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Interdependent Partnerships

A case study of Denmark's strategic partnerships

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Abstract

This paper examines how complex interdependence theory is reflected in the Danish strategic partnerships. As a case study, this thesis can be viewed as a contribution to the existing scholarly debate on the effectiveness of the constellation of the strategic partnership. A debate which has been centered around a confusion of the term, whether or not strategic partnerships are more than political rhetoric or if the new way of conducting foreign policy might have some substance. Our analysis has shown that many of the characteristics of complex interdependence theory are present in the partnerships, making the theory ideal for further analysis of the concept.

Through document analysis of the joint statements and work plans of the Danish strategic partnerships, we sought to contribute to the ongoing debate via complex interdependence theory.

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Introduction

The constellation of strategic partnership has since 2008 heralded a new way for Denmark to conduct its foreign policy, with the first partnership being created with China. 9 years later the partnership was renewed with an action plan spanning three years. The Chinese strategic partnership became the first version, serving as inspiration for bilateral strategic partnerships with five other countries, with the latest being created in 2020. After the Chinese partnership, the Danish government created partnerships with more diverse countries such as South Korea, Mexico, Japan, Indonesia, and India. Each of them different in substance, but following the same structure with emphasis on culture, trade, and environment.

The partnerships have largely gone under the radar of public and academic attention, with the exception of the newest one with India, which received a lot of public attention, due to its branding as a uniquely green partnership.¹

The partnerships in general, however, have garnered little academic attention, which gives us the opportunity to fill a gap in the academic literature. When it has been in the center of attention in academic circles, the strategic partnership as a concept has been receiving some criticism of being without much importance. The previous research on the concept has been focussing on major powers in world politics, leaving a knowledge gap on the minor states' implementation of the constellation. To fill this gap we will make use of Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye's Complex Interdependence theory. Keohane and Nye created the theory in the 1970s as an opposite pole to the realist approach, which they did not find to be adequate to understand contemporary international relations.² Complex Interdependence theory presents a way of analyzing world politics without having the main focus on military power as seen in realists theories, but by examining politics as it is made today, with a focus on all actors in the political field. This makes the theory suitable to examine the Danish strategic partnerships in order to uncover the perspective of a minor state and its implementation of strategic partnerships.

As such, in this thesis we will have a focus on the strategic partnerships in combination with complex interdependence theory, as formulated by our research question:

¹ Hindustan Times, *Others should look to follow India-Denmark Green Strategic Partnership, says Danish climate minister*, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/others-should-look-to-follow-india-denmark-green-strategic-partnership-says-danish-climate-minister/story-D1YUv3ucY1F68h817iA2eP.html>, (retrieved 12/05/21)

² Robert O. Keohane & Joseph S. Nye, *Power and interdependence*, 4th ed., (Glenview: Pearson, 2012).

How is Complex Interdependence theory reflected in the Danish strategic partnerships?

Complex interdependence theory will help us determine the substantiality of the partnerships, and offer a way to analyze the strategic partnerships methodically and theoretically.

Literature review

Strategic partnerships as a topic for scholarly debate are generally somewhat overlooked in the academic literature. The earliest academic writing on the topic began to take shape in the early 2000s with scholars such as Sean Kay.³ Most articles on the subject focus on two main aspects of the term. 1) How to define strategic partnerships, and 2) the strategic partnership as a tool for major powers exclusively.

Part of the academic literature is discussing how strategic partnerships are used as a foreign policy tool. Some argue that it is nothing more than a rhetorical instrument, others disagree and argue that the strategic partnerships do bring something new and unique to the way foreign policy is conducted, we will in the following section provide an overview of the most prevalent scholars and their arguments.

Due to the largely informal and often quite different ways in which strategic partnerships have been set up by various countries and organizations, an exact definition can be difficult to pinpoint. Thus, the question of defining the term has been at the forefront of scholarly research. Most researchers looking into strategic partnership have created their own definitions of the term in an attempt to make a framework to build their analysis upon. This makes it difficult to create a standard set of analysis criteria for what a strategic partnership is because each scholar's definition will deviate slightly from one another. In the first part of this literature review, we will try to give a brief overview of some notable ways of defining the term, as well as how they are similar, differ, and where we stand in the discussion. Secondly, we will try to give an overview of the general critique of strategic partnerships as a means of conducting foreign policy.

³ Sean Kay, *What is a Strategic Partnership?*, *Problems of post-communism*, vol. 47, no. 3, May/June 2000, pp. 15-24.

Jonathan Holslag defined strategic partnerships in a discursive analysis by dividing the policies into five main categories; economy, diplomacy, security, law, and environment. He was then able to see how many objectives were agreed upon for each category. Holslag's definition is two-folded, although he states that: “A *strategic partnership is what states make of it.*”⁴ Yet he continues to put forward his own definition of the concept that entails five features.⁵ According to Holslag, in order for something to be called a strategic partnership, it requires these criteria to be present: 1) There needs to be explicitly identified common interests. 2) the partnership should be long-term. 3) It needs to be multidimensional (economic, political, and military). 4) It has to have a global range. and 5) The goals of the Strategic partnership need to be unable to be achieved without a partnership and serve to distinguish the agreement from other relationships.

Thus, the partnership he analyzed was too narrow to be considered a strategic partnership according to himself.⁶ This definition, however, is quite narrow and would rule out most strategic partnerships made by minor powers, as they would simply not be able to have a global reach. Furthermore, his fifth point does not make sense in all cases. Some of the objectives set in the strategic partnerships are entirely possible to complete as separate agreements. The framework of a strategic partnership just makes such agreements easier, but the objectives would not be impossible to achieve without it. Holslag also argues that the EU is largely unattractive as a strategic partner for China due to its inability to be an ‘international actor’. Furthermore, he argues that China uses a realist approach against its rival USA, but “*looks for alliances to counterbalance its power.*”⁷ meaning that the strategic partnerships are used in a larger Chinese geopolitical strategy.

Marius Vahl follows the trend of creating his own definition for the term before he analyzes it. He argues that the normative differences between the EU and Russia are too big for their relationship to be a strategic partnership. He argues that even though they both see value in cooperation, their political worldviews are too different for a strategic partnership to function.⁸ Furthermore, Vahl argues that the asymmetrical relationship between Russia and the EU ultimately stands in the way of a constructive strategic partnership. This means that Vahl only regards relationships between two powers with similar political norms and structural sizes to be able to form

⁴ Jonathan Holslag, *The Elusive Axis: Assessing the EU–China Strategic Partnership*, *Journal of Common Market Studies* 2011 Volume 49. Number 2. pp. 293–313, p. 295.

⁵ Holslag, *The Elusive Axis*, p. 295.

⁶ Holslag, *The Elusive Axis*, p. 299.

⁷ Holslag, *The Elusive Axis*, p. 310.

⁸ Marius Vahl, *Just good friends? The EU - Russian “Strategic Partnership” and the Northern Dimension*, *Working Document No. 166*, (Center for European Policy Studies, 2001), p. 50.

a strategic partnership.⁹ We disagree with this definition as well, because it would rule out partnerships made by states having different political, cultural, or otherwise differing world-views, such as the one between China and the EU or China and Denmark.

Seeing as most strategic partnerships are made up of exactly these kinds of relationships across geographical as well as normative boundaries, we cannot agree with this definition. This would narrow the field of possible analysis of strategic partnerships to be almost exclusively used to describe countries from the same geographical regions and sizes.

The view that a strategic partnership should be defined from a specific set of rules, is shared by Thomas S. Wilkins.¹⁰ According to Wilkins, strategic partnerships need to be primarily based around security purposes founded not only on military power but on economic interdependence and stability as well. They should be goal-driven, rather than threat-driven, informal in nature, and in large part characterized by having economic incentives as key drivers for the agreements. The pattern repeats itself in that Wilkins has generally agreed on the substance of what a strategic partnership should be, but he differs from the other scholars by having an increased focus on security policies.¹¹ Wilkins' definitions are more open than what can be seen in the previously mentioned research and are thus applicable to a broader array of strategic partnerships between major powers including weaker states. This makes it easier for other researchers to lean on the basis of his work in order to make further inquiries with a similar approach. In terms of definition Wilkins concludes that the term strategic partnership is not comparable to an alliance due to the lack of emphasis on military capacities. Yet they are more comprehensive than coalitions.¹² In general, Wilkins is more positive towards the utility of the *concept* of strategic partnerships than both Vahl and Holslag.

Due to the varying nature of the concept of strategic partnerships, the academic research is quite diverse in terms of what is being analyzed. Giovanni Grevi, for example, focuses on a slightly different aspect of the partnership structure. He researches the concept of 'strategicness' and argues that strategic partnerships are not strategic just because they are called so. According to Grevi, they must be essential for both parties to achieve their international political goals in order to truly be a strategic partnership.¹³ He maintains a focus on the interdependence of the EU and its strategic

⁹ Vahl, *Just good friends?*, p. 50.

¹⁰ Thomas S. Wilkins, *Russo-Chinese Strategic Partnership: A New Form of Security Cooperation?*, *Contemporary Security Policy*, 29:2. 2008.

¹¹ Wilkins, *Russo-Chinese Strategic Partnership*, p. 360.

¹² Wilkins, *Russo-Chinese Strategic Partnership*, p. 377.

¹³ Giovanni Grevi, *Making the EU strategic partnerships effective*, (Fundación para las Relaciones Internacionales y el Diálogo Exterior (FRIDE), 2007), p. 3.

partnerships with great powers such as Russia and the USA and seeks to define strategic partnerships in relation to these powers. He highlights the fact that the EU emphasizes the requirement for a shared set of values and norms when engaging in strategic partnerships. Contradictory to Wilkins, Grevi sees strategic partnerships as a different word for alliance and as a more traditional form of foreign politics and not an independent form of multilateral agreement.¹⁴

In contrast to this approach, other scholars have tried giving the term a more broad definition. One such scholar is Avery Goldstein who tries to define the term by modeling it from common denominators from the Chinese strategic partnerships.

Goldstein puts forward four features. 1) Strategic partnerships are used to build “*stable bilateral relations without targeting any third party.*”¹⁵ 2) To promote economic interconnections. 3) Remove disagreements on domestic policy to cooperate on common concerns in international diplomacy. 4) Facilitate regular summit meetings between the military sector and the governments.¹⁶ Goldstein's definition is broader, but each strategic partnership is inherently different which makes it difficult to create a universal set of criteria to define what it is. Goldstein stands out from the other scholars by not disqualifying any agreements as being strategic partnerships on the basis of his own definitions. He simply describes the common denominators of the strategic partnerships and tries to uncover a pattern between them. The definition is so broad that it allows for a large and diverse range of agreements to fit under the term.

Feng Zhongping and Huang Jing, have taken a rather different approach in defining the term. They use the definition made by the Chinese premier, Wen Jiabao, who defined the EU-Sino comprehensive strategic partnership as follows:

“By ‘comprehensive’, it means that the cooperation should be all-dimensional, wide-ranging and multi-layered. It covers economic, scientific, technological, political and cultural fields, contains both bilateral and multilateral levels, and is conducted by both governments and non-governmental groups.”¹⁷

¹⁴ Grevi, *Making the EU strategic partnership effective*, p. 8.

¹⁵ Avery Goldstein, *Rising to the Challenge - China's Grand Strategy and International Security*, (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2005), p. 134.

¹⁶ Goldstein, *Rising to the Challenge*, p. 134.

¹⁷ Feng Zhongping, Huang Jing, *China's strategic partnership diplomacy: engaging with a changing world*, EPSO working paper, 2014.

With this definition, they explore the history of the Chinese strategic partnership and determine that China is the country with the most strategic partnerships in the world. The pair concludes that the strategic partnership approach has been the favored way of conducting foreign policy by the Chinese government in order to create constructive agreements with most corners of the world. China needed to establish relationships with other countries, and thus shifted to a more multidimensional diplomacy favoring not only superpowers but increasingly also minor countries. This shift highlighted the need for a new dynamic in Chinese diplomacy, that without alliances, needed a way to ensure that bilateral agreements could be made.¹⁸

According to Feng Zhongping and Huang Jing, the Chinese strategic partnerships have taken a substantial time to develop into an effective diplomatic tool.

The first Chinese strategic partnership was established in 1993 with Brazil but it was not until 2006 the partnership started to function as intended.¹⁹ A fact that may have contributed to the widespread belief that strategic partnerships as a concept are nothing more than political rhetoric.

While the first partnership seemed ineffective, the later constellations, including the one with Denmark, can be seen to have an impact in both countries shortly after they were agreed upon, as the following analysis will show.

Scholars such as Sean Kay have been making inquiries on strategic partnerships from a strict realist perspective on the major powers of the world.²⁰ In his article, Kay argues that strategic partnerships are mainly used by powerful military states to gain an edge in the international order. He argues that the strategic partnership constellation “*as a tool used by a powerful state or states to maximize political, economic or military dominance in the international system*”²¹ Kay argues further that the United States utilizes its strategic partnerships to secure its role as hegemon by creating bilateral relations with allies and non-allies, he regards this as a strategy to create a common front, without having to express security guarantees to the non-allied countries. Kay criticizes the term for “*diluting the international mechanisms*”,²² because he sees the strategic partnerships of the USA as miniature alliances, thus blurring the distinctions between the two terms. Ultimately he argues that the strategic partnerships are more of a rhetorical tool used by the United States to gain a non-binding bilateral agreement to secure the support of non-allied states.²³

¹⁸ Zhongping & Jing, *China's strategic partnership diplomacy*, pp. 11-12.

¹⁹ Zhongping & Jing, *China's strategic partnership diplomacy*, p. 10.

²⁰ Kay, *What is a Strategic Partnership?*, pp. 15-24.

²¹ Kay, *What is a strategic partnership?*, p. 16.

²² Kay, *What is a strategic partnership?*, p. 23.

²³ Kay, *What is a strategic partnership?*, p. 23.

As mentioned, his article was written in 2000 which may be a contributing factor as to why he perceives strategic partnerships as a security concept alone. The Danish partnerships are much removed from this view, and would not benefit from a realist analysis due to the apparent lack of security concerns expressed within them.

Yong Deng states a somewhat similar argument as that of Kay in his examination of China's strategic partnerships. He argues that China uses these agreements as a means to create an international environment that "*is overall friendly to its rise*" for power.²⁴ Deng examines the Chinese strategic partnerships and argues for three features: 1) The partnership signals the international partners' willingness to accept China's rise to power, 2) it improves bilateral relations by managing areas of disagreement, and finally, 3) it is based on promoting common interests.²⁵

He further argues that China and Russia's strategic partnership includes a common interest for a multipolar world, as they see this "*as an antidote to what they perceive to be US unilateralism and Western discrimination against them.*"²⁶ Similarly to what Sean Kay argues would happen as the United States made more use of its strategic partners which "*(...) may promote balancing against the United States.*"²⁷ Both Kay and Deng argue that on one hand, China and Russia use the strategic partnership to promote a multipolar world as a defense against US dominance. And on the other hand, they argue that the USA uses strategic partnerships to defend its position as a primarch.

