All Steps Necessary: Danish Nuclear Policy, 1949–1960

JONATHAN SØBORG AGGER
AND LASSE WOLSGAARD

Abstract

Danish nuclear policy was decided in the years 1949–60. The policies adopted by the Danish government in this period did not differ essentially from those of the other Western allies. For example, the government did not want the crucial decision of whether and when to use nuclear weapons to be made by the military. It should remain a political decision, in practice to be made by the US president. One distinctive Danish policy, however, was the decision not to allow storage of nuclear warheads on Danish soil 'under the present circumstances'. The motives for this seemingly irresolute policy are discussed in this article.

The years 1949–60 were in many ways a defining period for Danish nuclear policy. The challenge of incorporating nuclear weapons into the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) strategic concepts for the defence of the North Atlantic Area in 1949, 1954 and 1956/1957, coupled with resolving the question of whether or not to give the Danish forces a nuclear capability, determined Danish policies for years to come. Danish decision-makers (primarily the prime minister, foreign minister and defence minister, as well as key personnel in the ministries of defence and foreign affairs)[1] did not have a clear-cut strategy from the outset. Developments were swift. In 1949 the key players probably did not imagine that within eight years nuclear warheads could be made so small in size and in such great numbers that the United States would be willing to equip NATO countries with tactical dual-purpose weapons.

Jonathan Søborg Agger, Cand.mag., Palægade 4, DK-1261 Copenhagen K, Denmark; j.s.agger@mail.dk, currently Head of Section within the Danish Ministry of Defence. Lasse Wolsgaard, Mag.art., Head of Section, Messinavej 9, DK-2300 Copenhagen S, Denmark; Lasse.wolsgaard@mail.dk. We should like to thank Bo Lidegaard for helpful and insightful comments on this article, and Poul Villaume for granting access to his personal archive and for awakening our interest in Cold War history.

1 The key personnel in the ministry of foreign affairs were the director, the head of the juridical-political division and the head of section V (also called the NATO section). In the ministry of defence it was the head of the NATO section. When not in government the chairs of the Liberals and the Conservatives were also to some extent informed off the record. The foreign policy committee in Parliament was increasingly being informed, but most of the time only after the fact.

Contemporary European History, **15**, 1 (2006), pp. 67–84 © 2006 Cambridge University Press
doi:10.1017/S0960777306003109 Printed in the United Kingdom

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777306003109 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Following the introduction since the ending of the Cold War of a more liberal policy regarding access to government archives, more research has been conducted in the past ten years and more is sure to follow, since the subject is receiving much attention from politicians and journalists.[2] In this article we shall discuss Danish nuclear policy, using newly obtained access to the central files of the Danish administration.

The lessons of the Second World War

The date 9 April 1940 is seen as a dark spot in modern Danish history. Not only did Germany attack Denmark and plunge the country into the Second World War, but Denmark also decided not to fight back or declare war on Germany. Today, this decision and the policy of collaboration that followed are often discussed in the Danish media, not least because the current Danish prime minister has stated outright on several occasions that this policy was morally reprehensible.

In the years after the Second World War the experience of 9 April 1940 played an important part in the thinking of Danish decision-makers. On 27 September 1951 instructions were given to the Danish armed forces that they should fight even if the outcome seemed hopeless and, even if they were isolated, the fighting had to be prosecuted with the greatest vigour in order to buy time to organise forces within or outside the area being attacked. Furthermore, the fighting had to be continued even if the enemy carried out reprisals or threatened to do so.[3] Denmark had to defend its sovereignty.

Throughout the 1950s the Social Democrats were in a key position in government. Most of the time they occupied the posts central to security policy, and even when the Conservatives and the Liberals were in government from 1950 to 1953, they were dependent on Social Democrat support in order to carry out their defence policy. The continuity in Danish security policy throughout the period did not stem from this fact alone. In general, the bourgeois parties and the Social Democrats saw more or less eye to eye on the overall policy regarding NATO, a policy characterised by steady progress towards military and political integration.

The first strategic concept

Initially, the question of nuclear weapons did not affect military policy. This was partly because the United States only possessed a small number of warheads, but also because the means of delivery were quite inaccurate and it took time before new types of weapon could be deployed effectively. Therefore it was assumed that nuclear weapons would initially be used for area bombardment against large targets in the manner of the Second World War. Industrial complexes, oilfields, refineries,

2 For an overview of the most important Danish studies on Denmark's alliance policy during the Cold War, see Carsten Due-Nielsen, 'Samtidshistorie og politik', *Historisk Tidsskrift* 95:2 (1995), 467–77, and Thorsten B. Olesen, ed., *The Cold War – and the Nordic Countries, Historiography at a Crossroad* (Odense: University Press of Southern Denmark, 2004).

3 Udenrigsministeriet, *Dansk sikkerhedspolitik 1949–1966* (Copenhagen: Udenrigsministeriet, 1968), 149. All translations are by the authors.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777306003109 Published online by Cambridge University Press

ports and airfields were targeted by the US Strategic Air Command (SAC).[4] In June 1949, when the Danish military attaché in Washington asked representatives of the US State Department and the intelligence leadership at the Department of Defense (Pentagon) whether they could imagine nuclear weapons being used against a (local) amphibious attack in, for example, England, the representatives responded truthfully. The United States would only use nuclear weapons against vital enemy industrial and military centres and thus probably not against Soviet ground forces attacking, for example, Denmark. Apparently, this response was expected to be 'confidence-inspiring', as it was believed that the Danish attaché and Danish politicians would prefer nuclear weapons not to be used on Danish territory.[5] However, this response raised another question: how was Denmark to be defended? Danish hopes that their territory could be defended against Soviet aggression were already diminished in April 1949 when President Truman, in absolute secrecy, told the foreign ministers of the North Atlantic Treaty (NAT) countries that the United States did not expect to be able to mount a successful defence of Europe until 1956, and then only along the line running along the Rhine–Ijssel through West Germany, which would not have protected Jutland.[6]

In late 1949, when the first strategic concept for the defence of the NAT countries was discussed, their governments knew that in the event of a Soviet attack they could only expect subsequent liberation, not a defence of their territories. They also knew that the United States planned to use its nuclear weapons against Soviet targets in case of war. Furthermore, in September the Soviets had tested their first nuclear device, which, although not unexpected, had happened earlier than had been expected.

