International Constraints, Domestic Politics and Foreign Policy
Change in Small States:
The Fall of the Danish ‘Footnote Policy’
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Abstract
In a large body of literature in International Relations, the foreign policy of small states is seen as responsive to the constraints and opportunities of the international system. This paper attempts to challenge this widespread view by demonstrating the importance of domestic politics in the foreign policy of small states. Previous research has largely failed to theorize on the interplay between domestic politics and foreign policy making in small states. The paper sets out to investigate how two particular domestic political factors, in terms of political party opposition and public opposition, influenced the change that occurred in the foreign policy of Denmark when its government managed to put an end to the so-called ‘footnote policy’ in 1988. The main conclusion is that the change in foreign policy was the result of a combination of external pressures and domestic political concerns. The government found foreign policy change a useful strategy in order to achieve multiple goals, one being to increase its political power on the domestic scene.

Introduction
In a large body of literature in International Relations (IR), the foreign policy of small states is seen as responsive to the constraints and opportunities of the international system, rather than to domestic politics (see e.g. Fox, 1959; Wolfers, 1962; Rosenau, 1966; Waltz, 1979; Handel, 1981; Walt, 1987; Zahariadis, 1994; Mearsheimer, 2001; Weiner, 2004; Galbreath, 2006; Ringsmose, 2009). The reason for this seems to be the assumption made in previous research that small states are typically faced with external threats to national security. This makes them more attentive to the characteristics of the international environment, and less constrained by the domestic political process. By contrast, domestic politics are assumed to play a greater role in the study of the foreign policy of great powers. Given this widespread consensus, the foreign policy of small states can be seen as ‘a crucial test for domestic level theory’ (Elman, 1995: 172).

This paper attempts to challenge the scholarly consensus by demonstrating the importance of domestic politics in the foreign policy of small states. My ambition is to test a theoretical perspective, which is based on the idea that domestic political factors have an impact on how governments cope with the constraints and

1 No consensus-definition of the small state has yet emerged, despite an abundance of different quantifiable and qualitative characterizations and definitions (see Maass (2009) for a thorough discussion). In this paper, a small state should be understood to mean small in terms of power rather than size (for a similar conceptualization, see e.g. Volgy and Bailin, 2003). For an alternative definition based on size, see e.g. Kisanga and Dancie (2007).
opportunities of the international system, on a particular case of foreign policy change in a small state. Foreign policy change is a phenomenon that has received increasing scholarly attention after the end of the Cold War (see e.g. Hermann, 1990; Volgy and Schwarz, 1991; Carlsnaes, 1993; Rosati et al., 1994; Gustavsson, 1999; Kleistra and Mayer, 2001; Huxsoll, 2003; Welch, 2005; Niklasson, 2006; Doeser, 2008; Eidenfalk, 2009). The case of interest here is the change that occurred in the foreign policy of Denmark when its government managed to put an end to the so-called ‘footnote policy’ in mid-1988 (see below for a more detailed introduction). This event was the beginning of a major turning point in Danish support for NATO and the United States, which would be fully implemented after the end of the Cold War.

This case of foreign policy change provides tough conditions for a domestic political perspective on foreign policy, because of three conditions. First, as already noted, the unit of analysis is a small state, and the scholarly consensus is that international level theory has the ‘home-court advantage’ in explaining the foreign policy of small states. Second, this case deals with foreign security policy, in contrast with, for example, foreign economic policy. According to much previous research, international level theory is better at explaining foreign security policy, while domestic level theory is better at explaining foreign economic policy (see e.g. Mearsheimer, 2001; Malici, 2005; Ehrlich, 2009). When national security is not at stake, as in foreign economic policy, domestic political actors are assumed to have greater influence on the decision-making. Third, this case of foreign policy change took place in a period of major change in the international system, and a major change in the system should mean that domestic political factors have less of a chance to blur the impact of the system (Mouritzen, 1994: 156). Thus, this is a period in which one would expect the international system to be a major factor behind changes in foreign policy. If I can show that domestic politics mattered, even in a situation in which one would expect that it should not, then I will have provided strong support for domestic level theorizing.

The remainder of this paper is divided into three chapters. The first chapter presents the domestic political perspective used in the empirical analysis, relates it to previous theoretical research and presents the particular domestic political factors of the perspective. The second chapter places the case in a historical context, investigates the ‘footnote’ period and demonstrates the importance of domestic politics for this peculiar period in Danish foreign policy. The third chapter summarizes the main findings of the analysis and presents an alternative hypothesis on the relative importance of external and domestic political factors in small state foreign policy, namely that democratic small states pay relatively equal attention to international and domestic political considerations when making foreign policy.

2 The main task of this paper is not to elaborate on the concept of foreign policy change itself but to investigate the factors that can explain a change in foreign policy. However, it might still be relevant to relate this particular case of foreign policy change to existing typologies and models. For instance, using Charles Hermann’s (1991: 5) typology of foreign policy change, this case of change would probably qualify as a program change, i.e. changes in the methods or instruments of foreign policy.