Deng follows the tradition of looking at strategic partnerships from the perspective of major world powers, but his conclusion is quite different from that of Sean Kay. Deng concludes that the strategic partnerships are a sign that China has accepted that military alliances and "violent revisionism" ultimately are too costly for the great powers in a globalized world.²⁸

In opposition to Kay and Deng, later constructivist scholars have had a focus on the discursive level of the strategic partnerships. One such scholar is Marius Vahl, who, as mentioned, came to the conclusion that the EU and Russia's relationship contains fundamental differences which hinder the success of a strategic partnership, he argues a regional agreement would be a better suit for the two powers.²⁹

²⁴ Yong Deng, *Remolding Great Power Politics: China's Strategic Partnerships with Russia, the European Union, and India*, *The Journal of Strategic Studies* Vol. 30, No. 4–5, 863 – 903, August–October 2007, p. 898.

²⁵ Deng, *Remolding Great Power Politics*, p. 863.

²⁶ Deng, *Remolding Great Power Politics*, p. 881.

²⁷ Kay, *What is a strategic partnership?*, p. 23.

²⁸ Deng, *Remolding Great Power Politics*, p. 881.

²⁹ Vahl, *Just Good Friends?*, p. 50.

Luis Fernando Blanco and Konrad Adenaur-Stiftung use a discursive analysis to discuss different functions of strategic partnerships.³⁰ Their paper takes a closer look at how the term has been used throughout the foreign policy discourse of the European Union. They find examples of how the term is used and how it can affect the foreign policy of an entity. The paper sets itself apart by not trying to define the term strategic partnership, but instead takes it at face value, as a term used interchangeably by different organizations, for varying degrees of interconnection. The pair finds that the term is used as a ‘joker’ in the foreign policy discourse and covers a wide array of policy constellations that have the potential to become a major factor in the foreign policy of the future.³¹

The last academic article on the subject we will highlight is one written by Benjamin Tallis and Michal Šimečka. They examine how the European Union’s strategic partnerships are affected by the Czech strategic partnerships, marking the only piece of academic literature to investigate a minor nation and its relation to strategic partnerships, however, still keeping the EU at the core of the analysis. The two scholars are examining these partnerships through a language-based analysis, and conclude that the Czech partnerships undermine the EU’s external actorness through strategic partnerships.³² This is because one of the EU’s strategies with the strategic partnerships is to make its partners move closer to the EU in the normative sense.³³ This strategy is being undermined when minor nations without an adequate level of bargaining power create strategic partnerships outside the Union.

Danish foreign policy strategy

In order to understand Denmark's strategic partnerships, we need to see how weak states have traditionally been conducting their foreign policy and where that fits into the agreements analyzed in this project. This is because by understanding the way a country like Denmark conducts its foreign policy we can understand why Denmark would engage in what Keohane and Nye would describe as asymmetrical relations such as the ones analyzed in this thesis. The following section will provide an overview of select scholars’ views on this topic as well as weak states’ foreign policy behavior in general.

³⁰ Luis Fernando Blanco & Konrad Adenaur-Stiftung, *The functions of ‘strategic partnership’*, in *European Union foreign policy discourse*, Cambridge Review of International Affairs, 29:1. (2016)

³¹ Blanco & Adenaur-Stiftung, *The functions of ‘strategic partnership’*, p. 51.

³² Benjamin Tallis & Michal Šimečka, *Charting the EU–national strategic constellation*, p. 408.

³³ Tallis & Šimečka, *Charting the EU–national strategic constellation*.

Søren Z. von Dosenrode has examined how weak states conduct their foreign policy within a regime. Particularly the European community. From a standpoint of regime theory he argues that as much as possible, a weak state will work to preserve as much sovereignty as is possible within the boundaries of the regime they find themselves in, even to a degree where economic prizes were to be gained from seceding small parts of self-governance.³⁴ Furthermore, he argues that weak states join regimes in order to save foreign-policy resources. Dosenrode argues further that weak states tend to drift towards a strategy of cooperation with larger powers. They will seek greater coherence on the account of the dwindling amount of issues concerning the weak state. This lack of issues makes it easier for foreign policy decision-makers to remain flexible. He also argues that a weak state can benefit from being a specialist in a specific set of policies, or practices.³⁵ An approach that seems to have been adopted by Denmark in their focus on the environmental sector, a sector that is recurring in a major way in every strategic partnership.

Henrik Larsen analyzes the Danish *actorness* in foreign policy through a discursive analysis using official statements and policy documents. His analysis is split into two parts; pre-Lisbon treaty and post-Lisbon treaty. Five parameters are defined for his analytical framework: 1) the national ‘we’ (when only Denmark is mentioned), 2) Member state ‘we’ (when the EU acts on behalf of the member state), 3) Combination of the member state and the EU, 4) only the EU, 5) The EU through the member state (when the member state acts on behalf of the EU).³⁶ Larsen concludes that the independent Danish actorness in foreign policy, in general, has decreased. Danish influence in international politics with the EU as the main actor saw an increase after the implementation of the Lisbon treaty in 2009, however, he argues that the picture differs from policy area to policy area. He does not analyze the Danish strategic partnerships directly, but he does conclude that Denmark relies on the EU as the main actor when it comes to general strategic issues, in this case meaning foreign and security issues.³⁷

Another scholar analyzing Danish foreign policy and Danish *activism* is Rasmus Brun Pedersen. In his article, *Danish foreign policy activism*, he describes how the Danish foreign policy has changed since the cold war and argues that the state, in general, has been pursuing a more active foreign policy in recent years, in comparison to the adaptation strategy pursued earlier. His main

³⁴ Søren Z. von Dosenrode, *Western European small states in international regimes*, in *History of european Ideas*, vol 19, Nos 1-3, (Elsevier science ltd., 1994).

³⁵ Dosenrode, *Western European small states in international regimes*.

³⁶ Henrik Larsen, *Discourses of state identity and post-Lisbon national foreign policy: The case of Denmark*, (2013), in *Cooperation and Conflict*, SAGE, 2014. p. 371.

³⁷ Larsen, *Discourses of state identity and post-Lisbon national foreign policy*, p. 380.

argument is that these two ways of pursuing foreign policies are not different entities altogether but rather different degrees of activism instead of different kinds of foreign policy strategies.³⁸

He argues that Denmark's strategy of adaptability where the state would largely adapt to the actions of the major powers has been replaced by a strategy of *aggressiveness* in the form of a willingness to pursue their own goals regardless of the actions of the major powers. He defines the Danish foreign policy as being *active* as opposed to *reactive*, a shift that happened in 1989 with the end of the cold war.

He argues that the degree of activism has changed into being more focused on participating in wars, better relations with the USA, the development of strategic goals and more, since the year 2001. He argues that the Danish activism can be analyzed as a more coherent strategy in Denmark's foreign policy and that different kinds of activism should really be thought of as different degrees to which the Danish state has pursued its goals.³⁹

In summary, the academic literature contains disagreements about the nature of the concept of the strategic partnerships, both in terms of the definition and execution of the concept. While some scholars deem the strategic partnerships to be no more than a rhetorical tool others have found them to be more substantial.

The literature on the Danish foreign policy strategy does not share the same discrepancy though they examine the foreign policy strategy from different methodological standpoints.

The existing academic literature will be discussed in relation to the findings of our thesis at the end of this paper.

Methodology

In this section, we will provide an overview of our methodological approaches, including our chosen theory, our place on the theoretical spectrum, and a critique and discussion of the theory of Complex interdependence.

³⁸ Rasmus Brun Pedersen, *Danish foreign policy activism- difference in kind or degree?* sage 2012. p331

³⁹ Pedersen, *Danish foreign policy activism*, p. 332..

Theoretical approach

The theory of Complex Interdependence creates a framework for analyzing how modern states conduct foreign policy. Followers of this theory believe that the role of the military has taken the backseat and that the sphere of international politics has changed into becoming a complex system of interdependent actors. Not only in the form of states but increasingly through corporations, organizations, and private actors.

Our place on the theoretical spectrum

Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye are positioning themselves against the realist school, stating that they were trying to create the polar opposite of the realist assumptions about state behavior. They claim that theories that describe a phenomenon are often posed as ideal types of reality, but not reflecting reality as it is.⁴⁰ Where the realist school will portray a world where states are continually in conflict with each other.

In order to understand our position on the theoretical spectrum, we will have to present both extremes ranging from pure realism to pure liberalism.

Realism

Realists argue that the primary actors in international politics are states and that these act as coherent units.⁴¹ In the realist perspective, states act purely out of their own interest and that the main goal for each state in international politics is to secure the survival of the state. This can in their view only be done employing hard power. The realist view of the world of international politics is that, since there is no supranational organization that can hold states accountable for their actions within a set of written laws, the realm of international relations is essentially a state of anarchy.⁴²

The modern realist school is generally divided into two groups; Twentieth-Century Classical realists (classical realists) and neorealists. The classical realists came forth as a reaction to the liberalist assumptions of cooperation in international politics during the post-World War I era, and the outbreak of World War II, where the traditional liberal assumption that trading states do not go to war was

⁴⁰ Keohane & Nye, *“Power and Interdependence”* p 19

⁴¹ Keohane & Nye, *“Power and Interdependence”* p. 19.

⁴² W. Julian Korab-Karpowicz, *Political Realism in International Relations*, in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2018.

disproved by the major powers of the world. The events of the 20th century proved the realist argument that state leaders *“think and act in terms of interest defined as power”*.⁴³

The neorealist school took the views of the classical realist tradition and tried to adapt it to a changing world, in an attempt to modernize it. Where classical realists mainly looked to history and philosophy for arguments, neorealists put an emphasis on quantitative analysis, i.e. analysis of macroeconomics and the countable aspects of international relations.⁴⁴ Kenneth Waltz, a leading neorealist, argued that the old traditional liberalism and classical realists were unable to make a precise account of international politics.⁴⁵

Liberalism

The liberalist approach has its roots in the political ideology of liberalism. This ideology emphasizes freedom for its citizens as the highest goal for a government, freedom being defined as an individual's right to life, liberty, and property. The main emphasis in liberalism is, therefore, the well-being of the individual as the foundation for a political system. They focus on institutions that protect the freedom of the individual by limiting political power. Their emphasis lies much in the realm of domestic policies, but foreign policies are interesting to liberalists because of their strong influence on domestic liberty.⁴⁶

The way this is reflected in international relations is a theoretical emphasis on trade, international law through international organizations, and international norms such as international cooperation and human rights.⁴⁷

Contrary to the realist school, liberalists do not see military power as the most dominant for a political system. They see military power as a threat to civilians because military power is two-folded; on the one hand, it can protect citizens, on the other it can be used to restrain and control the citizens and thus remove some of the liberties the citizens enjoyed. Therefore they have a world view where citizens should have ensured control over the military.⁴⁸

⁴³ Hans, J. Morgenthau, *“Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace”*, 2nd ed., (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1954).

⁴⁴ Korab-Karpowicz, *Political Realism in International Relations*, Section 3.

⁴⁵ Korab-Karpowicz, *Political Realism in International Relations*, Section 3.1.

⁴⁶ Meiser, Jeffrey W., *Introducing Liberalism in International Relations Theory*, <https://www.e-ir.info/2018/02/18/introducing-liberalism-in-international-relations-theory/>, (retrieved 07-05-2021), p. 1.

⁴⁷ Meiser, *Introducing Liberalism in International Relations Theory*.

⁴⁸ Meiser, *Introducing Liberalism in International Relations Theory*, p. 1.

Some liberalists argue that democracies are unlikely to go to war with other democracies for two reasons: First, because of the restraining of military power as mentioned previously. Second, they regard each other as legitimate states and do not see other democracies as threats. According to liberal theoreticians, cooperation is more likely between democracies than with non-democracies. These arguments tend to be founded on statistics and historical cases.⁴⁹ This, however, is criticized since democracies are a new phenomenon, historically speaking. Critics, therefore, argue that there are only a few times in the history of democracies that they had the opportunity to wage war on one another.⁵⁰ Thus critics find the argument that there would be no wars if all states were democracies, because of the peaceful history between democracies, to be a vague argument.

Complex interdependence theory is positioned in the neoliberal school. Contrary to the traditional realist approach we believe that soft power in some areas can be just as, if not more, important than hard power. There is not just one hierarchy of policy areas in international politics, but several. An actor's position in the hierarchy depends on the policy area. If the policy area is centered around renewable energy, military power will not secure a position at the top of the hierarchy. We do, however, acknowledge hard power's ability to be the dominating power, when the policy area facilitates this.

Choice of theory

To help us analyze our case, we have chosen to use the theory of Complex Interdependence, created by Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye, based on their book *Power and Interdependence*. The book was first published in 1977 and has since then been revised multiple times. Following the neoliberal tradition, this theory has 3 major assumptions about how international relations are conducted in the modern world. These assumptions are:

- 1) *Multiple channels connect societies.*
- 2) *Absence of a hierarchy of issues.*
- 3) *States will refrain from using military force against other governments within their own region when Complex interdependence prevails.*⁵¹

⁴⁹ Meiser, *Introducing Liberalism in International Relations Theory*, pp. 1-2.

⁵⁰ Meiser, *Introducing Liberalism in International Relations Theory*, pp. 1-2.

⁵¹ Keohane & Nye, *Power and interdependence*, pp. 20-21.

The theory is based on the concept of complex interdependence and how the power structures have shifted in the modern-day. This can be used to analyze how countries are dealing with one another in a more complex web of interconnectedness, with both inter-state relations and the other various forms of relations that a state might participate in. With the theory being a branch of neoliberalism, Keohane and Nye formulated a critique of the realist tradition with their rejection of the notion that the role of military force is the most prevalent factor of dominance in modern international relations. In this following section, we will take a closer look at how the three key assumptions of the theory are to be understood, and subsequently why we chose the theory to analyze our particular case.

