

*The Friendcraft of Middle Powers: how the Netherlands & Denmark supported the War on Terror and how this affected their friendship with the US*

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## **Introduction**

While friendship scholarship in the humanities and social sciences has risen exponentially in the last decade, it focuses almost exclusively on the alliances of great powers.[1] This article introduces a new research agenda by drawing upon scholarship that suggests middle powers behave differently, arguing that middle powers pursue international friendship different than great powers. This example is illustrated by comparing how the Netherlands and Denmark, both considered traditional examples of middle powers and of atlanticist states, supported the US during the War on Terror, and how this affected their relationship with the US.

Middle powers possess a unique position in the international system: they are widely observed to engage in international friendships,[2] and favour a politics of compromise, cosmopolitanism, and multilateralism.[3] While definitions on middle powers vary widely, there is scholarly consensus on which countries qualify as middle powers. Eduard Jordaan helpfully differentiates between traditional and emerging middle powers, the former characterized by equal distributions of wealth, high levels of welfare, an egalitarian society, and a place at the core of the world economy. In contrast, while emerging middle powers lack these features, they are characterized by their powerful regional position, which traditional middle powers, such as Denmark and the Netherlands, lack.[4] Furthermore, both countries position themselves as atlanticist in international politics, that is, they favour the US and NATO. This is

especially pertinent for European middle powers, allowing them to balance against their bigger European neighbours.[5]

Friendcraft, the capacity of state representatives to successfully establish political friendship, is based on five key elements: (1) affect; (2) a grand project; (3) altruistic reciprocity; (4) moral obligations; and (5) equality.[6] Ties of friendship in international politics are characterized by a high degree of mutual affect, founded upon grand political projects, based upon shared worldviews which ‘promote an idea of international order that affects others’.[7] Acts for the sake of the friendship are done either out of altruistic reciprocity, that is, for the friendship’s sake alone, without the expectation of a reward, or out of moral obligations of the friendship, actively meeting the request of a friend. George. W. Bush’s 2001 ultimatum illustrates the danger moral obligations bring to a political friendship, best exemplified by a quote attributed to Condoleezza Rice: ‘Punish France, ignore Germany, forgive Russia’.[8]

Denmark and the Netherlands were never in doubt. Both countries had adopted staunch atlanticist politics in the years preceding 9/11. By and large, both had favoured good relations with the US in the twentieth century, with the notable exception of the Danish footnote period (1982-1988),[9] and the Dutch flirtation with a common European defence policy, abandoned after the US came to the rescue in the Bosnian War.[10] From then on, the Netherlands would only accept a common defence policy in line with NATO.[11] In contrast, Denmark had only relatively recently aligned themselves completely with the US, but soon with such a vehemence that Mouritzen dubbed it Super Atlanticism.[12] Both countries compete for the favour of the US, aligned with the US’s grand project, consider the US a friend, were involved in the same military operations, and both are atlanticist middle powers, justifying a comparison.[13]

## Comparing the Netherlands & Denmark

After 9/11, the Netherlands was quick to align themselves with the US and offered material and immaterial support. It was clear the Netherlands would take an active supporting role in the US-led *Operation Enduring Freedom* (OEF), focused primarily on replacing American forces. This role was simultaneously in line with Dutch policy of supporting the US, and with the specific Dutch version of counterinsurgency: the 3D approach of Defence, Diplomacy and Development, promoted as a uniquely Dutch form of conflict resolution.[14] The Netherlands further joined the NATO ISAF mission, also committing parts of its air force. It was an awkward surprise to the Dutch, then, when the US government introduced the 2002 *American Service-Members’ Protection* (ASPA), quickly dubbed and ridiculed (in the US and abroad),

as the ‘The Hague Invasion Act’:

the law allows the US to constitutionally send jack-booted commandos to fly over fields of innocent tulips, swoop into the land of wooden shoes, tread past threatening windmills and sleepy milk cows into the Dutch capital – into a city synonymous with international law – and pry loose any US troops. [15]