3 This study adopts a rather traditional understanding of security, conceived in terms of the security of a state and related to the organized instruments for applying force, the military in the first instance.
A Domestic Political Perspective on Foreign Policy

The view that foreign policy and domestic politics can be separated is under heavy fire from several directions. Previous research has demonstrated convincingly that domestic politics matter for the foreign policy of great powers, for foreign economic policy and for diplomatic relations (see below), while it has largely failed to demonstrate that it matters for the making of foreign security policy in small states (one notable exception is Elman, 1995). In addition, there is a lack of theorizing on how domestic political factors influence foreign policy making in small states and under what conditions.

The domestic political perspective used here focuses on how governments in western democratic countries respond to political opposition in the making of foreign policy (see e.g. Putnam, 1988; Volgy and Schwarz, 1991; Hagan, 1993; Knopf, 1998; Siverson, 1998; Davies, 2008; Deets, 2009). According to this perspective, foreign policy making is a ‘two-level game’, in which the government balances its perceived national interest with its assessment of domestic political constraints (Putnam, 1988). In the words of Joe D. Hagan (1993: 4), the link between domestic politics and foreign policy stems primarily from the domestic political imperative of retaining political power. One goal for political leaders is clearly to retain political power and, if possible, enhance the political support needed for keeping their positions. If foreign policy concerns are incompatible with the domestic situation, leaders may need to adjust foreign policy in order to make it more consistent with those domestic demands. A change in foreign policy might occur because leaders who are looking for ways to increase their political power in the face of domestic problems find foreign policy change a useful strategy to those ends (Knopf, 1998: 679). As noted by Thomas Volgy and John Schwarz (1991: 618), ‘political leaders in elective office aim to survive. It is in contexts and circumstances when fundamental changes in foreign policy serve that ultimate end that fundamental alterations of policy are most likely to occur.’

For the purposes of this paper, two domestic political factors have been singled out for the theoretical perspective: (1) political party opposition; and (2) public opposition. Political party opposition deals with challenges to the government from political parties with seats in the legislature but that are not representative in the government (Hagan, 1993: 82). In the IR discipline, the influence of parliaments on foreign policy has traditionally been seen as relatively insignificant (see Kesgin and Kaarbo (2010) for a discussion). However, some studies have demonstrated that political party opposition matters, especially for the foreign policy of great powers, for foreign economic policy and for diplomacy (see e.g. Hagan, 1993; Christensen, 1998; Bjereld and Demker, 2000; Hughes, 2007; Kesgin and Kaarbo, 2010). Following Hagan (1993: 79), the effects on foreign policy from political party opposition are here theorized to be a function of two attributes: (1) its strength, and (2) the intensity of opposition. The strength of an opposition party is based on its number of seats in the legislature. Thus, the strength of the opposition parties can be analyzed on the basis of comparison between the numbers of seats controlled by the government’s party (or parties) and the combined total controlled by all opposition
Political party opposition ‘becomes significant when it controls enough seats to threaten the government’s control over the policy process and maintain high public visibility as an alternative voice in national politics’ (Hagan, 1993: 83). The strength of political party opposition can also be observed on the basis of the cohesiveness of the opposition, which ranges from fragmented to cohesive opposition. If different parties control a sizable number of opposition seats, then it is less probable that they will be able and willing to cooperate to mount an effective assault on the government (Hagan, 1993: 83f). The intensity of party opposition refers to the severity with which parties oppose the government, which ranges from opposition against the government’s policy program to opposition against the continuation of the government in power (Hagan, 1993: 84).

Public opposition deals with challenges to the government from mass publics, which may influence foreign policy by expressing their own views on political issues and, in the process, influence governments toward adjusting their foreign policies, since governments are dependent on their support. In the IR discipline, the influence of public opinion on foreign policy has traditionally been seen as relatively insignificant, where the voter is described as apathetic and unconcerned regarding international affairs. According to this traditional perspective, voters are more interested in immediate social and economic issues. Research during the first two decades after the Second World War led to a broad agreement, called the ‘Almond-Lippmann consensus’, on three propositions about public opinion: (1) it is volatile and, thus, provides inadequate foundations for stable and effective foreign policies, (2) it lacks coherence, and (3) it has little if any impact on foreign policy (Holsti, 1992: 442). In more recent years, a number of studies that challenge the traditional view have been conducted. For instance, one body of literature shows that public opinion tends to set the frame for which foreign policy action is perceived as allowable by governments (see e.g. Everts and Isernia, 2001; Tomz, 2007). Other researchers suggest that the public plays a role in the implementation of foreign policy, since democratic leaders must mobilize support for their foreign policies by presenting their foreign policy in a way that is compatible to citizens’ views of foreign policy (see e.g. Hurwitz and Peffley, 1987; Wittkopf, 1996).

Depending on the situation, these two opposition groups may function either as a carrier for or as a barrier to foreign policy change. While a carrier is understood as an incentive for change, a barrier is defined as a hindrance for change or a stabilizing factor (Kleistra and Mayer, 2001: 391). The indicators used to evaluate whether a specific domestic political factor acts as a carrier for or as a barrier to change are the following: If there is sufficient/strong political support from rivalling parties for current policy, political party opposition acts as a barrier to change. Alternatively, if current policy is strongly disapproved of by public opinion, public opposition acts as a carrier for change. Carriers and barriers are,
thus, two sides of the same coin, where the situation determines whether the coin will land on one side or the other.

