



Small State Strategy in Practice: The Formulation and Execution of Danish Theories of Success in the United Nations Security Council, 2005–2006

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ABSTRACT

In 2005–2006, Denmark held a seat in the United Nations Security Council and, thus, had an opportunity to gain influence on international security issues otherwise not available to small states. This article applies the concept of theory of success as a heuristic tool to unfold how Denmark prepared and executed a general influence strategy in the Security Council. Furthermore, the article applies the concept to three instances where Denmark developed and executed issue-specific strategies: the establishment of the Peacebuilding Commission, the direction of the Counter-Terrorism Committee, and the referral of war crimes in Darfur to the International Criminal Court. Based on newly released archival records in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the article tracks the strategy formulation within Danish diplomacy that sought to gain influence despite Denmark's lack of relative power. The article also draws important lessons from the instances of successful Danish efforts in the Security Council that are applicable for the Danish election campaign for membership of the Security Council in 2025–2026.

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The study of small states elected as members of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) offers a window into the making and execution of strategies at the highest level of international diplomacy. Small states seek election to the UNSC to promote their interests and values – but face an uphill battle achieving this. The UNSC is an arena of intense competition among its members, who all seek to advance their particular interests and values without necessarily being willing to take on responsibility (Engelbrekt, 2015). The five permanent members (P5) hold veto power and possess important institutional memory in addition to their other sources of power. Unlike larger elected members, small states do not wield sufficient relative power to offset some of the P5's advantages (Ekengren et al., 2020). Their diplomatic resources are stretched by the workload of monitoring and deciding on the many conflicts that the UN has managed for years (Adler-Nissen & Pouliot, 2014). To gain influence, and to compensate for their disadvantageous position, elected small states are obliged to think creatively as they seek to persuade others. This is the domain of strategy. According to Lawrence Freedman (2013, p. xii), the purpose of strategy is “about getting more out of a situation than the starting balance of power would suggest. It is the art of creating power.” By carrying out a detailed empirical examination of an elected small state in the UNSC, this article aims to illuminate how a small state develops and executes strategies that may lead to greater influence than that warranted by the power distribution and institutional order of the UNSC.

The two-year membership means that formulation and implementation are, clearly, separate processes. Elected members can carefully formulate a general strategy to gain influence on questions of international security in the period leading up to their membership; during the intense two years in the UNSC, elected members have to execute that strategy in a fashion that takes into account the political dynamic of the UNSC. Based on previously unpublished diplomatic records, this article aims to provide the first detailed account of how Denmark developed a general strategy designed to gain influence in the UNSC and broke down the general strategy into specific strategies to handle particular international security issues between 2005 and 2006, when the country held a seat in the UNSC. More, the article adds empirical evidence to the strand of strategic studies positing that strategy is mainly a question of building a theory of success to explain how and why a range of actions will lead to goal attainment (Hill & Gerras, 2018; Jakobsen, 2022; Hoffman, 2020; Meiser, 2016; Meiser & Nath, 2018; Meiser & Quirk, 2020). The article uses the concept of the theory of success as a heuristic lens to analyse the preparation taken by Danish diplomats for the membership period and how those ideas were adapted to specific circumstances of P5 resistance requiring a bespoke theory.

This article argues that Denmark developed and executed what amounted to a general theory of success tailored to the strategic dynamic of the UNSC and specific theories of success pertaining to particular security issues. In the period leading up to Danish membership, Danish diplomats developed a general theory of success for the entire membership period based on the recent experience of other small states in the UNSC. The general theory explains how the diplomatic actions, or tactics, of preparation, bilateral diplomacy, and pro-active engagement with the UN organization connect with four broad priorities. Undefined priorities allowed Danish diplomats to seize on promising opportunities for influence without investing prestige in goals that would later prove unattainable.

The article analyses three such instances of Danish strategy where issue-specific strategies were nested within the general priorities. First, Denmark developed a theory of success for the founding of the Peacebuilding Commission, which included the use of expert knowledge and relations to the Secretariat. Second, Denmark articulated a theory of success for its engagement in counter-terrorism which identified the demonstration of hard work in relation to counter-terrorism as a necessary action in order to gain Russian and US acceptance of the inclusion of human rights. Third, Denmark followed a theory of success that saw consensus building among the nine UNSC members who were signatories to the International Criminal Court (ICC) as key to convincing China, Russia, and the United States to accept the referral of war crimes in Darfur to the ICC.

The article is organized in six sections. The first introduces the construct of the theory of success in the context of small state influence. The second discusses the method chosen for the examination of archival material from the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The third section examines the Danish formulation of a general theory of success prior to taking up

the seat in the UNSC; the fourth analyses the Danish contribution to the establishment of the Peacebuilding Commission in 2005. The fifth section studies the preparation and execution of the Danish chairmanship of the Counter-Terrorism Committee, while the sixth examines the political dilemma that characterized the referral of alleged war crimes in Darfur to the ICC. The final, concluding, section looks ahead to the upcoming Danish campaign for election to the UNSC in 2025–2026.

