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British Embassy,
Copenhagen.

11 December, 1968.

Denmark and NATO

Sir,

Denmark is not, it must be admitted, the most warlike of nations nor, perhaps, the most robust member of the North Atlantic Alliance. The policies of the Danish Government of the day are, however, of some importance: politically, the degree of commitment of Denmark to the Alliance is important to its cohesion; and militarily, her Armed Forces have an important task: to help bottle up the Baltic. It may therefore be useful to review where Denmark now stands after almost a year in office of a right-of-centre coalition government with a pacifist component and after the Soviet occupation of Czechoslovakia. The pacifism and the occupation have about cancelled each other out, leaving a residual bonus on the side of realism.

2. To understand the background to popular Danish attitudes to defence it is necessary to go back into Danish schoolrooms. Generations of Danes /have

The Right Honourable
Michael Stewart, M.P.,
etc., etc.

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Danes have been taught Danish history by generations of predominantly Radical (pacifist) schoolmasters. And although Danes are intensely patriotic people and proud of their little country, the facts of Danish history do not encourage a heroic attitude to service life. Denmark has won few military victories since Swayn Forkbeard ravaged Wessex before the Norman Conquest. Her history for the last four hundred years has been of battles lost, against the Swedes in the seventeenth and eighteenth, against the Germans in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Denmark's favourite King, Christian IV, is famous for building palaces (and a Stock Exchange) of great beauty, and for an unbroken record of defeat in battle against the Swedes. Denmark was occupied by the Germans during the Morning Watch of the 9th of April, 1940, without a shot being fired and subsequently enjoyed perhaps the lightest of occupation regimes under the German Reich. Perhaps Christian IV's Stock Market is symbolic; certainly the Danes seem to find ample scope for their patriotism in trade and navigation, as their great trading and shipping companies, like the East Asiatic and A.P. Møller lines, testify. But spending money on armies and navies runs counter to a powerfully surviving peasant-thrift mentality.

3. The German occupation has left a scar the more sensitive because there was so little effective Danish /opposition.

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opposition to it. When the Alliance was being formed in 1948 the Danes exhaustively examined the Nordic alternative before joining with Norway and leaving Sweden on her own. Most Danes realise that NATO offers Denmark extraordinary high life cover in return for ridiculously low annual premiums. Nevertheless, the Radicals, who are now in the Government, voted against membership of NATO in 1949 and against the accession of Turkey and Greece to NATO in 1951.

4. But it is the position of Germany within the Alliance that the Danes find most difficult to live with. That was why they took, and still take, the withdrawal of France from the integrated structure of the Alliance so hard. France could be relied upon to secure two major Danish objectives: that Germany did not dominate the Alliance inside Europe and that the United States did not involve the Alliance outside Europe. Britain, Danes feel, can probably be relied on to prevent these two latent disasters, but we are not quite as reliable as the French. Moreover, there is some anxiety lest our current policies within NATO and towards the EEC (the Harmel proposals) might result in still greater French alienation from NATO. Nevertheless, perhaps on the rebound from Germany, perhaps in gratitude for the liberation by General Montgomery's forces in 1945, the British Armed Services have everything their way in Denmark. A British officer Commands-in-Chief the Danish, Norwegian and German forces assigned to this /sector

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sector of the NATO front and only a British officer is likely to be acceptable in this capacity to the Danish government for as far ahead as it is useful to look. The Commander-in-Chief AFNORTH still finds it difficult to persuade the Danes to allow German land forces to conduct joint exercises on Danish territory, although the Navies can exercise jointly at sea and the Air Forces in the air. When I paid a visit in September with my German colleague, in a sort of symbolic gesture of solidarity, to COMBALTAP's Headquarters at Karup, General Wolff prefaced his briefing by reading out a statement on Danish-German military relations which had been cleared at the highest political level. On the other hand, when Admiral Thostrup, Commander-in-Chief of the Danish Navy, in November entertained Admiral Compston, Deputy SACLANT, to dinner in Copenhagen, he felt bold enough to invite Admiral Obermeier, COMBALTAP's German Naval Deputy, to the feast. At Service level at least the Danes seem to believe in the inevitability of gradualness.

