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Bandwagon for status:
Changing Patterns in the Nordic States Status-seeking Strategies?

Rasmus Brun Pedersen
PhD, Associate Professor
Department of Political Science
Aarhus University.
brun@ps.au.dk

Abstract

Why do the small Nordic states engage themselves in militarized interventions alongside the United States? The article argues that the Nordic states gradually have begun to perceive militarized coalition participation as an important tool to gain reputation and improve their status position. A good relationship with the United States is considered as a means to either consolidate or improve their relative status position and also secure protection or 'shelter' against regional competitors by improving their reputation. Empirically, the article contributes to our understanding of the status-seeking strategies of the Nordic countries and how they might have utilized a more militarized activism to seek status that departs from the traditional Nordic internationalism. Theoretically, the article contributes to our understanding of the concept of 'status' in international relations by offering a new explanation of the puzzling willingness of small states to use military means in international conflicts where immaterial gains play a larger role than otherwise assumed in the realist small state literature.

Keywords

Bandwagon, Nordic countries, interventions, status, small states, interventions

Introduction

Why do the small Nordic states engage in militarized interventions alongside the United States, in places where they do not have immanent interests or face direct threats? The hypothesis in this article is that the Nordic states perceive militarized coalition participation as an important tool to gain reputation and improve their status position. A good relationship with the United States is considered as a means to either consolidate or improve their relative status position or, for some small states, also to secure protection or ‘shelter’ against regional competitors by improving their reputation. It is often argued that the Nordic states have tried to pursue status along a ‘moral dimension’, where they act as ‘good states’ that support international cooperation, permanent alliance structures and a liberal order that de-emphasizes the use of hard power.¹ The argument in this article is, however, that this status-seeking pattern has changed after the end of the Cold War. I suggest that the Nordic countries, at various speeds, have begun to embrace a relatively more militarized activism in order to improve their reputation and status position. The literature has often downplayed the utility of ‘militarized small-state activism’ to obtain status for either pragmatic or idealistic reasons and has looked with suspicion on what was perceived as the ‘deviant’ development of, for instance, the militarized Danish activism in the 2000s in the war on terror.² The article argues that the unipolar order *did* challenge the traditional Nordic peacekeeping tradition and its detente approach and forced these countries to pursue status gradually in new and more militarized ways, where recognition from the United States is seen as a means to increase their status and improve their relative position in the international power hierarchy. This suggests that it is neither the mission of an intervention nor the institutional framework that determines small states’ participation in itself which has often been the claim in the literature on Scandinavian internationalism. Rather, it is who they become ‘brothers in arms’ with that helps to explain small

¹ Ingebritsen, “Norm Entrepreneurs”; de Cavalho, “Brasil”; Neumann, “Status is cultural”; Neumann and de Cavalho, “Small states and status.”

² Lawlor, “Janus-faced Solidarity.”

states' participation in international interventions, since small states might be motivated by the recognition and goodwill from the United States and from the potential support and 'security shelter' the United States can provide for both NATO members and partner countries.³

Empirically the article contributes to our understanding of the status-seeking strategies of the Nordic countries and how they might have utilized a more militarized activism to seek status that departs from the traditional Nordic internationalism and thereby challenge the traditional Scandinavian stereotype of international engagements and the sharp distinction between what is perceived as a 'Nordic model' and the alleged deviant behaviour of Denmark (and Norway).⁴

The theoretical ambition in the article is to add to our understanding of the concept of 'status' in international relations by offering a new explanation of the puzzling willingness of small states to use military means in international conflicts. In contrast to defensive realist assumptions, I argue that small states actually believe that they gain something from their cooperation with the great powers, which suggests that the power relation between small states and the United States is not as asymmetric as it is often presented in this branch of realism.⁵ Using an offensive realist-inspired framework, I argue that the Nordic countries' international engagement reflects a more instrumental and strategic motivation rather than a moral one, where their engagement is seen as a vehicle for a status strategy that helps them improve their status or consolidate their reputations as loyal allies and partners.⁶ Building on insights from classical realism, the article suggests that 'gain motives' for small states differs from those of the great powers in the sense that small states are occupied

³ Mourtizen and Wivel, *Euro-Atlantic integration*; Ringsmose, NATO Burden Sharing Redux; Bailes, Thayer, and Thorhallsson, "Alliance theory."

⁴ Kuisma, "Social Democratic Internationalism"; Lawlor, "Janus-Faced Solidarity."

⁵ Walt, "Alliance Formation"; Walt, *Origins of Alliances*.

⁶ Schweller, "Bandwagoning for Profit"; Wood, "Prestige in World Politics."

with building reputation and recognition from the great power, which generates goodwill and raises the possibility that the USA and NATO will support them against external threats.

Status and reputation in the IR literature

Status is understood as a state's position in a deference hierarchy or as being related to a state's ranking in international society. It is therefore considered an attribute or a social role that refers to a position vis-a-vis a peer group of states that a given state is assumed to compare itself to and compete with.⁷ For middle powers and small states, the peer groups will often be constituted in regional groups of states. If we see changes in an actor's status, it means that a change has occurred in the status of at least one of the members in a peer group: either a change in rank or in the group of states.⁸ Status-seeking can therefore be thought of as acts undertaken to maintain or better one's position compared to relevant others. While great powers compete for power and thereby the right to be the one to reward allies with recognition or security guarantees, small states are instead motivated by the desire to be seen, to share the limelight and to be recognized for their contributions.⁹ In this perspective, status-seeking can be seen as competition among small states in different peer groups for recognition by the great powers, where the aim is to improve or consolidate their position just below the great powers. That small states' status-seeking behaviour differs from that of the great powers is supported by the literature, where there exists broad consensus that small states do not try to compete with the great powers for status.¹⁰

Realists would often assume that a peer group is related to geographic position, and consists of states that face similar external threats or are in some sort of competition with each other over

⁷ Dafoe, Renshon, and Huth, "Motives for War," 375.

⁸ The logic here is that small states very seldom challenge or compete with great powers for status. This suggests that global great powers such as the United States have very different peer groups than smaller states such as Denmark.

⁹ Neumann and de Cavalho, "Small states and status."

