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Organizing Europe for Defense
Lessons from the Scandinavian *Machtstaat*

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As Europe hurls itself forward towards greater defense expenditure and greater defense responsibilities to stave off further Russian aggression, it is worth recalling General Dwight D. Eisenhower's view of the Russian way of war. "Americans assess the cost of war in terms of human lives," Eisenhower noted, "the Russians in the over-all drain on the nation." Thus, great power is guided by distinct ideas shaped in historical and geographical context. However, there is an underlying logic to war that applies across contexts, Eisenhower agreed with Soviet General Georgy Zhukov. The "aim of high command," the two generals concurred, was the "destruction of enemy morale" by way of "strategic surprise," meaning the positioning of own forces so that they threaten the enemy's ability to continue the war.

Eisenhower's recollections are striking because they highlight the role of knowledge, culture, and ideas in matters of war and defense. Russia and the United States today operate as they did back then: Russia with mass, grind, and high human cost; the United States with precision, agility, and low human cost. The ability to engender and pursue "strategic surprise" is likewise beholden to bright thinking. In Ukraine, Russia's leadership seems severely limited in its ability to acquire and to act on knowledge about its adversary. America wants to support Ukraine but not provoke too much of a surprise in Russia, which critics liken to self-deterrence.

What would Europe do? Europe of course is a slippery concept—it could refer to a European pillar of NATO, the EU, or something else, but if European states manage to put their money where their mouth is, they will now more seriously begin to organize for their own defense. And so, what could we expect from them? Presumably an approach like the American in that Europeans likewise will want to minimize the human cost of defense and war. But will they know how to draw on the best knowledge available and integrate it into an effective—agile and capable—defense organization? If they cannot, they will be like Thomas L. Friedman, the columnist, in the early phase of the Ukraine war: stunned that "the surprises just keep coming."[1] If they can, they might in the spirit of Eisenhower deliver "strategic surprise" to their adversary and thus gain security.

In this article we drill into one aspect of this question, namely the ability of states to create a productive and useful nexus between knowledge as generated by academics and other experts and policy as generated inside the state apparatus. There is a large and sophisticated Bridging the Gap literature that suggests how these two sides can overcome barriers to national security cooperation. However, the literature pays surprisingly little attention to state structures and context, and it is far from certain that the American experience, on which the Bridging the Gap literature builds, can guide the European effort to take defense matters more into own hands. Thus, in this article we suggest new ways of thinking about states, knowledge, and power, and we outline implications for Europe's defense organization.

[1] Thomas L. Friedman, "In the War Over Ukraine, Expect the Unexpected," *New York Times*, March 15, 2022, https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/15/opinion/russia-ukraine-putin-war.html.

Our agenda seeks to enrich the Bridging the Gap literature by going up against one of its core assumptions, namely that knowledge and policy can connect *if only people want it*—if scholars and practitioners become aware of how they can be lost in translation, and if they act to prevent it. We agree that knowledge outside the state can help practitioners develop and execute long-term and sustainable foreign policy (George 1993; Jentleson 2015). But we find that Europe's history does not necessarily support the voluntarism of the American experience. "Yes, we can," is the American outlook, but it has been shaped by a society that was always strong vis-à-vis the state. Europe's experience is the inverse. Its states developed as compact, self-sufficient, and directive states that had little time or patience for societal concerns as they sought to fine-tune the external balances of power on which their security depended. We shall examine two states—Denmark and Norway—where this *machtstaat* tradition still is very much alive.

Our agenda also runs against the grain of European self-perception in matters of security. Europe's professed commitment is to openness, pragmatism, inclusion, and compromise. But it is a commitment that has been allowed to prosper under American defense leadership. As Europeans step up in military organization and defense responsibility, a clash could emerge between professed values and political reality. If Europe does not take its national security history seriously, we argue, it could produce a long-term crisis of public trust and legitimacy, ultimately threatening the ambition to grow Europe's defense responsibility. To make this point, we dissect the reigning Bridging the Gap literature, we dig into Europe's history to demonstrate the enduring relevance of the *machtstaat*, or, Europe's national security state, and we finally consider how, at this crossroads of intellectual and political controversies, Europe must navigate certain pitfalls in its search for strategic surprise.

