This article contributes to research on the foreign policy influence of junior partners in coalition governments. In particular, it takes up the call to pay greater attention to different patterns and pathways of such influence. To this purpose, this article distinguishes two types of coalition set-ups for foreign policy making. In the first type, junior partners hold one or more departments in the foreign policy executive, and their foreign policy influence rests on the powers that controlling ministries in the field brings. In the second type, junior partners do not hold any department in foreign affairs, and their influence comes from their ability to constrain the discretion of the senior partner in foreign policy. The article exemplifies its theoretical contentions in comparative case studies on the current coalition governments in Germany and the UK, which represent the first and second type respectively.
**Introduction**

This article investigates the pathways of junior partner influence on the foreign policy making of coalition governments. The defining characteristic of coalition cabinets is that they divide government authority between different political parties. They bring together a senior party which fills the office of Prime Minister and one or more junior parties which have fewer seats in parliament and hold one or more positions in the cabinet. Since coalition governments are pervasive in parliamentary systems, it is small wonder that the field of Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) has attended to the foreign policies of coalitions.

A first strand of research investigates the foreign policy differences between single-party and coalition governments. One controversy is whether coalitions are marked by particularly tight constraints on their decision-making and therefore tend towards more peaceful foreign policies (Maoz and Russett 1993, 626) or whether the weakness ascribed to coalition governments will push them towards more aggressive foreign policy stances (Prins and Sprecher 1999, 285). However, other authors altogether reject the idea that coalition politics has a systematic effect on the substance of foreign policy, but argue over whether coalitions are more likely to engage in high-commitment (extreme) (Kaarbo and Beasley 2008, 74–79) or low-commitment (moderate) (Hagan 1993, 26–28) foreign policy behaviour. A second strand of research probes into the influence of junior partners on coalition foreign policies. For one, it examined the conditions under which junior partners enjoy a greater or lesser impact on decision-making (Kaarbo 1996, 517–522). For another, attention has been paid to the social-psychological and institutional underpinnings of junior partner strategies to shape coalition foreign policies (Kaarbo 2008, 64–69).

Given this state of the art, the article addresses two research desiderata. First, it takes up the call to move beyond the dichotomy between single-party and coalition governments...
and attend to differences in the patterns of junior party influence on foreign policy between different types of coalitions (Kaarbo and Beasley 2008, 78). Indeed, comparative research on cabinet government has long recognised that the distinction between single-party and coalition cabinets only has a small effect on many aspects of government decision-making (Frognier 1993, 69–71). Linking in with these findings, the article makes the case that the foreign policy influence of junior coalition partners plays out differently depending on how coalitions organise for foreign policy. Second, the article moves to pay greater attention to the process of foreign policy making in coalitions (Kaarbo 1996, 507–509; 2008, 59). Thus, it will be argued that different configurations of coalition governments imply different pathways of junior party influence on foreign policy.

The next section starts off with distinguishing two types of coalition arrangements for the making of foreign policy. The hypothesis is that those types go hand in hand with distinct patterns of how junior coalition partners influence coalition foreign policy. The article then empirically illustrates its theoretical contentions by looking into the patterns of junior partner influence within the current coalition governments in Germany and the UK.

These two governments closely mirror the two opposite types of coalition arrangements in foreign policy which the article will introduce and are thus well-suited to serve as plausibility probes (Eckstein 1975, 108–113) for our theoretical argument. As opposed to this difference, moreover, the coalition governments under Chancellor Angela Merkel in Germany and Prime Minister David Cameron in the UK resemble each other in a number of important ways which could otherwise have been expected to affect the prospects and pathways of the junior partners to influence coalition foreign policy. Most notably, both governments are two-party minimal winning coalitions in which the partners are highly asymmetric in terms of their representation in parliament. The two coalitions are also similar in that they bring together a conservative senior partner and a liberal junior partner. As far as
the processes of coalition governance are concerned, the case studies thus approximate a most similar cases design (see Przeworsky and Teune 1970) which is geared to investigating the effects of the two types of coalition arrangements on the patterns of junior partner influence on coalition foreign policy.¹

The specific issues under scrutiny for the two coalitions – namely the withdrawal of U.S. nuclear weapons from Germany and the renewal of the UK’s nuclear deterrent – have been selected on two criteria. First, they make for positive cases (see Ragin 2000, 206–207) in which the junior partners have indeed enjoyed meaningful influence on significant questions in German and British foreign policy.² This fits to the research purpose of the article which is not to ask if junior coalition partners are likely to have an impact on foreign policy but rather how such influence may play out. Second, the issues under consideration are well-suited to exemplify the different pathways of junior partner influence in the two types of coalition arrangement.