¹⁰ See also Pouilot, *International pecking orders*; Neumann and de Cavalho, "Small states and status."

material factors.¹¹ There is, however, no reason why a peer group could not be more broadly defined, as opposed to being restricted to certain geographical areas. Neumann and de Cavalho¹² have accordingly given nuance to this concept and distinguish between ‘objective’ and ‘subjective’ peer groups. The first relates to a country’s neighbours and its regional context. The latter refers to states that a small state sees as its immediate competitors, where status among them is a zero-sum good. These groups might be regional in nature but can also be more issue-specific, where small states might pursue status within different policy areas such as the environment, human rights, gender equality, and so on, and where their competitors can be more globally situated.

The concept of reputation is related to status but differs in a central respect. ‘When others hold beliefs about persistent characteristics of an actor, we say that the actor has a reputation for those characteristics or for the behaviours implied by them’.¹³ Accordingly, states can have reputations for different strands of behaviour. Reputation can bring status to a country if it engages in different types of activities that bring ‘prestige’. This might help states maintain or shift their status within a given international power hierarchy. Dafoe et al.¹⁴ note that reputation is often used as a ‘umbrella term’ that refers to any belief about a trait or behavioural tendency of an actor, based on that agent’s past behaviour. Similarly, ‘status’ can refer to many different kinds of attributes. For this reason, they argue that when using these terms, it is often helpful to identify the species of reputation or status: reputation for what trait or behaviour, in the eyes of whom and for whom?¹⁵

Reputation and status can be related in two ways. First, reputation is often crucial for changing or consolidating a state’s status position. Conflict can therefore arise when status hierarchies are

¹¹ See for instance the work of Mouritzen & Wivel 2005, where they use the concept of goodwill.

¹² Neumann and de Cavalho, “Small states and status,” 12–13.

¹³ Dafoe, Renshon, and Huth, “Motives for War,” 4.

¹⁴ Dafoe, Renshon, and Huth, “Motives for War.”

¹⁵ Renshon, “Status Deficits and War.”

unclear, for example when there are multiple dimensions on which actors may be ranked, or when an actor challenges the hierarchy. The loss or acquisition of certain reputations can have an effect on an actor's status vis-à-vis competitors within a certain peer group.¹⁶ Second, status influences reputation as a source of information and by setting expectations of a state's behaviour (see however Mercer¹⁷ for a critique of this understanding of the role of reputation). Gaining a desirable status would therefore have an effect on how others perceive the state's past actions and helps to shape expectations to future actions.¹⁸

Although status is often used interchangeably with reputation and prestige, I argue that it is more productive to employ them as analytically distinct concepts. Reputation and prestige are somewhat in the control of the actor; actors can seize, acquire and invest in their reputation and prestige. Status, on the other hand, is often regarded as a function of the global or regional system since it is granted or accorded by others, even though it can be influenced by a state's reputation.¹⁹

What allows small states to increase their status is their relation to the great powers, and it is the great powers' recognition of the small state that gives international leverage in terms of status? In order for status-seeking to be successful, the role played by the small state has to be noticed by the great power, and the recognition needs to be public, which will often take place as an acknowledgment of the small state's large contribution relative to its size.²⁰ This interpretation of small states' participation in both the permanent alliance structures and various ad hoc coalitions differs from that of the defensive realist, who sees this type of engagement as 'giving in' to the great powers. The relations between the small states and the great powers are seen as highly

¹⁶ Neumann and de Cavalho, "Small states and status."

¹⁷ Mercer, *Reputation and International Politics*; Mercer, "Illusion of International Prestige."

¹⁸ Press, *Calculating Credibility*.

¹⁹ Wohlforth, "Unipolarity."

²⁰ Neumann and de Cavalho, "Small states and status."

asymmetric, involving unequal exchange with the dominant power. Bandwagoning is seen as an expression of ‘adaptive acquiescence’ or ‘capitulation to the greater powers’.²¹ From a defensive realist perspective, small states’ participation in high-risk military coalitions is puzzling in itself since small states are assumed to be restricted by their risk-averse nature, caused by their low level of capabilities.²² This should encourage – and allow - them to free ride, buck pass or stay out of conflicts.²³ When engaging in militarized conflicts, ‘revisionist motives’ are often discarded, and it is often proposed that they either *bandwagon out of threats* from American power or *bandwagon for protection*. The assumption is that small states believe that their alliance participation will help them avoid influence marginalization from regional powers such as Germany and Russia, and small states’ alliance behaviour is often interpreted as a balancing act against the regional powers.²⁴

This article suggests that engaged and committed alliance behaviour can be seen as part of a reputation-building strategy on the part of the small states that ultimately helps them to improve their status relative to their peers. This implies that it is the small states’ valuation of the potential gains from a strong Atlantic alliance rather than the actual threats from the relevant conflicts that determines their coalition participation in militarized conflicts. Small states’ gain motives have thereby moved beyond the dominant asymmetric power perspective, according to which some small states are assumed to follow an ‘adaptive acquiesce’ strategy or pursue protection provided by the United States, which opens up for a broader understanding of the concept of gains than otherwise proposed by the literature. To some extent, this elaborates on the work of Randall Schweller, who has argued that states can be motivated by revisionist motivations to bandwagon, especially in situations where the level of external threat is low and where regional hegemons are no longer

²¹ Reiter and Gärtner, *Small States and Alliances*; Walt, *Origins of Alliances*; Walt, “Theories of Alliance Formation,” 55, 57; Mouritzen, “Denmark’s super Atlanticism.”

²² Archer, Bailes, and Wivel, *Small States and International Security*.

²³ Schweller, “Bandwagoning for Profit.”

²⁴ Mouritzen and Wivel, *Explaining Foreign Policy*.

considered a threat. This has led to the suggestion that states tend to *bandwagon for profit* rather than out of security concerns.²⁵ As Schweller notes, ‘Alliance choices, however, are often motivated by opportunities for gain as well as danger, by appetite as well as fear,’²⁶ which suggests that small states may not always be inclined to adhere to the status quo but can change their assessments and willingness to take risks and expand their political action space by pursuing a more active security policy. Small states’ participation in international cooperation and flexible ad hoc coalitions might be seen as an expression of this larger room for manoeuvre since the end of the Cold War. Small states’ coalition participation can therefore be seen as a tool to achieve certain foreign policy goals.