**Change and Continuity in Danish NATO Policy, 1949–88**

_A Quiet Adaptation and Cautious Involvement, 1949–81_

In 1949 Denmark joined the emerging NATO alliance. This decision was to a large extent the result of a recognition that isolated neutrality, the only remaining alternative after the failure of the Scandinavian defense league, would be too dangerous a position for Denmark under the circumstances prevailing at that time. NATO membership was thus perceived as 'the lesser of two evils' (Villaume, 2000: 31). The move to join NATO represented a break with Denmark's long tradition of seeking neutrality between competing power blocs. However, during the Cold War, Denmark often showed an unwillingness to participate in specific NATO programs and a tendency to diverge from the particular policies of the alliance (Holbraad, 1991: 108f). This was to a large extent illustrated by three restrictions that Denmark imposed on its NATO membership.

First, when the United States requested bases for tactical aircraft on both Danish and Norwegian soil in 1950–51, both governments declined. Norway had already introduced its 'no bases policy' before NATO membership, which reassured the Soviet Union that Norway would not open any bases on its territory for the troops of foreign powers as long as Norway was not under attack or under threats of attack. The Danish government presented a formal restriction of this kind in 1953. Second, in 1957, as a response to NATO's new nuclear strategy based on the doctrine of massive retaliation, the Danish government declared that nuclear weapons could not be deployed in Denmark in peacetime (Holbraad, 1991: 134). The government also imposed a third restriction on its NATO membership, which stated that no NATO exercises were allowed on certain parts of its territory that were strategically sensitive for the Soviet Union (Villaume, 2000: 37).

Changes in NATO during the late 1960s, such as the replacement of massive retaliation with a doctrine of flexible response and a greater emphasis on détente, paved the way for a more positively oriented Danish NATO policy (Due-Nielsen and Petersen, 1995: 11). However, when the Soviet Union began deploying the SS-20s in the mid-1970s, Danish loyalty to NATO was put to a test once again. As described below, the Soviet deployment, and NATO's response to it, led Denmark to distance itself from the alliance, culminating with the footnote policy in the 1980s.

In the fall of 1979, West German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt and U.S. President Jimmy Carter reached an agreement on the so-called dual-track decision, in which NATO would start a deployment of cruise and Pershing II missiles in Western Europe to counter the Soviet SS-20s, while the Soviet Union was at the same time offered negotiations on reductions. In a number of West European states where the new NATO missiles were to be deployed, popular opposition to the forthcoming dual-

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Footnote: The Soviet SS-20s was a mobile, multiple-warhead missile of intermediate range that could reach targets all over Western Europe but not the North American continent.
track decision began to develop late in 1979 (Faurby, 1995: 64f). In Denmark, the left wing of the Social Democrats, the Socialist People’s Party and the Left Socialists became more active in foreign policy. These groups were all opposed to the NATO missile deployment (Holm, 1989: 191).

Just before a NATO meeting in December 1979, a Danish Social Democratic government changed its position on the dual-track decision. The Social Democrats had in an earlier two-party government with the Liberals been responsible for preparing the decision. Now the Social Democratic government tried to get NATO to delay the decision for six months, by which time talks with the Soviets were to take place. This proposal was rejected by all other NATO members (Holm, 1989: 184). Despite its protests against the dual-track decision, the government accepted the decision in the end. Denmark would only participate indirectly through sharing the infrastructure costs associated with the deployment. However, there were some mental reservations on the part of some high-ranking Social Democrats (Villaume 2000: 42f). In December 1979, NATO unanimously approved the dual-track decision. However, after 1981, it became clear that NATO had failed to bring the Soviet Union to the negotiating table. In several NATO countries, the left wing of the Social Democrats went out for ‘unilateral peace’ by opposing the deployment of the new NATO missiles, while right wing Social Democrats and center right parties generally supported the deployment. These developments form the background for the Danish footnote policy.

The ‘Footnote’ Period, 1982–87

In August 1982, with the Danish economy in a state of major crisis, the Social Democratic government lost the support of the Social Liberal Party and thereby its parliamentary majority. It handed over power to a coalition government consisting of the Conservatives, the Liberals, the Center Democrats and the Christian People’s Party. This minority government enjoyed parliamentary support in economic policy, but in the area of foreign policy it soon became clear that an ‘alternative majority’ might be established in Parliament. After a few months, the Social Democrats, the Social Liberals, the Socialist People’s Party and the Left Socialists established this alternative majority and began to adopt parliamentary resolutions on foreign policy against the will of the government (Pedersen, 2006: 42). Due to the role of the Social Liberal Party as a swing party that confronted the government on foreign policy issues, but that would not support opposition declarations of no confidence while supporting the government on economic matters, this parliamentary situation was allowed to go on until the spring of 1988 (Holm, 1989: 180).

The government advocated a foreign policy that was characterized by a traditionally low NATO profile and a reluctance to criticize the United States. However, the parliamentary opposition enforced official reservations to vital aspects of NATO’s activities and policies. Accordingly, Denmark’s official foreign policy, which was conducted by Parliament, was characterized by skepticism toward the alliance in general and the United States in particular. The debate between the government and the parliamentary opposition centered on whether or not Denmark
should adhere to the dual-track decision. The parliamentary opposition was strongly against the decision and the way it was implemented by the NATO partners (Due-Nielsen and Petersen, 1995: 33).