Two Patterns of Junior Partner Influence on Coalition Foreign Policy

Coalition politics can be conceived of as a strategic bargaining relationship between parties which are members to a coalition government or which are about to come together in a coalition. Within the constraints imposed by the institutional setting, path dependencies and intraparty politics, party leaders negotiate over the formation of coalitions, the allocation of offices and competences, the program for government as well as the rules and procedures of coalition governance. These negotiations may be driven by both office-seeking and policy-seeking motivations, and coalition partners will in either case have a close eye on their individual political returns from participating in a coalition (Müller and Strøm 2000a). For
one thing, coalition members will hope to claim part of the credit for the success of the coalition as a whole. At the same time, they need to cultivate their profile as singular political parties in order to make sure they get at least as much out of the coalition as their partners (Müller and Strom 2000b, 587–590).

The foreign policy making of coalition governments is thus inherently political (Hagan et al. 2001, 171). Junior partners to a coalition – like the senior party – can be assumed to seek influence on coalition foreign policy in order to ensure that it furthers, or at least does not harm, their domestic political prospects. Junior coalition parties will try to secure their influence on foreign policy both during the negotiations about the formation of a coalition and with respect to the coalition governance in office. These two aspects of coalition politics are closely interlinked (Müller and Strom 2000b, 591). Specifically, the distribution of authority in foreign affairs between the partners and the procedures for the making of foreign policy agreed at the coalition formation stage will presage the techniques of junior partners to make their foreign policy views count in the coalition (Kaarbo 2008, 64–69). The ways in which junior coalition parties go about shaping foreign policy as well as their likely effect on the foreign policy behaviour of coalition governments (Kaarbo and Beasley 2008, 71–77) should be expected to differ depending on the configuration of the coalition in question.

In particular, we suggest distinguishing two types of coalition arrangements for foreign policy making.³ The primary difference between them relates to whether or not a junior partner holds cabinet posts which are responsible for the conduct of (parts of) the coalition government’s foreign policy and will therefore be seen to ‘own’ (parts of) this policy. The types are linked to two opposite theoretical models of coalition governance which imply different strategies and pathways for junior coalition parties to exercise influence in foreign affairs (see Müller and Strøm 2008, 160-164). The first type builds on the model of “ministerial government”, which starts out from decentralised authority structures within
governments and emphasises the autonomy of individual departments. The second type relates to the model of “cabinet government”, which gives prominence to centralised authority structures within governments and highlights the collective control of individual departments from the centre.

Junior partner influence, in turn, is taken to have occurred if coalition foreign policy can at least partly be put down to the preferences of a junior partner. It thus refers to the difference the junior partner has made to coalition policy compared to a hypothetical single-party majority government of the senior partner (see Kaarbo 1996, 507). This difference, moreover, is not restricted to the substance of foreign policy decisions, but extends to the process and agenda of decision-making, including non-decisions and the deferral of decisions.

In the first type, junior parties rely on holding senior authoritative positions in the foreign policy executive (see Hill 2003, 56-66) to shape foreign policy. In particular, junior party influence comes from the control of one or more ministries responsible for the conduct of foreign affairs, most notably the ministries for Foreign Affairs, Defence and/or Development Aid. This pattern of influence rests on the formal decision-making authority, agenda-setting power and informational advantages individual ministries enjoy (Laver and Shepsle 1996, 13–15). It is the discretion and powers which the control of issue-relevant ministries by individual coalition parties brings that lie at the heart of junior party attempts to influence coalition foreign policy.

Moreover, the first type implies a high profile of a junior coalition partner in foreign affairs. Its role and influence in foreign policy will be prominent, and foreign affairs are bound to become an important part of what the junior party stands for in the coalition. Specifically, junior parties can be expected to use their formal authority and high-profile role to seek a reputation for issue ownership of the field (Petrocik 1996, 826–828). Also, junior partners are in a good position to proactively shape coalition policy on newly emerging
issues. Particularly in issues of high salience to the senior partner, however, the latter will likely seek to constrain the junior partner’s room for manoeuvre by asserting its overall lead role in the coalition. Still, for better or worse, a junior partner’s perceived influence, competence and performance in foreign policy will become a major determinant of its overall electoral appeal (Rabinowitz and Macdonald 1989, 96–101).