THEORY OF SUCCESS AND SMALL STATES

Theory of success is a concept intended to capture the key part of the strategy formulation process –even strategy itself. In fact, Jeffrey W. Meiser and Sitara Nath (2018) define a strategy as an explanation of how and why a given set of actions will cause a desired outcome. The strategy process is the creative and critical identification and evaluation of plausible causal mechanisms; strategy is the (temporary) product containing an explanation that causally links a set of actions with a specified goal.

In order to connect this article's understanding of theory of success to Peter Viggo Jakobsen's (2022) operationalization of the concept in this special issue, I consider an action to be physical and intellectual means used in a specific manner – a combination of ways and means; how one particular action is undertaken is the realm of tactics. In diplomacy, tactical activities conducted by diplomats may be negotiations, bilateral meetings, or the formulation of letters, something which the skilful diplomat will do with timing and an understanding of the specific arena (Schmitt 2020, p. 928). A theory of success will typically draw on tactical insights, as the causal mechanism needs to incorporate the likely reactions of other relevant actors and to identify a feasible direction towards the desired end in the light of these anticipated dynamics (Meiser, 2016, p. 90). Few would argue that a causal mechanism detailing future events could fully take into account the contingency of human agency or the complexity of social systems. Nevertheless, the process of weighing alternative theories against each other may help to validate the decisions by forcing decision-makers to articulate the mechanisms they consider most plausible. This process may help to rule out less feasible strategies.

While the extent to which the agents under study engage in such a systematic approach may affect the quality of the strategy, such an approach is not a prerequisite for the process of strategy-making. On the contrary, any goal-oriented activity has a theory of success. Even a tacit strategy involves choices, because a goal can always be pursued in different ways (Meiser & Quirk, 2020). Moreover, this understanding of strategy includes all forms of strategic activities, regardless of the kind of actor or sector. Although diplomats and politicians looking for ways to achieve national goals in an international organization may not use the language of strategy, their considerations nonetheless qualify as strategy. The purpose of applying the concept of the theory of success as a lens to study diplomatic preparation for, and participation in, the UNSC is to bring to light how ideas about future interactions inform a small state's attempt to reach policy goals. Theory of success and its associated process of creative and critical thinking are particularly relevant in the context of small states engaged in diplomatic negotiations concerning international security. The decision-makers of the small state need to conceive of a theory of success taking into account the small state's relative lack of means vis-à-vis great and middle powers (Rostoks, 2010, p. 87). This article, therefore, makes a minor contribution to the literature on small states in international relations by introducing and applying the concept of theory of success.

Conversely, existing literature offers three insights, particularly relevant to this analysis, into commonplace elements of theory of success as employed by small states in pursuit of goals in international organisations. First, a small state may turn a close relationship to a great power into influence, because the great power may allow the trusted small state access to policy discussions and invite substantial inputs (Græger, 2015; Long, 2017, pp. 196–197; Pedersen & Reykers, 2020). Second, traditional shelter theory has been expanded to include international organizations: small states seeking protection and influence by close involvement in international organizations (Wivel & Ingebritsen, 2019). A niche shelter strategy in an international organization may be to use a relative advantage providing the state with specific competence or international recognition; this may be turned into norm-entrepreneurship or other forms of influence (Long, 2017, 184–185). Third, small states may build alliances among

each other to gain bargaining power or to act as mediators among great powers (Deitelhoff & Wallbott, 2012; Bueger & Wivel, 2018; Schoeller, 2022). In fact, the small state may even be able to generate power through diplomatic interactions if its diplomats are considered competent by other diplomats in the international organization (Adler-Nissen, 2015). I will return to the insights from the small state literature in the analytical sections. Now, I turn to the question of how to study theories of success in a Danish context.

STUDYING DANISH THEORIES OF SUCCESS IN THE UNSC

Danish actions to formulate and to execute theories of success in the context of temporary membership of the UNSC are divided between the preparatory period, before the assumption of the seat, and the execution of the strategy in the two years of membership. This divide informs the operationalization. While the first step is to identify the general Danish theory of success for the membership period, Danish decision-makers did not necessarily frame their thoughts about the membership period in the language of theory of success or causal logic, and nor was any specific theory of success necessarily evaluated systematically against alternatives. In many ways, bureaucratic politics are very likely to stray from such rationalist notions (Popescu, 2018, 453–455). Consequently, the examination of the development of the Danish theory of success must ask questions that translate into the realities of Danish decision-making. The first section of the analysis thus asks three questions concerning the general strategy, inspired by the framework given in this issue by Peter Viggo Jakobsen (2022). This section is based on the understanding that the membership period is an opportunity for influence, and thus asks, first, what opportunities for influence did Danish decision-makers identify in the strategic environment of the UNSC? Second, what actions did Danish decision-makers identify as most likely to produce goal attainment and why? And third, what threats and risks to goal attainment did the Danish decision-makers recognize?