With these facts in mind, the purpose of the first strategic concept for the defence of the North Atlantic Treaty area was first of all to prevent war and secondly to ensure an effective defence in the event of war. The general objectives of the strategic concept were to create a powerful deterrent and to develop plans which would, in case of war, provide for the combined deployment of the military forces available to the North Atlantic nations to counter enemy threats and to defend and maintain their peoples and home territories.[7] The concept was first approved by the military committee on 29 November and later by the defence ministers on 1 December 1949. A few days later, N. E. Halaby of the US Defense Department informed some of his colleagues that 'the general atmosphere at the meeting was one of harmony'.[8] However, the

4 Beatrice Heuser, 'The Development of NATO's Nuclear Strategy', *Contemporary European History*, 4, 1 (1995), 50f.

5 Poul Villaume, *Allieret med forbehold. Danmark, NATO og den kolde krig. En studie i dansk sikkerhedspolitik. 1949–1961* (Copenhagen: Eirene, 1995), 148.

6 Jonathan Søborg Agger and Lasse Wolsgaard, 'Pro Memoria: Atombomben er vor ven. Den danske regerings stillingtagen til og reaktion på atomvåbnenes integration i NATOs forsvarsstrategi 1949–1956', *Historisk Tidsskrift*, 101, 2 (2001), 397; Villaume, *Allieret med forbehold*, 147f.

7 The Strategic Concept for the Defence of the North Atlantic Area, M.C. 3/2 and D.C. 6. *NATO Strategy Documents 1949–1969* (Brussels: NATO, 1998) (www.nato.int).

8 Memorandum of Conversation, Deputy Director of the Office of European Affairs, 3 Dec. 1949. *Foreign Relations of the United States*, IV: *1949* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1975), 357.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777306003109 Published online by Cambridge University Press

strategic concept had not been approved without objections. When the military committee discussed the concept on 29 November, the Danish chief of staff objected to the phrasing of the first basic military undertaking as being to 'insure the ability to carry out strategic bombing including the prompt delivery of the atomic bomb. This is primarily a US responsibility assisted as practicable by other nations'. The Danish representative proposed that the phrase 'including the prompt delivery of the atomic bomb' be dropped. The chairman of the military committee, General Bradley, overcame this objection and the proposal was rejected. At the meeting on 1 December the Danish defence minister had been given categorical cabinet instructions not to agree to any reference to the atomic bomb.[9] This was a remarkable position to adopt. The proposal to omit this phrase met with fierce opposition from the other member states. Not even the Norwegian defence minister shared Denmark's reservations, but rather saw the raising of this point as unfortunate and dictated by Denmark's domestic affairs.[10] The Danish defence minister emphasised that the Danish proposal was by no means aimed at obstructing necessary military planning. All members agreed that nuclear weapons should be used 'when and where necessary', as the US secretary of defence, Louis Johnson, stated. In fact, the Danish minister never objected to the strategy as such.[11] The United States had been warned in advance of the Danish stand and was willing to alter the phrase, which was modified so as to stress the responsibility of the United States to 'insure the ability to carry out strategic bombing promptly by all means possible with all types of weapons, without exception'. In the words of the Norwegian defence minister, this new wording represented 'no change whatsoever in reality', and the Danish defence minister himself did not believe that it would have any consequence for either deterrence or the case of war whether or not the atomic bomb was mentioned explicitly.[12] The question remains why the Danish government was the only one that wanted all reference to the atomic bomb removed.

The devastating effect of an atomic bomb on a city had been demonstrated in Japan in August 1945, and a nuclear strike on Copenhagen was expected to result in the collapse of the Danish state. Thus the Danish decision-makers' greatest fear was without doubt that of Denmark becoming a nuclear target if the deterrent failed. Apparently, at the meeting of the military committee on 29 November, the Danish chief of staff had raised the concern that, were the use of nuclear weapons to be mentioned in the strategic concept, the Soviet Union might use them on

9 Memorandum of Conversation, Deputy Director of the Office of European Affairs. 3 Dec. 1949. *Foreign Relations of the United States*, IV: *1949* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1975), 357; Harry S. Truman Library, Mutual Defence (folder 1) CF, box 25, Confidential File, WH Central File. North Atlantic Defence Committee. 2. Meeting of Defence Ministers, 1 Dec. 1949; Villaume, *Allieret med forbehold*, 504.

10 Kjetil Skogrand and Rolf Tamnes, *Fryktens Likevekt. Atombomben, Norge og verden 1945–1970* (Oslo: Tiden Norsk Forlag, 2001), 102ff.

11 Agger and Wolsgaard, 'Atombomben er vor ven', 396ff.

12 The Strategic Concept for the Defence of the North Atlantic Area, D.C. 6/1 *NATO strategy Documents 1949–1969* (Brussels: NATO, 1998) (www.nato.int); Harry S. Truman Library, Mutual Defence (folder 1) CF, box 25, Confidential File, WH Central File. North Atlantic Defence Committee. 2. Meeting of Defence Ministers, 1 Dec. 1949.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777306003109 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Copenhagen if war broke out. But this was hardly the key motive behind the Danish position, as the US threat to use its nuclear weapons if the Soviets attacked was clear to everyone, including the Soviet Union. However, the Danish defence minister argued that if the wording became public, it might result in 'serious repercussions in the population of Denmark'. He emphasised that it was important to have the support of the people. Those groups in Denmark that opposed Danish membership of the Atlantic Pact might use any reference to atomic weapons for propaganda purposes. If the phrase was seen as the reason why an agreement on the prohibition of atomic warfare could not be reached (something the Danish government had tried to achieve immediately after the Second World War), it might only worsen the situation. Subsequently, in the 1950s Denmark agreed publicly, including in the United Nations, with the US attitude towards nuclear disarmament.[13] There were, the defence minister said, many groups besides the communists whose attitude to the Atlantic Pact was sceptical or who rejected it outright. If these groups began to regard the attitude of the political parties towards NATO as decisive, it would spell problems, not least for the Social Democrats. This consideration was even more important since, during 1949, the Social Democrat prime minister Hans Hedtoft and his close ally Jens Otto Krag considered calling an election, and thus also had to consider the position of the anti-militarist Social Liberal Party.[14]

The Danish government understood the reasoning behind the concept of deterrence and acknowledged that it was the primary purpose of the North Atlantic Treaty.[15] Although not a new concept in military thinking, it had not been applied in Denmark's defence strategy for a long period of time. The crucial difference was that, previously, having a deterrent had meant a state wanting to convince a possible attacker that an attack would be unsuccessful. Now, the deterrent implied that an attack by the Soviet Union could initially be successful, but that retaliation would mean destruction of the Soviet homelands.