Bridging the Gap

The term "bridging the gap" refers to the gap between the worlds of academic research and policy practice. Max Weber, the German sociologist, famously depicted the gap as one founded on ethics. Research, Weber argued, is a vocation guided by an ethics of conviction—an obligation to pursue truth, however politically inconvenient it may be. Inversely, politics is a vocation guided by an ethics of responsibility—an obligation to safeguard the community, irrespective of whatever "truth" academics may define.

At the time of Weber's writing in the late 1910s, the gap had become an enduring feature of politics and human thought because the alternative to it, a unified republic led by philosopher kings, had proven unrealizable. The attempt to unify knowledge and politics is old, originating with Greek philosopher, Plato (427-348 BCE). In his work *The Republic*, Plato suggested that if humankind chose to install philosophers as kings, it could fuse the two imperatives of conviction and responsibility and obliterate the "gap". However, this leap into a harmonious future was belied by society's resistance to the supremacy of philosophy: Plato's mentor, Socrates, was put to death by a jury of citizens, causing Plato to condemn democracy as a vile form of populism. It was also vulnerable to the willingness of the best philosophers to accept the responsibility to rule: in what may have been a failure of nerve, Plato himself declined to enter politics (Cornford 1950, 52).

"Bridging the gap" does not seek a Platonic leap in the future. It accepts the gap between scientific and political vocations and seeks to bridge it. Historically speaking, the idea of such

a bridge is still a bold proposition. Niccolò Machiavelli, the 16th century Florentine philosopher and diplomat, argued with lasting impact that politics had its own language and logic related to power. In this land of political power, there was no need for outside knowledge, merely the proper orientation of statesmanship. Bridging the Gap is a Machiavellian antidote in the sense that it foresees both the imperative and the feasibility of a "bridge." This voluntarist and optimist streak sets the Bridging the Gap literature apart. It also suggests that there is something uniquely American about it.

An American Spark

In his seminal book "Bridging the Gap: Theory and Practice in Foreign Policy" that founded the tradition, US scholar Alexander L. George acknowledged the gap in terms like those of Max Weber. George identified two distinct logics, or cultures, and found that while scholars pursued knowledge for sake of enlightenment and wisdom, practitioners were more interested in the type of knowledge that could "increase their ability to influence and control the course of events" (George 1993, pp. xx). George considered the gap as an intrinsic feature of the relationship between thought and action in foreign policy, but he also believed that there was a bridge to be built if only scholars would speak to the general problems with which policymakers were confronted. Scholars, situated on the outside of policy, could not pretend to solve specific policy challenges, but they might advance policymakers' thinking by helping them think in broader terms about their challenges.

George's thinking was not idealistic: he did not foresee, like Plato, a unified republic ruled by philosopher kings. George was very much a pragmatist but also a voluntarist who believed that choices made by scholars and policymakers make a real difference. It was this voluntarism that provoked the ire of scholars differently indebted to the European experience. Some argued that to penetrate the state is to be swallowed up by it. "The Galileos of this world never get invited to working lunches by popes," one critic warned (Booth 1997, p. 373). For the sake of intellectual integrity and perspective, others added, scholars should tie themselves to the mast of academic inquiry and resist "the siren song of policy relevance" (Hill 1994; see also, Eriksson 1999; Stein 2000). Still others took aim at George's pragmatism, which they found modest and subservient. Instead of appealing to policymakers for relevance, scholars should care for the 'voiceless, unrepresented, and powerless' (Said 1994; Booth 1997).

Still, the American scholarly context proved more receptive to the Bridging the Gap agenda. George had offered a spark that his former students later would turn into a fire. This happened in 2006 when four graduate students at the University of California, Berkely received support from the Carnegie Corporation of New York to fund and organize a Bridging workshop (Jentleson 2015; Tama et al. 2023). The fire then spread. The Carnegie Corporation established a Bridging the Gap research program, which over the next two decades channeled $33.5 millions into research initiatives leveled at exploring how scholarship could inform foreign policy (Carnegie Corporation of New York 2023).

Many notable scholars were attracted to the research program, and their research output was impressive in scope and creativity. Some considered the gap between knowledge and policy a result of different professional cultures (Stein 2000; Lieberthal 2006), others ascribed it to inappropriate incentive structures in academia (Goldman 2006; Nye 2008; Jentleson and Ratner 2011; Mearsheimer and Walt 2013; Maliniak et. al. 2019), including the professionalization of political science which had sophisticated methods and lingo trump

substance and readability (Walt 1999; Putnam 2003; Lepgold and Nincic 2001; Shapiro 2005; Desch 2019). In the spirit of George, they concurred that the gap was not inevitable: it could be bridged.