In the second type, in contrast, junior parties do not occupy leading positions in the foreign policy executive and they do not hold any of the relevant departments. Rather, junior party influence rests on the ability to constrain the ways in which the senior partner employs its departmental authority. This pattern of influence does thus not start out from the discretion of individual ministries but from the power of junior parties to put limits on that discretion. Chief among the tools for junior parties to impose such limits are high-level coalition committees which are tasked with overseeing the government agenda and in which senior and junior partners are equally represented; powerful centripetal, cross-party policy making bodies in foreign affairs which transcend departmental boundaries, such as national security councils (Kaarbo 1996, 518–519); coalition agreements which lay down specific guidelines for the conduct of foreign affairs (Moury 2010; also Timmermans 2006); divided portfolios which are led by the senior coalition party but in which a junior party is represented below the level of cabinet ministers (Thies 2001; also Verzichelli 2008, 259–264); and the shadowing of senior party-led ministries by junior party chairs of relevant parliamentary committees (Martin and Vanberg 2004; Carroll and Cox 2012, 221–223). Thus, junior partner influence is primarily about monitoring and controlling the senior party’s conduct of coalition foreign policy. Still, since the senior party is the more powerful member of the coalition and formally in charge of foreign policy, it might seek to counteract any measures by a junior party to limit its discretion. Again, this is particularly likely on issues that are highly salient to the senior party.
The second type of coalition governments, moreover, implies a lower profile of junior partners in foreign affairs, since they do not represent coalition policy in this field in high office. Their influence on coalition foreign policy will be less visible and their public image will be less associated with the coalition’s performance in this field. Junior coalition parties will be less inclined to single foreign policy out as a prominent feature of their overall electoral appeal. Correspondingly, they will less likely be in a position to exploit foreign policy as a means of cultivating a distinct political profile.

Whether the pattern of junior party influence on foreign policy in a specific coalition government will be more akin to the first or the second type follows from the initial negotiations between the senior and junior partners at the coalition formation stage. Specifically, it will depend on the balance of power between the involved parties and on their relative priorities (see Bäck, Debus and Dumont 2011, 442–450). The senior party must decide whether it is ready to cede control over one or more ministries in foreign affairs. It will be less likely to do so the more it values holding these ministries itself, the more the foreign policy preferences of the junior parties diverge from its own and the more powerful it is vis-à-vis the junior parties. In case a ministry in the foreign policy executive is within reach of a junior party, in turn, the latter has to determine whether it goes for that ministry or opts for other cabinet positions instead. This decision, in essence, depends on the relative expected political returns from holding different departments. Junior parties will be more likely to aspire for ministries in foreign affairs, the more salient foreign policy is to their programs, the less divisive foreign affairs are for them internally and the more they seek to build their electoral appeal around their foreign policy agenda.4

Depending on how the coalition negotiations have played out it can be hypothesised that the two patterns of junior party influence will bring about different foreign policy effects. In particular, coalition foreign policy should be more susceptible to being hijacked by an
ideologically extreme junior party and being pushed towards more extreme foreign policy
behaviour (Kaarbo and Beasley 2008, 77) in coalition governments that are instances of the
first type. Here, junior parties are better positioned and more willing to leave a distinctive
partisan mark on coalition foreign policy, to instigate foreign policies that move beyond the
preferences of the (ideologically often more centrist) senior party, to aim at high-profile
foreign policy actions and to politicise the making of foreign policy (Hagan 1993, 5–9).

In coalition governments of the second type, in contrast, the foreign policy influence
of junior parties is more attuned to serving a “‘corrective’ function” (Kaarbo 1996, 504) in the
sense that it poses a restraint on the senior party’s ability to implement its foreign policy
agenda to the full. According to this dynamic, junior party influence should moderate the
foreign policy behaviour of coalition governments (Hagan 1993, 5–6). Table 1 serves to
summarise our argument and illustrates the ‘real world’ frequency of the two types in
European Union member states (where the first type is more common than the second one).