As the leaders of a small state at the front line in the Cold War, Danish decision-makers probably saw the strategy to defend the North Atlantic Area differently from US or British decision-makers around 1950. Since the defence of Denmark might well leave the country destroyed, whether in the end it was successful or not, Danish decision-makers focused very strongly on making sure that war did not break out at all. The deterrent simply had to work. Thus, in September 1949 the Danish foreign minister, Gustav Rasmussen, told the press that it was his personal opinion that the predictable Soviet acquisition of nuclear weapons might promote greater political equality between the two superpowers and therefore support peace.[16] His reasoning seemed to be that the Soviets might be more inclined to negotiate a reduction in conventional forces, for example, when they too possessed nuclear weapons.

13 Erik Boel, *Socialdemokratiets atomvåbenpolitik 1945–1988* (Copenhagen: Akademisk Forlag, 1988), 18f.
14 Bo Lidegaard, *Jens Otto Krag 1919–1961* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 2001), 351ff.
15 Lidegaard, *Jens Otto Krag*, 336, diary entry, 24 Feb. 1949; Villaume, *Allieret med forbehold*, 153.
16 Villaume, *Allieret med forbehold*, 502.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777306003109 Published online by Cambridge University Press

The 'new look'

One of the central and fundamental dilemmas of Danish security policy in the 1950s was how to determine the degree to which the Danish government might reasonably expect Denmark to be defended if, in the eyes of its allies, Denmark itself did not play its part. The dilemma was accentuated in early 1952 when NATO agreed on new conventional force goals. On the one hand, Denmark always wanted NATO's forces in the northern region to be as large as possible in order to facilitate the defence of Denmark in case of a Soviet attack. On the other hand, the Danish government was unwilling to increase its defence budget as much as would be needed if the Danish armed forces were to meet NATO's new goals. Actually, during the 1950s Denmark spent less on defence as a proportion of gross national product than any other NATO country apart from Iceland. When pressed by NATO and allied states to spend more on defence, Danish politicians argued that it was particularly important for a front-line state to secure popular support for NATO membership and that one way to do this was to keep on expanding the welfare state.

The British government too realised early on that the forces required would be too costly to establish and therefore was already ushering a new phase in NATO strategy in 1952. The British wanted more emphasis on deterrence through the threat of using nuclear weapons, which they too now possessed. This understanding of deterrence made its way into US thinking in 1953, and the Eisenhower administration made sure that it became a part of NATO's strategic concept to defend the North Atlantic Area through the 'new look',[17] initiated in December 1953. There were a number of reasons behind it, above all the US development of smaller nuclear weapons for use on the battlefield, which were deployed in Western Europe in 1953.

The new policy is best known from statements concerning 'massive retaliation' made by US Secretary of State John Foster Dulles in January 1954, but it should be emphasised that the US defence policy as announced by Dulles could not be equated at that point with the defence strategy that was approved by NATO in December. US politicians had a propensity for heavy-handed general declarations about the intentions, politics and strategies of the United States.

In 1952 the emphasis on the importance of nuclear weapons was not lost on the Danish foreign minister or the ministry of foreign affairs. And in late 1953 the argument was pushed to extremes in a memorandum from the head of the juridical-political division that claimed, 'The nuclear bomb is our friend'. The background for this memorandum was the news of the first operational Soviet hydrogen bomb, which caused protests around the world, with some groups demanding a complete ban on all nuclear weapons and hydrogen bombs. The point being made by the Danish foreign minister was that, at that time, it was not to Denmark's advantage to have nuclear weapons abolished.[18]

17 Heuser, 'Development of NATO's Nuclear Strategy', 43.

18 Memorandum by C. A. C. Brun, 5.D.22, Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (hereafter MFA), Danish National Archives (Copenhagen) (hereafter DNA (Cph)); P.M. by Birger Kronmann, 24 Sep. 1953, 105.I.40.b., MFA, DNA (Cph); Agger and Wolsgaard', Atombomben er vor ven', 405f.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777306003109 Published online by Cambridge University Press

The new strategy paper (M.C. 48) was approved at the North Atlantic Council meeting in December 1954. M.C. 48 assumed that a Soviet attack would include the use of nuclear weapons. An important reason for this was that NATO also assumed that the Kremlin was aware that NATO did not expect to be able to repel a conventional attack without using nuclear weapons. Thus, if the Soviet Union wanted to retain the upper hand in the battle, it would have to use nuclear weapons first. Therefore the purpose of NATO's new strategy was to deter the Soviet Union from any attack by threatening it with a 'devastating counter-attack employing atomic weapons'. It was imperative that NATO showed the will and the necessary military means to inflict effective retaliatory damage (the 'Sword'): 'We must be able to strike an aggressor where it hurts'. This would involve using atomic as well as conventional weapons. Furthermore, NATO's 'shield forces' should be able to use atomic and thermonuclear weapons in their defence of Western Europe. This posture should be maintained until an efficient disarmament programme could be implemented. US ideas on how to use nuclear weapons were as follows. First, no limits should be imposed in advance on the use of nuclear weapons. Second, nuclear weapons should be treated like conventional weapons. Third, if time allowed, the United States intended to consult its allies before using nuclear weapons.[19]

To what extent this strategic concept actually differed from the strategy agreed on in December 1949 is debatable. There was nothing new in stating that nuclear weapons would probably be 'used in defence from the outset' and that NATO's forces should 'be able to use atomic and thermonuclear weapons in their defence'.[20] The deterrent was still the crucial factor. However, as Lawrence Freedman emphasises, the strategy also included an element of flexible response.[21] It was not assumed that a massive nuclear attack would be initiated in the case of any Soviet aggression: 'Conventional forces are required to oppose threats and bluff. Without these forces we should not be able to stop a limited offensive by the conventional forces of a Satellite (e.g. E. Germany) without using nuclear weapons'.[22] A purely nuclear-based deterrent would not be sufficient if – or when – the Soviet Union developed the capability to hit targets within the US homeland. This was foreseen from the very beginning of the nuclear age.[23] In March 1954 this reasoning also became part of the thinking of the NATO sections of the Danish ministries of defence and foreign affairs. Two memoranda, co-written by these ministries and signed by the head of the juridical-political division in the ministry of foreign affairs, analysed the status of Danish security policy and reviewed the 'new look' strategy. Even though the

19 M.C. 48, the most effective pattern of NATO military strength for the next few years (*NATO Strategy Documents 1949–1969*); Hovedpunkter på NAC-møde april 1954, 105.G.1., MFA, DNA (Cph); *Foreign Relations of the United States*, V: *1952–54* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1983), 509ff.