However, this article differs from Schweller’s materialistic understanding of gains, which is seen through the lens of revisionist states. Revisionism often associates gains with territorial expansion, which is not an option for (most) small states and not the motive for small states’ participation in international interventions or peacekeeping operations. Rather, I suggest that small states aim to utilize their alliance with a great power to compete with similarly placed small states, gaining the favour of the great power by showing commitment and loyalty as ‘brothers in arms’ through actual war commitment, where they are recognized for ‘punching above their weight’. This article expands on the understanding of profit to go beyond territorial gains or wealth. Instead it is proposed that small states may also bandwagon for other types of non-material gains, for instance ‘prestige’, ‘standing’, ‘status’ or ‘reputation’. This suggests that insights from classical realists can be used to qualify our understanding of small states gain motives.²⁷

²⁵ Schweller, “Bandwagoning for Profit.”

²⁶ Schweller, “Bandwagoning for Profit,” 79.

²⁷ E.g., Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations*; Markey, “Prestige and the Origins of War.”

Patterns in the Nordic countries' participation in US-led military interventions

In recent years, the Atlantic dimension in small states' foreign and security policy has become more important. Karlsrud and Osland²⁸ have for instance noted that Norway has begun to prioritize NATO operations and a strong bilateral relationship with the United States, which has resulted in the prioritization of NATO-led operations. Even groups of countries with a strong UN-focused tradition such as Finland and Sweden have invested more heavily in EU and/or NATO initiatives.²⁹ Nilsson and Zetterlund³⁰ have demonstrated that Sweden has reduced its contributions to UN peacekeeping missions as a result of a growing commitment to EU- and NATO-led operations and have argued that because of the changing security threats in the Baltic Sea area, commitments to NATO will be a priority in the future despite financial constraints. There are also examples of more interest-driven engagements in NATO-led operations, for instance in relation to the Danish and Norwegian participation in the anti-piracy operation on the coast of Somalia due to their maritime traditions and large merchant fleets.³¹ Here, bandwagoning is probably not motivated by concerns of status seeking but rather by a desire to solve the problems together with their allies.

In the following, four Nordic countries' participation in five US-led coalitions is studied. These coalitions include the campaigns in Kosovo (1999), Afghanistan (2011-2014), Iraq (2003-11), Lybia (2011) and Syria-Iraq (2011-). These operations were selected because they were driven by the United States, which allows us to study small-state engagement and status-seeking strategies in coalitions led by the United States where they have no immanent interests at play and could have

²⁸ Karlsrud and Osland, "Self-interest and Solidarity."

²⁹ Koops and Tercovich, "European Return," 2.

³⁰ Nilsson and Zetterlund, "Sweden and the UN."

³¹ Smed and Wivel, "Vulnerability without capabilities," 80.

chosen to free ride on the security provision of others. With respect to the actual contributions, the analysis focuses on the type of contributions in each phase of the operation. Military participation is understood as the participation in operations with military capabilities, while non-military contributions are operationalized as diplomatic support, logistic support or other civil capabilities (police, administrative support, etc.).

Table 1 presents the countries' participation in the initial phase of the US-led coalitions. The table clearly demonstrates a divide between Denmark and Norway and the rest of the Nordic countries. Denmark appears to be the most hawkish state, participating in all operations, while Norway has participated in all operations except the Iraq War. Sweden and Finland have not participated in these initial phases.

TABLE 1

Studying the countries' participation in the second phases, meaning the phases after the actual military campaign, the picture changes somewhat, and the differences between the countries are somewhat diminished. Table 2 demonstrates greater enthusiasm from the Nordic countries, where Sweden has made greater contributions. Finland has also been engaged, but to a lesser degree. Both Sweden and Norway refused to participate in the occupation forces in Iraq, while Finland chose not to participate in the Libya operations even though these second-phase operations are often UN-mandated and closer to a classic peacekeeping operation. The overall patterns seem to indicate a variation in the way the different Nordic countries participate in these types of operations, where Denmark and Norway have been willing to use military power extensively in all phases of international conflicts while Sweden and Finland have contributed primarily with economic

assistance and often only in the second phases, thus proving to be less risk-willing than the two other countries.

TABLE 2

Studying status as a driver for the Nordic countries' participation

Methodologically this analysis is based on a variant of the congruence method.³² In this method, we begin with the outcome and then attempt to assess theory's ability to explain or predict the outcome in a particular case by searching for the expected empirical fingerprints in the empirical material (searching for congruence between expected predictions and observed empirical evidence). In the following, the analysis attempts to test whether we can identify status motives. Such motives can take different forms³³ but will typically reflect statements that suggest that the countries' motivation for participating in the various interventions was driven by status considerations, with success criteria defined in terms of increased alliance goodwill or acknowledgement that the contributions are designed to enhance visibility.

Did status act as a driver for Danish coalition participation?

It has been argued that Denmark's contributions followed a Danish tradition of participating in UN peacekeeping operations during the Cold War, but during this period, the country's armed forces were not allowed to use force beyond self-defence.³⁴ This restriction was removed in the 1990s as the UN operation in Bosnia demonstrated a need for greater protection and combat capacity.³⁵ One of the lessons of the increase in the use of military capabilities was that combat-capable

³² Beach and Pedersen, *Causal Case Studies*.

³³ For recent examples, see Henriksen and Ringsmose, *What did Denmark gain?* Pedersen and Reykers, *Small states Bandwagon*; Jakobsen, Ringsmose, and Saxi, *Bandwagoning for Prestige*.