The ASPA controversy is especially revealing from the perspective of friendship. There is an affective (hurt) reaction; it calls into question the equality between the two friends; and, strikingly, it draws attention to the question of the shared grand project. After all, the Netherlands positions itself internationally as a champion of human rights, the Hague housing both the UN’s International Court of Justice and ASPA’s target: the International Criminal Court. Nevertheless, confusion and bemusement aside, the Dutch government remained a stalwart supporter of the US, defying Dutch public opinion in supporting the 2003 invasion of Iraq. Strikingly, when France and Germany refused to support Turkey with missiles later that year, the Netherlands obliged.[16] Yet simultaneously, the Dutch commitment to NATO was in doubt. While the Netherlands answered multiple support calls, they faced condemnation for not meeting budget commitments and for taking too long to agree to extending ISAF missions.[17] To boot, the Dutch supported both Germany’s ambitions for a common European defence policy and Germany’s opposition to NATO enlargement.[18] Finally, while the US commended the Netherlands for their contributions, documents on Wikileaks suggest the praise was only meant to keep the Dutch onboard with ISAF. [19] By navigating between the US and their continental allies, and between an atlanticist government and an increasingly US-wary population, the Dutch tried to have it both ways, and in the end pleased none.

Denmark, a very reluctant NATO partner at best in the late nineties, favoured a more active foreign policy, and passionately supporting the US after 9/11 fit that policy.[20] The Danish were less concerned with the question of whether the invasion was justified. Seeing unequivocal support as a sure way to improve their standing with the US.[21] Under prime minister (2001-2009) Anders Fogh Rasmussen, Danish support for the US was second only to the UK. Like the Netherlands, Denmark took part in both OEF and ISAF, but, unlike the Netherlands, Denmark maintained ‘the highest level of public support among the nations contributing to the NATO mission in Afghanistan, while suffering the highest number of fatalities per capita’.[22] Denmark gained further in prestige by being one of only five EU countries signing an open letter, ‘Europe and America Must Stand United’, in support of the Iraq war.[23] The goodwill of the US proved beneficial during the 2005-2006 cartoon crisis, when the US offered both material and political support.[24] In contrast, when in 2008 the controversial Dutch politician Geert Wilders released a film targeting Islam, strong Dutch government condemnation ensured a mild response abroad, which contrasts sharply to Rasmussen’s vehement defence

of freedom of the press, making US support especially welcome.[25] In both cases, US support hurt America's own standing in Islamic countries.[26] More than the Netherlands, Denmark gained access to key American policy makers, high level military material, and lucrative military contracts, and Rasmussen's exemplary support gave him excellent qualifications to become the next NATO Secretary General in 2009.[27]

## Conclusion

Both the Netherlands and Denmark offered their unconditional support to the US in the wake of 9/11. This fit both their atlanticist policy and their role as traditional middle powers. The Netherlands focused more on maintaining their good relationship with the US, while Denmark saw an opportunity to establish itself as a strong friend of the US. This is reflected in Denmark's unequivocal support throughout the entire period, while the Netherlands became more of a reluctant friend after the Iraq war. Denmark full heartedly supported both the US and NATO, while the Dutch government failed in reconciling its atlanticist ambitions with its reluctant population and their European neighbours. This is most apparent in the reluctant Dutch commitment to NATO, which to this day has damaged both the international standing of the Netherlands, and of Dutch defensive capabilities in general.[28]

Considering Denmark and the Netherlands through the lens of friendship reveals several intriguing starting points for future research on middle powers and friendship. The central role Rasmussen played calls for an in-depth comparison with the Dutch prime minister, Jan Peter Balkenende, especially since their eight year tenures coincide.[29] Doubts can be put to the question whether the Netherlands and the US (at least rhetorically) differ in their international projects, and, if they diverge to such an extent, whether the Dutch striving for friendship with the US is ultimately in vain. ASPA in particular reveals a genuine affective connection between the Netherlands and the US, while simultaneously calling into question to what extent the US considers the Netherlands a serious and equal friend. Both Denmark and the Netherlands show altruistic reciprocity and meet their moral obligations to the US: both proactively offer support after 9/11 and are committed throughout the war on terror. Surprisingly, the more emotional Dutch bond was less effective than the utilitaristic Danish policy, which suggests the US values and rewards consistency and loyalty over shared history.

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