Multiple channels

One of the key arguments within the theory of complex interdependence is that there are multiple channels that connect societies across the globe. This is to say that governments do not only come into contact with one another on the official level during state visits. Things as trivial as telephone calls between government bureaucrats, and low-ranking officials, can become an important channel to conduct foreign relations. Furthermore, Keohane and Nye argue that the role of the state in international relations is somewhat diminishing. Instead, channels through private actors have become more common in the years after world war II. Furthermore, since 1945, there has been a rise of large international organizations such as the U.N, NATO, and the EU, where states will be able to communicate and coordinate with each other on a much more regular basis than before the war. Furthermore, the introduction of non-state actors on the international scene has been on a steady rise in the post-war, and especially post-Cold War era, where business conducted between private actors in the form of multinational corporations, banks, and the state have become the norm.⁵² Keohane and Nye argue that these private actors have had an increasing role in shaping both the domestic and international policies of the state. These private actors work as a lubricant that makes government policies in various sectors more sensitive to one another, thus creating an increased interconnectedness where states will benefit if another interconnected state succeeds. There are varying degrees to which these international private actors have a role to play, according to each government, making these states less interdependent than others. Keohane and Nye, however, argue that most states to some degree have these forms of private actors helping to shape their domestic

⁵² Keohane & Nye, *Power and interdependence*, p. 20.

policies. These channels that have opened up are creating an increasingly blurred line between what is domestic, and what is foreign policy, and economic activity.

Absence of hierarchy among issues

Keohane and Nye make the argument that because the issues that governments are concerned with are becoming “*broader and more diverse*”⁵³ The scope of the foreign policies have become less about the traditional security of the state, and more of a cluster of differing policies, that are tied loosely or tightly together by diverse aspects of society.⁵⁴ The words of the former secretary of state Henry Kissinger are used as an example of how the hierarchy of issues is being rejected in favor of a more dynamic foreign policy. Kissinger stated that:

*“The problems of energy resources, environment, population, and the uses of space and the seas now rank with questions of military security, ideology and territorial rivalry which have traditionally made up the diplomatic agenda.”*⁵⁵

This list of policies also illustrates how the foreign and domestic spheres are being intertwined and how multiple channels in the form of non-state actors play a role in government politics.

Nye and Keohane further argue that the fact that organizations such as the GATT, OECD, IMF, and the European Community all have created extensive consulting operations within all ministries of the United States’ Government. This fact shows how the domestic and foreign policies have come to be blurred and oftentimes overlap across multiple areas of interest for the United States. A great example of the multiple channels aspect of modern politics is something like the environmental crisis of the 21st century, where major corporations, the military, and domestic interest groups all have a shared interest in fixing the problems.

Minor role of hard power

The third major argument of what constitutes complex interdependence is in some ways tied closely to the second criteria. The notion that the role of military power has declined drastically in

⁵³ Keohane & Nye, *Power and interdependence*, p. 22.

⁵⁴ Keohane & Nye, *Power and interdependence*, p. 22.

⁵⁵ Keohane & Nye, *Power and interdependence*, p. 22.

international relations. Keohane and Nye argue that among industrialized countries the perceived safety has greatly increased, to a point where it is virtually unimaginable that a country like France would use military force on its former arch-enemy, Germany. They use the abandonment of the French foreign policy principle of *Tout Azimuts* (Defense from all sides) which was originally initiated by Charles de Gaulle, as an example of the decreased role of the military in foreign politics. Instead, these countries influence each other by way of diplomatic and economic relations, government-to-government relations, the EU, UN, and other private channels.

This does not mean, however, that military force is entirely irrelevant in modern international relations. Even though it might not be used directly, the mere presence of a powerful military backing a government can have effects on foreign relations. Such examples as the nuclear deterrence of the cold war prove this point. The argument made by Keohane and Nye is only that the cost of an armed conflict has become so vast, that it is not *likely* to happen between interdependent nations. Thus they state that for two nations whose relations can be characterized by complex interdependence, two factors can still make the presence of a strong military become a significant bargaining chip. These factors are 1) a drastic social and political change within one or both of the actors, or 2) In the event where a country uses its military force to protect another country the protective state will have significant leverage over the other.⁵⁶

Furthermore, they state that in relations between nations in the Global South, the role of military power is still highly prevalent. However, within their own regions, nations whose relations can be characterized as complex interdependent will refrain from the use of military force.

Linkage and asymmetrical interdependence as a means of power

Linkages and asymmetrical interdependence are important concepts to understand in order to fully analyze cases through the lens of Complex Interdependence.

Linkage can be understood as to how multiple policy areas can be connected to one another in order to gain certain concessions from other states when negotiating deals.

Keohane and Nye argue that linkage is more difficult to achieve for economically or militarily strong states, due to the more complex nature of their policies. It is harder for a nation like the USA to create obvious links between their areas of policies because it would involve more people, departments, and bureaucratic machinery. Whereas smaller nations often will have more simple

⁵⁶ Keohane & Nye, *Power and interdependence*, p 23.

policies, making it easier to create links between them. This means that weak, poor states can use linkages in order to draw concessions from more powerful and complex states, thus benefiting from a system of complex interdependence. One such instance where a small, weak nation can draw concessions from the strong and powerful, can be in linking the price of oil together with other areas of policies.⁵⁷ In this way, linkages can also have an impact on what is on top of the agenda for bilateral agreements.⁵⁸

It is often the case that two interdependent nations have an asymmetrical relationship, meaning a relationship where each party gets an unequal amount of benefits from the relationship. It is these asymmetries that are most likely to provide resources in which one nation can leverage the other into giving it concessions. Therefore, unsurprisingly, the nation that is less dependent on its partner will have an advantage in its bargaining.

Sensitivity/vulnerability

To understand the role of power in interdependence, it is necessary to understand the distinction between *sensitivity* and *vulnerability*. Sensitivity determines how sensitive a state is to external social, political, or economic changes. Including how costly it would be to manage an eventual new situation, and how quickly and well the state can adapt to the new situation when changes in the policy framework are not available.

Keohane and Nye exemplified this by the oil crisis in the early 1970s. The United States, Japan, and Western Europe were all sensitive to the price changes in oil since they all imported a substantial proportion of oil from the OPEC countries. However, the United States was less sensitive to the change than Japan, since the US import of oil was lower than that of Japan.⁵⁹ The external changes can also be social, for example when the student movements of the 1960s through the media gained knowledge of each other's activities, the protests spread across borders,⁶⁰ and states would have to cope with this sudden change in their society imposed by external factors.

Vulnerability revolves around how well a state can cope with these changes when policy changes and alternatives are available.⁶¹ For example, if an oil crisis happens again, the vulnerability

⁵⁷ Keohane & Nye, *Power and Interdependence*, p. 30

⁵⁸ Keohane & Nye, *Power and Interdependence*, p. 27.

⁵⁹ Keohane & Nye, *Power and Interdependence*, p. 10.

⁶⁰ Keohane & Nye, *Power and Interdependence*, p. 11.

⁶¹ Keohane & Nye, *Power and Interdependence*, p. 11.

would be measured by the political willingness and costs of changing the energy supply from being most dependent on oil, to being more dependent on alternative energy sources.⁶²

When successful the strategic partnerships can create more interdependence, and when two countries become more interdependent the cost of sanctioning the partner country will increase, thus the possibility of sanctions between the two countries becomes less likely.

How we will apply the theory

In order to answer our research question, we will be using the Danish strategic partnerships as a case study with the lens of complex interdependence. Some aspects of the theory are outside the scope of our examination, therefore, we will not draw upon all parameters of the theory to conduct our research. Specifically, the third major point made in the book about how states under the conditions of complex interdependence will refrain from using force against one another when they are in the same geographical region, will not be referred to very much in this thesis. This is due to the fact that the partnering countries are all in a different region than Denmark, and especially because it is highly unlikely that Denmark would use force against its partners. The theory will be applied to our analysis in the way that each category of the theory will be a section in itself, presenting the strategic partnership along with the theoretical framework.

As the theory of complex interdependence has aged, more scholars have added to the theory, opening up new ways to analyze cases via its lens.

One such scholar is Thomas Oatley who has taken the concept of international political economy and complex interdependence and merged it into what he calls political economy of complex interdependence, or PECI for short. In broad terms, PECI sees a system as a pattern of relationships between private and public agents which goes beyond national and into international economies as well as international institutions such as the world bank, International Monetary Fund, etc.⁶³ Oatley makes the example that complexity in PECI terms can be exemplified by rural banks in China, which are connected to the Chinese central bank, which is tied to the world bank, which is tied to the U.S federal reserve, through formal and informal channels. Thus creating a complex web of economical and political channels. This is an example of how the theory has evolved, however, it is complex

⁶² Keohane & Nye, *Power and Interdependence*, p. 12.

⁶³ Thomas Oatley, *Toward a political economy of complex interdependence*, in *European journal of international relations*. vol 25, 2019.

interdependence in its purest form that is the most prevalent theory to analyze strategic partnerships, as these are concerning more than political economy.

A critique and discussion of complex interdependence

No theory can perfectly illustrate the world exactly as it is while remaining concise and readily understood by most. As such we will try to formulate points where we disagree with the views put forward in *Power and Interdependence*, as well as reviewing other scholars' points of critique in this following section.

One flaw in the theory and its applicability to analyze the Danish strategic partnerships lies in the third major characteristic:

*“Military force is not used by governments toward other governments within the region, or on the issues, when Complex interdependence prevails. It may, however, be important in these government’s relations with governments outside that region, or on other issues.”*⁶⁴

While this sentiment might be perfectly true, the role of military power in terms of the Danish strategic partnerships with various countries around the world is not only minor but practically non-existent, making the Danish strategic partnerships unfit to be analyzed by this characteristic. This is not a fault in the theory, but rather in its application to this case.

Jennifer Sterling Folker argues that the realist school is still the most proficient in explaining state behavior, and delivers a stark critique of complex interdependence and other cooperation theories and liberal international relations theories. She rejects the notion that interdependence is *the* permissive condition for international cooperation.

Folker makes the comparison of the doctor in Alfred Hitchcock's movie *'the lady vanishes'* who notes: *“my theory was perfectly good. The facts were misleading”*.⁶⁵ With the comparison, she is stating that practitioners following the theory of complex interdependence are willing to omit facts in order to support their own theories.

⁶⁴ Keohane & Nye, *Power and interdependence*, p. 21.

⁶⁵ Jennifer Sterling Folker, *Theories of international cooperation and the primacy of anarchy: explaining US monetary policymaking after Bretton Woods*, (State University of New York press, 2002), p. 8.

She argues that scholars following the liberal theories lack the capacity to properly analyze cooperation because they view every account of cooperation between two countries as evidence for their theories' validity, thus losing objectivity.

“The result (red: of the fundamental misreading of what cooperation is about) is that each act of cooperation is misread by the liberal theorists as confirmatory evidence that decision-makers have learned to value multilateralism over unilateralism in an interdependent world, when in fact they typically have learned nothing of the kind.”⁶⁶

What she believes instead is that decision-makers are perfectly fine with cooperation, but that it is not clear evidence of the states' proclivity to choose multilateralism above unilateralism, cementing her more realist view of international relations.

We find this criticism of complex interdependence quite harsh. Confirmation bias will always be present when analyzing a piece of data, but it should go without saying that the scholar in question will try to be as objective as can be. Therefore, rejecting all liberal theories on the basis of the notion that these scholars should fundamentally overlook important facts is rather difficult to believe. Folker argues that interdependence is an abstract concept, which often leads practitioners hereof to be incapable of understanding the social and political circumstances that can help answer *why* states choose to cooperate or indeed, *not* to cooperate with each other. This point might be partially true, as we are not seeking to explain the social circumstances of the strategic partnerships for example, but we are trying to explain the political positions and motives behind the objectives set in them, following the principles of complex interdependence.

It is also in the realm of realism, particularly military capacity and conflict, that some other scholars have formulated a critique of Keohane and Nye's theory. In their book, *Neoclassical realism, the state, and foreign policy* by Steven E. Lobell, Norria M. Ripsman and Jeffrey W. Taliaferro criticize the fact that complex interdependence fails to explain how conflicts occur between countries.⁶⁷ They challenge the idea that because countries are economically interdependent they will refrain from going to war with each other. They argue that liberal theories tend to overlook nationalism and unilateralism as serious factors in the decision-making of states, and instead treat the concepts as

⁶⁶ Folker, *Theories of international cooperation and the primacy of anarchy*, p 4.

⁶⁷ Steven E. Lobell, Norrin M. Ripsman and Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, *Neoclassical realism, the state, and foreign policy*, (Cambridge university press, 2009).

historical relics. In line with that, they argue that liberal theories and complex interdependence cannot explain how a country can perceive a partner both as an economical prospect and as a potentially existential threat. This is very much in line with the arguments of Jennifer Folker, stemming from the same theoretical standpoint of realism. We are somewhat agreeing with the critics on the point that the theory does not take into account factors such as ideology and the fact that states might cooperate not due to economic ties, but from purely nationalistic or unilateralist perspectives.

We also found it difficult to apply the theory to explain certain security aspects, such as the objective in the Danish-Korean strategic partnership regarding the situation on the Korean peninsula. This is because of the aforementioned lack of capability of the theory to explain military conflicts and the reasons for these. Therefore, we can not with complex interdependence theory explain why Denmark would support South Korea in its efforts to denuclearize North Korea. It is clear why Denmark would be interested in denuclearization, but the theory fails to explain it.

Our main problem with the theory, however, is with the concept of linkage. Linkage is the act of linking two or more policies together in order to draw concessions from the larger power in an asymmetric relation. The problem with this is that it is exceedingly difficult to prove what policies are linked together unless one has access to the actual minutes from the negotiations. While we in the strategic partnerships do see instances where linkage might have been used by Denmark, we cannot with certainty confirm or deny that linkage has been used.

Alternative theory

One theory that could potentially have been beneficial for us to use is Thomas S. Wilkins's theory on strategic partnerships. Drawing from organizational theory, he seeks to create an analytical framework that can encompass most strategic partnerships. Wilkins creates a basic framework for how strategic partnerships work between countries and analyses them through three different phases. 1) *Formation*, 2) *implementation*, and 3) *Evaluation*.⁶⁸

He argues that the formation of a strategic partnership is based on several key factors, among them are Environmental uncertainty, strategic fit, and system principle. Environmental uncertainty meaning uncertainty in the international political environment. States engage in strategic partnerships to counter the uncertainty. Secondly, the partner will have to be of a strategic fit, meaning they will

⁶⁸ Wilkins, *Russo-Chinese Strategic Partnership*, pp. 363-364.

have to share mutual interests and make the partnership beneficial to both parties. Thirdly, the mutual interests are solidified into common goals.

The second phase is *implementation*, wherein it is decided how the common goals are to be reached or implemented, and who will be responsible for the different goals. This can be different ministries or bureaus.⁶⁹ In the Danish strategic partnerships, this is the phase where the action plans were formulated.