20 M.C. 48.

21 Lawrence Freedman, *The Evolution of Nuclear Strategy* (London: Macmillan 1982), 86f.

22 Memorandum 3 Sep. 1954, Secretary General from the Standing Group on the need for conventional forces (www.isn.ethz.ch/php/collections/coll_7.htlm).

23 Heuser, 'The Development of NATO's Nuclear Strategy', 52.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777306003109 Published online by Cambridge University Press

authors found no obvious indication of immediate or specific plans by the Soviet Union to attack Western Europe, the threat was still there. If the Soviet Union launched an attack it would be with conventional forces, thus 'blackmailing' the European allies into refraining from using nuclear weapons. As was foreseen in M.C. 48, it would be necessary to maintain the build-up of conventional forces. Nuclear weapons alone could not decide the outcome of a war. The so-called 'new look' strategy was regarded as 'natural' and part of an on-going process of adaptation to technological developments.[24]

It is noteworthy that NATO's military authorities considered the so-called tactical nuclear weapons to be necessary in mounting an allied defence of Denmark, not just in northern Germany, but also in Denmark itself, a fact acknowledged by the Danish ministry of defence as early as May 1954.[25] The Danish government seemed to share this view. At no point during 1954, when briefed on the concepts of the 'new look', did the key ministers object to the guiding principles. This does not imply that the Danish government accepted all aspects of the various proposals with no objections, or that they agreed with all the defence doctrines in their entirety. In accordance with the other NATO countries, Denmark accepted the potential use of nuclear weapons. However, one cannot deduce from this that the Danish government would have agreed to nuclear weapons being used on Danish soil in case of war and thus to the threat actually being carried out. But it was tantalising that the 'new' strategy promoted the realisation of a forward line of defence, which included Denmark. And the strategy was meant to make the deterrent as effective as possible.[26]

The decision on when to use nuclear weapons presented yet another dilemma for Danish decision-makers. Basically, this decision had to rest solely with the US president in order to minimise response time and maximise the deterrent. The Danish government supported this state of affairs, and as early as 1954 it voted against proposals to increase the number of people who could influence the decision to use atomic weapons. This was partly because the government believed that this decision ought to be political, not military, but mostly because they felt that the deterrent effect would be weakened if a large number of people had to be consulted prior to the employment of nuclear weapons. However, this was not a view that could be expressed in public, and during the debates within NATO the rhetoric was deliberately kept as vague as possible. In their initial proposals, the Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR) and the United States wanted to obtain approval to use nuclear weapons before the outbreak of war, but in the end SACEUR only requested permission to begin planning and preparing its defence 'on the assumption

24 Birger Kronmann, P.M. Danmarks sikkerhedspolitiske stilling, 26 Mar 1954, 105.I.8.i., 105.G.1., MFA, DNA (Cph); Birger Kronmann, Referat. Den såkaldte "New-Look"-strategi, 26 Mar 1954, 105.I.1.a., MFA, DNA (Cph).

25 Notits om anvendelsen af atomvåben', 13 May 1954, 711/54, Archives of the Danish Ministry of Defence (Copenhagen) (hereafter DMD (Cph)); Agger and Wolsgaard, 'Atombomben er vor ven', 405f.

26 Agger and Wolsgaard, 'Atombomben er vor ven', 405ff.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777306003109 Published online by Cambridge University Press

that atomic and thermonuclear weapons will be used in defence from the outset'.[27] When the NATO countries approved M.C. 48, they accepted that NATO might use nuclear weapons first. SACEUR might even be given authority to use atomic weapons without prior authorisation. If the Soviets did not know who had the power to authorise the use of nuclear weapons, it would be more difficult to figure out exactly how and when nuclear weapons would be used. This uncertainty might just have been intended as part of the deterrent, since the president of the United States would probably not be prepared to delegate so much power to anyone else.

However, there were reasons for the Danish stand in the matter of political influence other than sheer belief in and understanding of the deterrent. In 1954 the head of the juridical-political division of the ministry of foreign affairs argued that it was hardly in Denmark's interests to be involved more than was absolutely necessary in decisions to embark on nuclear warfare. Whereas actual influence would be limited, not to say symbolic, the responsibility would be considerable. This combination was seen as highly undesirable, not least because of the political consequences if it became publicly known that the Danish government could in principle influence the decision to use nuclear weapons in specific situations. Strong pressure from both the Kremlin and Danish anti-militarist and communist circles was probably to be expected.[28]

According to the strategic concept (M.C. 48), it was still up to individual governments to decide to what extent they would commit themselves to a NATO response to an attack, and the Danish government retained the (formal) right to decide whether nuclear weapons could be used in the defence of Denmark. It is questionable whether this right would be significant if NATO began using nuclear weapons in, for example, West Germany. Would the Soviet Union then refrain from using nuclear weapons against Denmark?

The policies of the Danish government should be regarded as always serving two purposes. It had to ensure that the Soviet Union was deterred but at the same that the threats made to deter it did not automatically lead to nuclear war in case of failure, hence the government's acceptance of the principles of 'massive retaliation' and its simultaneous insistence that the decision whether or not to use nuclear weapons would be political.