Due to the parliamentary situation from late 1982, the government had to conduct a foreign policy to which it was itself opposed. When its supporting party on economic issues, the Social Liberal Party, voted with the opposition, the government, rather than taking the parliamentary consequences of having a majority against it in important foreign policy issues, remained in power (Heurlin, 2001: 10). The government decided to ‘live with’ the alternative majority in order to remain in power and to save its ‘economic restoration program’, which obtained a parliamentary majority due to the votes of the Social Liberals (Dukk, 2005: 74).

In 1982–1983, the parliamentary opposition called upon the government to stop Danish participation in the NATO infrastructure program dealing with preparations for missile deployment. Between 1982 and 1986, the opposition forced the government to include dissenting footnotes in those NATO communiqués that supported missile deployment. Footnotes were also inserted into NATO communiqués supporting the United States’ Strategic Defense Initiative (Villaume, 2000: 42-45). Moreover, a principal concern for the parliamentary opposition was to exclude nuclear weapons from Danish territory, not only in peacetime but also in the event of war (Holbraad, 1991: 123f). The alternative majority passed 23 resolutions between 1982 and 1988 that were inconsistent with NATO policies. Ministers, civil servants and military officers reluctantly communicated these resolutions to their NATO colleagues (Pedersen, 2006: 42f).

The footnote policy caused a strain in the relationship between Denmark and the United States. On several occasions, the Reagan Administration tried to persuade the Social Democratic Party to reorient its NATO policy (Petersen, 2004: 258). In order for the alternative majority to be established in the first place, the Social Democrats needed to make a ‘U-turn’ on the NATO policy to which they had been committed since 1949. They could then count on ‘enthusiastic support’ from the Socialist People’s Party and ‘unenthusiastic support’ from the traditionally anti-defense Social Liberal Party (Pedersen, 2006: 4). However, as noted above, the Social Democrats had been skeptical of the dual-track decision since 1979 (Petersen, 1998: 308f). Thus, the Social Democrats’ policy change in 1982 was not only an example of tactical use of foreign policy in a domestic political power play.⁶

Despite the strain between the Reagan Administration and the parliamentary opposition, Prime Minister Poul Schlüter of the Conservative Party and Foreign Minister Uffe Ellemann-Jensen of the Liberal Party managed to keep good relations with their American counterparts (Petersen, 2004: 474). As tensions started to decrease between the Soviet Union and the United States in early 1987, the Danish

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⁵ After each NATO Ministerial Meeting, a joint communiqué is worked out that summarizes the points the member governments have agreed upon. In such communiqués the Danish government was forced to insert footnotes, which expressed dissent from one or more of the points agreed upon in the main document.

⁶ In their memoirs members of the government argue that the Social Democratic Party’s nuclear weapons policy was based on party strategic concerns. Since the party had lost its credibility in economic policy, it had to politicize foreign policy in order to challenge the government (Ellemann-Jensen, 1996: 276f; Engell, 1997: 161).
government adopted a more confrontational strategy in its dealings with the parliamentary opposition (Ellemann-Jensen, 2004: 233). For instance, in May 1987, Foreign Minister Ellemann-Jensen declared that he would no longer place more footnotes in NATO communiqués, irrespective of what Parliament might decide (Faurby, 1995: 70). A major turning point in détente occurred in December 1987 when the superpowers signed the Treaty on Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF Treaty). As the international climate improved, the government became more active in opposing the alternative majority. However, there were also domestic political concerns behind the government’s more confrontational strategy (see below).

**The End of the ‘Footnote Policy’, 1988**

Here, two events represent the end of the footnote policy. First, on 19 April 1988, the government decided, for the first time since it had taken office in 1982, to call parliamentary elections after having a majority against it on a foreign policy issue. A resolution passed in Parliament on 14 April 1988 obliged the government to inform all visiting warships about Denmark’s policy of banning nuclear weapons from its territory in time of peace. After a few days, the Prime Minister declared that the resolution was unacceptable and constituted a threat to ‘Denmark’s full membership in NATO’. For the first time ever, a Danish government decided to call elections on a foreign policy issue. Second, after the elections, the Social Liberal Party abandoned the parliamentary opposition and joined the Conservatives and Liberals in a new government in June 1988. Thereby, the alternative majority on foreign policy was gone.

The analysis below sets out to answer two questions. First, why did the government call elections on the nuclear port call resolution? This decision constituted a radical break with the government’s previous policy, since it had on 22 occasions during six years accepted being outvoted in Parliament on foreign policy without resigning. Second, why did the Social Liberals give up their previous alignment with the other parties in the alternative majority by joining the Conservatives and Liberals in a new government? Below I demonstrate that both the four-party government and the Social Liberal Party acted on the basis of a combination of external pressures and domestic political imperatives.

The remainder of this subchapter is divided into three sections. The first section focuses on the evolution of Danish foreign policy and domestic politics between January and June 1988. In the second section, I assess the impact of political party opposition on foreign policy change. In the last section, I evaluate the impact of public opposition.