³⁴ Jakobsen 2016b

³⁵ Møller, *Operation Bøllebank*; Petersen, "Den tro allierede."

contributions provided an effective way to increase Danish prestige in the United States and NATO. This meant that Danish politicians gradually began to display a far greater willingness and tolerance for using force beyond self-defence in international conflicts, since it came to be seen as means to transform Denmark's position internationally.³⁶ In the 1990s, the Danish government considered a close relationship with the United States to be critical to obtaining Danish priorities in foreign policy, for instance in relation to the campaign to secure the Baltic states' entry into NATO.³⁷ It became a clear Danish strategy to position Denmark as closely to the United States as possible by making Denmark a useful ally. This was first demonstrated in relation to the Danish participation in the NATO-led *Operation Allied Force* in 1999.³⁸ In the operation, nine Danish F-16s were allowed to conduct strike missions, and the motivation behind the deployment was partly justified out of concern for a credible alliance system and to demonstrate the Danish willingness to uphold this system.³⁹

That Denmark's militarized activism was seen as part of the ambition to promote a strong multilateral framework and increase Danish standing in Washington became more visible in the aftermath of 9/11. As early as December 5, 2001, the Danish government offered to commit troops and aircraft to the response operation, before the United States had made any request for Danish participation.⁴⁰ The official request only came later, leading to the Danish Parliament's proposed resolution text on December 13 allowing Denmark to participate in the coalition.⁴¹ The Danish contribution differed from previous missions since it placed the contribution under US command

³⁶ Branner, *I krig igen*.

³⁷ Petersen, "Den tro allierede."

³⁸ Jakobsen, Ringsmose, and Saxi, *Bandwagoning for Prestige*.

³⁹ Danish Parliament, 1998/99a; Danish Parliament, 1998/99b.

⁴⁰ Politiken, Danmark klar til militær aktion.

⁴¹ Petersen, *Den tro allierede*

and did not include any restrictions on the use of Danish military forces,⁴² and it proved to be the heaviest fighting experienced by Danish forces since 1864. In the debate over this involvement, the war was portrayed as being in Denmark's interest because it supported the United States and NATO and reduced the risk of terror attacks on Danish soil. It was also emphasized that it enhanced Denmark's standing and influence in NATO and Washington and portrayed it as a duty that Denmark had to meet as a responsible member of international society.⁴³

Denmark was later one of only three EU allies that contributed to the US attack on Iraq in 2003. Shortly before the outbreak of the war, the government justified participation in the Iraq War in terms of 'alliance solidarity' and 'historical indebtedness' to the United States.⁴⁴ Several statements from the decision makers of that period indicate that Danish coalition participation was designed to enhance Denmark's prestige in Washington and NATO; the Prime Minister on several occasions argued that Denmark's positive standing in Washington strengthened Denmark's voice on the international stage.⁴⁵ He also believed that Denmark's many military contributions to NATO operations had earned it a reputation as an 'elite ally.'⁴⁶

Denmark also became one of only six NATO members to deploy combat troops to Afghanistan in 2006, and one of only eight NATO members to drop bombs over Libya in 2011.⁴⁷ Here, it was highlighted that it was a priority to be among the first to participate and to be 'in front' with 'the right states',⁴⁸ as was also the case when Denmark decided to send F-16s and special forces to Iraq/Syria in 2016 as part of the US-led campaign against ISIL. Finally, Denmark was one of only

⁴² Danish Parliament, 2001/02a; Danish Parliament 2001/02b.

⁴³ Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *En verden i forandring*.

⁴⁴ Rasmussen, "Hvad kan det nytte?"

⁴⁵ Rasmussen, "60 året for 29. august 1943"; Rasmussen, "Visioner om Danmarks aktive Europapolitik"; Rasmussen, "Danmark må gøre op med småstatsmentaliteten."

⁴⁶ Jakobsen, Ringsmose, and Saxi, *Bandwagoning for Prestige*.

⁴⁷ Jakobsen, Ringsmose, and Saxi, *Bandwagoning for Prestige*.

⁴⁸ Jakobsen, "The Danish Libya Campaign," 199.

six NATO members to drop bombs over Iraq in 2014-15 and over Iraq/Syria in 2016-17.⁴⁹ The government was also quick to point out that the United States had praised Denmark for its contribution, which was also the case in the Danish participation in the fight against ISIL from 2014 onwards.

The Danish 'activism' which led to the participation in the Iraq War and in Afghanistan included a value-based foundation as well as a geopolitical ambition. The Danish government was inspired by the offensive liberal and neo-conservative ideas expressed by the Bush administration, and began to argue that democracies had not only the right but also the duty to make a difference in international politics and promote liberal values.⁵⁰ According to the Danish government, this meant that Denmark and the United States were 'equal partners' in the struggle against tyranny and suppression, which meant that Denmark through its militarized activism could develop into a middle power.⁵¹ Aside from the ideological arguments, there was also an element of realpolitik in the new foreign policy thinking. The motive behind the Danish alliance with the United States was that Denmark would become able to put aside its small-state complex, drop all notions of isolation and neutrality, and instead see itself as part of a broader global alliance that would provide new and greater opportunities to exert Danish influence internationally and increase Denmark's status.⁵² To ensure this, it was vital for the government to secure further American commitment to the region surrounding Denmark. This policy was to be carried out through active participation in flexible coalitions of declared states with common interests and values.⁵³

⁴⁹ Jakobsen, Ringsmose, and Saxi, *Bandwagoning for Prestige*.

⁵⁰ Rasmussen, "60 året for 29. august 1943."

⁵¹ Rasmussen, "60 året for 29. august 1943"; Rasmussen, "Visioner om Danmarks aktive Europapolitik"; Rasmussen, "Danmark må gøre op med småstatsmentaliteten."

⁵² Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *En verden i forandring*.

⁵³ Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *En verden i forandring*.

Did status act as a driver for Norwegian coalition participation?

Like Denmark, Norway was an important contributor to UN peacekeeping operations during the Cold War but mostly refused to go beyond ‘traditional’ peacekeeping. Nevertheless, in recent years transatlantic ties have taken precedence, which means that the country, if pushed, would prefer to commit to NATO-led operations.⁵⁴ One of the reasons for the Norwegian eagerness to emphasize its Atlantic ties when it comes to security relates to circumstances after the end of the Cold War. In this period, Norway’s once-high importance to American and NATO strategy was reduced, which resulted in a profound lack of interest in Washington.⁵⁵ One way to compensate for Norway’s loss of strategic importance and to avoid marginalization was to make sure that the country kept its high standing in Washington and NATO. While Norway had always contributed to the more permanent alliance structures such as the UN, it seemed that more active measures needed to be taken. Saxi notes that the Norwegian government saw the provision of ‘visible and relevant military contributions to US- and NATO-led military operations’ as a central means to improve its reputation and status.⁵⁶

During the 1990s, Norway had been slower than Denmark to embrace ‘robust’ peacekeeping and remained more focused on territorial defence.⁵⁷ Yet in 1999, Norway introduced a plan to significantly adapt the armed forces and strengthen their ability to contribute to international military operations abroad.⁵⁸ The initiative was given extra impetus from the air campaign in Kosovo, where the country wanted to make a ‘significant and visible’ contribution to the NATO operation despite lack of relevant capabilities, a goal that was stressed in the government’s reflections that ‘the overall goal of Norway’s participation in international military operations is to

⁵⁴ Karlsrud and Osland, “Self-interest and Solidarity,” 16.