The political directive

In September 1955 the Danish prime minister, H. C. Hansen, stated publicly for the first time that the government would consider Danish nuclear armament if the situation should demand it.[29] The occasion arose in October 1956, when the British-led NATO Northern Command suggested to the Danish ministry of defence that the Danish army should be equipped with atomic artillery. The weapon in question

27 Ibid., 408ff.; M.C. 48.

28 Birger Kronmann, Referat. Den såkaldte "New-Look"-strategi, 26 March 1954 105.I.1.a., MFA, DNA (Cph).

29 *Land og Folk* 29 Sept. 1955, 105.I.40.b., MFA, DNA (Cph).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777306003109 Published online by Cambridge University Press

was the surface-to-surface missile Honest John, which had a dual capability, that is, the ability to launch nuclear as well as conventional warheads.[30] Furthermore, during autumn 1956 the US army secretly counted Denmark among the countries it would recommend to be equipped with the dual capability guided missile Nike, a surface-to-air missile with atomic capability and a range of up to seventy-five miles.[31]

At the same time, the military committee and the North Atlantic Council discussed new strategic guidelines for the defence of NATO, which led to the approval of the Political Directive in December 1956. The Political Directive was supposed to provide the military authorities with guidelines in revising NATO's strategy to defend the North Atlantic Area. Like the situation prior to the 'new look', these discussions, which took place in NATO's military and civilian agencies, were initiated by the United Kingdom, which was also responsible for the first draft of the Political Directive.[32] In the present situation it was important for the British government to show initiative, so the content of the draft was, somewhat misleadingly, presented as new. Both the draft and the content of the Political Directive as approved were essentially derived from M.C. 48, although they were more detailed with regard to the use of nuclear weapons in allied defence. In the end the Political Directive was not what the British had hoped for, since they were eager to reduce their ground forces in Germany and abolish conscription.[33]

The Political Directive called for a revision of NATO defence planning in order 'to determine how, within the resources likely to be available, the defence effort of the Alliance and of each individual member can best achieve the most effective pattern of forces'. The deterrent effect of the large strategic nuclear weapons played a significant part in the strategy to defend the North Atlantic Area, but if the nuclear deterrent was to work, all NATO forces had to be able to

> deal with armed aggression, other than infiltrations, incursions or hostile local actions by the Soviets, or by Satellites with or without overt or covert Soviet support, in accordance with the concept of "forward strategy", counting on the use of nuclear weapons at the outset, and to sustain operations, without any intention to make a major withdrawal, until the strategic counter-offensive has achieved its objective.

But at the same time, the forces should also be able 'to deal with incidents such as infiltrations, incursions or hostile local actions by the Soviets, or by Satellites with or without overt or covert Soviet support' without resorting to nuclear weapons.[34]

30 Jonathan S. Agger and Lasse Wolsgaard 'Den størst mulige fleksibilitet. Dansk atomvåbenpolitik 1956–1960', *Historisk Tidsskrift*, 101, 1 (2001), 78ff.

31 Villaume, *Allieret med forbehold*, 529.

32 Agger and Wolsgaard, 'Atombomben er vor ven', 408ff.

33 Heuser, 'Development of NATO's Nuclear Strategy', 44.

34 Memorandum, 24 Sept. 1956 from the Danish Defence Ministry to the Foreign Ministry: 'Til orientering Dokument MC 14/2 draft (IPT 131/20 (6. rev. final draft)) af 15/9–56', 105.I.1.a/1, MFA, DNA (Cph); Referat. Overall Strategic Concept for the defence of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation area. Dokument MC 14/2., 8 Oct 1956, 105.I.1.a/1 MFA, DNA (Cph); DNA (Cph) MFA 105.I.1.a/1. 'Militærkomitéens 14. samling i Washington D.C. i dagene 18. og 19. oktober 1956. Dagsordenens punkt 6: MC 14/2: Strategic Concept', 105.I.1.a/1 MFA, DNA (Cph); Directive to the

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777306003109 Published online by Cambridge University Press

The language used might have differed from that of the earlier strategic concepts, but the NATO strategy was still based on the early use of nuclear weapons, while attempting to maintain a flexible response to Soviet aggression.[35] Now all of NATO's forces assigned to defend Europe were to be equipped with dual capability weapons. The logical conclusion drawn by one Danish official from the NATO section of the ministry of foreign affairs was that Danish forces too might be armed with nuclear weapons. Unknown to him this process had already begun in October, as described above.[36]

The Danish government was pleased to note that the Political Directive and the derived strategic concepts (M.C. 14/2 and M.C. 70) were intended to ensure the forward strategy and thus the defence of Danish territory. Denmark wanted to make sure that NATO was not going to plan to fight limited wars, an issue that became a problem during the debate on the Political Directive in 1956, when at one point it was proposed that the NATO countries should be prepared to do precisely this. The NATO section of the ministry of foreign affairs believed that this proposal conflicted with the North Atlantic Treaty. The Danes feared that if NATO was prepared to fight a limited war, this might convince the Kremlin that the United States would not launch a nuclear attack to counter an isolated act of aggression against, for example, Denmark. Thus, the proposal would undermine the deterrent effect and make a Soviet attack on Denmark more likely.[37] Apparently, the Norwegian government also considered a limited war undesirable due to the possible negative effect on the deterrent.[38] Furthermore, SACEUR refused to initiate the planning of a limited war. However, the Danish government was probably quite pleased with the resulting compromise. On one the hand, it was stated that there was no plan for a limited war with the Soviets; on the other, non-nuclear reactions to a Soviet attack were allowed.[39]

The strategy was a balancing act, which worked as long as it was not tested. Arming local forces with nuclear weapons made their use more likely and was therefore believed to strengthen both deterrence and defence. But if deterrence

NATO Military Authorities from the North Atlantic Council, para. 4, *NATO Strategy Documents 1949–1969*; Agger and Wolsgaard, 'Atombomben er vor ven', 422. The increased flexibility was especially desired by NATO's military authorities (Rolf Tamnes: *United States and the Cold War in the High North*. (Oslo: Ad Notam,1991), 142).

35 Michael O. Wheeler, 'NATO Nuclear Strategy 1949–90', in Gustav Schmidt, ed., *A History of NATO – The First Fifty Years* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), 130. Heuser, 'Development of NATO's Nuclear Strategy', 44f., 54f.

36 Agger and Wolsgaard, 'Den størst mulige fleksibilitet', 78f.; Agger and Wolsgaard, 'Atombomben er vor ven', 423f.

37 Agger and Wolsgaard, 'Atombomben er vor ven', 405f.; Referat. Dokument MC 14/2, 8 Oct 1956, 105.I.1.a/1 MFA, DNA (Cph). The problem had already been discussed in the Danish ministry of foreign affairs in 1955 (Memorandum by Hessellund-Jensen, 26 Aug. 1955, 105.I.1.a/1, MFA, DNA (Cph); Memorandum by Hessellund-Jensen, 14 Jan. 1956, 105.I.1.a/1, MFA, DNA (Cph)).