**The Final Showdown between the Government and the Parliamentary Opposition.** Due to the increasing unwillingness of the government to bow to Parliament, the stage was set for a fierce debate on foreign policy when the alternative majority challenged the government once again in April 1988. This time, a circle of high-ranking Social Democratic party members, such as Chairman Svend Auken and Chairman on Foreign Policy Lasse Budtz, intended to tighten up
Denmark’s official policy on banning nuclear weapons in Danish waters and ports in connection with port calls of nuclear weapons certified warships. In 1967, the Danish government had agreed, after an American warning that the naval cooperation between the United States and Denmark might otherwise be terminated, that Danish authorities could no longer remind the Americans of Danish nuclear weapons policies in connection with navy visits to Danish ports (Villaume, 2000: 47). In the fall of 1987, the issue came to the fore once again when two NATO warships visited the harbor of Copenhagen (Dukk, 2005: 175f).

A resolution presented by the Social Democratic Party to Parliament on 14 April 1988 obliged the government to notify each visiting warship of Denmark’s policy of banning nuclear weapons from its territory in time of peace (Duå, 1988: 166ff). However, neither an answer nor inspection was requested. To do so would have threatened the policy of the United States of neither confirming nor denying the presence of nuclear weapons on its ships. In response to this resolution, the government presented a resolution of its own, which called for notification to other governments of the Danish nuclear reservations under present circumstances (Duå, 1988: 168f). Thus, the issue centered on whether Danish authorities should communicate Danish nuclear restrictions to the visiting ship or to its government. The Danish government argued that there was no need to notify visiting ships of Denmark’s nuclear restrictions, since it could be taken for granted that other NATO members would respect them (Duå, 1988: 174ff; Schlüter, 1998: 335). For Auken and Budtz, the resolution was important in the attempt to create a Nordic nuclear weapons free zone (Duå, 1988: 250).

All of the parties in the parliamentary opposition were prepared to vote for the resolution proposed by the Social Democrats. However, the Social Liberal Party was ambiguous in its position. Its spokesperson in foreign policy, Lone Dybkjær, said that her party favored both resolutions, since both constituted a tightening of Danish nuclear policy. However, as stated by Dybkjær, her party could only vote for the government’s resolution if the Social Democratic Party did so (Duå, 1988: 172). Dybkjær also hinted that the previous years’ politicization of foreign policy had not been beneficial for Denmark and that the improved superpower relations had created new opportunities for Denmark to act in the global arena (Duå, 1988: 172f). After skilful political maneuvering, the Social Democrats managed to put their resolution to a vote first in an attempt to gain the necessary support from the Social Liberals (Bruun, 2005: 43f). Subsequently, all of the parties in the parliamentary opposition, including the Social Liberals, voted for the resolution proposed by the Social Democrats and secured its passage.

Immediately after the government’s defeat, a disappointed Prime Minister Schlüter stated that the government would withdraw for internal deliberations in order to investigate whether the resolution was compatible with full membership in

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7 A debate on how to deal with visiting warships to Danish ports had started in 1985 when the Socialist People's Party suggested that foreign warships should only be allowed in Danish ports if the ship’s captain or its government gave assurances that the ship did not carry nuclear weapons on board. However, none of the major parties wanted a tightening of Danish nuclear policies at that point in time. The Social Democrats did not decide to go ahead with a resolution on this matter until March 1988 (Dukk, 2005: 174-177).
NATO (Duå, 1988: 179). Earlier the same day, the British government had noted that, if implemented, the resolution would make it impossible for Britain to continue with naval visits to Danish ports (Petersen, 1989: 39). The day after, the United States’ Secretary of State, George Shultz, informed Schlüter that the implementation of the resolution would have serious consequences for Danish-American security cooperation (Dukk, 2005: 302).

On 19 April, the Prime Minister appeared in Parliament, declaring that the implications of the port call resolution constituted a threat to ‘Denmark’s full membership in NATO’ and was unacceptable to Denmark’s allies. He said that an issue of such importance must be decided by the electorate (Duå, 1988: 180f). Accordingly, parliamentary elections were scheduled for 10 May 1988. The government had external political reasons for calling the elections. The resolution was not only unacceptable to the NATO allies, it could also have hampered the possibility for NATO to reinforce Danish defense in the event of war (Dukk, 2005: 182f; Duå, 1988: 248f, 253f). In addition, the resolution could weaken both NATO’s negotiating position vis-à-vis the Soviet Union and Denmark’s possibilities to play a role in détente politics (Ellemann-Jensen, 1991: 57f; Schlüter, 1998: 337).

In the elections on 10 May, the parties that had voted for the resolution lost seven seats but still had a majority. The government was left with exactly the same number of seats as before. Hence, ‘the problem on which the election had been called had to be solved in the negotiations about the formation of a new government’ (Faurby, 1995: 70). The only possibility for the Conservatives and the Liberals to break up the parliamentary opposition and to put an end to the footnote policy was to create a three-party government with the Social Liberals (Schlüter, 1999: 226). In order to do that, however, the Conservatives and the Liberals needed to find some common ground with the Social Liberals on foreign policy (Ellemann-Jensen, 2004: 257).