⁵⁵ Jakobsen, Ringsmose, and Saxi, *Bandwagoning for Prestige*.

⁵⁶ Saxi, “So Similar.”

⁵⁷ Forsvarsdepartementet, *Beredskap for fred*, 61–69.

⁵⁸ Saxi, “So Similar.”

demonstrate to our allies that we are willing to take responsibility and make a solidary effort.’⁵⁹ Norwegian concerns about its standing in Washington and NATO were also visible in official considerations in which participation in international interventions was seen as means to maintain ‘good standing’ with the country’s allies and partners.⁶⁰ This continues to be a driver for Norwegian involvement in the campaigns in Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya.

The war in Afghanistan provided an opportunity to raise Norway’s standing in the alliance, so the government decided to deploy the Norwegian Special Forces to Afghanistan in January 2002, which generated goodwill from the United States. This was expressed, for instance, by the Norwegian Minister of Foreign Affairs, who argued that Norway ‘put something in which is good to have on our bank account,’⁶¹ indicating that the motivation behind Norwegian participation in Afghanistan can partly be described as an attempt to obtain a reputation for being a ‘good ally’. Similarly, in an interview the Norwegian defence minister argued that the main objective for Norway was to be ‘relevant’ by participating with niche capabilities where Norway could actually make a difference.⁶² In August 2003, NATO assumed command of the ISAF, leading Norway to rebalance its efforts from OEF to ISAF. Norway deployed infantry companies, special forces, and F-16 combat aircrafts for close air support, and from 2005, it assumed lead nation responsibility of a provincial reconstruction team in northern Afghanistan. Overall troop numbers in the north had grown to about 500 soldiers by 2007, and Norway remained lead nation until 2012. A key purpose of the incremental scaling up of Norway’s engagement in the ISAF was to demonstrate NATO’s continued relevance, especially to the United States. In addition, it was considered vital to provide ‘visible contributions’ to demonstrate Norway’s commitment to the alliance and improve its

⁵⁹ Norwegian Ministry of Defence, *Tilpasning av forsvaret*, 10.

⁶⁰ Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Interesser, Ansvar og Muligheter*, 98.

⁶¹ Quoted from Jakobsen, Saxi and Ringsmose, *Bringing status back*: 35

⁶² Devold quoted in *The New York Times* on August 24, 2003.

reputation and status.⁶³ Jakobsen, Ringsmose and Saxi⁶⁴ note that Norwegian companies took on the role of quick reaction force in Kabul and Northern Afghanistan on two occasions since this was viewed as a high-profile mission that would demonstrate NATO's flexibility and Norway's ability and willingness to support the efforts of the alliance.

The 2003 Iraq War proved to be a balancing act between, on the one hand, demonstrating alliance loyalty and gaining standing abroad and, on the other hand, keeping coalition governments in Oslo together.⁶⁵ Norwegian public opinion was deeply critical of the war, and the centre-right coalition government was split on the issue. In March 2003, Norway decided not to make a direct contribution to the US invasion of Iraq.⁶⁶ However, as soon as the UN Security Council passed a resolution in May calling for UN member states to stabilize Iraq, Norway was quick to send a military contribution. In June 2003, a Norwegian engineering company arrived and served as part of the British-led division in southern Iraq. This immediately raised Norway's status in Washington. In his January 2004 State of the Union address, President George W. Bush mentioned Norway as one of America's 34 'partners' who had 'committed troops to Iraq.'⁶⁷ However, after only one year, Norwegian troops were withdrawn because of the shift in government. American dissatisfaction with the withdrawal from Iraq was coupled with disappointment over Norway's simultaneous refusal to deploy forces to southern Afghanistan.⁶⁸ Both stood in stark contrast to Denmark's willingness to deploy forces to Helmand province.

⁶³ Godal et al. *En god alliert*, 138-155.

⁶⁴ Jakobsen, Ringsmose, and Saxi, *Bandwagoning for Prestige*.

⁶⁵ Saxi, *Norwegian and Danish defence policy*; Jakobsen, Ringsmose, and Saxi, *Bandwagoning for Prestige*.

⁶⁶ Utenriksdepartementet, *Irak*.

⁶⁷ Jakobsen, Ringsmose, and Saxi, *Bandwagoning for Prestige*.

⁶⁸ Verdens Gang, "Norge sier nei til NATO"; Browning, "Brand Nordicity," 36-39.

But another opportunity to improve Norway's status emerged with its participation in the 2011 Libyan War. This time, the government quickly chose to make a significant contribution. In March 2011, Norway was among the first allies to deploy military support to the air campaign and participated with a robust contribution, dropping about eight per cent of the total number of bombs. The importance of the Norwegian contribution was amplified by the fact that only 11 of NATO's 28 member states contributed with combat aircrafts to the campaign, and only eight agreed to attack ground targets.⁶⁹ This participation immediately raised Norway's profile and prestige in the United States, which was also one of the aims of the contribution.⁷⁰ After having previously made four unsuccessful attempts, the Norwegian Prime Minister, Jens Stoltenberg, now managed to secure an invitation to meet with President Barack Obama in the White House,⁷¹ and the American military released a publication in which the Norwegian contribution was recognized.⁷²

Did status act as a driver for Swedish coalition participation?