The next step is the examination of specific strategies to deal with particular security policy issues during the membership period. This step is important, because strategy implementation involves competitive interaction with other actors, who have other priorities and theories of success. The way Danish decision-makers implement, and possibly adjust, their theory of success is an integral part of the strategy process. To each of the specific theories of success, the analysis asks two questions. First, to what extent was the general Danish theory of success developed into a specific theory of success in this instance? And second, to what extent were Danish diplomats able to depend on the theory of success in order to meet opportunities, threats, and risks that arose as events unfolded?

The analysis of the execution centres on three cases. These were selected based on two criteria. First, the cases must vary in their theory of success in order to fulfil the heuristic purpose of illuminating how different circumstances require different translations of the general theory of success; second, the issue had to involve the interests of one or more of the permanent members that openly went against the Danish position. In cases where there exists declared opposition to the Danish ambitions, Danish diplomats and politicians are more likely to leave a paper trail detailing how Denmark took into consideration the reactions of states working towards other ends. Moreover, opposition and negotiations require Danish diplomats to adapt tactically and possibly to revise the theory of success in the light of events, which would cast light on strategy-making in practice. Based on these criteria, the study settled on the process behind the founding of the Peacebuilding Commission in September 2005, the Danish chairmanship of the Counter-Terrorism Committee, and the UNSC referral of Darfur war crimes to the International Criminal Court. Together, these subcases offer the best possibility of studying the diversity and intricacies of Danish strategy-making and specific theories of success.

This is the first study to access the archival records related to Denmark's temporary membership of the UNSC in the years 2005–2006. The Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) provided access to records on the diplomatic footwork required to see Denmark elected to the UNSC, the preparation of the Danish membership, and general records from the membership period, including those pertaining to the selected cases such as the ICC referral of alleged Darfur war crimes. The archives contain correspondence between the Danish UN representation in New York and the Home Office in Copenhagen, in addition to correspondence between the Home Office and embassies, most importantly the Danish embassies in the P5 countries. It further

contains records of internal considerations at the Home Office and the correspondence with other ministries, such as the Ministry of Defence and the Prime Minister's Office, as well as communication with the Danish Parliament. When possible, the archival records were validated by other sources, such as academic examinations of the establishment of the Peacebuilding Committee.

THE FORMULATION OF THE DANISH THEORY OF SUCCESS

In August 2003, the Western European and Others Group endorsed the Danish candidature – a de facto election to the UNSC. As one of five regional groups in the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), the group's endorsement was crucial as seats in the UNSC are regionally distributed. Soon after this, Danish decision-makers devoted their attention to the conceivable opportunities, threats, and risks during the Danish membership period. Yet they did not start from scratch. The MFA had appointed a steering committee for the Danish candidacy that began the formulation of priorities as early as August 2001. Instead of identifying specific goals, civil servants and politicians identified four priorities: African conflicts, conflict management, new threats (mainly terrorism), and reforms of the UNSC. In an internal memo dated 5 March 2004, the Permanent Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Friis Arne Petersen, presented Foreign Minister Per Stig Møller with the final priorities, explicitly referring to the government's foreign policy strategy and its focus on new threats (*Memorandum 5/3, 2004*). African states had long been the primary beneficiaries of Danish development aid, and Denmark considered itself a frontrunner and role model in concern to the integration of military and civilian means in crisis management and post-conflict peacebuilding. Conflict management and reform of the UNSC reflected the agenda of the UN administration, which produced a number of reports and recommendations to improve the body's efficiency and legitimacy. In the wake of 9/11, new threats such as terrorism became an important focus. Based on archival material from the MFA, the process of identifying Danish priorities came about without substantial internal deliberations on alternative priorities, although a verbal process might have preceded it. Interestingly, the priorities were first formulated by Ellen Margrethe Løj, the Danish Ambassador to the UN, who would become responsible for day-to-day diplomatic tactics in the UNSC between 2005 and 2006. With very few changes, the priorities gained support from both the leadership of the MFA, the Foreign Minister, and the Government's Foreign Policy Committee (*Memoranda 12/2, 5/3, and 23/4, 2004*). The process of formulating ends was, thus, a cooperative process conducted at the diplomatic and political level. We may assume diplomats in New York had a clearer picture of the feasibility of pursuing specific opportunities. Settling on four broad priorities allowed Denmark considerable room for manoeuvre when faced with opportunities and threats. In fact, pursuing less strongly determined goals is probably a necessary condition for a small state in the UNSC. Between 2003 and 2004, Denmark and the other elected members sought out different positions available between 2005 and 2006; Denmark considered the sanction committee regarding Sierra Leone, taking the lead of handling of an African conflict in the UNSC, and the so-called 1267 committee concerning sanctions related to terrorism. While none of the opportunities materialized, the broadness of the priorities meant that Denmark had the flexibility to focus on other intermediate goals within the same priorities.