The Anatomy of a Bridge

The Bridging the Gap literature steers clear of the Platonic temptation to grant scholars unique insight and a unique responsibility to guide society. Instead, it spreads the responsibility for change widely.

Scholars Can Choose Relevance

A first core assumption is that scholars have agency and can penetrate the state structure – *if only they want to*. Therefore, the Bridging the Gap literature stands ready to inform and guide scholars in this individual choice. It suggests various ways in which scholars can mimic Alexander L. George and become more attentive to the needs of policymakers: they can choose to engage in interdisciplinary, problem-based research (Lepgold 1998; Lepgold and Nincic 2001); they can adhere to methodological pluralism (Desch 2015; 2019); they can communicate broadly and accessibly, (Avey and Desch 2014; Del Rosso 2015; Wiers 2017); and they can interact with policymakers on a regular basis (Goldman 2006; Lieberthal 2006; Jentleson and Ratner 2011; Van Evera 2015; Preble 2017).

Universities Can Choose Engagement

A second core assumption that saturates the Bridging the Gap literature is that universities, too, can opt for relevance – *if they want to.* The recipient institutions of Carnegie's Bridging the Gap grants have all made this choice. Yet, many universities have sought to guard their intellectual freedom and integrity by moving in the inverse direction—seeking the independence and shelter that was made into an ideal by Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767-1835), a famed philosopher who helped found the University of Berlin in 1810. Historically, this Humboldtian perspective has been powerful among many universities, explains Jeremi Suri. During the Great Depression, a university such as Harvard "prided itself on standing apart from the corruptions of ordinary politics, business, and society. Much like Boston, just across the Charles River, it was to be a "city on a hill", a cloistered world of privilege, a temple of learning and gentlemanly grooming" (Suri 2009, p. 100). In effect, "Harvard was not a hothouse for new policy ideas at a moment of world crisis". But Humboldtian distance is a choice, and so is policy relevance. If opting for relevance, the Bridging the Gap literatue suggests that institutions can pursue it by organizing interdisciplinary departments (Van Evera 2015), teaching courses on professional ethics encouraging scholars to go beyond the "ivory tower" (Van Evera 2015), and by privileging merits of engagement in hirings and promotions (Nye 2009; Jentleson and Ratner 2011; Mearsheimer and Walt 2013).

Private Foundations Can Choose to Enable Engagement

A third and final core assumption is that private foundations can be key advocates and enablers of the individual scholar's and university's choice and potential for relevance. It was no coincidence that the Bridging the Gap literature blossomed once, in 2008, the Carnegie Foundation launched its own Bridging the Gap program and subsequently offered generous research grants (Jentleson 2015). Carnegie thus built institutions. One was the University of Notre Dame's Carnegie Policy Relevance Project, which went against academic orthodoxy by performing 'relevance rankings' of US political science departments. Another was the College of William and Mary's Teaching, Research, and International Policy (TRIP) Project, which surveyed international relations scholars, policymakers, and think tank researchers to

take stock of their interaction and the size of the gap that separates them (Carnegie Corporation of New York 2023). Finally, Carnegie also established a series of professional programs leveled at training researchers, students, and policy-makers in how to engage with each other and thus bridge the gap. Examples hereof include the 'International Policy Summer Institute', the 'New Era Workshop', and the 'New Voices in National Security' programs.

A Fraught Debate

American scholars involved in the Bridging the Gap debate are of course aware of how the structure of the state can impact on the gap and efforts to bridge it. They have paid special attention to role of think tanks in delivering the kind of knowledge that politicians want. With an eye on the 1,200 think tanks that operate in the United States, Joseph Nye worried that the gap between research and policy was in fact growing. Nye, an experienced scholar-practitioner, expressed this concern in an article lauding Alexander L. George's contribution to the field.[2] Think tanks do not "bridge," they belong squarely to the political arena. They tangentially reference research, but their game is to advance certain interests in the domestic struggle for power. The same concern has been expressed by Michael C. Desch, who warns that although "the plenthora of think tanks in Washington" is supposed to translate knowledge into action, it is important to be aware of that most of these often are "overtly political and advocacy organizations, rather than nonpartisan, translational research centers" (Desch, 2019: 251).