The *Evaluation* phase is where the effectiveness and cohesiveness of the organization are being evaluated. A strategic partnership may only exist if both partners prove to be committed in both actions and words. If the organization proves effective it will have the potential to evolve and include more states' strategic partnerships.⁷⁰

Wilkins uses his approach to analyze the Russo-Chinese strategic partnership, from a security perspective. Wilkins' approach is more directly related to strategic partnerships than complex interdependence, so at first glance, it would perhaps make more sense to use his theory.

The reason why we have elected not to use the theory for this thesis is because Wilkins' point of departure is philosophically too different from ours. Because he perceives the partnerships to be mainly security-based, he views the formation phase as being a product of political uncertainty, this means that the evaluation phase will be a reflection of how well the strategic partnership can counter these uncertainties. This approach is thus best applicable to a security-based analysis of partnerships, whereas we view the Danish strategic partnerships as being based in a wider array of policy areas. The Danish strategic partnerships, according to the Danish ministry of foreign affairs, are formed to gain privileged access to foreign markets and are thus not based on security. Therefore, we find that complex interdependence offers a more encompassing framework regarding the Danish strategic partnerships allowing for analysis going further than only security concerns.

Methods

In the following section, we will discuss the methods we are going to use in order to answer our research question: *How is Complex Interdependence theory reflected in the Danish strategic partnerships?*

⁶⁹ Wilkins, *Russo-Chinese Strategic Partnership*, pp. 364-365.

⁷⁰ Wilkins, *Russo-Chinese Strategic Partnership*, pp. 366-367.

We will be discussing how we structure our analysis, what data we will be using, key definitions, and finally which parameters we will be using for our analysis.

Structure of our research

For each strategic partnership, a description has been made, outlining what had been agreed. These take the form of joint statements and action plans. These documents will be the main focus of our analysis, which is going to be structured around the parameters present within the theory of Complex interdependence.

We will conduct a deductive research, using the theory of complex interdependence to answer our research question. The analysis will be written with a focus on four features from the theory. These are: Multiple channels, Absence of Hierarchy, Sensitivity, and Vulnerability, and asymmetries. A fifth feature is the absence of military force, this parameter is intentionally left out because it cannot be analyzed based on our data.

Within the parameters chosen, the objectives of each country's strategic partnership will be analyzed and compared to each other.

Additionally, we are going to create diagrams allowing for an easy overview of what category of objectives has been emphasized in the individual agreements with inspiration in those of Jonathan Holslag. He examines the idea of an all-around strategic partnership, and this method enables him to get an overview of how broad or narrow the objectives of the strategic partnerships are. The categories we have chosen will vary from those of Holslags, due to the differing subjects we have been analyzing. Each diagram is made based on how many objectives are under each category in percentage. By counting how many objectives each category contains, we can calculate where the main focus of each strategic partnership lies.

Sometimes, however, the objectives are concerning policy areas included in more than one category, in this case, we will put them into the category which is most central to the objective. The categories are:

- **Diplomacy:** This entails every objective specifying future meetings between high-level officials, for example, biennial talks between the leaders of each country.

- **Economics:** This category is for all of the agreed-upon objectives specifically centered around trade, promotion of trade, and cooperation within the trading or economic sectors.
- **Law and human rights:** This entails every agreement regarding rule of law, anti-corruption, cooperation in international organizations, minority rights, and human rights.
- **Environment:** When the environment, biodiversity, or nature preservation are most emphasized in the objectives it is sorted into this category.
- **Defense and security:** Everything involving anti-terror, nuclear disarmament, and general defense is sorted into this category.
- **Education and research:** Exchange students, science cooperation, and training of any kind are included in this category.
- **Society:** This category is for those agreements involving art, sport, cultural exchange, as well as welfare, in general, which will be sorted into this section.

It is worth noting, however, that just because one category has few objectives in it, it does not *necessarily* mean that the category is unimportant. What we will argue, however, is that when a category has a lot of objectives, it does reflect somewhat how much emphasis has been put on that subject. When we calculated the values for the diagrams, we rounded up the decimals, this means that in some cases the total value is 99 percent or 101 percent. When assigning each objective into its respective category, there was a considerable overlap. For example, one objective could be argued to fit into both environmental and economic categories. In those cases, we assigned the objective into what seemed to be the most prevalent category. As such, the diagrams are to be viewed as a guide to a quick overview of the strategic partnerships.

The Korean, Chinese, and Indonesian diagrams seem to cover the largest number of categories, but as mentioned, these are the only three partnerships with elaborated work plans, which may skewer the diagrams slightly. We will compare the different charts, which enables us to see certain patterns or, the lack thereof, in the strategic partnerships that we would otherwise not be able to find.

We will use the data extracted from statistics to look for spikes in trade based on the categories mentioned in the agreements. Furthermore, we will use the statistics of import and export to get data for our analysis on the sensitivities and vulnerabilities of different sectors of the Danish economy. We are aware that a spike in trade between, for example, Denmark and Mexico following the strategic partnership is not necessarily due to the partnership, therefore, we will be looking at the general

situation surrounding the agreement, for example, the covid-19 pandemic causing a sudden drop in trade in general.

After the analysis, we will weigh our findings against the existing academic literature on the subject of strategic partnerships and Danish foreign policy in general.

Definitions

In order to fully understand key concepts, and to avoid confusion about certain phrases, we will in the following section provide an overview of definitions and clarifications.

Strategic partnership

As our literature review showed, the concept of strategic partnership as a diplomatic instrument is not very well defined, in general, there is some discussion as to the definition of the term. Because the central element of this thesis is the strategic partnerships, we define what we are referring to when using the term. Our definition is based on the way the Danish strategic partnerships are defined by the Danish ministry of foreign affairs. The definition is as follows:

“The strategic partnerships are made on the state- and government level and are based on a ‘whole-of-government’ approach, furthermore, they are based on political, commercial, and sector-specific interests, and are involving all relevant authorities. (..)

The partnerships act as a platform to promote Danish political and commercial interests, including Danish foreign political key issues and interests. The promotion of market access for the private business sector, and issues such as environmental protection, health care, and green energy are key drivers for the Danish strategic partnerships. (...)

*The strategic partnerships are made in order to give Danish enterprises and government authorities privileged access to countries and markets in select growth-economies.*⁷¹

We find this definition most relevant to use since it is what the strategic partnerships are based on, and will therefore likely be reflected in the documents. In addition to this definition, we believe that, in order for the agreement to be called a legitimate strategic partnership, it should be long-term and stable. It should have the ability to be expanded with time, both in terms of objectives and in terms of duration. All of the agreements referred to as strategic partnerships by Denmark have this quality to them. Additionally, there should be some form of a win-win situation for the parties involved. We realize that most of the strategic partnerships made by Denmark are highly asymmetrical, but still, we would argue that this criterion is being upheld in the partnerships we have elected to analyze.

When we mention the Danish strategic partnerships in this paper, we are referring specifically to the agreements made between Denmark and China (2008), South Korea (2011) Japan (2014), Indonesia (2017), Mexico (2017), and India (2020) that are called strategic partnerships by both parties involved.

Objective

The strategic partnership consists of numerous agreed-upon goals, these individual goals are what we will refer to as objectives. These objectives are what make up the content of the strategic partnerships.

Weak state

When we in the analysis and discussion refer to weak states, we are referring to it in relation to the strategic partnership. A weak state in this context will therefore be the smaller actor in any asymmetrical strategic partnership, as measured by economic output, population, and geographical size. Therefore, it does not necessarily mean a small or powerless state, but it is to be viewed in relation to the context it is used. As such, Denmark will be referred to as a relatively weak state throughout this thesis.

⁷¹ Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Strategiske Partnerskaber*, <https://um.dk/da/udenrigspolitik/lande-og-regioner/strategiske-partnerskaber/>, (our translation), (retrieved 16-05-2021).

Policy area

A policy area is what we refer to when discussing multiple policies that are all related to the same area of politics. This can take the form of healthcare, agriculture, or green energy, which are three different policy areas. A policy area is thus a grouping of related policies.

Choice of data

As our theory lends itself best for a mix of qualitative and quantitative data, we will be using both throughout our thesis. The quantitative data will take the form of statistics that can help us analyze the outcomes of some of the objectives agreed upon. The quantitative data can help us determine the sensitivities and vulnerabilities by looking at imports and exports. The qualitative data will be extracted from the joint statements and action plans with the method of document analysis. The document analysis will be used to show the relation of certain objectives within the strategic partnerships with the theory of complex interdependence.

The Action plans are the most detailed papers on the partnerships, outlining both headlines and subcategories under each headline. Furthermore, they give a detailed explanation of how the objectives are to be reached, thus providing a detailed overview of each strategic partnership. These can be seen as a supplement and elaboration for the Joint statements. The action plans only exist for half of the Danish strategic partnerships, namely the ones with; China, Indonesia, and South Korea.

The joint statements are significantly less detailed, only giving an overview of the headlines and main points of focus for what the partnership entails. These are all written immediately after the agreements were made. Joint statements are made for all of the partnerships. Of these Mexico, Japan and India only have joint statements to give information of what the agreements are entailing. This difference in detail will likely be reflected in the analysis. As such, there will be an emphasis on the strategic partnerships to which there have been drafted action plans, these are, as mentioned: China, Korea, and Indonesia. This is due to the more detailed nature of the agreements, which gives us more to construct our analysis upon.

Based on these action plans and joint statements we will know what to look for in the statistics, which we are going to extract from Danmarks Statistik, Danish Energy Agency, The Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the World Bank, Statista, Danske Erhverv, and IRENA.

Furthermore, we will be using document analysis to find out how Denmark uses the strategic partnerships and how the objectives relate to the theory. We will also be using document analysis to try to explain how Denmark has been able to use linkage in order to gain favorable terms in the agreements.

The documents analyzed will mostly be the joint statements and action plans drafted to explain each strategic partnership. We will also make use of news articles to confirm some of the objectives.

Analysis

In this chapter, we will analyze the Danish strategic partnerships through the lens of complex interdependence. The analysis will be structured around the parameters which we have found to be most prevalent from the theory. We will begin our analysis by presenting our findings regarding sensitivity and vulnerability because this parameter is at the core of understanding power relations in complex interdependence. Furthermore, sensitivity and vulnerability are to some degree present when examining the other parameters. It is thus important to have a grasp of this parameter in order to fully understand the other aspects of the theory.

Sensitivity & Vulnerability

The two dimensions of sensitivity and vulnerability can help us analyze how the power structures in the strategic partnerships are aligned, and help explain why some of the objectives are present in the partnerships.

The aspects of vulnerability and sensitivity are highly present in the partnership with Korea, with objectives such as:

“Korea and Denmark will continue joint efforts to promote quality shipping on fair and equal terms, effective regulation, reduction of administrative burdens and streamlining of IMO.”⁷²

⁷² Action Plan for the Strategic Partnership and the Green Growth Alliance between the Government of the Republic of Korea and the Government of the Kingdom of Denmark 2016-2019, Objective 27.2.

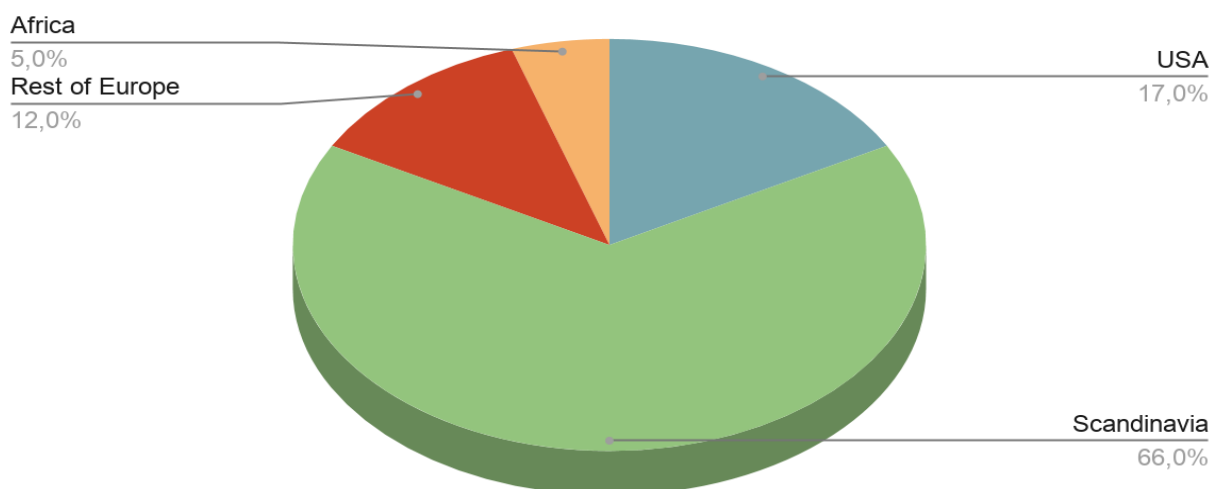
As both Denmark and Korea are major maritime nations it is important for them to mitigate the sensitivity and vulnerability of their maritime sectors. Worldwide equal terms are necessary for both nations to guarantee fair competition. Changes to the way global shipping are being conducted is something Denmark can potentially be very sensitive to, due to the large portion of Danish GDP being contributed to by this one sector. Sea transport accumulated 189 billion DKK in 2017.⁷³ The maritime sector is sensitive to external changes since it is a sector that is difficult and expensive to adapt to new situations, because policy changes within the policy area might not be an option.

Another sector where Denmark uses the strategic partnership to lower its sensitivity is the energy sector. It is crucial for a modern society to have a continuous and stable energy supply, in other words, there is a high degree of sensitivity and vulnerability in being dependent on other countries' export of energy. In 2019 Denmark had a total energy consumption of 712.788 TJ, but the Danish energy production only accounted for 523.118 TJ. Because of the Danish export of energy, the import of energy that year was 753.723 TJ, fossil fuels being the largest category. All in all, Denmark had a self-sufficiency rate of 70 percent,⁷⁴ meaning that Denmark needed to import 30 percent of its energy. The transition to renewable energy will increase the self-sufficiency rate and thus lower the vulnerability of the Danish energy sector, which can help explain why the energy sector and green growth are emphasized to such a degree in the partnerships.

⁷³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, The Trade Council, *Forstå dansk eksport*, (2019), <https://thetradecouncil.dk/services/eksport/dansk-eksport>, (retrieved 16-05-2021).

⁷⁴ Danish Energy Agency, *Energistatistik 2019*, (Danish Energy Agency, December 2020), p.4.