A reconstruction of the deliberations made during the preparation ascertains three main causal mechanisms in the Danish theory of success connecting diplomatic tactics with goal accomplishment. The first is based on the outsized power of the P5 members in the UNSC, which made them the key to Danish influence. In accordance with the findings of the small state literature, Danish diplomats saw bilateral consultations as an important diplomatic action. Consultations would make it possible to identify overlapping interests, which in turn would help Denmark select goals within its broad priorities with the highest probabilities of being adopted (*Memorandum 12/2, 2004*). Consultations primarily included the United States and the fellow EU members, France and the United Kingdom, but also China and Russia. The Permanent Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and the ambassadors in these countries met repeatedly with the five ministries of foreign affairs. This added to the efforts of the Danish UN representation in New York, who worked to strengthen personal relations to the P5 representations.

In addition to identifying overlaps in interests, the meeting also allowed Danish diplomats to establish personal contacts and to build trust, which made it easier to build the coalitions necessary for the promotion of Danish priorities. In return, the P5 members used the meetings to influence Danish priorities and views. The United Kingdom shared some of their internal correspondence, and France and the United States held meetings that introduced Denmark to their partial views on the intricacies of diplomacy in the UNSC (Report 26/4, 2004). The three states no doubt sought to influence Danish positions, to which Denmark was not impervious: remarkably, in August 2004, Foreign Minister Per Stig Møller asked his counterpart Colin Powell, US Secretary of State, about any wishes the United States have for Danish priorities in 2005–2006 (Minute 3/8 2004). While I shall return to US influence on Danish counter-terrorism goals, the principal mechanism is the detailed understanding of P5 interests that, in conjunction with Danish priorities, defined the Danish room for manoeuvre.

The second causal mechanism in the general Danish theory of success focused on the social effects of diligent preparations. Preparation was a necessary action to cope with the massive workload of conflict management. If Denmark contributed competently with highly detailed knowledge, it would increase its credibility, which might make coalition-building easier (Minutes, 11/12, 2003; Memorandum 17/9, 2004). Elected members without the necessary knowledge to contribute to conflict management found themselves marginalized in the UNSC. Colleagues from Ireland and Norway – two recently elected members – warned the Permanent Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs that the P5 would often regard the priorities of elected members as a nuisance in the UNSC meetings due to the heavy workload of handling ongoing conflicts. In the internal correspondence, Danish civil servants reason that without credibility and manifest competence, Denmark would not be able to influence decisions on key issues (Memorandum 17/9, 2004; Minutes 21/12, 2004). Nevertheless, the theory of success had to take into account the limited means that Denmark was willing to commit to diplomatic action. Responding to the experience of Norway, Denmark's representation was expanded from 8 to 14 people, including one military staff officer to handle the workload of ongoing armed conflicts. The expanded representation was, however, still relatively small. As a result, the internal working group decided to establish 31 virtual working groups with inputs from relevant embassies, the Danish Defence Intelligence Service, and the Danish Armed Forces. Each working group prepared work packages for all current and potential conflicts. In case the conflict was handled within the UN, the Government's Foreign Policy Committee would sign off the work package (Memorandum 24/10, 2003). Preparations had a practical element, helping the small UN representation handle the workload – but Danish diplomats further expected an augmented social position in the UNSC, which in turn might generate power in other negotiations (Adler-Nissen, 2015).

The third causal mechanism follows the institutional shelter logic. Danish diplomats considered the diplomatic action of establishing close contacts to the office of the UN Secretary-General and other UN organs as key to aligning Danish initiatives with UN institutional priorities (Minutes 21/12, 2004). In this line of thinking, close contacts and interaction with the UN agencies could potentially bestow legitimacy and agenda-setting support to Danish priorities. However, the enlargement of the representation was not matched by new engagement in UN peacekeeping missions or an increase in development aid to gain recognition among the UN agencies. At the time, the Danish foreign policy favoured US-led military operations, and the government chose to maintain the reduced level of development aid it had decided on in 2002. Nevertheless, Danish development aid was still among the highest in the world, relatively speaking, and Denmark could rely on its reputation as a staunch supporter of the United Nations (Jakobsen & Kjærsgaard, 2017). Close coordination with the UN Secretary-General and the organisation's agencies was expected to bestow legitimacy on Danish proposals if they were an expression of more than national interests.

Addressing the question of which threats and risks Danish decision-makers took into account, we must address two sets of risks with the potential to impede the prospect of success. First, political decision-makers had little interest in reconsidering their reluctance to prioritize UN operations, despite the possible consequences for Danish legitimacy. Second, Danish support for the unilateral US invasion of Iraq was politically controversial. The United States had not been able to pass a resolution providing a mandate for the war in the UNSC. In the EU, NATO, and among the Nordic states, disagreement inhibited cooperation. Early on, civil servants in the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs expressed concerns that the decision to go to war

would be detrimental for the country's election to the UNSC. At least two-thirds of the General Assembly's members would have to vote in favour, and there was a possibility that France and Germany might orchestrate a campaign against Danish membership (Memorandum 6/3, 2003). However, as preparations went along, it became clear that the fear of diplomatic stigmatization in 2005–2006 was overblown. Not only was Denmark careful to coordinate positions within the EU, the United States was keen on re-establishing good relations to allies and the other P5 members.