The Conservative-Liberal Coalition in Germany

Coalition Set-up

The German coalition government between the Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social
Union (CDU/CSU) and the Free Democratic Party (FDP), which was formed in September
2009, falls into the first type. In the cabinet led by Chancellor Angela Merkel (CDU) the FDP
occupies five out of 16 posts. Most importantly for this article the FDP took over two
ministries that are part of Germany’s foreign policy executive: the Foreign Ministry and the Ministry for Economic Co-operation and Development (BMZ).

The FDP opted for the Foreign Ministry for several reasons. First, path dependencies are of crucial importance, since it has become a ‘tradition’ from the mid-1960s onwards that the junior partner in two-party coalition governments is in charge of this ministry. Second, the Foreign Ministry was of great symbolic value to Guido Westerwelle who at that time was the chairperson of both the FDP and the FDP’s parliamentary group in the Bundestag. By assuming the post of foreign minister (along with the vice-chancellorship) Westerwelle wanted to put himself in the tradition of the “monuments of the FDP” (Westerwelle, quoted in Sattar 2009), such as Hans-Dietrich Genscher who was one of Westerwelle’s advisors during the election campaign. Finally, foreign ministers have always been among the most popular politicians in Germany. Indeed, two commentators referred to Westerwelle’s “yearning for popularity” that made him opt for the post (Carstens and Schmiese 2009). In any case, the promise of the Foreign Ministry was that the FDP would benefit from it in future elections.

Whereas the FDP’s choice of the Foreign Ministry was almost ‘inevitable’ its selection of the BMZ came as a surprise. Indeed, in their 2009 election manifesto the FDP had called for the ministry’s abolition and its integration in the Foreign Ministry (FDP 2009, 69). Still, there are at least two reasons for the FDP’s choice. First, even though the BMZ is considerably less important in political terms its budget far exceeds that of the Foreign Ministry. In 2012, for instance, the BMZ budget is almost twice the size of the Foreign Ministry’s budget (BMF 2012). Second, controlling both ministries reduces the likelihood that the BMZ enters in a competition with the Foreign Ministry. During the presentation of the coalition agreement Westerwelle referred to the dangers of a “Nebenaußenpolitik” (Lau 2009), that is, a foreign policy next to that of the foreign office, which had to be prevented.
The FDP’s influence in the two ministries has been shored up by the appointment of parliamentary state secretaries, or ministers of state as they are called in the Foreign Ministry, exclusively from its own ranks. In neither ministry is the senior coalition partner represented on that level. The same holds true for the FDP with respect to the ministries that are controlled by the CDU/CSU. Thus, there is no junior ministerial ‘shadowing’ within departments.

Of course, the FDP does not control all the ministries that are part of the foreign policy executive. Rather, the CDU/CSU took over the Defence Ministry, as it already had done, for instance, during the preceding grand coalition government. With Angela Merkel, the Chancellery is also led by a member of the senior coalition party. Indeed, the actual surprise was that the FDP was able to secure two foreign affairs-related ministries in the first place, which was rather unusual for Germany (Braun 2009).

Finally, a brief glance at the coalition structures and mechanisms for the co-ordination between ministries and the coalition parties is in order. Formally, the regular meetings of the state secretaries of the different ministries and, ultimately, the meetings of the cabinet are the main venues for co-coordinating the work of the ministries and for settling conflict between them. Concerning the latter the coalition agreement states that in “issues that are of fundamental importance for one coalition partner [it] cannot be overruled by another partner” (CDU/CSU/FDP 2009, 131). However, of greater importance for the actual working of the coalition is the ‘coalition committee’, which assembles, among others, the chairpersons and the secretary-generals of the parties along with the chairpersons of the parliamentary groups. This committee is the major institution for “bringing about consensus in case of conflict” among the parties of the coalition (CDU/CSU/FDP 2009, 131). Since the FDP carries a strong position within both the ministerial bodies and the coalition committee, its ability to influence
Germany’s foreign policy based on its control of senior authoritative foreign policy positions in government⁶ should not be circumscribed by these institutions.

*The Withdrawal of U.S. Nuclear Weapons from German Soil*

The FDP’s demand for the withdrawal of U.S. nuclear weapons from Germany is a striking example of issue ownership by a junior coalition party.⁷ Particularly Foreign Minister Westerwelle has been a staunch advocate of this idea. However, the FDP’s call has received a lukewarm reception by the senior coalition partner. Still, by using first its strong electoral performance and the discretion vested in the Foreign Ministry the FDP has been able to press forward with the issue since entering government in 2009.