After weeks of negotiations, Foreign Minister Ellemann-Jensen and Lone Dybkjær concluded that several of the 23 resolutions proposed by the alternative majority since 1982 had lost their relevance in the new international situation (Ellemann-Jensen, 1996: 301). As détente was deepening, the footnote policy became less relevant for the Social Liberals. In particular, the signing of the INF Treaty removed a highly controversial issue from the domestic agenda of Denmark. Despite disagreement on some foreign policy issues, a three-party government could be formed on 3 June (Petersen, 2004: 360). The new government promptly agreed on a port call resolution that was similar to the one that the four-party government had proposed on 14 April. It stipulated that ‘the Danish government assumes that the vessel will be in compliance with rules laid down by the Danish government’ (Duå, 1988: 248f, translation by the author). When explaining the reasons for the establishment of the new government, the Foreign Minister and other representatives from the new government stated that the three parties had reached an understanding that Denmark’s foreign policy, especially on disarmament, should be conducted through an active NATO membership (Duå, 1988: 191, 248, 252; Ellemann-Jensen, 1991: 60f). However, I should also examine the domestic political setting in order to provide a full explanation of foreign policy change.
The government had since it took office in 1982 been domestically constrained in the making of foreign policy. From 1982 to 1986, this government reacted to opposition by trying to accommodate it with restraint in its foreign policy. Rather than trying to break up the parliamentary opposition, which had popular support for some of its policies (see below), the government accepted the situation, gave priority to its economic policy and survival as a government. As demonstrated above, the government adopted from early 1987 a more confrontational strategy toward the alternative majority. This strategy would not be fully used until April 1988, however, when the government seized the opportunities offered by the alternative majority’s port call resolution to attempt to reorient Danish NATO policy. Before I elaborate on these issues, let me present the changes that occurred in the strength and intensity of political party opposition.

From late 1982, the parliamentary opposition constituted a barrier to policy change, which hindered the government to pursue a more pro-NATO policy. The four governing parties had by a narrow margin been able to form a coalition government on three occasions up until 1988 (in 1982, 1984 and 1987). In 1987, the government lost seven seats in Parliament, while the alternative majority gained four seats. After this election, the government also lost the tacit support of the Social Liberal Party (see below). This government could not muster the support of a majority in Parliament but could continue in office due to the lack of other parliamentary constellations. The 1987 election was a major disappointment for the governing parties (Engell, 1997: 219f; Schlüter, 1999: 211f). Another indicator of the government’s weakened position in relation to Parliament was its budget proposal of December 1987, in which the Social Democrats managed to include a number of reforms (Petersen and Svensson, 1989: 33). Thus, the strength of political party opposition increased after the 1987 election. Accordingly, the government was in early 1988 in an extremely weak parliamentary situation. It seems reasonable to assume that a government in such a situation would, if the opportunity were to arise, take political risks (such as of losing credibility or even office) to strengthen its parliamentary power base (see below).

Regarding the other aspect of strength of political party opposition, i.e. the cohesiveness of the opposition, it can be established that the alternative majority never constituted a unified force. While the Social Democrats and the Social Liberals perceived NATO membership as the main basis for Danish foreign policy, the Left Socialists and the Socialist People’s Party were critical of membership in itself (Petersen, 1998: 312). The cohesiveness of the parliamentary opposition decreased even more from the spring of 1987, when Social Democratic and Social Liberal circles were becoming gradually more hesitant about the footnote policy (Faurby, 1995: 70; Petersen, 1998: 316). Thus, this aspect of strength started to decrease in 1987.

Regarding the intensity of opposition, the alternative majority inserted no new footnotes into NATO communiqués after December 1986. In April 1987, Parliament

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8 In 1982, the government had 65 seats in Parliament as compared to 94 for the alternative majority. In 1984, it had 77 seats as compared to 92 for the alternative majority. In 1987, it had 70 seats as compared to 96 for the alternative majority.
could unanimously agree on a formula that welcomed the approaching INF Treaty (Petersen, 1989: 33). In addition, the Left Socialists, which had been particularly active in the politicization of foreign policy, were ousted from Parliament in 1987 and replaced by the more moderate Common Course (Petersen and Svensson, 1989: 39). Another indicator of intensity is the number of resolutions passed by the alternative majority each year. In 1982–83, the parliamentary opposition passed six resolutions against the will of the government. In 1984, the number decreased to five. In 1985, the number decreased to four. Four resolutions were also adopted in 1986, while only two in 1987 (Petersen and Svensson, 1989: 37). Thus, these data are also indicators of a decreasing intensity of opposition, especially from 1987. On the other hand, in September 1987, the Social Liberal Party declared that it wanted a freer role in relation to the government (Petersen, 1989: 41f). Thus, from challenging major policies, the Social Liberals began to challenge the government itself. However, they were becoming less interested in pursuing alternative policies in foreign policy (Petersen, 1998: 316; Bruun, 2005: 34). Together, these data suggest that the intensity of opposition decreased from 1987.

Hence, party opposition gradually turned into a carrier for change from early 1987. In other words, it turned into an incentive for the government to attempt to redirect Denmark’s foreign policy in a more pro-NATO direction, since the intensity and cohesiveness of the NATO skeptical opposition began to decrease. In the view of the government, the decreasing intensity and cohesiveness of the opposition became more evident early in 1988, when several Social Liberals were becoming increasingly uncomfortable with the alternative majority’s actions against the government (Schlüter, 1999: 220f). Moreover, the decreasing cohesiveness of the alternative majority became even more evident during the negotiations on the port call resolution on 14 April 1988, in which Dybkjær said she favored both resolutions. Dybkjær’s pessimistic view of politicization of foreign policy in recent years served as a signal to Foreign Minister Ellemann-Jensen that the days of the parliamentary opposition were close to an end (Duå, 1988: 172f; Ellemann-Jensen, 2004: 251).