In the preparatory phase, Danish diplomats and politicians built a general theory of success. Goals (or, rather, priorities) were broad and gave considerable room for manoeuvre, allowing Denmark to seize upon opportunities for influence, such as a chairmanship of a committee. The broadness of the priorities also provided a “narrative flexibility,” which meant that Danish decision-makers did not have to explain why highly specific goals were not achieved. It also meant that the three causal mechanisms explained how Denmark could garner influence in general, if not necessarily on specific issues.

The following sections examine three specific theories of success on particular issues. The three specific theories of success were nested within the general theory of success, but specify concrete goals and causal mechanisms accordingly.

FOUNDING THE PEACEBUILDING COMMISSION

The agenda of peacebuilding, in contrast to the well-established peacekeeping operations, only took off in 1992 with the *Agenda for Peace* report (Campbell & Kaspersen, 2008). In 2000, the Brahimi report identified the lack of integration within the UN organs as an important obstacle to effective peacebuilding (Campbell & Kaspersen, 2008). In September 2005, the United Nations World Summit agreed to establish the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC). In the following years, the Commission sought to integrate civilian and military efforts in peacebuilding missions. Denmark wholeheartedly supported these ideas, and sought to promote the agenda that dovetailed with the Danish positions on the subject. The PBC corresponded to three of the four Danish priorities: reforms of the UN, new threats, and (in particular) conflict management. For Danish diplomats, the most important causal mechanism was based on the logic of institutional shelter. Diplomatic actions to promote the creation of the PBC took place within the UN system of expert groups and agencies with the expectation that if the issue of the PBC fitted hand-in-glove with the UN Secretary-General's agenda, it would mobilize a broad member state coalition and marginalize the reluctant P5 members. Moreover, diplomatic action to separate the issue of the PBC from wider reforms of the UNSC would enable Denmark to put the PBC on the agenda of the World Summit without triggering a P5 veto, because the initiative would not threaten the national interests of the P5.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs made use of Denmark's prominent position within the donor community, which had been established through decades of high levels of development aid and international activism, in order to create awareness of the PBC (Jakobsen & Kjærsgaard, 2017). In 2004, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs supported research-based activities that influenced the agenda of peacebuilding. Together with Tanzania – an elected member in the same period and a major recipient of Danish development aid – Denmark hosted a seminar on strengthening the civilian capacity of UN peacebuilding that presented international research funded by the ministry (Forman, 2004). The research influenced the recommendations of a prominent High-Level Panel, an expert group established by Secretary-General Kofi Annan to identify threats to international security, and policy and institutional changes to deal with them. In December 2004, the High-Level Panel publicly proposed the Peacebuilding Commission (Jenkins, 2013).

After becoming a member of the UNSC, Denmark built on the strong support among the UN agencies and its close-knit cooperation with Tanzania. In January 2005, the two countries co-hosted a peacebuilding seminar in New York, which increased the awareness of the possibility of creating a PBC. Denmark also used its chairmanship of the UNSC in May 2005, chairing an open hearing on peacebuilding in which all members of the UNSC and 23 other member states contributed to the debate, and inviting James Wolfensohn, the President of the World Bank, who expressed his support for the founding of the PBC. This support was important, as the World Bank would be a key donor to the PBC (Note 14/6, 2005). As a result, the monthly assessment

published by the Danish chair underscored “the UNSC’s unconditional support to renew and improve UN’s ability to lead peacebuilding. For the first time the need for the UNSC coordination with the UN development agencies was recognized – an important step for the broad approach to peacebuilding.” When preparations for the UN World Summit in September 2005 picked up, the year-long campaign to create awareness and garner support paid off. The United Nations Department of Peace Operations expressed support for the PBC, and President of the General Assembly Jan Eliasson agreed to prioritize the PBC in the agenda for the General Assembly. With little resistance, the World Summit voted to establish the PBC, a decision reaffirmed by the General Assembly and the UNSC in Resolution 1645 of December 2005.

However, political issues in the UNSC challenged its creation. Danish diplomats needed to approach the question of the PBC in relation to the difficult debate on reforming the UNSC, which the High-Level Panel had suggested. For years, Denmark had supported the inclusion of Germany and Japan, and possibly Brazil, India, and an African state, as permanent members. The high stakes of changing the composition of the UNSC were vividly illustrated once Denmark became a member of the UNSC. On January 13 2005, the ambassadors of Brazil, Germany, India, and Japan delivered an *aide memoire* to the Permanent Undersecretary of Foreign Affairs to promote a reform model sketched in the High-Level Panel’s report. A few weeks later, the so-called Coffee Club of states expressed their opposition to the aide memoire. The Coffee Club, which included Argentina, Italy, Korea, Mexico, Pakistan, and Spain, preferred a model of semi-permanent members of the UNSC, and warned that the question of UNSC reform might overshadow post-conflict initiatives (Minutes, 3/2, 2005). This pressure may have added to Chinese and Russian reluctance to reform the UNSC. As a consequence, Denmark needed to promote the PBC as a separate initiative rather than a component in a wide-ranging reform. Denmark had, however, already consulted with the P5 in the autumn of 2004, all of which aired scepticism of reforms. The question of a reform of the UNSC never gained traction, which helped Denmark in promoting the PBC as a separate initiative.