Figure 2. Danish import of Fossil Fuels (Share by country)



Source: DrivkraftDanmark, *Energistatistik 2019*, p. 45

If we closely examine the import of fossil fuels we can get a sense of how sensitive the Danish energy sector is. As seen in figure 2, most of the imported fossil fuels came from countries with which Denmark is very interconnected. The largest importer being the Scandinavian countries, with whom Denmark have a strong brotherhood-like relationship founded on long historical ties, thus representing a low sensitivity. The rest of Europe also consists of partners with who Denmark has a close relationship with, mainly through the membership of the EU. Countries such as Germany and the Netherlands have always culturally and historically been very close to Denmark. The close ties and interconnectedness of the other European countries mean that the sensitivity of Denmark's energy supply from those countries is extremely low, as it is almost unthinkable that the EU or the rest of Scandinavia would cease to export energy to the country.

The USA, a long ally and partner to Denmark, accounts for 17 % of the imported fossil fuels to Denmark. The two countries have had a close bond since the end of World War II. The three mentioned countries and regions are thus by far the largest importers of fossil fuels to Denmark, making up 95 percent of the total imported fossil fuels. They are all very closely related to Denmark, and even though the vulnerability of the Danish energy sector is rather high, due to the fact that the impact on the Danish society would be critical if the imports of fossil fuels stopped, and no alternative source is available. The sensitivity is very low since sanctions against Denmark from the importing

countries are highly unlikely. However, the last 5 percent of the imports are from Africa, which Denmark does not have as close ties with as the others. A situation where the fossil fuels from Africa are halted is not as unrealistic as the other regions.

We saw this in the 1970s when the OPEC countries raised the prices on oil, which in turn catalyzed an economic crisis in Denmark. The reason why we mention this is that since the oil crisis, Denmark has multiplied its number of energy sources, as a means to withstand a similar scenario in the future, thus lowering its vulnerability.⁷⁵ Therefore, the sensitivity of the Danish energy sector is much lower, since the disruption of imported fossil fuels from Africa will not have a critical impact on the Danish society. The objectives regarding energy export and facilitation of green tech know-how in the strategic partnerships can thus be seen as a part of a larger Danish foreign policy strategy of exporting renewable energy technology to all parts of the world. This will help lower the vulnerability of the Danish energy sector, because if renewable energy technology can be exported worldwide, the development of the technology will receive more attention and funding, and the development will thus be economically self-sustaining. This will in turn help Denmark realize its goal of becoming independent of fossil fuels in 2050.

The relationship between vulnerability and sensitivity is also evident in the Chinese-Danish partnership. The overall Danish export to China has been growing steadily for the duration of the partnership from 2008 to 2020.

The Danish exports to China grew from 11.2 billion DKK in 2008 to 41.4 billion DKK in 2020. But if we take a closer look at the development, the increase is steady with an annual average growth of 5.9 percent from 2007 to 2018. After a small decrease from 2017 to 2018, the total export grew by 45.35 percent from 2018 to 2020.⁷⁶ While we cannot with certainty say that the strategic partnership is the number one reason for this growth, we do, however, find it interesting that the growth happened after the two states agreed to facilitate more business connections and in general aiming at increasing trade and cultural ties between each other.

To have its trade diversified to several markets lowers the sensitivity of the economy for a society. If one market crashes, the general economy will stay afloat as long as it is diversified. Furthermore, before the creation of the Danish-Chinese strategic partnership China was the 14th

⁷⁵ Danmarkshistorien.dk, *Oliekriserne og deres betydning for dansk økonomi, 1973-1991*, (30-10-2018), <https://danmarkshistorien.dk/leksikon-og-kilder/vis/materiale/oliekriserne-og-deres-betydning-for-dansk-oekonomi-1973-1991/>, (retrieved 14-05-2021).

⁷⁶ Danmarks Statistik, *Udenrigshandel med varer - hovedtal*, <https://www.dst.dk/da/Statistik/emner/udenrigsoekonomi/udenrigshandel/udenrigshandel-med-varer>.

largest receiver of Danish goods. In 2020 they had grown to become the 6th largest export partner.⁷⁷ When it comes to Danish imports, China has been the fourth largest partner through the last 13 years, and the value of imports from China has had a steady increase of 5.6 percent per year on average from 2007 to 2020.⁷⁸

Many of the objectives involving the economic aspects of the agreement suit the various industries of Denmark. Objectives both in the environment and economic categories can be translated to Danish exports of goods. Examples such as the environmental objective to: “*Strengthen the cooperation on renewable energy, mainly through technical assistance and policy formulation.*”⁷⁹ And the economic objective to: “*Strengthen cooperation in the area of green maritime technology, shipbuilding and offshore equipment.*”⁸⁰ Though these objectives are from the Chinese partnership, they are indicative of the broader strategy behind the partnerships. Both of these objectives represent opportunities for Denmark to make use of their know-how in the fields of green technology and maritime experience, as well as expertise in formulating green policies.

This also falls in line with the fact that the maritime sector is the sector in the Danish economy with the largest share of exports when examining goods and services combined.⁸¹ With the aforementioned objectives of the strategic partnership with China, Denmark facilitates more trade within its core export sectors, which will help secure and lower the vulnerability of the Danish economy. The maritime sector is the largest in the Danish exports, and thus an area of high vulnerability since the Danish economy is dependent on the sector. Therefore it makes sense to lower the vulnerability of it by the facilitating of future exports of maritime technology. It can be seen as a brick in a wall of security for the Danish economy. The more bricks the wall contains, the less vulnerable it is to the removal of one or a few bricks.

Additionally, the objective also has an aspect of multiple channels proving that the parameters are often fluid and that the objectives will likely be a combination of several theoretical aspects. The description of the objective ends with “... *through facilitation of policy dialogue between relevant government authorities as well as collaboration between Chinese and Danish maritime businesses*

⁷⁷ Danmarks Statistik, *Udenrigshandel med varer*, Hovedtal, *Værdi af import og eksport*, <https://www.dst.dk/da/Statistik/emner/udenrigsoekonomi/udenrigshandel/udenrigshandel-med-varer>.

⁷⁸ Danmarks Statistik, *Udenrigshandel med varer*.

⁷⁹ China-Denmark Joint Work Programme (2017-2020), under *Building a Green and Sustainable Civilization*.

⁸⁰ China-Denmark Joint Work Programme (2017-2020), under *Reaping the Benefits of Economic Relations, Transport and Infrastructure*.

⁸¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, The Trade Council, *Forstå dansk eksport*.

and industries.”⁸² This means the objective is to be reached through multiple channels both on a governmental level and on a private business level. The policymakers will have to work together with the businesses so that the exchanges will be as profitable and as streamlined as possible. Meaning that the success of this kind of objective is dependent on the domestic market, and domestic policies of both countries.

The cases examined show that the Danish government uses the strategic partnerships to lower the sensitivity and vulnerability of several sectors. This is done by the use of export, import, and through international organizations.

Multiple channels

The theoretical aspect most present within the Danish strategic partnerships is the theory that multiple channels are involved when states make agreements with each other. In the strategic partnerships it is evident that the agreements are not just made between political actors, but span across sectors, such as culture, industry, and state level.

With agreements such as the exchange of pandas for the Copenhagen zoo, which is also perhaps the most publicly discussed part of any of the strategic partnerships, the partnership accentuates the Chinese goal of expanding westerners’ knowledge of Chinese culture. The aspect of culture is further elaborated with additional objectives such as cooperation between Denmark and China in the areas of museums, architecture, and cultural heritage in other forms.

An example of this is the creation of several Confucius Institutes at various Danish universities. With the first institute created merely a month before the official signing of the partnership.⁸³ Numerous Confucius Institutes have since then been created all over Denmark, including Aalborg University in 2009, just one year after the strategic partnership was enacted.

One of the objectives of the strategic partnership is to facilitate Danish language courses in China and vice versa. The objective specified that the Ministry of Education in China should provide “support to Danish Institutions of higher education to establish Confucius Institutes in Denmark.”⁸⁴ This is an example of how the strategic partnerships are used in an attempt to connect the citizens of

⁸² China-Denmark Joint Work Programme (2017-2020), under *Reaping the Benefits of Economic Relations, Transport and Infrastructure*.

⁸³ Copenhagen Business School, *Official Opening of Copenhagen Business Confucius Institute*, (2008), <https://www.cbs.dk/nyheder-arrangementer/arrangementer/official-opening-of-copenhagen-business-confucius-institute>.

⁸⁴ China-Denmark Joint Work Programme (2017-2020), *Promoting Cooperation on Science, Education, Culture, Tourism and Academy*.

each country. Denmark gains citizens with Chinese language skills, which in the future will become an asset for Danish companies conducting business in China. From the Chinese perspective, it is part of the larger Chinese strategy of implementing Confucius Institutes all over the world, as an instrument to promote the Chinese language and culture.⁸⁵ Having one's language as one of the main languages of the world outside one's country can have benefits in terms of cultural influence. In this way, the objective fulfills its requirement of being win-win. The establishment of these institutes also points to the fact that the partnerships are intended to incorporate all areas of society, not just the ones within the field of government. For the partnership to work, various interest organizations outside of the governments will need to work together and be introduced to the plans made on the state-to-state level.

This encapsulates complex interdependence theory's focus on multiple channels and the fact that having multiple national and international stakeholders acting in accordance with bilateral agreements can act as "transmission belts" which is making the government policies sensitive to each other as described by Keohane and Nye.⁸⁶ It also shows how matters which are seemingly small and unrelated to classic foreign policy goals, such as trade and defense will become a factor when conducting foreign policy in a situation where complex interdependence is present. An additional example of this is how the Japanese partnership has put an emphasis on the exchange of sports between the two countries, thus putting the implementation of the agreement in the hands of the civil society of each country.⁸⁷

The line between cultural and economic interests becomes blurred at times, for example when discussing the desire to increase tourism and flight routes.

The objective involving The China-Denmark Tourism Year of 2017 facilitated cooperation through more than just governmental assets.⁸⁸ It marks the first time an EU member-state arranged a tourism year with China. The tourism year consisted of the implementation of various events in both China and Denmark, as well as increased cooperation between Danish and Chinese travel agencies. Highlighting the large role various non-governmental channels have played in the implementation of the policy agreed upon. While we can observe the importance of multiple channels in this objective,

⁸⁵ Luwei Rose Luqiu & John D. McCarthy, *Confucius Institutes: The Successful Stealth "Soft Power" Penetration of American Universities*, in *The Journal of Higher Education* 2019, Vol. 90, No. 4, 620-643, (Routledge, 2019), p. 620.

⁸⁶ Keohane & Nye, *Power and Interdependence*, p. 21.

⁸⁷ Joint statement on the Establishment of a Strategic Partnership for Growth and Innovation between the Government of Japan and the Government of the Kingdom of Denmark.

⁸⁸ China-Denmark Joint Work Programme (2017-2020), *Promoting Cooperation on Science, Education, Culture, Tourism and Academy*.

there is also an overlap in the aspect of sensitivity. While some arguments for tourism speak highly of cultural exchanges, others, like Chairman of China National Tourism Administration Li Jinzao, said:

*“Tourism is not only a culture exchange activity, but also an industry that connects people with destination countries and help the development of local economic growth, job creation and the improving of local people's livelihood.”*⁸⁹

As Jinzao stated, the increased focus on travel between the countries is not only a matter of cultural exchanges between peoples but also a matter of economic growth. In 2017 Danish service exports were dominated by the travel sector which exported for a total value of 52.6 billion DKK.⁹⁰ While this is not all due to tourism, it shows the importance of the sector for the overall economy. More Chinese tourism to Denmark will thus also lower the sensitivity of the Danish tourism sector, to which Chinese tourists contributed with 855 million DKK in 2017.⁹¹ Having tourists coming from different countries lowers the sensitivity because it makes the sector less dependent on one country. It is thus an instance where there is an overlap of the theoretical aspect of multiple channels and sensitivity, in this case, private actors will be directly involved in lowering the sensitivity of a whole sector. Airlines in China and Denmark have the right to operate three daily flight routes between the two countries, and the work plan emphasizes the need to expand the number of flights as the relationship develops and demand increases.⁹² This is something that will have to happen if the objective of enhanced tourism is to be achieved. Furthermore, the most valuable airline passengers are business travelers.⁹³ In 2018, the year after the work plan was implemented, the total number of flight seats offered between the two countries (from Copenhagen airport) rose by 230 percent, showing the concrete effect of the partnership.⁹⁴ Therefore, more flight connections will also help facilitate more

⁸⁹ China Daily, *2017 China-Denmark Tourism Year concludes in Copenhagen*, (07-12-2017), https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/201712/07/WS5a28ae51a310fcb6fafd2b91_2.html.

⁹⁰ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, The Trade Council, *Forstå dansk eksport*.

⁹¹ Visit Denmark. Markedsprofil 2019. Kina. <https://api.www.visitdenmark.dk/sites/visitdenmark.com/files/2019-11/Markedsprofil%20Kina%20-%202019.pdf>, (retrieved 09-05-21).

⁹² China-Denmark Joint Work Programme (2017-2020), under *Reaping the Benefits of Economic Relations, Transport and Infrastructure*.

⁹³ Investopedia, *How much of Airlines' Revenue Comes From Business Travellers?*, (7-10-2020), <https://www.investopedia.com/ask/answers/041315/how-much-revenue-airline-industry-comes-business-travelers-compared-leisure-travelers.asp>, (retrieved 20-05-2021).

⁹⁴ Copenhagen Airport, *Flere flyruter fra Kina til Danmark øger turisme og samhandel*, <https://www.cph.dk/om-cph/presse/nyheder/2018/8/flere-flyruter-fra-kina-til-danmark-oger-turisme-og-samhandel>, (Retrieved 20-05-2021).

interconnectedness between Danish and Chinese businesses. As mentioned, the traveling sector dominated the Danish service sector in 2017. Therefore, the outlook for an increase in tourism from the most populated nation in the world presents a great opportunity for expansion in the sector.

As described by Keohane and Nye, the domestic and foreign policies are getting increasingly blurred, and the number of policy areas relevant to the sphere of foreign policy is growing.⁹⁵ One such instance is evident in the environmental dimensions of the strategic partnerships. Due to problems with air pollution, and domestic pressure,⁹⁶ China has set a goal to cut CO2 emissions by 40 percent in 2030, and be carbon-neutral by 2060.⁹⁷ To reach these goals, China cooperates with Denmark to gain the essential knowledge for that transition, a knowledge possessed by Danish firms. The strategic partnership is thus utilized as an instrument to facilitate more cooperation in the area between private and public actors. The fusion between public and private enterprise underlines the notion described by Keohane and Nye that most states will rely on private businesses and civil society to complement government-made decisions.