As a result, the government perceived an opportunity to weaken or even split the parliamentary opposition by calling elections on the resolution and, in the process, to increase its own political power. Remember that the government was in an extremely weak parliamentary situation. Members of the Conservative Party thought that the alternative majority’s port call resolution and the Social Democrats’ foul play surrounding it were clumsy political moves, which in the end could hurt their credibility. With the port call issue, the government got the confrontation on foreign policy it so long had waited for. In the view of the government, this was an opportunity to reverse the negative developments since the last parliamentary elections and to deliver a fatal blow to the Social Democrats (Engell, 1997: 234f). However, in order to increase its own political power at the expense of the opposition, the government needed the support of the public.

The Impact of Public Opposition. First, let me present data from the Gallup Institute concerning the trend in the public’s view of Danish NATO membership from 1949 to 1987. These data are displayed in Figure 1 (on the next page).
As seen in Figure 1, support for NATO membership has been relatively constant since 1949 in the polls conducted by Gallup. Public support for NATO membership in these polls peaked at 69% in the summer of 1983. In the polls carried out by the Observer the pattern is similar: from February 1980 to April 1987, support for NATO membership shifted between 55 and 63% and opposition between 17 and 23% (Duå, 1987: 433). As these figures show, there was no significant public opposition to Danish NATO membership, especially not in the 1980s. Moreover, one day before the government publicly declared its intention to call elections, an opinion poll conducted by the Observer showed 66% in favor of NATO membership and 16% against (Duå, 1988: 43f). This was the highest value ever recorded in polls by the Observer in terms of support for NATO.

To what extent did the alternative majority have support for its policies within specific issue areas of Danish NATO membership? On the basis of Gallup data, 43% were against the dual-track decision in December 1979, while only 31% supported it (Duå, 1979: 372). In the summer of 1983, 58% were against the installation of the Western missiles, while only 24% were in favor (Duå, 1983: 429). In September 1985, 42% favored a Nordic nuclear free zone, while only 37% were against the idea (Duå, 1985: 459). No reliable data exist for other years.

In sum, there was strong support for NATO membership during the 1980s, as well as relatively strong support for some of the alternative majority’s policies in specific issue areas dealing with Danish relations to NATO. The public’s view on these matters was recognized by the government. As noted by the Foreign Minister one day before the government publicly stated its willingness to call elections:

*If Denmark’s full membership in NATO is jeopardized, we should ask the electorate. The electorate’s response was crystal-clear two years ago, when the issue dealt with our EC*
In order to be successful in the forthcoming elections, the government needed to convince the basically pro-NATO population that the elections dealt with full Danish membership in NATO and not merely Danish policies within the alliance (Petersen, 1989: 43). Otherwise, strong support for Danish NATO membership would be of little use. Thus, Prime Minister Schlüter’s statement, that the resolution constituted 'a threat to Danish full membership in NATO', was not only based on security concerns but also on electoral concerns. In other words, by presenting the issue as dealing with full membership in NATO, the Prime Minister tried to mobilize the voters in favor of the government’s line. Throughout the election campaign, the government presented the issue as for or against full membership in NATO, while the parties in opposition argued that the elections dealt with Danish policies within NATO (Dukk, 2005: 184ff). By manipulating foreign policy issues in a way that aimed at damaging the reputation of the alternative majority, the government tried to increase its own legitimacy. Thus, the government’s decision to call the elections was in part based on a desire to strengthen its political power in domestic politics. By calling elections on the issue and presenting it as a matter of full Danish membership in NATO the government thought that the rather large support for NATO membership among the public could increase its political power in the forthcoming elections (Petersen, 1989: 37f).

One question remains to be answered: Why did the Social Liberals abandon the alternative majority by joining the Conservatives and Liberals in a new government? I argue that the Social Liberals in part adapted to changes in public opinion (the other reasons were based on external concerns). As demonstrated below, voters in general and Social Liberal voters in particular became more pro-NATO before and after the elections on 10 May. However, I should first show that voters viewed Danish foreign and security policy as an important issue in the elections. In Table 1 these data are provided (see the next page).

As seen in Table 1, voters took an interest in defense and security policy before the elections on 10 May. In fact, most respondents identified defense and security policy as the most important election issue. Thus, in this poll, the public ranked defense and security policy issues before immediate social and economic concerns. It seems reasonable to assume that in order to increase its political power in and after the elections, the Social Liberal Party needed to take voter preferences on defense and security policy into account.