38 Skogrand and Tamnes, *Fryktens Likevekt*, 39 ff.

39 Heuser, 'Development of NATO's Nuclear Strategy', 44f.; Agger and Wolsgaard, 'Atombomben er vor ven', 405f.; Referat. Strategiske retningslinier for NATO-forsvaret. MC 14/2, 14 Mar. 1957, 105.I.1.a/1, MFA, DNA (Cph); *NATO Strategy Documents 1949–1969*.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777306003109 Published online by Cambridge University Press

failed, it was not in the interest of the Danish government that an attack should lead to Armageddon. Furthermore, as an official of the ministry of foreign affairs put it in 1955, 'Hypnotized by the threat of nuclear weapons, the people of a great power will be less willing than ever to "die for Danzig".' Nuclear weapons would only prevent a war between the great powers, not war as such.[40] The question remained whether the Europeans could believe in the US-guaranteed deterrence, especially in the years after the first Soviet ICBM test-firing in 1957, which made the Soviet Union capable of hitting targets in North America. Would the United States' new-found sense of vulnerability make it less likely that it would use nuclear weapons to defend its allies, thus exposing Western Europe to an attack?

Danish nuclear armed forces?

The ministerial meeting of the North Atlantic Council in December 1956 was important in several respects. Not only was the Political Directive approved, but the United States also disclosed that its allies would be offered dual capability weapons. Shortly after the NATO meeting in December, NATO's Northern Command recommended to the Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE) that six Honest John missile launchers should be allocated to the Danish army in accordance with the suggestion made in October, described above. When the chief of the Northern Command, General Sugden, subsequently met the Danish defence minister to discuss the possibility of nuclear armament for the Danish forces, he informed the Danish delegation of his recommendation to SHAPE. The defence minister approved of the general's action. The minister further inquired whether any of the artillery already deployed by the Danish armed forces could be used to launch nuclear warheads. Sugden promised to investigate the matter. It is difficult to say whether the Danish defence minister was reassured when Sugden expressed the opinion that 'the progress until nuclear artillery [i.e. Honest John] was available to the Danish army had to be slow and gradual. Nobody expected there to be nuclear warheads in Denmark within a few months'.[41] By mid-February 1957, a proposal for the delivery of Honest John and Nike missiles reached the Danish ministry of defence. At this point it had still not been decided how the weapons were to be armed, as the United States could not even offer to store nuclear weapons in a country like Denmark due to restrictions laid down in the US Atomic Energy Law.[42]

Prior to the Danish acceptance, two main points were prominent in the discussion between NATO, the US authorities and Danish military and political decision-makers. One of the major political problems concerning the defence of Denmark was whether to allow foreign forces to be stationed in the country.[43] Before Denmark

40 Memorandum by Hessellund-Jensen, 26 Aug. 1955, 105.I.1.a/1, MFA, DNA (Cph).

41 Memorandum 14 Jan. 1957, Forsvarsministerens møde med general Sugden den 28. december 1956 vedrørende atomartilleri til den danske hær, 96/21, DMD (Cph).

42 Agger and Wolsgaard, 'Den størst mulige fleksibilitet', 8off.

43 Memorandum 14 Jan. 1957, Forsvarsministerens møde med general Sugden den 28. december 1956 vedrørende atomartilleri til den danske hær, 96/21, DMD (Cph).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777306003109 Published online by Cambridge University Press

signed the North Atlantic Treaty, the foreign minister stated reassuringly in parliament that Denmark would not face any demand for foreign bases to be set up on Danish soil simply because Denmark had acceded to the treaty. A few years later, in 1952, the United States offered to deploy US aircraft to Denmark, but the offer was finally declined in 1953.[44] The problem of stationing foreign forces in Denmark was discussed in the press in October 1955 and again during summer 1956. According to a Gallup poll in September 1956, 44 per cent of the Danish population was opposed to foreign troops from another NATO country being stationed in Denmark.[45]

In fact, foreign specialists would be needed at the missile sites to assist in operating the weapons. This was simply established practice, as a number of US air-force advisors had been stationed in Denmark to support the large number of US weapons systems used by the Danish air force.[46] When the subject was discussed with General Sugden, the Danish defence minister believed that NATO had already taken the Danish policy on the presence of allied forces into account, and that the proposal to station Honest John missiles in Denmark did not clash with government policy on the stationing of foreign troops.[47]

The other main point of discussion between the US authorities and the Danish decision-makers concerned the economic consequences. To the US Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG) delegation, the Danish negotiators from the ministry of defence seemed mostly 'concerned with installation costs, land requirements, desirable siting and current tactical concepts'.[48] The US delegation did not expect Denmark to take the final decision 'until the total cost to Denmark has been determined'. It was expected that Denmark 'will ultimately accept Nike. However, it does not appear that Denmark will make a final decision until the political situation [the imminent national election of May 1957] is cleared or until the total cost to Denmark has been determined'.[49]

From the beginning, it was made clear to the Danish decision-makers that the Honest John missiles were intended to replace existing artillery units so that overall costs would remain constant. The numerical limitations on the Danish ground forces made the incorporation of so-called modern weapons desirable because, in theory at least, it would allow a numerically inferior Danish force to stand its ground against a greatly superior force. However, introducing dual capability weapons did not entail an overall saving – it just meant that the rise in costs would be lower than foreseen at the time.

44 Lidegaard, *Jens Otto Krag*, 448ff.; Villaume, *Allieret med forbehold*, 434ff.

45 Villaume, *Allieret med forbehold*, 491f. In this context 'Denmark' means southern Denmark, i.e. not including Greenland.

46 Ibid., 488.

47 Memorandum 14 Jan. 1957, Forsvarsministerens møde med general Sugden den 28. Dec. 1956 vedrørende atomartilleri til den danske hær, 96/21, DMD (Cph).

48 Briefing Paper on Denmark for General Norstad, e. Provision of Nike and Honest John, desp. no. 697, NA.

49 Ibid.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777306003109 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Replacing the existing artillery units with Honest John missiles only made sense if they were equipped with nuclear warheads. The conventional warheads were inefficient, since the entire tactical concept of both Nike and Honest John was dependent on the very wide radius of destruction caused by a nuclear explosion. Honest John was very inaccurate and could only deliver one shell per hour. Nike would only be able to take down a single aircraft with conventional warheads, whereas whole squadrons could be stopped with a single nuclear warhead. Thus in February 1957 the ministry of defence concluded that it was unlikely that Honest John missiles would be used with conventional ammunition in time of war.[50] Everything indicated that the new weapons were intended to be used with nuclear warheads; a conventional warhead for these missiles had not even been produced.

