
URL: [http://www.h-net.org/~diplo/reviews/PDF/AR323.pdf](http://www.h-net.org/~diplo/reviews/PDF/AR323.pdf)

Review by Ann-Marie Ekengren, University of Gothenburg

The Danish scholar Kristine Midtgaard acknowledges in her article “National Security and the Choice of International Humanitarian Aid. Denmark and the Korean War, 1950-1953” that great power politics have been the primary focus for social scientists interested in the Korean War. Studying small states’ policies towards an international crisis like the Korean War could certainly add to our understanding of these greater events. At the same time, we also receive a fuller picture of why a small state like Denmark decided to be the only NATO member neither to contribute troops, nor military personnel. This could even be phrased as an intriguing research puzzle; wouldn’t it be more likely that a small state, just recovering from the occupation from the Second World War and a new member of NATO, wanted to be perceived as a committed NATO member, following U.S. wishes? This would be our most likely guess, both from a power perspective focusing on Denmark’s need to receive protection from NATO in times of a future crisis in Europe, and from an identity perspective focusing on Denmark’s need to establish a new foreign policy identity. And since U.S. and UN wishes coincided, this question tends to be even more intriguing.

The article gives a thorough description of how the Danish Government reasoned during different stages of the process. The UN sent three requests to Denmark concerning a contribution to the UN military action, and all of them were turned down. Instead Denmark offered humanitarian aid, both an ambulance and a hospital ship. Why did Denmark only offer humanitarian aid, instead of the more likely choice of sending troops or military personnel, according to U.S. wishes? Denmark’s military capabilities were highly limited after the German occupation during the Second World War, and because of earlier disarmament policies. But the question is why Denmark, if it was so limited that no troops at all were possible, did not prioritize a very limited but symbolic military contribution?
Midtgaard presents convincing arguments that more important for Denmark’s position was the fear Denmark felt of an escalation of the conflict. In such a perspective, it would have been unwise to contribute to actions that could cause the Soviet Union to intervene in the Korean War. Midtgaard’s empirical work also emphasizes the need to take domestic politics into consideration. Public opinion and the need for support from other parties affected the government’s position as well. A democratic government always takes the need to be reelected into account; its foreign policies must also be perceived as legitimate. It was important that the mission in Korea was not perceived as solely a U.S. operation, but rather a legitimate UN operation. The fact that Denmark was part of a Nordic community also reinforced Denmark’s unwillingness to fully comply with U.S. positions. Partly, Denmark’s earlier neutrality policy was institutionalized, and it took time to adapt to the new allied position. Repeated discussions with, for example, non-aligned Sweden provided Denmark with an even more skeptical view on U.S. power politics.

The article provides a thorough empirical account of how Denmark assessed different situations during the Korean War. Midtgaard presents new empirical evidence and provides an interesting picture of small state policies during the early Cold War. The article offers a multifaceted way of viewing the empirical evidence on Denmark’s statements and reactions during the Korean War; as a relationship between small and great powers, between might and right, between international and domestic issues, between neutrality and alignment or military and humanitarian aid to mention only the most obvious. Depending on which of these relationships one would like to stress, different avenues for further research open up. Midtgaard’s rich description certainly adds to our understanding of Danish foreign policy. But the theoretical focus is a bit more uncertain. Depending on which of the abovementioned relationships stand in focus, different comparisons become relevant.

It would have been interesting to know more about how the author would like to theoretically contextualize and develop the study in the future. A couple of examples; if Midtgaard wants to contribute to a discussion of how international and domestic considerations influence foreign policy, this is a very interesting case, since it illustrates how both sides were taken into consideration. To improve our knowledge even further, it could be illuminating to study other events in the global arena, events that differed in terms of ‘high politics’. Is there more room for domestic considerations in ‘low politics’ issues? Or, if Midtgaard mainly wants to contribute to a discussion on the relationship between small and great powers, it would be interesting to compare Denmark to other small countries; both with countries that acted the same way as Denmark, and countries that acted differently. In what way did they make the same considerations, and in what way did they differ? By comparing this interesting case with others, we will be able to see more general patterns. Even though I have tried to highlight a few possible future comparative avenues, Midtgaard’s findings are a prerequisite for even thinking in those comparative terms.
Ann-Marie Ekengren is Associate Professor at the Department of Political Science, University of Gothenburg. Her main research interest is foreign policy analysis as well as party elite behavior. She has published articles in *International Review of Sociology, International Studies Quarterly, Party Politics, Scandinavian Journal of History* and *Scandinavian Political Studies*, as well as books and chapters within her field of research.

Copyright © 2011 H-Net: Humanities and Social Sciences Online. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for non-profit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author(s), web location, date of publication, H-Diplo, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For other uses, contact the H-Diplo editorial staff at h-diplo@h-net.msu.edu.