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9 Here, the Foreign Minister refers to the 1986 referendum on the Single European Act (SEA), which was won by the pro-side, to which the government belonged, with 56.2 % in favor and 43.8 % against the SEA. The Social Democrats and the Social Liberals had before the referendum rejected the SEA, thereby leaving the government in a minority on the issue and forcing it to call the referendum.
Table 1. The public's interest in different political issues before the elections on 10 May 1988

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political issue area</th>
<th>Left wing %</th>
<th>Social Democrats %</th>
<th>Governing party %</th>
<th>Other party %</th>
<th>Total %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Defense, security policy</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign trade, the EC</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Government's color</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economy, finance</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social conditions</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental policy</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other issues</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not know</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Now I need to demonstrate that Social Liberal voters became more pro-NATO before and after the elections. An opinion poll on the public’s attitude on NATO membership on 18 April 1988 shows that 62 % of the Social Liberal voters supported NATO membership, while only 11 % opposed NATO membership (Duå, 1988: 475). This was the highest value ever recorded for Social Liberal voters in terms of support for NATO membership.

Table 2 (on the next page) contains data from two opinion polls, one conducted after the elections in 1987 and one conducted after the elections in 1988. 670 respondents were asked the same set of questions in both polls. These data provide me with another possibility to assess whether public opinion changed between the elections. Thus, if Social Liberal voters became more pro-NATO between the elections, the Social Liberal Party may have acted on the basis of domestic political imperatives when joining the Conservatives and Liberals.

As seen in Table 2, the support for Danish NATO membership increased significantly between 1987 and 1988. In 1987, 21 % of the respondents wanted to leave NATO as soon as possible. In the election of May 1988, only 10 % of the same group of people wanted to leave NATO. Other data from the same investigation show that people who had voted for the parties in the alternative majority in 1987 became more pro-NATO in connection with the 1988 election. In 1987, 24 % of the respondents who had voted for the Social Liberal Party wanted to leave NATO as soon as possible. In the election of May 1988, only 6 % of the same group of people wanted to leave NATO (Duå, 1988: 45).

In sum, one important reason for the Social Liberal Party to join the new government seems to have been to increase its political power in the long run. It seems reasonable to assume that it became more important for the Social Liberal Party to abandon the footnote policy as voters in general and Social Liberal voters in particular became more pro-NATO (for more data on changing public preferences in
Denmark during this period, see Doeser, 2008). Thus, in this case of foreign policy change, public opposition acted as a carrier for change.

**Table 2.** Changes in the public’s attitude on NATO membership between the elections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Totally agree</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partially agree</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither in agreement nor in disagreement</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partially disagree</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totally disagree</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not know</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


**Conclusions**

Previous research has failed to demonstrate the importance of domestic politics in the foreign security policy of small states as well as to theorize sufficiently on how domestic politics influence foreign policy making in small states and under what conditions. As demonstrated by this paper, domestic political factors are not only important for the foreign policy of great powers, for foreign economic policy and for diplomatic relations but also for the making of foreign security policy in small states under conditions of *fundamental shift in the international system*.

The case study revealed that the changes that occurred in political party and public opposition in 1987–88 facilitated a change in foreign policy for the Danish government by acting as carriers for policy change. Thus, the government was responsive to changes in the strength and intensity of party opposition, as well as to changes in public opposition. In this case, public opinion was neither volatile nor lacked coherence. Rather it was relatively constant and had a major impact on foreign policy. Moreover, the public seems to have played several roles, since it both set the frame for which foreign policy was perceived as allowable by the government and played a role in the implementation of foreign policy. Thus, when changing its foreign policy, the government sought multiple pay-offs, both international and domestic political gains. The primary domestic political gain for the government was to increase its political power on the domestic scene. Thus, domestic political factors and external factors seem to have been equally important. These findings provide strong support for theories emphasizing the importance of domestic politics in foreign policy making.

Accordingly, it may be reasonable to hypothesize that, unlike great powers and non-democratic small states, *democratic small states* like Denmark are exposed to *major* pressures from *both* the international and the domestic political
environments. This particular group of small states would also include states like Austria, Belgium, Finland, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland. Because they are small states, they are highly constrained by the international system, unlike the strongest states in the system. Because they are democratic, they are also highly constrained by the domestic political environment, unlike non-democratic small states.\(^{10}\)

Thus, governments of democratic small states seem to pay relatively equal attention to international and domestic political considerations when making their foreign policies. However, two qualifications may be in order, based on the characteristics of this case. First, the foreign policy change investigated here was relatively minor in terms of scope and domain. In instances of major change, external political factors may be more important than domestic politics. Second, the degree to which opposition forces can participate in the foreign policy decision-making process may vary between different democratic small states. In the political system of Denmark, the ability of domestic actors to contest foreign policy is probably higher than in most other democratic small states. Thus, the relative potency of international and domestic political factors for foreign policy making can vary between different democratic small states, depending on the degree of change and the type of political system. However, the most fruitful starting point for any analysis of the mechanisms of foreign policy change in democratic small states should be that international and domestic political factors are equally important, rather than assuming that only the external political environment matters.

References


\(^{10}\) Governments of non-democratic small states usually confront far fewer challenges from their domestic political environment. However, the degree to which different types of small states is responsive to the external and domestic environments also depends on other characteristics. One important characteristic may be whether the country is a closed society or not. A ‘closed small state’ (e.g. Burma) would probably be less exposed to the external political environment than is the case for an ‘open small state’ (see Kassimeris (2009) for a discussion).

Duà (annual) *Dansk Udenrigspolitiske Årbog*. Copenhagen: Jurist- og Økonomforbundets Forlag. (Danish foreign policy yearbook)


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