The FDP had enshrined the demand already in its election manifesto. It stipulated that the FDP “supports […] the withdrawal of the remaining American nuclear weapons from Germany” (FDP 2009, 67). The manifesto of the CDU/CSU did not contain a similar demand. It merely put forward the party’s general commitment to the reduction of nuclear weapons (CDU/CSU 2009, 59). During the election campaign the issue featured prominently among the FDP’s foreign policy proposals (e.g., Süddeutsche Zeitung 2009).

After the elections the FDP succeeded in including ‘its’ demand in the coalition agreement. The parties resolved to “advocate within the Alliance [NATO] and with our American allies the removal of the remaining nuclear weapons from Germany” (CDU/CSU/FDP 2009, 120). During the presentation of the coalition agreement Westerwelle emphasised that with the withdrawal of the “relicts of the Cold War” (Sueddeutsche.de 2009) Germany wanted “to set a signal” in the realm of foreign policy (Welt Online 2009). Chancellor Merkel, for her part, made it clear that there will be no unilateral action in implementing this demand (FAZ.net 2009). Indeed, by placing the objective in the wider
context of NATO’s upcoming revision of its strategic concept the CDU/CSU had already in the coalition agreement put limits to the FDP’s ambition (CDU/CSU/FDP 2009, 120). The conservatives wanted to avoid any demands that could irritate the United States (Brössler 2009). Moreover, the Chancellor considered unilateral German action as futile in the first place (Friedmann et al. 2010, 21). Having said that, the CDU/CSU had no chance but to support the FDP’s idea in general terms now that it was enshrined in the coalition agreement.

Since entering office the pattern of support for the withdrawal of U.S. nuclear weapons from Germany has remained unchanged. On the one hand, Foreign Minister Westerwelle has continued to advocate one of his “favourite topics” (Westerwelle, quoted in FAZ 2009). He did so, for instance, in the United States where he placed his demand in the context of President Barack Obama’s vision of a world free of nuclear weapons, or “global zero” (Carstens 2009). Since then Westerwelle has restated his commitment to the goal of a “national zero” (Jungholt 2010) on various occasions (e.g., Bulletin 2010; Westerwelle 2012). At the same time, he has been careful from the outset to avoid tensions within the coalition over this issue. To this end he took up, for instance, Merkel’s demand that Germany will not act unilaterally (Busse 2009). The CDU/CSU, for its part, has kept emphasising its red lines, including the rejection of unilateral action (Löwenstein 2009). Besides, the Minister of Defence, Thomas de Maizière (CDU), stressed in his defence policy guidelines of May 2011 the continued importance of nuclear deterrence as well as NATO’s role as a “nuclear alliance” (BMVg 2011), which also runs counter Westerwelle’s demand for withdrawal.

In short, it was the junior coalition partner that put the withdrawal of nuclear weapons on the agenda and has used its foreign policy cabinet posts to advocate the issue internationally ever since. The issue is truly ‘owned’ by the FDP. True, to date success has been scant as far as the implementation of this objective is concerned. Still, if it had not been for the FDP the German government would not have promoted the issue in the first place. A
similarly strong influence of the junior coalition partner on the government’s foreign policy can be discerned regarding Germany’s abstention during the United Nations Security Council’s (UNSC) vote on Resolution 1973 on Libya in March 2011. Due to the FDP’s uncompromising stance on the issue together with the party’s control of the Foreign Ministry, the participation of German armed forces in a military intervention in Libya was put out of reach for the CDU/CSU irrespective of its own policy preferences. By reiterating over and over again his rejection of a military intervention, Foreign Minister Westerwelle “blocked the formation of an opinion by the government in his sense” (Rühl 2011, 569). The FDP did indeed use the power vested in its ministerial posts to ‘hijack’ the issue and push through its policy preferences at the expense of the senior partner’s room of manoeuvre.

The Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition in the UK

Coalition Set-up

The British coalition government between the Conservative Party and the Liberal Democrats, which was formed after the general elections in May 2010, represents the second type. Given the lack of a tradition with coalition cabinets in the UK, the negotiations between the two parties on forming a coalition were exceptionally fluid (e.g., Laws 2010; Wilson 2010). In the event, the junior coalition partner, the Liberal Democrats, secured five positions in the Cabinet (Debus 2011, 296–302).