On 6 March 1957, the Danish defence minister accepted the US offer of Nike in principle, not least because of considerable pressure from the United States. Even though it had had several months to draw up an official policy, the Danish government was apparently taken aback by the speed with which they had to reach a decision on the matter. The prime minister had no doubt hoped to postpone this decision until after the May 1957 elections. Now he was forced to make it.

A policy of maximum flexibility

In mid-March 1957 Denmark's de facto acceptance of Nike was leaked to the press. A few days later the Danish government received a threatening letter from the Kremlin.[51] The question of stationing nuclear weapons on Danish soil became a contentious issue in the election campaign. The Danish Communist Party in particular attacked the government's policy. When asked in late April, the prime minister declared that it was his personal opinion that the government would have declined a possible US offer to store nuclear warheads in Denmark. Despite the somewhat remarkable coincidence, the Soviet letter apparently never led to serious worries in Denmark and should not be seen as the key factor in the making of the Danish policy, which was finally adopted when the new tri-party government, headed by the Social Democrats, took office in late May. The fact that Denmark was not the only country to receive such a letter probably contributed to the relatively calm Danish reaction.[52]

The politically ingenious formula 'not under the present circumstances' was used to answer the question of whether the government would allow nuclear weapons on Danish soil. Even though consideration for the views of the Social Liberal Party, which was now part of the government, appears to have been the most important reason for the phrasing of the policy, it must be assumed that the Social Democrats themselves were satisfied with simply not having to accept nuclear weapons.

50 Udenrigsministeriet, *Dansk sikkerhedspolitik 1949–1966* (Copenhagen: Udenrigsministeriet, 1968), appendix 159; Agger and Wolsgaard, 'Den størst mulige fleksibilitet', 84.

51 Udenrigsministeriet, *Dansk sikkerhedspolitik*, appendix 156.

52 Memorandum from meeting in the foreign policy committee, 30 Mar. 1957, DNA (Cph); Villaume, *Allieret med forbehold*, 536f.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777306003109 Published online by Cambridge University Press

The policy on the storage of nuclear warheads on Danish soil as laid down in spring 1957 bore a striking resemblance to the policy regarding the stationing of foreign troops on Danish soil. This was a policy that Denmark shared with Norway, whose attitude towards the stationing of nuclear warheads was explicitly linked to its dogmatic policy of the non-acceptance of foreign troops in peacetime. However, Danish policy on storing nuclear warheads in Denmark was at no point in the 1950s publicly linked to this particular problem, as it was in Norway.

Danish policy regarding nuclear weapons was very dynamic. It never specified *when* the government would allow nuclear weapons on Danish soil, and thus the policy could and would be altered if the key ministers, especially Prime Minister H. C. Hansen, saw sufficient cause.

In late March 1958 the ministry of foreign affairs acknowledged that policy on stationing nuclear weapons on Danish soil had to remain as flexible as possible and could not appear final. As the head of the NATO section emphasised, it could hardly be doubted that the Danish government would, at some point, have to adopt another position on the matter. Although the present formulation seemed to allow for a future policy change, the ministry considered whether to soften the policy by altering the wording. These considerations were kept in mind when writing the prime minister's public speeches. Still, the time had not come for an actual change of policy.[53] In the meantime, it was of the utmost importance to ensure that the policy could be changed if this should be deemed necessary.

The phrasing of Denmark's nuclear policy tilted in favour of those who did not want nuclear warheads on Danish soil but a number of steps were nevertheless taken to facilitate Danish nuclear armament. Besides the introduction of Nike, Honest John and other weapons systems, Danish key personnel received training in the use of nuclear weapons. Storage facilities for nuclear ammunition were established as a result of the US offer to locate nuclear warheads in Western Europe and the decision taken at NATO's ministerial council in December 1957 to establish stores for nuclear weapons in Europe. Funding for housing for the guards was also included in the allied infrastructure programme (10th slice), but this was never built. The necessary allied presence in Denmark was never considered a major obstacle to the introduction of nuclear warheads on Danish soil, since their numbers would be limited to approximately 100–150 persons and their presence could be of a discreet and non-military character. Furthermore, there were already supposed to be personnel from MAAG at the missile sites.[54] A number of symbolic steps were also taken, which were to a large extent motivated by considerable US political pressure in late 1958 and early 1959 for more positive Danish signals on the nuclear question. Thus, in January 1959 the defence minister told SACEUR that the Danish government appreciated 'the military significance of such [atomic] weapons being available' and that there was no reason why Denmark should not 'take all steps necessary to facilitate the

53 Agger and Wolsgaard, 'Den størst mulige fleksibilitet', 94ff.
54 Ibid., 99ff.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777306003109 Published online by Cambridge University Press

introduction of such weapons systems if circumstances change'.[55] The foreign and defence ministers made public and private statements that a change of course over the nuclear question was to be expected. But the Danish moves – whether material or immaterial – and statements were to some extent, so to speak, a matter of selling elastic by the metre. No commitment was ever implied.

There was ample reason for there not to be a permanent ban on nuclear weapons on Danish soil. It would have contradicted NATO's nuclear strategy and undermined the possibility of an allied defence of Denmark. This in turn would have called Denmark's membership of NATO into question, reducing the possibility that United States would use its nuclear weapons to defend Denmark and thus weakening the deterrent. In times of crisis or war such weapons could be deployed, not least since NATO's political authorities no longer assumed that an assault on the NATO area would be launched without warning. Any aggression was expected to be preceded by a period of strong political tension, during which nuclear warheads could be transferred to Denmark.

Danish nuclear policy was thus a delicate balancing act between the opposing forces of those parties who wanted nuclear warheads to be stored on Danish soil, namely NATO, the United States, the Danish armed forces and the non-socialist parties, and of those who did not, namely the Social Liberals, the left and the Soviet Union. Every one taking part could find something they approved of. But the policy also proved to be operational when the individual players pressed for a change. It was the prime minister's opinion that Danish interests were best served in times of peace and crisis by not having nuclear warheads on Danish soil.[56]

With regard to the Soviet Union, the policy contained both a reassurance and a warning of a future change in policy if there were any more political pressure. On the one hand the Danish negotiators could claim that Denmark did not allow nuclear weapons to be stored on Danish soil, while on the other they could refuse to state this in the communiqués.

