vast majority of votes in the Danish parliament, but the decision was not taken easily. Clearly, everybody had preferred an authorisation from the UN Security Council for the Kosovo action.

It has become evident in the course of 1999 that there are differences in attitude among the allies concerning the future of the doctrine of humanitarian intervention.

Among other things, these differences are associated with varying visions of the role of the UN Security Council.

Denmark in NATO . 1989-1999

<u>'C'operation Strategy</u>	<u>'D'efection Strategy</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong engagement in Central and Eastern Europe, incl. Baltic countries. • Strong PfP support. • Participation in Kosovo humanitarian intervention without UN SC authorisation • Greenland: Possible modernisation of Thule radar. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Traditional reservations have lost their political significance. • Potentially divisive issue: doctrine of humanitarian intervention.

Fig. 9.

Generally speaking, there is a feeling that strong moral and political arguments speak in favour of the legitimacy of humanitarian intervention without Security Council mandate in cases where the most serious crimes against individuals take place, and the Security Council is blocked. On the other hand, there is also a feeling that such interventions, should they become legal under international law, might blur the hard-earned and now generally recognised prohibition on the use of force between states, put the fragile collective security system at risk and thus undermine basic tenets of the international legal order in its present stage of development.

The present period is characterised by a low degree of tension in the international system. It has been called 'the unipolar moment'. The Western states (or the 'OECD states') led by the United States have a predominant position in the system, but evidently there are limits to this pre-eminence both in time and degree. The present favourable moment implies a special responsibility for the Western states to strengthen the international legal order and the credibility and capacity of the UN Security Council. It cannot be ruled out that it could become a contentious issue in the alliance how to steer this course.

The main characteristics of Danish alliance policy in the 1990s are shown in fig. 10.



Fig. 10.

Danish alliance politics in EU and NATO

Figure 11 shows four adaptive modes of behaviour in adaptation theory and their characteristics: dominance, balancing, acquiescence and quiescence. The four modes are classical ideal types that cannot be expected to be found in pure form, only in approximations. A number of intermediate positions can be imagined.⁵

Danish policy concerning the defence dimension of the EU is determined by the so-called national compromise of 1992, according to which Denmark remains outside the defence dimension of the EU, including membership of the WEU, common defence policy and common defence. According to the Edinburgh Decision adopted by the Heads of State or Government, 12 December 1992, Denmark does not participate in the elaboration and the implementation of decisions and actions of the Union which have defence implications, but will not prevent the development of closer cooperation between Member States in this area (Protocol on the position of Denmark).

This position can only be changed by way of a referendum – and the public is sceptical about a common European defence. Due to constitutional requirements and political convention, referendums play an important role in the making of the Danish Europe policy.

⁵ Source of graph: Nikolaj Petersen: National Strategies in the Integration Dilemma: An Adaptation Approach, in *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 36, No. 1, March 1998, pp. 33-54.

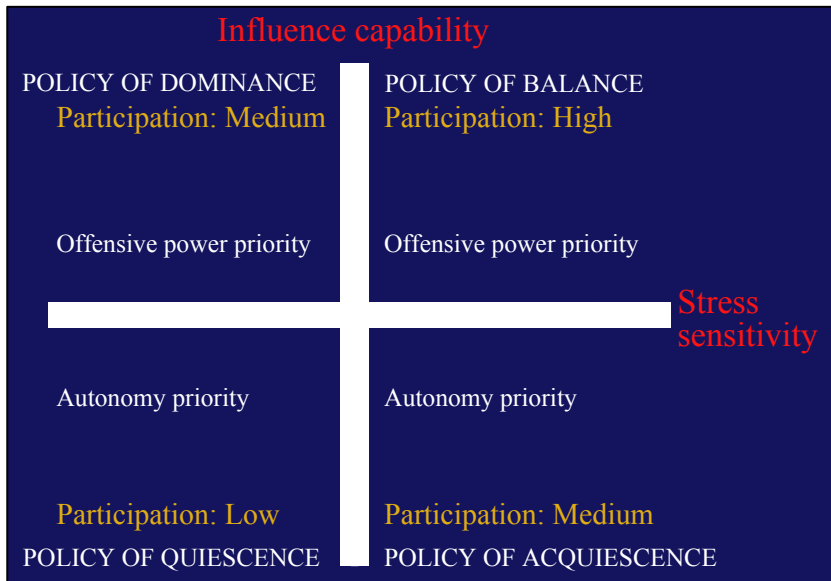


Fig. 11.

Following adaptation theory, Danish policy concerning the defence dimension of the EU seems to be very close to a policy of quiescence.

The other side of the coin is an extraordinary Danish activism in NATO. This aspect of the Danish security and defence policy rather qualifies as a policy of balance, characterised by a high degree of participation, an offensive power priority and a high degree of sensitivity to the eventuality of being left out of the fora, where decisions concerning the future security landscape of Europe are being made.

The evident question is: why such activism in NATO and the opposite in the EU?

First of all, this seeming paradox is possible because Denmark – at least temporarily and as perceived by some political parties – can compensate for her EU quiescence with participation in NATO. Second, apparently the Danish public and sceptical politicians are, for the moment, more comfortable with NATO than with the thought of a European defence dimension. This may have something to do with fears among the electorate and some of the political parties that the long-term risk of entrapment is higher in an EU set-up than in NATO. This may reflect a feeling that the EU integration process is progressive by having a developmental aspect to it, while the alliance dilemma will be either constant or decline. If integration succeeds, it may become an ever expanding reality for its constituent member states.⁶

6 Ibid.