A second threat came from John Bolton, the newly appointed US Ambassador to the UN, who fervently criticized the proposed Peacebuilding Commission a few months before the General Assembly (Jenkins, 2013, p. 64). At that time, however, John Bolton faced an uphill battle as a broad support for the PBC was formed among the other members of the Security Council and the General Assembly – the organ with the function of passing the crucial vote. Denmark played a role behind the scenes by coordinating closely with Tanzania and President Eliasson in order to secure broad support in the General Assembly. Denmark also likely coordinated with EU members and other UNSC members supportive of the PBC, but there are no archival record documenting this. During the negotiations, the then-Assistant Secretary General Bob Orr attributed this success to the Danish efforts, writing “the office of the Secretary General was very pleased with the Danish efforts to gather support for the PBC. Many states took credit for the proposal, but it was known within the Secretariat, who had lifted the task” (Correspondence 12/4, 2005, MIS555). Moreover, the United States had not opposed the founding of the PBC prior to the appointment of John Bolton. Bolton’s critique was probably just part of a wider attack on the bodies of the United Nations. In the end, Denmark’s specific theory of success proved successful; a broad coalition of countries in the General Assembly adopted the PBC, and the issue was isolated from wider reform debates. The specific theory of success relied on a detailed understanding of the mechanism of institutional shelter within the UN which was, itself, nested within the general theory of success.

CHAIRMANSHIP OF THE COUNTER-TERRORISM COMMITTEE

The Counter-Terrorism Committee (CTC) is tasked with monitoring and supporting the implementation of Security Council Resolution 1373, mandating UN member states to implement counter-terrorism legislation, technologies, and procedures. In 2003, Ambassador Ellen Margrethe Løj identified the CTC as the most interesting committee for Denmark to chair, because the CTC worked most intensively with developing states, many of which Denmark supported with development aid (Memorandum 21/7, 2003). In March 2004, Foreign Minister Per Stig Møller internally resolved that the Danish priority would be the CTC rather than the two other committees related to the War on Terror (Memorandum 5/3, 2004). Moreover, the handling of new threats was one of Denmark’s four priorities. The Danish ambitions were to

make the CTC more efficient, to increase its focus on human rights and legal certainty, against the wishes of China, Russia, and partly the United States, and increase its cooperation with regional organizations and the United Nations Development Programme. In tying development aid to a security agenda, the latter provoked contestation among the UN development agencies (*Memorandum 13/1, 2005*). In order to accomplish the goals, Denmark held to a theory of success that relied on two kinds of diplomatic actions: bilateral diplomacy with Russia and the United States, the two P5 members most concerned about terrorism, and a highly activist approach to the chairmanship. The focus on relations to great powers is in line with one of the causal mechanisms of the general theory of success. By demonstrating sincerity and concern for Russian and American priorities, the diplomats expected that the P2 would accept Danish priorities as a small price for increasing international cooperation on counterterrorism.

Denmark received a prompt indication of the concern the United States held for the effectiveness of the committee. In a letter to Foreign Minister Per Stig Møller, US Secretary of State Colin Powell wrote that “confronting terrorism will remain among the council’s highest priorities as the council works to build and sustain the global will, capacity, standards, and institutions necessary to fight terrorism effectively” (*Correspondence 20/10, 2004*). Still reeling from the terror attack on Beslan, Russia insisted both on chairing the CTC in 2004 and on extending its tenure until April 2005. Engaging Russia and the United States diplomatically and demonstrating Denmark’s dedication and ability to improve the efficiency of the CTC would potentially convince them of Denmark’s sincerity, in turn encouraging their acceptance of the country’s (limited) ends.

Even though counter-terrorism initiatives received broad support from the P5, Denmark also faced resistance to its assumption of the chairmanship, hindering the attainment of its goals. First, the Danish delegation to the UN noted that the CTC’s initial push for documentation from member states had turned into “a ritual of reporting. The use of resources is not prioritized according to actual need, and incoming reports are dealt with in an uncritical and routinely manner.” (*Correspondence 28/1, 2004*). To demonstrate competency, the Danish chair would have to reform the way the CTC worked. Second, Russian authorities were angered by Denmark’s decision to give asylum to prominent Chechen opposition politicians and its effort to secure the release of a Danish Guantanamo Bay prisoner who had been active in Chechnya. In addition, the United States vacillated between nominating Denmark and the Philippines; the Philippines, as a non-Western candidate, would face less opposition from the CTC’s intended audience, the developing states (*Memorandum 15/10, 2004*). The lack of clear P5 support and organizational stasis challenged the specific Danish theory of success.