Sweden has over the past decade begun to prioritize participation in NATO-led operations, and has contributed with various types of capabilities that seem to be aimed at attracting recognition from the alliance and the United States. Swedish participation in the various conflicts still largely follows from the Swedish tradition of engaging in peacekeeping operations,⁷³ but there seems nonetheless to be a growing realization in the Swedish strategic environment that small states cannot credibly guarantee their own security and that this requires cooperation at various levels with external actors and allies.⁷⁴ The Finland-Sweden cooperation is considered as an important international

⁶⁹ Saxi, "So Similar."

⁷⁰ Stoltenberg, *Min Historie*, 447.

⁷¹ Ask, "Stoltenberg skal møte Obama."

⁷² White House, *The United States and Norway*.

⁷³ Nilsson and Zetterlund, "Sweden and the UN."

⁷⁴ Haglund, "Credible defense forces."

partnership in this respect,⁷⁵ but there is an understanding of that it needs to be accompanied by cooperation with other Nordic countries and other bilateral partnerships, including with the United States, NATO and the EU. Part of the motive behind Swedish participation in various US-led interventions can be interpreted as an example of bandwagoning with the United States that is partially aimed at balancing increasing Russian power. Thus the commitments of Sweden's troops have primarily been to Kosovo, Afghanistan and Iraq, which were all operations led by the United States or NATO. Sweden's high profile in the Nordic battle group also provides closer cooperation with the United Kingdom. While the most efficient way to bandwagon would have been to join NATO, the second-best way is to increase cooperation with NATO and contribute to US-led missions instead of free-riding on the security provision offered by the United States.⁷⁶

Due to its tradition of participating only in peacekeeping operations, Sweden initially refused to participate in the NATO-led air campaign in Kosovo, but opted for participation in the Kosovo Force (KFOR) from the very outset of the follow-up operation. Sweden contributed with a range of capabilities, such as operation forces and advisors.⁷⁷ Between 1999 and 2013, Sweden contributed up to 1000 personnel to KFOR. Following the decision to gradually reduce the KFOR troops in 2010, Sweden ended its military involvement in Kosovo in 2013. Since 2015, the Swedish contribution in Kosovo has consisted of seven advisors and administrative officials in the NATO Advisory Team, the NATO Liaison and Advisory Team and the headquarters of the Kosovo Force.

Sweden has participated in the ISAF force since 2002 with up to 900 soldiers and various capabilities, e.g. intelligence, medical and logistics units. The main force consists of three mechanized companies operating in Mazar-e-Sharif and also includes helicopters for medical

⁷⁵ Forsberg, The rise of Nordic defence cooperation

⁷⁶ Archer, "Small States," 54–55.

⁷⁷ Doeser, "Finland, Sweden, and Operation Unified Protector."

evacuation and training for Afghan soldiers.⁷⁸ In March 2006, Sweden took operational command in Mazar-e-Sharif, with responsibility for security in four provinces in northern Afghanistan. Further contributions have included personnel for military training and advice to the Afghan army. In 2011, ISAF gradually started to hand over responsibility for the country's security to the Afghan forces. In 2014, ISAF completed its mission and gave way to the new NATO-led training and advice mission in Afghanistan – the Resolute Support Mission (RSM), in which Sweden also participates.⁷⁹

In the Libya conflict, Sweden decided to join the coalition after the Swedish Parliament approved the deployment of up to eight Gripen aircrafts and a C-130 transport aircraft to help enforce the no-fly zone. The Swedish deployment was approved by a broad parliamentary consensus and was the first use of fighter jets by Sweden in a peace operation since 1963.⁸⁰ The government deemed participation important since it would allow the Swedish government to demonstrate its support for the Western alliance and thereby related to a more overarching ambition of the government to further strengthen its relationship with NATO.⁸¹ Prime Minister Fredrik Reinfeldt, for instance, noted that 'now it is time for Sweden to move from words to deeds and do what we can to promote international peace'⁸² and Foreign Minister Carl Bildt argued that 'Sweden's decision to contribute eight *Gripen* planes was received positively by the different countries [in the alliance]. In addition to the military value, the political value of Sweden's contribution was highly credited.'⁸³ Further contributions included reconnaissance and support resources as well as personnel for information

⁷⁸ Doeser, "Finland, Sweden, and Operation Unified Protector."

⁷⁹ Swedish Government, *Sweden in NATO led operations – completed*; Swedish Government, *Sweden in NATO led operations – ongoing*.

⁸⁰ Doeser, "Finland, Sweden and Operation Unified Protector."

⁸¹ Doeser, "Finland, Sweden, and Operation Unified Protector."

⁸² Swedish Parliament 2010/11 March 29, 2011, statement 1.

⁸³ Bildt, Personal blog.

operations. This involved about 140 Swedish staff members.⁸⁴ Doeser,⁸⁵ for instance, argues that one of the reasons why Sweden prioritized involvement in Operation Unified Protector was that it would be led by NATO. He notes that the Swedish government explicitly refers to its ‘partnership with NATO’ as a central base for the country’s foreign and security policy. This suggests that one way to preserve a close relation to the USA is to participate in peace operations. By doing so Sweden proves its worth as a trustworthy ally without being a formal member of NATO. The partnership is therefore important for maintaining and strengthening Sweden’s security and its influence on the international arena. In addition, by participating in NATO operations, the government demonstrates that Sweden, after the Cold War policy of neutrality actually belongs to the NATO community. By demonstrating its solidarity, the likelihood that *‘NATO will help Sweden in the future increases.’*⁸⁶

A similar logic guides Swedish participation in the campaigns in Syria and Iraq. From early on, Sweden has expressed support for military assistance to others, but for legal reasons, the country will only provide humanitarian support, and it has contributed at least \$13 million in humanitarian aid to Iraq in 2014 alone. In April 2015, the Swedish government announced that they would send up to 120 troops to northern Iraq to train Iraqi and Kurdish soldiers as part of the US-led coalition against ISIL.⁸⁷ However, Sweden did not participate in the US-led coalition in Iraq in 2003 because it did not have a clear UN mandate.

Status considerations help to explain why Sweden and partly Finland seem to have given priority to NATO-led operations. While EU remains a very important dimension in the country’s foreign

⁸⁴ Swedish Government, *Sweden in NATO led operations – completed*.

⁸⁵ Doeser 2014b, 648–649.