Most importantly for this article, the Liberal Democrats did not take over a single ministry in foreign affairs. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) and the Ministry of Defence (MoD) were clearly not within reach. In view of his stature within the Conservative
Party, it was a foregone conclusion during the coalition negotiations that the Conservative shadow foreign secretary, William Hague, would come to head the FCO (see Wilson 2010). Similarly, there was never any question of the Conservatives ceding control over government policy on an issue that was as central to the party’s overall image as defence. At the same time, the preferences of the Liberal Democrats counselled against challenging the Conservative prerogative regarding the FCO or the MoD and did not suggest going after the one remaining department in foreign affairs which might have been available, i.e., the Department for International Development (DfID). The priority for the Liberal Democrats was to obtain government positions related to their four most prominent (domestic) manifesto pledges, above all on constitutional reform (Laws 2010, 68). Moreover, they decided to seek a strong position at the centre of government which would enhance their influence across the board rather than to push for a major department. Most notably, this led to the – by international standards – unusual role of the Liberal Democrat leader and Deputy Prime Minister, Nick Clegg, who does not head a ministry but who is to be on a par with the Prime Minister in having a “full and contemporaneous overview of the business of Government” (Cabinet Office 2010a) and who is at the heart of the informal mechanisms to coordinate coalition policy from the centre (Hazell 2012, 55-61).

Over and above the office of the Deputy Prime Minister, the British coalition government is marked out by strongly institutionalised mechanisms to ensure junior partner input into the whole range of government policy, including foreign affairs. Three of these mechanisms are particularly noteworthy. First, the foreign policy influence of the Liberal Democrats rests on the letter of the coalition program (Cabinet Office 2010b) which includes separate sections on Defense, Europe, Foreign Affairs, International Development and National Security. The government has mostly been quite rigid in keeping with the coalition
agreement, because attempts to deviate from it were seen as potential threats to the stability of the coalition (Guardian 2010a).

Second, the Liberal Democrats can rely on a comprehensive system of ‘shadowing’ Conservative ministers of state. Indeed, the objective of the Liberal Democrats in the coalition negotiations was to have a government minister in every department (Guardian 2010b) which were to be their “eyes and ears” (Wallace 2011, 18) in Conservatives-led ministries. Thus, the Liberal Democrats secured representation by a junior minister in both the FCO and the MoD. One of the few exceptions to this pattern is DfID, which the Liberal Democrats did not consider contentious and where they did not regard a ministerial presence as essential (Hall-Matthews 2011).

Third, the coalition has set out to return to more formalised procedures of Cabinet decision-making and has reinvigorated the system of Cabinet Committees (Hazell 2012, 53–55). In particular, all committees have a chair and a co-chair from a different coalition partner, and their rules of procedure make sure that the Liberal Democrats cannot be overruled. The committees, moreover, may refer any contentious issue upwards to the Coalition Committee, in which the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats are represented in equal numbers (Cabinet Office 2010a). This drive to “‘coalitionise’ policy” (Rutter and Atkinson 2011, 22) also includes the Coalition Operation and Strategic Planning Group, which is tasked with overseeing the implementation of the coalition program and which is again co-chaired by members of the senior and junior coalition partners (Paun 2011, 253). As regards foreign affairs, more specifically, the coalition has set up a National Security Council (NSC) in the Cabinet Office, which – like the Coalition Committee – is co-chaired by the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister.

A foremost concern of the Liberal Democrats thus was to put in place structures which would give them maximum cross-government leverage on the coalition agenda. Their
political case for being in the coalition was to rest on the overall difference they would make compared to a hypothetical Conservative single-party government. The Conservatives, in turn, are certainly aware – and have partly come to resent – the pressure to make compromises with their junior partner in almost every department. Overall, the advent of coalition government in the UK has added to the range of actors which expect to have a say in foreign policy decision-making, further increasing the “sense of messiness in British foreign policy” (Bevir et al. 2013, 163).

The Replacement of Trident

The issue of renewing ‘Trident’ represents one of the few points in the coalition program on which the two partners decided to ‘agree to disagree’. This was to bridge opposing views on a like-for-like replacement of the current system, with the Conservatives being in favour (Conservative Party 2010, 106) and the Liberal Democrats against (Liberal Democrats 2010, 65). The issue was hotly debated during the election campaign and used by the Liberal Democrats to distinguish themselves from both Labour and the Conservatives (Dorman 2010, 377). The formula on which the two sides could eventually agree was that the coalition “will maintain Britain’s nuclear deterrent” while the “Liberal Democrats will continue to make the case for alternatives”. In an important concession to the Liberal Democrats, the coalition agreement also announced that “the renewal of Trident should be scrutinised to ensure value for money” (Cabinet Office 2010b, 15).