5. All Danish Governments have, therefore, a difficult task persuading Danish citizens to pay taxes to support Armed Services which have won no victories for centuries and which, like it or not, are integrated with Germans for mutual defence. When the new right-of-centre coalition government took office at the beginning of February this year, it looked at one stage as if concessions over defence might have to be the price the

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Conservatives and Liberals would have to pay for Radical support. A major NATO exercise, - two years in preparation and involving both SACEUR and SACLANT - "Beach Bazaar" - was called off without discussion or warning. There was a lot of talk about retaining the ability to opt out of NATO at a year's notice and much discussion about the necessity to reduce, for economic as well as pacifist reasons, the defence budget. Even so, this concession to the Radicals was balanced by a counter-concession to the Conservatives and Liberals: plans were approved for re-equipping the Royal Danish Air Force with two squadrons of SAAB DRAKEN fighter bombers. In this connexion it is significant that the Danish Defence Bill at present under consideration in Parliament does not provide for any cuts in force levels. And this compromise was completed by the appointment of a Commission of all the talents under ^{Dr} Gunnar Seidenfaden, a former Political Deputy Under-Secretary at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to study defence policy in the Seventies. The Commission is due to report in 1969 to a triumvirate consisting of the Minister of Defence (Conservative), the Minister of Foreign Affairs (Liberal) and the Minister of Disarmament (Radical). The Conservatives and Liberals naturally hope that the Commission will produce evidence to support their views on an adequate defence effort: the Radicals to support theirs on a reduced defence effort.

6. The Soviet action in Czechoslovakia on the 21st of August came as a salutary reminder about the realities of

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of the world we live in. There is now no public talk from Radical politicians about the rights of withdrawal from NATO. The Radicals have not changed their minds; in a typically Danish fashion, they have simply ceased to argue their case. The Seidenfaden Commission is still at work; but it has dropped out of the public consciousness and Dr Seidenfaden has told me that he is in no hurry and now under no pressure to report. A Gallup poll published in September showed that the public support for NATO is now at the highest level since the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956, and even higher than when the Social Democrats broke with tradition and brought Denmark into the Alliance in 1949. Even the Radicals polled 62% in favour of NATO.

7. Moreover, during the past few months Denmark has been modestly responsive to all British proposals for strengthening NATO. The Government agreed to advance the date of the usual end-of-year ministerial meeting so that NATO could take up a robust but unprovocative public stand against Soviet actions. The Minister of Defence, Mr Ninn-Hansen, agreed, albeit rather timorously, to join Mr Healey for dinner before the NATO ministerial meeting at Brussels in November in order to try and formulate a European view on Defence, but they have slight qualms about the dangers of fragmentation in the Alliance. Mr Ninn-Hansen announced to the ministerial meeting an increase in defence expenditure of 13% in 1969: although this was something

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of an optical increase, the fact he was able publicly to announce it without embarrassment at home is a good sign. At the moment the NATO planners are busy planning "Bold Adventure", a reinforcement exercise for the late winter in southern Denmark and over the German border: while in normal times this would have touched the Danish policy makers on their most sensitive spot, German participation, there is a reasonable prospect that the exercise will receive political clearance. Moreover, in response to Mr Healey's representations, reinforced by those of Denmark's Foreign Minister, Mr Ninn-Hansen has undertaken to reconsider the possibility of Denmark's participation in the Zenda project. An exchange of visits between Mr Healey and Mr Ninn-Hansen is in prospect.

8. Altogether, therefore, I think we have reason to continue to be modestly satisfied with Denmark's modest contribution to the NATO Alliance. So long as France has not returned to the fold she will not be altogether happy with developments; and too much progress "in and around" WEU without France will make her distinctly uncomfortable, especially should it be institutionalised. Politically, however, her commitment to the purposes of the Alliance is probably greater than at any time in the Alliance's history. Militarily, the contribution of her Armed Services to the integrated structure of the Alliance is certainly no less effective than it has ever been. On the whole, /the

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the foreign policy conclusions I drew in my despatch of the 5th of February on the formation of the new Danish Government - that they would be generally sound and helpful to British interests but would need constant watching to keep it that way - have, with a little bit of help from the Russians, been fully confirmed.

9 I am sending a copy of this despatch to the Secretary of State for Defence; to Her Majesty's Ambassadors at Bonn, Stockholm and Oslo, and to the United Kingdom Permanent Representative to the North Atlantic Council at Brussels.

I have the honour to be,
With the highest respect,
Sir,
Your obedient Servant,

(Oliver Wright)

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