The fusion of government and private enterprise is especially prevalent in the Korean-Danish partnership. It is thus interesting to see the difference between the economic objectives in the Danish-Chinese strategic partnership and the Danish-Korean strategic partnership. The one with Korea facilitates more business between private companies in both countries, whereas the one with China most of the time was between the private sector in Denmark and the relevant ministries in China, reflecting the different forms of government present within the partnerships. The larger emphasis on private stakeholders also means the Danish and Korean governments have less control of securing the implementation of the objectives, and it is increasingly up to stakeholders in the private sector to make sure that the objectives are reached. A prime example of this is Objective 9.2: “*Korea and Denmark will jointly organize business events such as seminars, forums and exhibitions to promote better use of design in the product development of SMEs, start-ups as well as export businesses.*”⁹⁸ By making bilateral agreements like this on a multi-level, it enables the countries to tailor their objectives closely to the business communities of both countries. This shows how the private and public sectors are working together by having the states facilitate the initial framework for contact and then relying on the private firms to complete the objective. The overall result of such a process

⁹⁵ Keohane & Nye, *Power and interdependence*, p. 21.

⁹⁶ Council on Foreign Relations, *China's Environmental Crisis*, (2016), <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/chinas-environmental-crisis>.

⁹⁷ Reuters, China plans to raise minimum renewable power purchase to 40% by 2030: government document, (2021), <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-climatechange-renewables-idUSKBN2AA0BA>, (retrieved 10-05-2021).

⁹⁸ *Action Plan for Korea and Denmark*, Objective 9.2

is increased interdependence between the Danish and Korean economies and private businesses as explained in the theory section on vulnerability and sensitivity. Additionally, this is also an example of how private businesses have become an important factor in the foreign relations between two countries as proposed by the theory.

The private-public cooperation on the partnerships is also evident in the emergence of what is referred to as industry 4.0, also known as the fourth industrial revolution. It presents the opportunity of having another area where Denmark and Korea can cooperate to the benefit of both countries. In short, industry 4.0 is the integration of advanced computer technology in manufacturing. This will enable factories to become more efficient and interconnected within whole regions thus improving the overall level of manufacturing.⁹⁹

In the Danish-Korean strategic partnership, the two countries agreed to “...*exchange knowledge regarding industry 4.0...*”¹⁰⁰ Denmark is ranked 8th in the world in competitiveness for industry 4.0 and Tae Sung argues in his article *Industry 4.0: A Korean Perspective* that Korea needs to follow the example of the EU countries.¹⁰¹

Even though Korea was ranked 21st in its ability to transition to industry 4.0, the country is known to have a highly sophisticated IT industry. The two countries can thus use this common ground to gain economic growth and further develop the IT industries in both countries. Overall the objectives with an economic aspect emphasize bilateral investment, free trade through the EU, and cooperation on state level and within the business communities in sectors where the partnering countries excel.¹⁰² As a result, the two state’s economies will be more interdependent, furthermore, it shows how they use their national expertise to expand trade and investment.

Compared to the strategic partnership with China, the Korean partnership has a greater emphasis on knowledge sharing in the maritime, human rights, environment, and research sectors. This is evident in multiple objectives, for example in the objective to cooperate and share knowledge on maritime issues. The two state leaders agreed to invite each other's maritime communities to conferences in Korea and Denmark to facilitate networking between the two countries' merchant navies, in order to create business opportunities in the future. The same can be seen in the Danish-Indonesian partnership, where Indonesia invites Denmark to the *Our Ocean Conference*. Furthermore, Denmark and Indonesia, as well as China, agreed-upon closer cooperation and knowledge sharing in the

⁹⁹ Tae Kyung Sung, *Industry 4.0: A Korea Perspective*, (Elsevier, 2017), p. 1.

¹⁰⁰ *Action Plan for Korea and Denmark*, Objective 8.3.

¹⁰¹ Sung, *Industry 4.0*, p. 4.

¹⁰² *Action Plan for Korea and Denmark*.

maritime sector.¹⁰³ Serving as an example of how business and policies can be facilitated through more than just governmental channels. It also illustrates how Denmark can use its strategic partnerships to get invited to more fora in which to discuss and create policies, thus opening new channels of influence.

The Danish-Indonesian strategic partnership also set objectives to promote and facilitate more frequent mutual visits by delegations consisting of experts and personnel from the defense industry. In addition to this, a future seminar was to take place in Indonesia organized by the Danish embassy as a follow-up to a similar seminar held earlier in 2017 also in Indonesia.¹⁰⁴ By examining the participants of the 2017 defense industry seminar, it becomes clear that these kinds of objectives are examples of how multi-channel constellations can work. At the seminar, high-level personnel from the Royal Danish Navy attended alongside delegations from the private business sector.¹⁰⁵ This way the Danish authorities function as a bridgehead between Danish businesses and the Indonesian government. For example, the Danish company Odense Maritime Technology signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Indonesian National Naval Design Center,¹⁰⁶ which is managed partly by the Indonesian Ministry of Industry.¹⁰⁷ Thus connecting the Danish company with the Indonesian government for a business opportunity, which they could not have gained access to without the presence of the Danish high-level personnel and the strategic partnership.

The same objectives also serve as an example of what Keohane and Nye describe as absence of hierarchy, exemplified in the way that military- and merchant navies are working together to secure business opportunities. Furthermore, the strategic partnership was not strictly necessary for the first seminar to be held, but the partnership ties the objective of arranging another seminar to the other objectives in the action plan which spans across various policy areas, and it allows privileged access to the high-level coordination, being conducted at the seminars.

Something unique to the Danish-Korean partnership is that the green growth alliance is included in the strategic partnership. Even though it contains the word alliance, the Green Growth

¹⁰³ Plan of action 2017-2020 for the Partnership between The Government of the Kingdom of Denmark and The Government of the Republic of Indonesia, objective 9.

¹⁰⁴ Plan of action between Denmark and Indonesia, objective 4.

¹⁰⁵ ScandAsia.com, Danish naval defense solutions introduced to Indonesia, (21-05-2017), <https://scandasia.com/danish-naval-defense-solutions-introduced-to-indonesia/>, (retrieved 14-05-2021).

¹⁰⁶ ScandAsia.com, *Danish naval defense solutions introduced to Indonesia*.

¹⁰⁷ NASDEC, Our profile, <http://nasdec.its.ac.id/ourprofile.php>, (retrieved 08-05-2021).

Alliance is not a stand-alone project. It does have its own joint statement,¹⁰⁸ but it is incorporated into the work plan for the strategic partnership. Therefore, we see it as part of the strategic partnership.

The first objective in the section is about the Green Growth Alliance which is inspired by the Paris Agreements' goal of limiting "*the increase in global average temperature to well below 2 °C above pre-industrial levels and to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5 °C above pre-industrial levels.*"¹⁰⁹ It is a way of showcasing the need to act fast when it comes to solving the climate issues, thus exhibiting how global challenges are forcing countries to become more interdependent.

Looking at the rest of the objectives centered on the category of environment in the Korean partnership, they either try to create a discourse about the problems regarding the climate changes through the United Nations framework, or they are discussing how to create cooperation in resolving the climate issue. Showcasing the importance of multiple actors and channels in the strategic partnerships, one objective facilitates the possibility for a business delegation to participate in a Korean high-level visit to the Global Green Growth Forum in Denmark.¹¹⁰ Additionally, objective 21.4 states that; "*Korea and Denmark will establish partnerships within green growth and renewable energy between relevant stakeholders.*"¹¹¹ This plays to Denmark's strengths because the country is the leading country when it comes to the transition to renewable energy, as will be explained in greater detail later in this analysis.¹¹² Objective 21.4 can therefore be perceived as an example of how the Danish authorities are fulfilling their stated purposes and definitions of what a strategic partnership should provide.

Added to that, Denmark is already planning on continuing the development of new ways of developing renewable energy thus creating economic opportunities for Danish companies and the opportunity to brand itself on the foreign political core interest of being a green economy, as stated in the definition of strategic partnerships.¹¹³

The Danish government has set a goal to be independent of fossil fuels by 2050, and increase the share of renewable energy in the Danish sources of energy substantially, within a short

¹⁰⁸ *Joint Statement on the Establishment of a Green Growth Alliance between the Government of the Republic of Korea and the Government of the Kingdom of Denmark.*

¹⁰⁹ *Action Plan for Korea and Denmark*, Objective 19.

¹¹⁰ *Action Plan for Korea and Denmark*, Objective 21.2.

¹¹¹ *Action Plan for Korea and Denmark*, Objective 21.4.

¹¹² Dr. Iain Staffel & Dr. Malte Jansen, *Energy Revolution: A Global Outlook*, (Imperial College London, 2018).

¹¹³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, *Strategiske Partnerskaber*, <https://um.dk/da/udenrigspolitik/lande-og-regioner/strategiske-partnerskaber/>.

timeframe.¹¹⁴ Coupled with the aim to reduce “*the costs of clean energy, while providing maximum benefit to both countries.*”¹¹⁵ They create international focus on the need to transition to renewable energy, while they are also ready to export the technology needed for that transition and turn it into an economic asset. The aspect of the environmental know-how and export of green energy tech has been consistent in all of the strategic partnerships made by Denmark. Especially the one with India from 2020 which is branded as an exclusively “environmental” partnership,¹¹⁶ favoring Danish companies to help create sustainable urban development, enhanced market access for small and medium businesses, and environmental protection in general. Thus opening a market with the potential of exports on an exponential scale for Danish corporations in the green growth sector. Furthermore, if Denmark succeeds in making the transition to renewable energy globally, there will be potential for economic growth which in turn will help to realize the goal of being independent of fossil fuels in 2050. Reaching this goal will lower the Danish sensitivity and vulnerability by securing increased self-sufficiency in the area of energy supply, incorporating channels spanning across public and private partnerships as a coherent unit.

The presence of multiple channels is not only visible in arenas such as environment and economics, but also within the law and human rights categories, as is evident in the strategic partnership with Mexico.¹¹⁷ The agreement with Mexico is in itself far less comprehensive than the Chinese, Korean and Indonesian ones, being one of the partnerships with only a joint statement. It stands out, however, by having a much greater emphasis on minority rights. When making the partnership with Mexico, cooperation within already established international organizations was preferred. Cooperation on the equality of indigenous Mexicans, ethnic, sexual, and gender minorities through the United Nations was emphasized. The GATT and WTO are also mentioned as channels that will be operated within. It is thus a clear example of how policy is being made through different channels than just the bilateral one, but it is hardly unique to the constellation of strategic partnerships.

To summarize, the aspect of multiple channels is clearly visible across all six strategic partnerships, covering sectors as diverse as culture, trade, and innovation. Usually, they are built upon already established sectors and facilitate a connection between private actors and civil society. They

¹¹⁴ Danish Energy Agency, *Overview: Targets impacting Danish climate policies*, <https://ens.dk/en/our-responsibilities/energy-climate-politics/danish-climate-policies>, (visited 30-04-2021).

¹¹⁵ *Action Plan for Korea and Denmark*, Objective 21.5

¹¹⁶ Hindustan Times, *Others should look to follow India-Denmark Green Strategic Partnership, says Danish climate minister.*

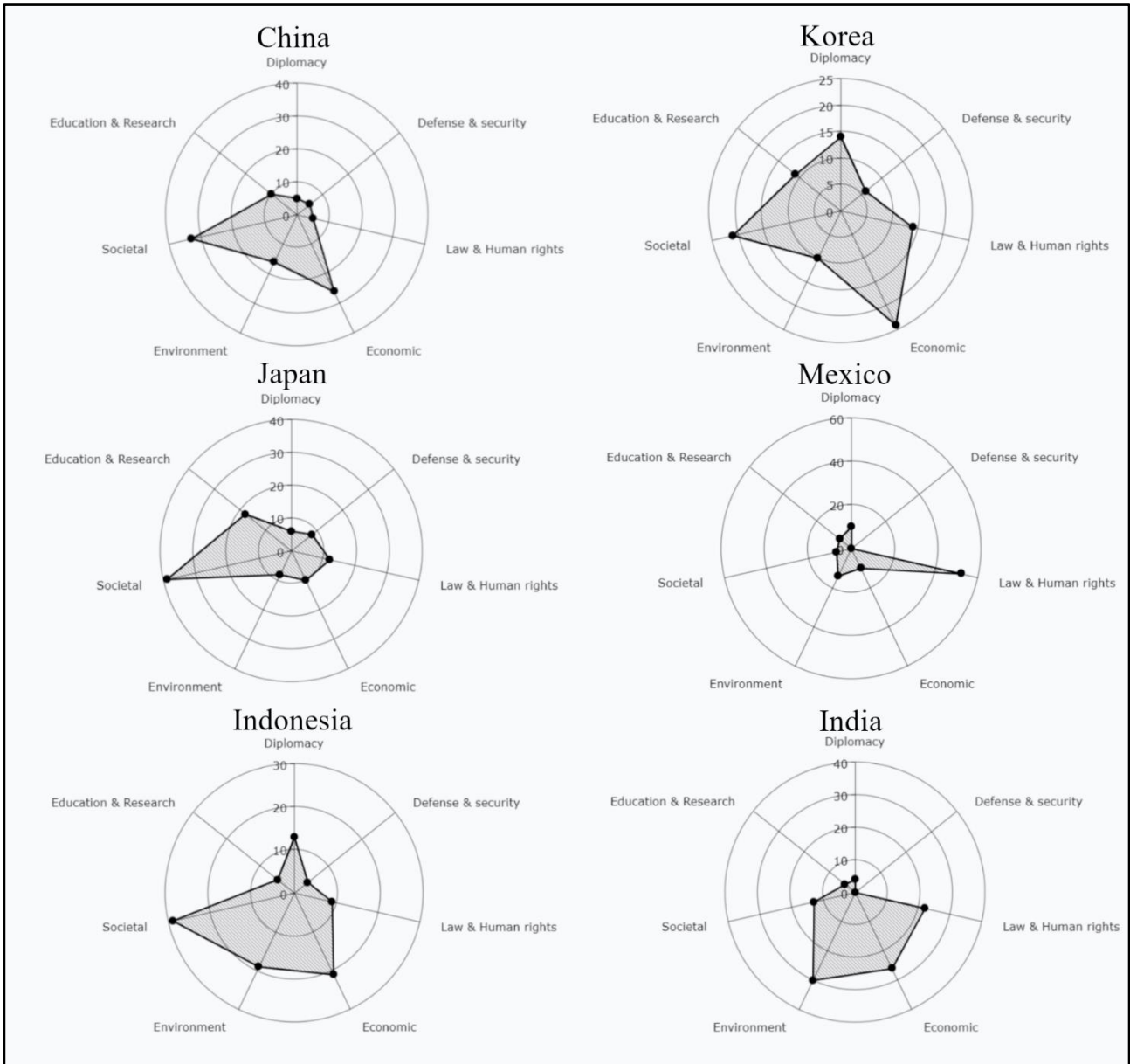
¹¹⁷ Joint statement between the government Kingdom of Denmark and the Government of the United Mexican States.

require the support of these private actors in order to secure the full implementation of the objectives agreed upon.