As a result, the coalition’s Strategic Defence and Security Review has identified possible savings which are to come from reducing, for example, the number of warheads and missiles. Most significantly, the Review defers the key investment decisions for the renewal of Trident (‘Main Gate’) to 2016, i.e., into the next parliament (HM Government 2010, 37–
39). It is only then that binding acquisition plans have to be made and that the future shape and scope of Trident will be decided (Martin 2011, 191–192). This effectively works to defuse one of the most contentious issues between the coalition partners.

It is important to note, moreover, that the deferral of the Trident replacement passed over the explicit opposition of the Conservative Secretary of State for Defence at the time, Liam Fox (Guardian 2010c), and fuelled widespread discontent among Conservative backbenchers. For example, a former Conservative shadow defence minister, Julian Lewis, accused the Conservative leadership of “appeasement of the Liberal Democrats […] in total breach of the pledges given to Conservative MPs” (Guardian 2010d). Correspondingly, the Liberal Democrats consider the concessions granted to them over Trident as one of their major successes in the coalition (Independent 2010).

As for the pathways through which the Liberal Democrats were able to influence coalition policy on the nuclear deterrent, four points stand out. First, the commitment to a value for money review in the coalition program provided a crucial opening for them to build up pressure on the Conservative policy of a like-for-like replacement of Trident. Second, the decision to defer the replacement was taken in the NSC, in which the Liberal Democrats have a strong voice. Nick Clegg, in particular, has been credited with pushing the Prime Minister to back such a decision (Observer 2011b). Third, the Liberal Democrat Chief Secretary to the Treasury, Danny Alexander, who was tasked with implementing the agreed spending cuts across Whitehall and who is a member of the NSC, played an essential role in developing the Treasury line that the capital costs of the Trident renewal would have to come out of the defence budget rather than from a separate government account (Barnaby 2011, 85–86). Fourth, the Liberal Democrats benefited from having a junior minister in the MoD, the Minister of State for the Armed Forces, Nicholas Harvey. This has given the Liberal Democrats direct access to crucial strategic, technical and financial information on the nuclear
deterrent and strengthened their resources to develop viable alternatives to a like-for-like replacement in time for the next general elections (Guardian 2011).

The case of the UK nuclear deterrent, therefore, attests to a number of mechanisms by which junior coalition partners can constrain the foreign policy discretion of their senior partners without holding the relevant department. The impact of the Liberal Democrats was to foster a decidedly low-commitment approach of the coalition government towards the modernisation of Trident. A similar dynamic can be observed in European policy. During the coalition’s first two years, the relatively pro-European Liberal Democrats have in various ways succeeded in taking the edge off the Conservatives’ eurosceptic agenda (Observer 2011a). In particular, they were instrumental in making the Conservatives back away from their manifesto commitment to negotiate the repatriation of certain European competences, which did not make it into the coalition program and which the senior partner put on hold in return for junior partner support for the 2011 European Union Bill (Blick 2011). In this case, the moderating influence of the junior partner primarily goes back to the initial coalition negotiations and was mainly about constraining the senior partner’s eurosceptic aspirations. It should be noted, however, that this influence of the Liberal Democrats has weakened the stronger the pressure for a tougher coalition line on Europe from the Conservative backbenches has become and the nearer the next elections draw.

**Conclusion**

The suggested distinction between different pathways for junior partner influence on coalition foreign policy promises more nuanced insights on both the effects of coalition government on foreign policy and the causal mechanisms behind these effects (see Kaarbo 2012, 40–66). In
particular, this unpacking of coalitions adds to our understanding of why the empirical evidence on the foreign policy influence of coalition government has so far largely remained inconclusive. Whereas the pattern of junior partner influence under the first type of coalitions should work as a causal mechanism for a more extreme foreign policy behavior of coalitions, the pathways of junior partner influence under the second type should have a moderating influence on coalition foreign policy. These differences remain hidden from view as long as the study of coalition foreign policy does not differentiate between different coalition arrangements for the making of foreign policy.