This case is a rare example of Denmark translating US goodwill from Danish war contributions to tangible outcomes. In November 2004, when the United States began to doubt the capacity of the Philippines to handle the chair of the CTC, a senior US diplomat ensured support for the Danish Permanent Secretary of State on the grounds that “the US owed Denmark thanks for the active Danish participation in Afghanistan and Iraq.” However, “if Russia refused a Danish chairmanship, the US would have to reconsider its position” (*Report 23/11, 2004*). Only after a number of high-level, bilateral consultations between Russia and the United States did Russia accept the Danish chairmanship, but the Russian Vice Foreign Minister insisted that Denmark “needed to continue the reform of the CTC, and increase counter-terrorism efforts against Chechyan in Denmark” (*Correspondence 21/12, 2004*).

Once Denmark took the chair, Danish efforts concentrated on demonstrating competency. The approach was to address the inefficiency of the Counter Terrorism Executive Directorate (CTED), a body subordinate to the CTC and responsible for the daily work of monitoring the implementation of resolution 1373. The CTED was instructed to reduce its demands for reports from the member states to clear the “backlog” of unprocessed reports, focus on country visits, and tailor assistance to member states most in need. The Danish pressure on CTED resulted in public clashes. At a CTC meeting in January 2006, Ambassador Løj “expressed her disappointment with the work of CTED.” The Danish critique was clearly aligned with Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States who wanted a more “pro-active CTED” (*Correspondence 2/2, 2006*). The Danish chair also demanded a plan for the engagement with regional organizations, which resulted in a sustained CTED engagement with those organizations, especially those most challenged by the requirements of 1373. Most importantly, the Danish representation

ensured that CTED had a human rights specialist that took part in country visits and monitoring reports (Correspondence 29/12, 2006). Russia and the United States, who otherwise insisted that human rights were outside the mandate of 1373 and the CTC, accepted that CTED added human rights (Correspondence 29/12, 2006). Apparently, Russia and the United States acted as expected in the Danish theory of success in deeming a small concession to Denmark on human rights an acceptable cost for increasing the efficiency of the CTC.

The Danish efforts meant that Russia came to accept Denmark as a competent chair. In a bilateral meeting, Anatolij Safonov, President Putin's Special Representative for International Cooperation, declared that "Denmark had made a great effort as chair of the CTC. Denmark had continued the work in the right spirit: concerned, but determined. It will be difficult for the next chair to match the work of Denmark and Russia." Russian satisfaction meant that Danish priorities, especially human rights, avoided P5 resistance. In an otherwise harsh evaluation of the CTED in the Security Council at the end of the Danish chairmanship period, Denmark received universal praise for its efforts and a Danish diplomat noted that "CTED's lack of results has not been attributed to the Chair" (Minutes 27/12, 2006). The specific causal mechanism of the theory of success relied on the general mechanism identified in the preparatory phase of aligning closely with P5 members as a way to pursue minor Danish ends.

THE REFERRAL OF DARFURIAN WAR CRIMES TO ICC

In Resolution 1593 of 31 March, 2005, the UNSC decided for the first time to refer all war crimes allegedly committed in Darfur to the International Criminal Court (ICC). During the presidency of George Bush, the United States strongly opposed the ICC, fearing it might become a legal weapon used against US troops. In a similar vein, China and Russia opposed the ICC due to their opposition to building a permanent criminal court, preferring instead ad hoc tribunals to handle war crimes in specific conflicts. Despite their initial opposition and support for an ad hoc tribunal, none of them vetoed the resolution. For Denmark, the referral to the ICC was a success that fitted within the priority of strengthening conflict management (which specifically mentions strengthening international justice). However, getting there forced Denmark to choose between acting as a mediator among great powers and being part of a coalition of like-minded ICC-signatories. Denmark followed a theory of success that suggested that diplomatic actions of consultations and demarches would increase the coherence among the ICC-signatories in the UNSC. If the ICC-signatories could stay together, the United States would eventually accept an ICC referral to avoid diplomatic isolation.

Denmark adopted its position early in the process, supporting a coalition of the ICC signatories and the EU. In a press statement, the foreign minister declared that "our clear position is that the ICC is the natural choice" (Press Release 1/2, 2005). Importantly, the EU General Affairs Council – with the exception of the UK, which raised concerns about adopting a fixed, public position early on – had given unanimous support to ICC referral the day before (Correspondence 1/2, 2005). The British civil servants undoubtedly faced immense pressure from the United States (Report 14/1, 2005). The backing of the EU ameliorated Danish vulnerability to US pressure. The public stance went against the wishes of the United States, who had appealed to discretion some months earlier. In a phone conversation with the Danish State Secretary for Foreign Policy, a US ambassador advised that "[Western] views on the referral of the war crimes should be privately coordinated in advance to avoid a derailing discussion about the ICC in the UNSC" (Minutes 20/10, 2004).