⁸⁶ Quoted in Doeser, *Sweden's Participation*: 649.

⁸⁷ Doeser, “Sweden’s Libya decision.”

policy, membership does not entail any security guarantees or shelter from a threatening external environment. Kaim⁸⁸ argues that this has become more evident due to changes in the geopolitical circumstances. NATO now pursues the intention of strengthening neighbouring non-members by drawing them closer into various partnership programmes with the ambition to deter external threats through closer cooperation with NATO. This has been coupled with the cultivation of a new perspective on partnerships where the Alliance no longer only evaluates partnership formats based on what NATO can do for its partners, but also on what partners can do for NATO. The Alliance is interested in their military contributions and whether they are willing to share risks in ongoing operations.⁸⁹ Participation in US-led interventions thereby becomes an important security currency for partnership countries, which might help to explain why unaligned countries join the USA in military conflicts where they have no immanent interests.

Did status act as a driver for Finnish coalition participation?

During the Cold War, Finland kept a low profile regarding participation in UN peacekeeping operations and has maintained a more cautious approach to the participation in out-of-area operations compared to Denmark, Norway and Sweden, mainly because of its geopolitical position close to the Soviet/Russian border and its tradition of non-involvement.⁹⁰ In recent years, Russia's increasingly aggressive policy and enhanced military activity in the Nordic-Baltic region has led to reassessments in both the Swedish and Finnish security and defence policies and a rethinking of the formats of their military co-operation.⁹¹ Meanwhile, the United States has also become increasingly aware of the strategic importance of the two states, where increased cooperation is in fact an

⁸⁸ Kaim, *Reforming NATO's partnerships*, 15.

⁸⁹ Ringsmose, NATO Burden Sharing Redux; Moore, "Lisbon and the Evolution of NATO's New Partnership Policy."

⁹⁰ Doeser, "Finland, Sweden, and Operation Unified Protector."

⁹¹ Finnish Ministry of Defense, "Finlands säkerhets- och Sörsvärsolitik 2012."

extension of NATO's north-eastern flank.⁹² After the end of the Cold War, the Finnish Armed Forces therefore increased their interoperability with the US military, mainly in the framework of the multilateral regional exercises within the NATO Partnership for Peace program.⁹³ This co-operation with the United States has not been emphasized to the domestic public, because of the strong traditions of neutrality and a reluctance to vex relations with Russia. The centre-right government formed in 2015 has noted that the United States plays a key role in ensuring the security of the Nordic-Baltic region and hopes that increased US engagement will stop potential Russian aggression.⁹⁴

However, developing deeper bilateral military co-operation with the United States is politically controversial in Finland, and a great part of the political elite and the wider public believes that it is best to avoid tensions between Russia and the West even though the accession of the Baltic States to NATO has changed the geopolitical situation. Still, Finland has declared its readiness to continue supporting the United States in overseas deployments despite the government's plans to scale down the international involvement of the armed forces. The government has already pledged to increase the size of the Finnish training mission in Iraq as part of the US-led international coalition to 100 instructors.⁹⁵ This also implies that Finnish engagement in US-led coalitions has traditionally been moderate. For instance, Finland engaged with a battalion in the NATO-led KFOR peacekeeping force in Kosovo as part of a British-led brigade. Since August 1999, Finland has deployed about 800 peacekeepers in this operation. Like other EU countries, Finland has dispatched police to various types of operations led by NATO and the EU. Finnish soldiers have also worked alongside Allied forces in Afghanistan as a part of ISAF and later in the follow-up operations (Resolute

⁹² Coffey and Kochis, *The Role of Sweden and Finland*; NATO, "Relations with Finland."

⁹³ Gotkowska & Szymański, *Pro-American non-alignment*.

⁹⁴ Eeland, "Friends, But Not Allies"; Gotkowska & Szymański, *Pro-American non-alignment*.

⁹⁵ Finnish Ministry of Defense, "Puolustusministeri Niinistö."

Support), where the country has offered training assistance and helped to advise the Afghan security forces and institutions. Since 2007, Finland has contributed over USD 9.4 million to the Afghan National Army Trust Fund. Finland also contributed to a project aimed at training counter-narcotics personnel from Afghanistan and other Central Asian partner countries, which was conducted under the auspices of the NATO-Russia Council.⁹⁶ The country further pledged 50 million Euros to reconstruction efforts in the period from 2006 to 2010.⁹⁷ Since then, Finland has provided assistance to, for example, good governance and law and order systems such as police, judicial systems and prisons. Furthermore, it has built facilities for healthcare, women and children and provided human rights assistance.⁹⁸

In the Libya campaign, the Minister for Foreign Affairs at the time Alexander Stubb said that his government had ‘considered’ participating in coalition efforts in Libya but ruled out sending the Finnish air force to enforce the no-fly zone and that he did not see a role for Finland in the coalition (Stub 2011).⁹⁹ In an analysis of the impact of Finnish strategic culture on the decision to participate in the Libya campaign, Doeser notes that Finland’s profile differs from that of Sweden as well as the other Nordic countries.¹⁰⁰ When it comes to participation in militarized operations, they are much more cautious, as the country finds it much more appropriate to participate in civilian and peacekeeping operations. Instead of participating in US-led peace enforcement operations, the country seems to favour efforts such as political support, economic sanctions, humanitarian aid and perhaps a later provision of peacekeeping forces. In the case of Libya, it has been suggested that the air campaign was problematic due to both operational concerns and the NATO organizational aspect of the operation, where Finland preferred to participate with support measures as well as

⁹⁶ NATO, “Relations with Finland.”

⁹⁷ Finnish Ministry of Defense, *Section III*.

⁹⁸ Gotkowska & Szymański, *Pro-American non-alignment*.

⁹⁹ Stubb, “Finnish Participation.”