Building on these insights, the article suggests several avenues for further research. What needs investigating is why coalition arrangements of the first type are more frequent among EU member states than coalitions of the second type. Such research can build on a well-established comparative literature on portfolio allocation, most notably regarding the relative salience different coalition partners ascribe to departments in the foreign policy executive (see Bäck et al. 2011). The foreign office, in particular, is generally ranked among the most senior ministries and therefore makes for one of the best-suited departments to accommodate the interests of the party that does not hold the office of Prime Minister (Müller and Strøm 2000a, 22-25). Given the prestige that comes with the position of foreign minister as well as the high political profile of this position, many junior coalition partners will likely see the foreign office as a highly attractive prize both in office- and vote-seeking terms (Strøm and Müller 1999, 9-13).

More specifically, however, our case studies suggest that political systems, like the German one, which emphasise departmental authority and discretion, should further add to the incentives for junior partners to seek direct control over ministries in foreign affairs, whereas systems, like the British, which put a premium on collective cabinet responsibility should make the second type of coalition arrangements more viable. In this context, it seems
promising to broaden the sample of countries and the types of coalitions (i.e., multiparty coalitions) under examination. Such a comparative endeavour should also examine the electoral payoffs that junior coalition partners actually derive from the different strategies. This is particularly important for the first type where junior partners invest much of their political capital in foreign policy at the expense of other fields which might be more politically rewarding.

Notes

1 This is not to gloss over the differences between the German and British systems of government, such as the strong tradition of coalition government in Germany and the much lesser experience with coalitions in Westminster. Further relevant factors include the greater emphasis on departmental autonomy in Germany compared to a stronger focus on collective cabinet responsibility and interdepartmental coordination in the UK as well as the more partisan role of the civil service in Germany than in the UK. These differences certainly affect the coalition formation stage as well as the prospects for junior partner to shape foreign policy under different coalition arrangements. They should be less relevant, however, for the pathways of junior partner influence once the partners have agreed on a particular coalition set-up.

2 It is therefore beyond the scope of this article to provide an overall assessment of how successful the junior partners to the current coalition governments in Germany and the UK have so far been in shaping coalition foreign policy across the board.

3 While this article focuses on two-party coalitions, the dynamics associated with the two types should be discernable in all coalition governments irrespective of the number of parties involved.

4 The political calculations of senior and junior parties during the coalition negotiations are closely interdependent. They have been divided into successive stages for heuristic purposes only.

5 Since the mid-1950s two-party coalitions have been the rule in the Federal Republic of Germany.

6 Article 65 of the Basic Law stipulates that within the confines set by the chancellor’s power to determine policy guidelines the individual ministers “shall conduct the affairs of his department independently and on his own responsibility”.

7 It is estimated that 10-20 nuclear warheads are stockpiled in Germany.
‘Trident’ is used as shorthand for the UK’s submarine-based nuclear deterrent. Strictly speaking, however, the term only designates the American-built intercontinental ballistic missiles which carry British-assembled nuclear warheads and are deployed on British-designed submarines (Allen 2010).

The coalition has approved the first investment decision (‘Initial Gate’) (HM Government 2010, 38). This was as a concession of the Liberal Democrats who had worked to avert progress on the issue for as long as possible (Observer 2011b).

Bibliography


Guardian (2010d) ‘Cameron to Delay Trident Replacement’, 19 October, 1.


Observer (2011a) ‘How Should We Judge Clegg’s Eventful Year?’, 10 April, 36.


Table 1: Two Types of Coalition Arrangements for Foreign Policy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th><strong>Type 1</strong></th>
<th><strong>Type 2</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Defining Feature</strong></td>
<td>Junior partner holds at least one department in the foreign policy executive.</td>
<td>Junior partner does <em>not</em> hold a department in the foreign policy executive.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Empirical Cases**  | CDU/FDP coalition in Germany.  
More common in European parliamentary systems: currently 16 out of 20 coalition governments in EU-27. | Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition in the UK.  
Less common in European parliamentary systems: currently 4 out of 20 coalition governments in EU-27. |
| **Strategies and Pathways of Influence** | Ministerial government: resources and discretion that come with holding issue-relevant departments.  
High political profile of junior partner influence (issue ownership). | Cabinet government: instruments to put constraints on the foreign policy discretion of the senior partner.  
Lower political profile of junior partner influence (behind-the-scenes influence). |
| **Effects on Coalition Foreign Policy** | Susceptible to ‘hijacking’ and politicisation by junior partner. | ‘Corrective’ and moderating influence of junior partner. |