Absence of hierarchy

The aspects most emphasized in the strategic partnerships plays to Denmark's strengths, such as environmental protection, including the export and expanse of green energy technology, export of knowhow in the healthcare and welfare sectors, as well as an emphasis on trade.

As shown in the diagrams below, it is typical that there are only two or three dominating categories in the partnerships, however, they do change slightly with every country. The relatively few major categories agreed upon may show the lack of a general rule dictating what set of policy should be emphasized in a strategic partnership, as opposed to a traditional military alliance with a clear emphasis on defense. This absence of one single policy issue is illustrated by the diagrams showing the categories most frequently agreed upon.



Diagrams showing the share of each category in the strategic partnerships (in percentage).

As the diagrams show, there does not seem to be a certain hierarchy of the issue areas which are consistent across all partnerships. Instead the policies and policy areas in focus change to better suit the country in question in order to better adapt to the strengths and needs of each country.

As illustrated, the societal category in the Chinese partnership, covering cultural and welfare sectors is one of the most emphasized. The cultural aspects of the Chinese partnership carry over into the education and research sector, with an emphasis on exchanges between people. This was made apparent by the fact that countries agreed to further cooperate on the exchange of students, in an attempt to increase mutual understanding between the peoples of each country, as well as cooperate

on activities carried out by their respective educational facilities.¹¹⁸ The statistics show us that this particular objective actually has been achieved since the agreement was made. The number of exchange students from Denmark going to China has risen by a considerable amount. In 2019 the number of exchange students had tripled at around 600 individuals compared to 2010 when the number was at 200 Danish students studying in China.¹¹⁹

Adversely, the number of Chinese students rose by roughly the same amount over the course of the same period. The action plan we are analyzing was made in 2017, so looking at numbers before that might not make sense at first, however, the numbers do show a considerable jump in 2017 at an increase of 100 students traveling to study in China.

The case of the exchange students is not only a great opportunity to see a concrete effect stemming from an objective agreed upon in the strategic partnership, but it also tells us something about how the spread of culture, in this case, the exchange of experiences and branding, is at the forefront of modern diplomacy, accentuating the theory that military capabilities are no longer at the top of the hierarchy of issues.

As with the other partnerships the societal category is the one with the most objectives, cementing the notion that cultural exchange and the exchange of ideas, is an important factor in the Danish strategic partnerships. However, compared to the partnership made with China, the cultural exchanges with Indonesia do not at first glance seem to further cooperation, trade, or other sectors, such as what could be observed with the Chinese tourism sector, being about both cultural exchange and economic gains. The objectives made with Indonesia in this regard, seems to only further cultural interconnectedness for its own sake, for example, objective 17.3:

“Indonesia and Denmark will continue to promote cultural exchange between the two countries through, for example, but not limited to cultural events, displaying Indonesian and Danish culture and arts.”

If perceived through the lens of complex interdependence the objective fits under the parameter of absence of hierarchy where close cultural ties take up as much or more space in the action plan as military action and cooperation.

¹¹⁸ China-Denmark Joint Work Programme (2017-2020), *Promoting Cooperation on Science, Education, Culture, Tourism and Academy*.

¹¹⁹ Danmarks Statistik, *Femdobling af korte udgående udvekslingsophold*, <https://www.dst.dk/da/Statistik/nyt/NytHtml?cid=30618>, (retrieved 11-05-2021).

In addition to this, the aspect of absence of hierarchy is clearly seen in the trade section of the Danish-Indonesian strategic partnership. One of the objectives, for example, state that:

*“(...) there are many areas, which have potential for the expansion of trade and investment between Indonesia and Denmark, including health and medical services, maritime affairs and green shipping, agriculture and food, defense, renewable energy and green solutions.”*¹²⁰

This long list of different sectors shows how the categories of policy and trade goods are not prioritized in an order above or below each other, rather they are mentioned as if they hold an equal value of negotiation, even though their value from an economical perspective is different.

Furthermore, the partnership with Indonesia is the only one where religion plays a major role in the objectives. This takes the form of interfaith dialogue and anti-radicalization. These objectives overlap into the security category, for example, objective 6.1 which focuses on *“promoting tolerance, interfaith and intercultural dialogue and anti-radicalization.”*¹²¹ overlaps with objective 6.4 in the defense category, which states that Denmark will share *“...experiences from ‘the Danish Model for prevention of radicalization and extremism’ with Indonesia...”*¹²²

Additionally, an objective on the promotion of bicycling as a means of transportation in Indonesia is seemingly sorted as valued equal to the objectives to cooperate on security issues.¹²³

This shows how religion, interfaith dialogue, culture, environment, and all of the other categories shown in the diagrams, have an equal or a larger emphasis than security, which is only mentioned as a small part of a larger objective. The traditional hierarchy where security would be on top has thus been neutralized.

As is the case with Indonesia, China, and Japan, the Korean-Danish partnership has an emphasis on the general societal objectives, especially in the welfare sector regarding the aging population of Korea. Like China, Korea has a problem that 16.5 percent of the population is more than 65 years old. With the fastest aging population in the world, Korea is estimated to have 37.3 percent of its population being above the age of 65 in 2050.¹²⁴ This problem is shared by Denmark,

¹²⁰ Plan of action between Denmark and Indonesia, p. 5.

¹²¹ Plan of action between Denmark and Indonesia, objective 6.1.

¹²² Plan of action between Denmark and Indonesia, objective 6.4.

¹²³ Plan of action between Denmark and Indonesia, objective 10.2.

¹²⁴ Japan Spotlight, *South Korea's Looming Aging Crisis Demographic Change & Challenges of Graying Ahead*, (March/April 2009), https://www.jef.or.jp/journal/pdf/164th_cover08.pdf

where 19 percent of the population is over the age of 65, a number which is estimated to increase to 25 percent in 2040.¹²⁵

The two countries are trying to overcome this problem by means of sharing knowledge and experiences on the subject. This is also in line with the general goal of the Danish authorities, which are using the partnerships to export Danish welfare to its strategic partners.¹²⁶

Objective 15.5 in the Korean-Danish partnership calls for cooperation in the area of an aging population and e-health.¹²⁷ The objective to share knowledge on eldercare, is also present in the Chinese and Japanese partnerships, showing the similarities in what Denmark is able to provide to the agreements. The objectives regarding enhanced knowledge-sharing intertwine the two countries in each strategic partnership culturally and professionally. The problem of having an increasingly aging population is an issue that is traditionally derived from the sphere of domestic politics but has increasingly become elevated to also play a role in the arena of foreign policy. The strategic partnerships can thus be observed to not only involve the foreign ministries but span across policies and public-private dimensions as well. Government ministries across several areas of expertise are being brought in to help create the partnership. These objectives thus serve as textbook examples of what Keohane and Nye pointed out; that not only one channel is involved in defining foreign policy issues anymore. Especially how the distinction between domestic and foreign policy issues is increasingly being blurred.¹²⁸

It is interesting that the sharing of knowledge on welfare is emphasized to such a degree, when in the partnerships with both Japan and Korea, the objectives regarding eldercare, culture, and exchange students are side by side with issues such as the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula. An issue that traditionally, would be at the top priority in foreign policy negotiations.

Asymmetries

When negotiating with countries that are larger in both economic output, population, and size, it is natural that the strategic partnerships will be somewhat asymmetrical in terms of what kind of leverage can be applied to get the best deal possible. Denmark will thus be the weak power in all of the strategic partnerships, measured on the parameters mentioned above. Therefore, it can at first

¹²⁵ Danish ministry of health, Signe Dilling-Pedersen. *Denmark's National Follow-up to the UNECE Regional Implementation Strategy (RIS) of the Madrid Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA) from 2012-2016.*

¹²⁶ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, *Strategiske Partnerskaber.*

¹²⁷ *Action Plan for Korea and Denmark*, Objective 15.5.

¹²⁸ Keohane & Nye. *Power and Interdependence*, p. 20.

glance seem puzzling that Denmark engages in these strategic partnerships when it will always be the more dependent state in the relationship.

One reason as to why Denmark would engage in these partnerships could be that the relative size of Denmark, compared to countries like Japan, Indonesia, and China is not going to change, so working with the resources available, even at a disadvantage, can in the right circumstances still be better than not working with the countries at all.

The most obvious asymmetries between Denmark and China are the considerable differences mentioned above, the size of population, military force, and economy where China is dominating all parameters by a large margin. However, asymmetries do not always take the form of physical limitations, in some cases, Denmark has the advantage in the form of a more seasoned, experienced welfare system and health authority. An advantage that seems to be played as a bargaining chip in the strategic partnerships as a general rule, not just with the Chinese partnership, but across all 6 agreements.

One example of this is how the healthcare system of Denmark is used as a means to export know-how and solutions to the partnering countries. With an appraised healthcare system,¹²⁹ Denmark is able to leverage the expertise gained on healthcare to utilize the asymmetries to create political agreements. This is because smaller states will generally have a tendency to specialize in a few areas of expertise since their power over outcomes in the larger schemes will be limited.¹³⁰ Using this expertise as a bargaining chip, Denmark can, according to the theory, use its unique know-how and experience in this one particular area and link it together with other policies in order to draw concessions from the larger partner.¹³¹ These concessions can take the form of better deals in other areas, where Denmark is the weaker part of the relationship. Though difficult to prove, one example where Denmark can use its know-how as a linkage is in the objective to: *“Establish a Sino-Danish Pig Model Farm (...)”*¹³²

In the Denmark-China partnership from 2017 two of the objectives were to further cooperation within the health- and elder care systems. With 17.9 percent of its total population (255 million) over the age of 60 in 2020, China needs to facilitate changes to its eldercare system, which has been known

¹²⁹ US News, These 10 Countries Are Seen to Have the Best Public Health Care Systems, (13-04-2021), <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-countries/slideshows/countries-with-the-most-well-developed-public-health-care-system?slide=9>, (retrieved 16-05-2021).

¹³⁰ Dosenrode, *Western European small states in international regimes*.

¹³¹ Keohane & Nye, *Power and interdependence*, p. 25.

¹³² China-Denmark Joint Work Programme (2017-2020), under *Reaping the Benefits of Economic Relations, Transport and Infrastructure*.

to have waiting lists of up to 20 years at public nursing homes.¹³³ A society with a high percentage of elders is somewhat challenged since people older than 60 years old often do not work, and are therefore not contributing to the social system with tax payments. Moreover, they usually have to receive some sort of elder and health care at some point. So economically they provide an overall loss, furthermore, the eldercare system needs a sufficiently skilled workforce to cope with the growing number of people in the system. As a solution to this challenge, know-how is being exchanged between an “... *established working group*” and “*Roundtable discussions on future challenges in the field of eldercare.*” Between China and Denmark. The sharing of knowledge in this area is largely to the advantage and in the interest of China, but it gives Denmark an opportunity to gain privileged access to the Chinese government and their health care programs, with possible economic or branding gains in the future. Much in line with this, another objective is concerning poverty reduction which is only planned to take place in China. This is to be reached by encouraging and “...*support Danish enterprises to participate in poverty reduction in China.*”¹³⁴ However, as mentioned, the fact that Denmark is able to share knowledge on the subject can be used as a bargaining chip where policies can be linked together to gain concessions in other areas.

Another area where the asymmetric relation becomes clear is in one of the agreed-upon objectives to further strengthen the ties between Denmark and China in the area of film production. Concretely this has been enacted by the co-production agreement made in 2017, giving film productions the right to apply for funding in the respective countries. The agreement allows Danish-made movies to bypass a Chinese law that states that only 38 foreign films can be imported each year, as long as the Danish movies are co-produced with Chinese partners. Thus in theory giving Danish movies a significant competitive advantage over those of other countries that do not have a partnership agreement with China.¹³⁵

This serves as an example of an asymmetrical relationship, which is not entirely in the favor of Denmark, as its movie industry is being leveraged into accepting concessions in order to export its productions. However, it also serves as an example as to why it can still be an overall benefit to engage in asymmetrical relations for a small state like Denmark. In this example, Denmark, as the

¹³³ CGTN News, Why China can support the elderly so well, (13-09-2019), <https://news.cgtn.com/news/2019-09-12/Why-China-can-support-the-elderly-so-well-JVygx2Hkcw/index.html>, (retrieved 16-05-2021).

¹³⁴ China-Denmark Joint Work Programme (2017-2020), under *Enhancing Cooperation on Political, Judicial and Internal Affairs*.

¹³⁵ Dansk-Kinesisk Kultur Innovation, *Støtte til filmproduktioner*, <http://dkki.dk/stoette-til-filmproduktioner/>, retrieved 12-05-2021.

less powerful state, will still have an opportunity to break into the Chinese market, which countries without a strategic partnership would not have had.

The asymmetries are also evident in the Danish-Indonesian strategic partnership, for example in Objective 7.4 which promotes and facilitates “(...) *Danish investments in Indonesia, such as the Investment Fund for Developing Countries(...)*” The asymmetry in the relationship with Denmark favors Indonesia since the country’s economy is the 16th largest in the world as measured by GDP and expected to be the 11th largest in 2025.¹³⁶ Compared to Denmark as the 38th largest economy in the world,¹³⁷ Indonesia outweighs Denmark substantially when it comes to economic power.

This asymmetry is seen in the strategic partnership as Denmark cannot demand the same investment from Indonesia into the Danish economy. It is therefore not surprising that the Danish investment in Indonesia accumulates to 1.1 billion DKK compared to the Indonesian investment in Denmark which amounts to 0.2 billion DKK.¹³⁸ Since the Indonesian market poses a larger potential for Danish companies than the Danish market does for Indonesian companies, and that per capita Indonesia is a relatively poorer country. It is therefore not a surprise that Denmark and Danish companies would invest more in Indonesian enterprises than vice versa. What this shows, however, is that the stated overall purpose of engaging in the strategic partnerships, in general, is to build solid relations with select growth economies. Seeing as Indonesia is projected to grow substantially into one of the largest economies in the world, it is thus an opportunity to make early investments for Danish companies, and thus an advantage to be a minor state in an asymmetrical relationship.

The examples of the export of know-how and the advantages of the movie industry can be seen as cases where the asymmetrical relationship can be an advantage for Denmark. This is because it is highly unlikely that the movies produced and exported into China will flood the market, thus making it easier for the Chinese government to give concessions on the area.