¹⁰⁰ Doeser, “Finland, Sweden and Operation Unified Protector,” 290.

support for the later stabilization efforts. President Tarja Halonen argued that ‘We are not, in this respect, a country that really specializes in air forces’ and that Finland traditionally participated mostly in long-term civil-military cooperation missions and would prefer to continue in that manner.¹⁰¹

In the Syria-Iraq campaign, Finland joined the coalition against ISIL in a non-military role and focused on delivering humanitarian aid. Finland has thereby become one of the ‘Enhanced Opportunities Partners’ that contributes to NATO operations as well as other Alliance objectives. It seems that in the current security context, with increased concerns about Russian military activities, the ties with NATO have become closer and more explicit than previously. In concrete terms, this means that there has been an increase in the exchange of information on hybrid warfare, coordinating training and exercises.¹⁰² Also underway are talks on how to include both Sweden and Finland in the enhanced NATO Response Force and regular consultations on security in the Baltic Sea region, even though Finland has not yet taken the full step of participating actively with military support in US-led interventions.

Changing status-seeking patterns?

This article has aimed to contribute to our understanding of the status-seeking strategies of the small Nordic countries and how they might have utilized a more militarized activism to seek status that departs from the assumptions identified in the traditional Nordic small-state literature. It has also tried to improve our understanding of the status concept within the realist literature. Status-seeking has always been a central element in small states’ foreign and security policy. The Nordic small-state literature in particular has argued that these countries have tried to pursue status along a ‘moral

¹⁰¹ Halonen, “Halonen Lukewarm.”

¹⁰² NATO, “Relations with Finland.”

dimension' where they act as 'good states' that support international cooperation, permanent alliance structures and a liberal order that de-emphasizes the use of hard power.¹⁰³ Accordingly, this literature has downplayed the utility of 'militarized small-state activism' to obtain status for small states. The question is whether this is still the case after the end of the Cold War, where many small states, including the Nordic countries, have begun to engage in militarized interventions alongside the United States. Using an offensive realist-inspired framework, I have argued that the Nordic countries' international engagement reflects a more instrumental and strategic motivation rather than a moral one, where their engagement can be seen as a bandwagon for status strategy that helps them improve their status or consolidate their reputation as either loyal allies and partners. The results for particularly Denmark and Norway seem to indicate that these countries have cultivated a close relationship with the United States and have made militarized capabilities available to the US-led coalitions because they believe that prestige in Washington can be translated into prestige globally. It also seemed important for the Swedish government to cooperate with NATO, first of all because the Alliance offered a clear leadership structure to ensure that the Swedish forces would be used in the 'right way,'¹⁰⁴ and second because this structure increased the operation's chances of being anchored in the Alliance, which allowed the government to demonstrate support for NATO.¹⁰⁵ The government had previously explicitly referred to its 'partnership with NATO' as a 'central basis for Swedish foreign, security and defence policy.'¹⁰⁶ One way to strengthen or maintain this partnership therefore seemed to be to contribute to US-led interventions, which would allow Sweden to 'prove its worth' without being a member of the Alliance and demonstrate that it belongs under the extended shelter of NATO. Another factor was the desire to gain experience in

¹⁰³ Lawlor, *the good state*

¹⁰⁴ Doeser, Sweden's Participation; Doeser, Sweden's Lybia decision

¹⁰⁵ Doeser, "Finland, Sweden and Operation Unified Protector."

¹⁰⁶ Swedish Government, *Nationell strategi för svenskt deltagande*, 4.

the development of crisis management capabilities.¹⁰⁷ By demonstrating its solidarity and that Sweden is an international ally and a ‘player’, the Swedish government hoped to increase the country’s credibility and build a reputation as a ‘useful’ ally.¹⁰⁸ This is in line with the formulations in a 2008 government report stating that ‘The participation increases our credibility, which is useful for us in several different areas within our partnership with NATO.’ This was a reference to the Swedish experiences from Afghanistan, where the lesson was that active participation helped to increase Swedish status. Status motivation is therefore also visible in the Swedish and Finnish positions, where concerns about national security and regional stability also seem to drive the countries’ ambitions for Atlanticism even though both have been more hesitant to do so, partly because of their strategic cultures, geopolitical situations and domestic political climates.¹⁰⁹ Recent trends of involvement, however, can be interpreted as part of a bandwagon for status and/or bandwagon for protection strategy, which became more explicit after the revitalization of Russia’s more active and aggressive neighbour politics since 2010. Sweden and Finland have become more interested in cultivating closer relations with NATO and the United States in order to receive ‘shelter’, even though they maintain their non-aligned status. While NATO membership is out of the question for domestic reasons, the elites’ aim has been to utilize the NATO partnership agreements to increase American interest in the Baltic Sea region, which is one of the central motivations for Swedish participation in the case of Libya. Accordingly, I suggest that intervention participation can simply be seen as a tool of statecraft to achieve certain ends and that it can be determined by interests rather than power considerations and may involve security concerns as well as other profit motives.¹¹⁰ This *bandwagon for status* perspective is a somewhat overlooked driver

¹⁰⁷ Swedish Government, *Nationell strategi för svenskt deltagande*, 6.

¹⁰⁸ Doeser, “Sweden’s Libya decision.

¹⁰⁹ Doeser, “Finland, Sweden and Operation Unified Protector.”

¹¹⁰ Sweeney and Fritz, *Jumping on the Bandwagon*.

for small states' bandwagon strategies and might help explain the puzzling risk willingness among small states to join high-risk coalitions where they have no direct interests at play.

The question is, of course, whether this change in the Nordic countries' status-seeking behaviour represents a wider tendency and whether status motives can explain the various types of militarized international engagements the small states engage in. Scholars have recently argued that status as a driver was also visible in the British decision to participate in the Iraq War in 2003, where the relationship with Washington played a central role, and other studies have also suggested that status played a role for the Benelux countries in the same period.¹¹¹ Another dimension of generalizability relates to the examined time period. Here it can be noted that the post-Cold War period has been characterized by a low degree of external threats to the Nordic (and Western European) states and by an engaged and multilaterally oriented great power. Yet recent trends with the Trump administration seem to indicate clear instances of spheres-of-influence thinking and a more open approach to Russia. This might reduce US engagement and thereby put pressure on the demand for small states' intervention and participation, which will limit the scope of the conclusions here to the examined time period due to the overall changes in US foreign and security policy.¹¹²

¹¹¹ Pedersen & Reykers, *Small States Bandwagon for Status?*

¹¹² Mouritzen, "Small States and Finlandisation."

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