Nonetheless, the public stance seemed less confrontational and risky at the outset. In a meeting with the Danish Ambassador to the United States, "Wolfowitz admitted that the question of referral was new to him, but said that the original US position was that the use of the ICC demanded a UNSC resolution in each case. A junior aide intervened and said that the US position was an ad hoc tribunal in Africa" (Correspondence 4/2, 2005). The Danish position became risky, however, when the United States ruled out an ICC-solution and elaborated on their ad hoc tribunal alternative, which saw early support from Algeria, China, and Russia (Correspondence 9/2, 2005). In a briefing of the EU ambassadors in the State Department, the US-Sudan coordinator made it clear that an ICC referral "would be over their cold, dead bodies" – the "they" here being the Pentagon, who wielded influence in the White House (Minutes 17/2, 2005). Even if the pro-ICC bloc avoided a veto, they would still run the risk of a weakened, separate, resolution.

In response, Denmark sought to increase the coherence of the coalition of nine ICC-signatories within the UNSC rather than act as a mediator between the United States, France and Britain, who continued their negotiations at the capital level. While the negotiations among the three Western permanent members were the most important factor of the outcome, the other ICC signatories contributed to pressuring the pressure on the United States. First, with the approval of Foreign Minister Per Stig Møller, Denmark coordinated a *démarche* with France and Greece to a number of African states, most of them recipients of Danish aid, both to gather support for an ICC referral and to counter a similar US *démarche* (Note 15/2, 2005). Second, Denmark offered to co-sponsor the French resolution proposal together with Greece, Romania, and possibly Britain to signal EU unity in order to put pressure on the United States (Correspondence 16/3, 2005). Third, Per Stig Møller met with the British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw in order to avoid the UK breaking ranks with the ICC coalition. Danish diplomats sensed that British diplomats had an ambiguous agenda, and Per Stig Møller was advised to make sure of the country's support for the ICC-referral, and that Jack Straw put pressure on the United States to abstain from voting in return for a postponement of the vote (Memorandum 24/3, 2005).

In the end, the specific Danish theory of success proved valid, despite some late concessions that threatened the broad ICC coalition. An internal Danish assessment deemed the theory of success to have adequately taken into account US opposition. According to Ambassador Løj, "the adoption is a significant victory for the ICC-countries. The compromise was on the table from the beginning, and it is difficult to explain what caused the US to accept the solution. One probable reason was US fear of being publicly blamed for the continued impunity in Darfur" (Memorandum 24/3, 2005). The public blame would have come from domestic groups seeking to stop the alleged genocide, and the United States would have been isolated among Western UNSC members (Lanz, 2009). The Danish decision to pursue a theory of coalition building might also have reflected that the extremely close negotiations between France, United Kingdom and the United States left no room for Denmark in the role of moderator.

CONCLUSIONS

This article sets out to illustrate how a small state develops and executes strategies that may lead to greater influence than that warranted by the institutional composition and the power distribution of the UNSC. The concept of the theory of success serves as a heuristic tool to reconstruct the manner in which Danish diplomats developed causal explanations of how certain diplomatic actions could lead to influence.

In the preparatory phase leading up to the membership period, Denmark defined four broad priorities and three general causal mechanisms explaining the road to influence. Broad priorities allowed Denmark a certain amount of opportunism. Denmark could seize on promising opportunities for influence, such as the referral to the ICC, and afterwards frame it as a Danish priority. The article does not cast light, however, on the other side of pragmatism – how small states choose vague priorities in order to mitigate against lack of influence or missed opportunities. Future studies might garner additional insights on their need for narrative flexibility by examining those cases. The second part of the analysis shows how Danish diplomats developed issue-specific theories of success during the membership period. The issue-specific theories were nested within the general theory of success, as they related to the four priorities and drew on the general causal logic of things such as institutional shelter. The social game of diplomacy means that successful diplomatic actions – or tactics – are conditional on factors such as competence and legitimacy. In the three issue-specific case studies, the Danish theory of success emphasized social recognition in the UNSC. Although small states may be forced to pursue minor goals, primarily, the importance of social recognition makes more ambitious ones possible.

Danish diplomats may gain at least three valuable insights from this case study of their preparation for the Danish candidacy to the UNSC in 2025–2026. The first is that since all goal-oriented activities rely on a tacit or explicit theory of success, Danish diplomats would benefit from explicating and validating it against alternative ones. Furthermore, in the light of the importance of site-specific knowledge and the country's limited power, the general theory of success would preferably be practice-based and with flexible goals to allow diplomats to identify opportunities. Such a theory would undoubtedly also identify the demonstration of

competence and the cultivation of personal contact with the P5 and the Secretary-General to be prerequisites for coalition-building. The second is the importance of establishing knowledge of contemporary conflicts, which would establish the competence of Denmark and possibly create acceptance of Danish positions on other issues. Third, the variety of ways employed by Denmark in building coalitions in 2005–2006 may also be relevant for 2025–2026 – a period likely to be dominated by more intense great power competition.

In addition to the obvious importance of coordinating with P5 and the EU, Danish diplomats should carefully cultivate their relationship with relevant UN departments and the UN Secretary-General as well as the other elected members in order to build trust, to increase legitimacy, and to identify convergence of interests and opportunities for building support for Danish priorities. Moreover, this analysis illustrates that Danish practitioners would most likely benefit from developing specific theories of success on how to achieve specific goals in the UNSC when opportunity arises.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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