In our analysis of the asymmetrical relations observed in the strategic partnerships, we have found that even though Denmark has a distinct disadvantage in terms of bargaining power, the strategic partnerships still seem to be a benefit in the grand scheme. This asymmetrical relation can in some circumstances be beneficial for Denmark. By taking advantage of the fact that it is easier for the more

¹³⁶ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, *Udenrigsøkonomisk analyse: Udviklingstendenser i den indonesiske økonomi*, (19-10-2015).

¹³⁷ The World Bank, Data Catalog, GDP ranking, Gross domestic product 2019, <https://datacatalog.worldbank.org/dataset/gdp-ranking>, (retrieved 26-04-2021).

¹³⁸ Dansk Erhverv, *Markedsrapport for Indonesien*, (March 2020), p. 3.

powerful party in the agreement to give concessions because it will impact them less than giving the same concessions to a large country.

In the clean energy sector, the asymmetrical relations also play a role in how the countries implement the partnership. Denmark has been recognized as one of the leading countries in the world when it comes to the transition to renewable energy, according to an energy report developed by researchers at Imperial College London, tasked with examining five parameters consisting of: Clean power, Phase-out of fossil fuels, Electrification of personal vehicles, Carbon capture and storage, and Improved energy efficiency across the economy.¹³⁹ This leading position is the reason for the relatively large role of the environment category in the strategic partnerships across all six agreements. Under the headline “Building a Green and Sustainable Civilization” the first objective mentioned is about “*Strengthen the cooperation on renewable energy...*”¹⁴⁰ This highlights the enhanced focus on the transition to sustainable energy, Denmark and China make a perfect match for this. With Denmark’s know-how as a world leader on the issue, and Danish companies such as Vestas and Ørsted as global leaders within renewable energy (4th and 6th respectively in the world measured by revenue for companies in renewable energy).¹⁴¹ Coupled with China as the world’s largest market for renewable energy.¹⁴² This creates a great economic potential for Denmark to further enhance the already established partnership between the two countries, within the renewable energy sector. More importantly, it also shows how the success of domestic corporations will in some cases lead to the creation of tangible foreign policy, showing how the theory of multiple channels plays out in reality. This is also a case where the concept of asymmetries can be perceived to be to the benefit of Denmark because the objective is opening up for a potential of exponential growth in the sector, compared to the potential the objective holds for China. The asymmetries in each partnership can thus, in some instances be seen to play out as an advantage for a country like Denmark, because its smaller size will be perceived as less imposing, giving minor nations a way to gain favorable agreements.

The asymmetries are evident in the concessions Denmark has had to make when, for example, agreeing to not support the Taiwanese inclusion into international organizations,¹⁴³ and support the

¹³⁹ Staffel & Jansen, *Energy Revolution: A Global Outlook*, Imperial College London.

¹⁴⁰ China-Denmark Joint Work Programme (2017-2020), under *Building a Green and Sustainable Civilization*.

¹⁴¹ Statista, Revenue of select companies in renewable energy in FY 2019 (in million U.S. dollars), (2021), <https://www.statista.com/statistics/273079/revenue-of-selected-companies-in-the-renewable-energy-field/>, (retrieved 05-05-2021).

¹⁴² IRENA, World Adds Record New Renewable Energy Capacity in 2020, (05-04-2021),

<https://www.irena.org/newsroom/pressreleases/2021/Apr/World-Adds-Record-New-Renewable-Energy-Capacity-in-2020>, (retrieved 05-05-2021).

¹⁴³ Joint statement China and Denmark SP. 2008.

One-China policy by opposing the independence of Tibet.¹⁴⁴ This cements the claim by Yong Deng that part of China's strategy with the strategic partnerships is to make other nations overall friendly to its rise to regional power.¹⁴⁵ Denmark does seem to have been able to use the asymmetries, in order to gain certain advantages, using the specialized knowledge as a bargaining chip. Furthermore, the small size can give Denmark power over certain outcomes by using the small size as a way to create linkages between policy areas, as well as to seem less imposing and therefore easier to give certain concessions.

Discussion

In the following section, we will discuss our findings from the analysis with the existing literature on the subject of strategic partnerships, as well as Danish foreign policy.

Much of the academic literature has revolved around the exact definitions of strategic partnerships. Some argue that they are no more than a rhetorical device used by politicians and diplomats to make their actions justifiable. Others argue that strategic partnerships are substantial agreements, but must adhere to select criteria in order for the agreements to qualify as true strategic partnerships.

Sean Kay argued that the strategic partnership is a rhetorical tool used by the United States to create informal and non-binding agreements with smaller countries outside of NATO in order to create a common front against its rivals. This view is similar to that of Jonathan Holslag, who, as mentioned in the literature review, argued the same about the Chinese partnerships. While this may be correct in the context of the USA, we find it to be incorrect to view strategic partnerships in general, according to these terms. As our analysis shows, there has been little to no mention of creating a common front against another country, except for North Korea in the context of cooperation in the U.N. Instead, we found the partnerships to be rather concrete, even to the point wherein the Chinese partnership, it was written down in detail how to achieve each objective. Based on the various examples highlighted in our analysis, we have shown that the objectives are being implemented in accordance with the strategic partnership in substantive ways, meaning that at least the majority of the Danish partnerships are more than political rhetoric.

¹⁴⁴ Det Udenrigspolitiske Nævn 2009-10, UPN Alm.del Bilag 24.

¹⁴⁵ Deng, *Remolding Great Power Politics*, p. 898

However, the fact that there are only joint statements and not fully-fledged action plans for the Japanese and Mexican partnerships after 7 and 4 years respectively, can be argued to be a sign that not all partnerships are prioritized equally, thus lacking effectiveness. The implementation of the objectives in the joint statements is therefore difficult to quantify since no official documents are showing in as much detail what has been agreed upon. It is therefore understandable that some would deem these partnerships more rhetorical than substantial.

The fact that the Indian partnership is yet to be made into an action plan can be explained by the fact that the partnership was agreed upon in 2020 and that the covid-19 pandemic obstructed the work. Our findings are similar to those of Feng Zhongping and Huang Jing, who found that the Chinese strategic partnerships with Russia and Brazil took more than a decade to become effective.¹⁴⁶ This pattern shows that strategic partnerships generally take a long time to prove their worth as a foreign policy tool. Furthermore, the critique of the partnerships being ineffective can be explained by the fact that it was formulated when the constellation of strategic partnerships was still a relatively new concept in international relations. Sean Kay's article was published in the year 2000, and according to Zhongping and Jing, the Chinese strategic partnerships became effective in the mid-2000s.¹⁴⁷

The majority of the literature on strategic partnerships have had a focus on the major powers, such as Russia, The EU, the USA, and China. Scholars such as Jonathan Holslag and Sean Kay, have argued that the constellation of strategic partnerships seems to be more akin to alliances, than being its own tool in the foreign policy toolbox.¹⁴⁸

Holslags argument that China uses the strategic partnerships to create mini-alliances to counterbalance the power of the USA, does not align with our findings. If following the definition of alliances presented by Glen Snyder, who perceived alliances to be: "*formal associations of states for the use (or non-use) of military force, in specified circumstances, against states outside their own membership.*"¹⁴⁹ The Danish strategic partnerships do not show similarities with alliances, as these are driven by goals and not threats. Furthermore, there is no sign that Denmark should be moving closer to China than the USA, because of the partnerships. They do not align Denmark and its partnering country against a common front, but rather towards common objectives, in the realms of economics, culture, and welfare. The argument presented by Sean Kay that strategic partnerships are used by powerful military states does not align with the fact that Denmark has been able to create 6

¹⁴⁶ Zhongping & Jing, *China's strategic partnership diplomacy*.

¹⁴⁷ Zhongping & Jing, *China's strategic partnership diplomacy*, pp. 11 - 12.

¹⁴⁸ Kay, *What is a strategic partnership?*, and Holslag, *The Elusive Axis*.

¹⁴⁹ Glenn Snyder, *Alliance Politics*, (New York: Cornell University Press, 1997), p. 4.

different partnerships, including countries as diverse as Mexico and China. Seen in this light, the Danish partnerships are difficult to analyze using a realist perspective, such as that of Sean Kay, and are more suited to be analyzed using a liberalist theory such as complex interdependence.

Thomas Wilkins is somewhat aligned with Holslag and Kay, but with the crucial difference that he does not perceive the strategic partnerships to be alliances, nor coalitions, but its own independent concept. He perceives the strategic partnerships to be threat-driven, not only in military terms but also in economic terms,¹⁵⁰ which in some ways can be seen in the Danish partnerships as well. This is seen in the way Denmark can be argued to use its partnerships in order to lower its vulnerabilities in the energy sector, which will have a slight security advantage. Secondly, the Danish partnerships are fitting into Wilkins's arguments about strategic partnerships, in that the partnerships cannot be seen as a coalition, as this would entail, “*a grouping of like-minded states that agree on the need for joint action on a specific problem at a particular time*”.¹⁵¹ The Danish partnerships are thus too comprehensive to fit into this category, both in time and in the fact that there is not one specific problem that needs to be addressed. Instead, there is a non-hierarchical structure of many individual tasks and objectives, which the partnering countries can agree on helping each other with.

Contrary to Wilkins, Giovanni Grevi also perceives strategic partnerships to be a different word for an alliance, however, the core of his analysis examines the *strategicness* of strategic partnerships. With strategicness, he argues that the partnerships must be essential for the states to reach their international goals.¹⁵² Based on our findings we disagree with this because the Danish partnerships contain much more than what can be argued to be *essential* for the Danish Government. Objectives such as the exchange of art and artists with Indonesia are hardly essential for either party in the agreement. Instead, we would argue that because some objectives are cultural and some are economical, the strategic partnerships should be perceived as more of a package deal, where both culture, economics, and in some cases security concerns can be bundled together. It would be possible for both states to only focus on the essential parts of the partnerships, yet they elect not to. This is showing how the strategic partnership constellation can cover a broader array of objectives and interests, than the bare essentials which could be covered by standard bilateral agreements.

In his analysis of the EU-Russian strategic partnership, Marius Vahl deemed the partnership to be ineffective because of the massive normative differences. He also argued that the asymmetries in the relationship hindered the constructiveness of the strategic partnership. Thus arguing that for a

¹⁵⁰ Wilkins, *Russo-Chinese Strategic Partnership*.

¹⁵¹ Andrew J. Pierre, *Coalitions: Building and Maintenance*, (Georgetown University, DC, 2002), p. 2.

¹⁵² Grevi, *Making the EU strategic partnership effective*, p. 8.

strategic partnership to function the parties must be of equal power and share the same norms.¹⁵³ We do not find this to be true regarding the Danish strategic partnerships, as the normative differences between Denmark and most of the partner countries are as far apart as that of the EU and Russia, as for asymmetries the difference is also much larger. Adversely, our analysis shows how Denmark can use the asymmetrical relationships to its advantage.

The problem with having a narrow definition of the term is two-sided. First, we see the pattern that the scholars working from a narrow definition will often have the tendency to deem the partnerships inconsequential. The second problem is that it makes it difficult to create an analysis based on another scholar's definition because the narrow definition fails to encapsulate the varying nature of strategic partnerships. Most partnerships would thus be deemed as form rather than substance according to a narrow definition.

Our contribution to the academic literature on strategic partnerships is in that we are offering an analysis of a minor state as opposed to the traditional examination of major powers, and how the theory of complex interdependence can be used as an analytical tool for the examination of the framework. We agree with some of the aspects regarding Wilkins' approach as well as Zhongping and Jing, however, we have not found it to be as relevant to put an emphasis on the definitions of strategic partnerships which is another point where we differ from the existing literature.

In regards to the literature on the Danish foreign policy, we have found Dosenrodes theory that smaller nations will find specialized subjects in order to be able to compete on the world stage to be aligned with our analysis.

Henrik Larsen claims that Denmark's *actorness* as a strategic actor has decreased since the Lisbon treaty was enacted in 2009.¹⁵⁴ However, our analysis of the Danish strategic partnerships shows Denmark's capabilities of being a strategic actor outside of the EU system, by creating bilateral agreements with countries outside of the traditional Danish sphere.

Our argument that the Danish *actorness* has increased in the last decade, is generally backed up by Brun Pedersen's view that the degree to which Danish involvement in foreign affairs has been increasing since 2001. He argues for a shift in the Danish foreign policy strategy towards a more aggressive strategy of being more active rather than reactive.¹⁵⁵ This stands as a contrast to the claim of Larsen, where we perceive the Danish strategic partnerships to be a reflection of Brun Pedersen's view of Denmark being active as opposed to reactive.

¹⁵³ Marius Vahl, *Just good friends?*

¹⁵⁴ Larsen, *Discourses of state identity and post-Lisbon national foreign policy*.

¹⁵⁵ Rasmus Brun Pedersen, *Danish foreign policy activism*.

A subject for further analysis of the Danish strategic partnership could be based on the broader Danish foreign policy strategy. Thereby not looking as much in detail at what each objective states, but rather examining the strategic partnerships in relation to how Denmark conducts its foreign policy.

Conclusion

The Danish strategic partnerships have shown to be a distilled version of the theory of complex interdependence. No clear hierarchy of issues seems to exist, and there have been ample opportunities for the smaller country in the partnership to link policies together, that might not have anything to do with each other on the surface in order to gain advantages in the negotiation process.

The role of the asymmetrical relationship is evident throughout the partnerships. It becomes clear that Denmark has had to make certain considerable concessions, such as the pledge to not support the independence of Tibet. Conversely, our analysis also showed that the asymmetric relation in some cases could be played to the advantage of Denmark, by the use of linkage and the fact that Danish products are unlikely to flood the markets of its partnering countries.

The role of multiple channels is highly evident in our analysis of the strategic partnerships in the way actors across public, private, and even civil society are being used to complete the objectives agreed upon in the partnership. Furthermore, we can see how the private sphere is present in setting the agenda of foreign relations in the strategic partnerships. Thus, blurring the line between domestic- and foreign policy.

Military power is not immediately present on the surface. However, traces of a military presence can be detected, for example in the aforementioned objective of North Korean nuclear disarmament. It is characteristic that the security aspect of the partnerships exclusively takes the form of diplomatic security and not a question of troop deployment. This is in line with complex interdependence theory's notion, that the role of military force is diminished.

The analysis showed that there is an absence of hierarchy in the Danish strategic partnerships. The different policy areas are grouped together regardless of their relevance to military force or eldercare. As shown by the diagrams in our analysis, no general pattern can be seen in the way the states emphasize the different policy areas.

For these reasons, the Danish strategic partnerships can therefore be argued to be reflecting the theory of complex interdependence. There are multiple channels through which policy is being made and implemented. There is no clear hierarchy in the policy areas, and the role of military force is at a minimum.

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