For their part NATO, and in particular the United States, temporarily accepted the Danish policy, but pressure was still applied. Actual preparations by Denmark for receiving warheads in times of crisis probably constituted one of the main reasons for allied acceptance of Danish policy. However, additional factors explain why the Alliance only brought limited pressure to bear on the Danish ministers, and initially only from the allied military authorities. First, it is likely that the US administration had concluded that its peremptory stand in 1952–3 regarding the stationing of US aircraft and troops on Danish soil had actually been counter-productive. This was a mistake not to be repeated. Second, in 1957, under the US Atomic Energy Law, it was still not possible for the United States to hand over its nuclear warheads to national NATO forces, even with US guard personnel. In 1958, when the law had

55 Telegram from Danish Defence Minister Poul Hansen to SACEUR, General Norstad, 19 Jan. 1959, 105.Dan.6, MFA, DNA (Cph).

56 Government negotiations May 1957, J. O. Krag's Archive, box 47, archive no. 165, Arbejderbevægelsens Bibliotek og Arkiv (Cph).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777306003109 Published online by Cambridge University Press

been amended, there was still no reason to apply pressure, since both Honest John and Nike would not be delivered until 1959. Third, strength in numbers helped: the fact that the Norwegians had adopted the same policy made it harder to apply pressure. Fourth, the prime minister might have brought political leverage to bear in refusing the stationing of nuclear weapons in southern Denmark because of the so-called H. C. Hansen paper of November 1957. In this paper, in deep secrecy, the prime minister gave the United States de facto permission to store nuclear weapons at their base in Greenland. The so-called 'Greenland card' might have been an underlying and implied factor in Denmark's latitude in respect of nuclear policy, though this remains debatable.

In the long term, Danish nuclear policy had two consequences: nuclear warheads would not be stored in Denmark in peacetime, and it would be extremely difficult to gain access to the atomic warheads in case of a rapid Soviet assault. Still, the Danish government had secured the option for the nuclear arming of the Danish armed forces in times of war or crisis. Nuclear weapons might, however, be used by allied forces. It is likely that US or British reinforcements would be armed with nuclear weapons. Preparations were thus made for atomic stockpiling at Danish airfields, which were prepared for possible allied use. And if an attack by the Warsaw Pact countries forced the allied defence westward, the nuclear-armed German forces were supposed to draw back, still fighting, through Jutland. Such a battle had been well planned, using German military stores on Danish soil. Since an attack on Denmark would probably only occur as part of a full-scale attack on NATO, nuclear weapons would be in abundance across Europe, including the Danish theatre. Would reinforcements appear if they were not allowed to bring nuclear weapons? Would the German forces leave their warheads at the border? If the warheads were in Denmark, one might wonder whether the sovereign right of the Danish government to decide how Denmark was to be defended would be respected, or whether it could be asked at all. If they were asked, their answer would probably be in accordance with that given by the head of the NATO office in the Danish ministry of defence during a NATO exercise in May 1957, when General Sugden asked him his position regarding the use of nuclear weapons near Copenhagen. He expressed a view that he probably shared with his political masters. The dilemma was that, if war broke out, using nuclear weapons would certainly kill many Danish citizens and put the continuing existence of Denmark at risk. An occupation might at least leave hope. Therefore the military advisors would have to promise decisive results before they would be allowed to use nuclear weapons.[57]

Conclusion: Danish nuclear policy 1949–60

'It is probable that none of us fully apprehend the implications for war or peace of the release of atomic energy. A century or so hence, historians, if there still are any left, may wonder at our astonishing short-sightedness'. This insight came in a

57 Memorandum by Svend Hansen, 9 May 1957, DMD.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777306003109 Published online by Cambridge University Press

speech by the Canadian foreign minister Lester Pearson in London in April 1956. It reflects the fact that in the early Cold War nobody could foresee the consequences of the invention and use of the most destructive weapon yet to be placed in the hands of mankind. As time went by it became evident that the deterrent worked, but as Lawrence Freedman has emphasised, it worked better in practice than in theory.[58] The consequence of another world war was frightening beyond imagination. Danish nuclear policy from 1949 to 1960 reflects the fact that the Danish decision-makers were in an extremely difficult situation and had to manoeuvre carefully in uncharted and somewhat dangerous waters.

The Danish government did not adopt policies that differed essentially from those of the other Western allies. One exception, however, was the policy not to allow the storage of nuclear warheads on Danish soil 'under the present circumstances', a policy shared only with Norway. Danish politicians faced the dilemma of not wanting a nuclear war on Danish soil while acknowledging the need to take steps to deter the Soviet Union from an attack and thus avoid occupation.

Denmark wanted to avoid war, and the nuclear deterrent was seen as a way of achieving this. But the deterrent relied upon the will of the United States to use its weapons. How could Europeans be sure that these would be used only if and when they themselves found it necessary? They could not.

Unlike other European allies, Denmark did not want the right to decide *when* to use nuclear weapons to be in the hands of anyone other than the US president, or the British prime minister with regard to the British nuclear arsenal. The government worked against proliferation on this matter as well as against nuclear proliferation in general. The greater the number of countries possessing nuclear weapons or the right to use them, the greater the risk of nuclear war. Furthermore, it was worth considering whether the deterrent effect of nuclear weapons against an attack on Denmark would diminish if other NATO governments had to be consulted. Would France risk a nuclear strike on its soil just to defend Denmark? Would Portugal?

However, it is important to emphasise that the Danish government, along with Britain, for example, fought to keep the decision as political and not allow it to be made by the military. This was, of course, in accordance with the wording in the Atlantic Treaty.[59] Had there been official and precise guidelines instead of the vague and general passages in the Treaty (Art. 5), these would in fact have reduced the flexibility of the allied response to Soviet aggression. Not only would this have allowed the Soviet forces to go right to the brink of war without risking a nuclear attack, it would also have increased the possibility of an accidental nuclear war. None of these options were desirable to Danish decision-makers.

58 Lawrence Freedman, *The Revolution in Strategic Affairs*, Adelphi Paper 318 (Oxford: Oxford University Press for the International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1998), 20.

59 The North Atlantic Treaty http://www.nato.int/docu/basictxt/treaty.htm.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777306003109 Published online by Cambridge University Press