The European experience reflects a similar yet broader skepticism of the promise of liberal states. True, liberal states are supposed to be open for business and open for new thinking. But even liberal states are states, and states tend to be compelled to think in terms of power, as Machiavelli so clearly underscored.

Max Weber observed this imperative of power both in the international and the domestic arena of the state. Weber grew up in the shadow of a recently unified and ambitious state, imperial Germany, which struggled for power at home and abroad. Weber dedicated much thought to the social forces that mobilized to gain control of state and society—monarchs, aristocrats, capitalists and industrialists, farmers and socialists. Weber did not foresee harmony among these forces, merely the likelihood that an institutional balance of power could keep them in check. In this, Weber was very much a Machiavellian who believed politics was ruled by power, and that political stability necessitated balanced power.

For these reasons Weber grew to distrust the scholar who felt that he or she could step from research into the political arena and guide political choice. Weber wrote his famous essays on the distinct ethics and vocations of science and politics in the shadow of the Great War. He looked at his scientific colleagues and saw how many of them fell for the temptation to seek fame and high reputation. That is, they dressed up as scientists but acted like politicians. "I have a deep distrust of courses that draw crowds," Weber thus wrote (reference).

If Weber was a realist seeking liberal shelter (he died in 1920 just as the Weimar Republic stood up), he left a legacy of mediated pessimism in terms of bridging the gap. If institutions were destined to balance the power of social forces, individuals had to fashion modest ways

[2] Bridging the Gap between Theory and Policy, "Political Psychology," 29/4, 2008, 593-603.

of bridging the theory-policy gap. Karl Popper, an Austrian philosopher who fled Nazism to settle in New Zealand and later England, later reinforced this view of the centrality of the individual scholar's qualities and wisdom. Popper worried that philosophers and scientists who believed in eternal ideas inevitably would come to grant political leaders who allegedly understood the rhythm of History near total, if not total power (insert reference, Popper - *The Open Society and Its Enemies*; *The Poverty of Historicism*).

Popper, like Weber, embraced liberal government in the same guarded fashion. Supreme confidence could afflict all thought, liberal thought included. Popper thus advocated the type of careful, empirically grounded and contextual knowledge that Plato's student, Aristoteles, had also come to advocate in the wake of his mentor's idealism and political retreat. What Aristoteles had learned from his experience, and what Popper sought to impute into the ravaged societies of war-torn Europe was not collectivist wisdom by a learned avantgarde but the individual's exercise of judgement in historical context.

The United States has not bequeathed us with a clear position in this respect. On the one hand, it has spun an intellectual tradition of confidence in the ability of knowledge to guide policy. America's privileged position at the end of the Second World War boosted this confidence: it was truly the land of plentifulness and opportunity wherein research converged with new foreign policy responsibilities. On the other hand, it has had bruising experiences with ideas wrecking policy. New disciplines such as anthropology, area studies, and strategic studies were meant to prudently guide policy, but as policy went off the rails, some came to suspect that power had infected the world of research. The "Cold War University," once destined to bridge the gap between theory and policy, became an intense and bitter battlefield (Chomsky et al. 1996).

In 1958 Hannah Arendt, another philosopher who had fled Nazism to settle in the US, had sought in her book, *The Human Condition*, to invoke an Aristotelean tradition of modest knowledge-based politics, always within limits and within context, for modern society. Arendt's aim was in part to impute a degree of Weberian and Popperian (and thus, European) modesty into the American debate. However, *the American condition* was so marked by opportunity, energy, and passion that modesty stood no chance: scholars were either passionately bridging the gap or whole-heartedly opposed to the effort (insert the following reference: Robert Proctor, Value-Free Science; Desch 2019). This leaves the question of *the European condition*. Below we shall demonstrate why it was not coincidental that the Bridging the Gap tradition experienced a revival in the United States, and why Europe's *machtstaat* legacy still today necessitates a Weberian skepticism as to the feasibility of changing vocations.

State History Matters:
The American Republic meets the Scandinavian *Machtstaat*

Denmark and Norway are happy Scandinavian countries that have entered "a very virtuous cycle, where efficient and democratic institutions are able to provide citizens security, so that citizens trust institutions and each other."[3] These high-trust, highly educated societies have consensus-based parliamentarian politics and coalition governments broadly supportive of

[3] https://www.euronews.com/health/2024/03/23/why-do-people-in-nordic-countries-consistently-rank-as-the-happiest-and-what-can-we-learn-

popular values. One may therefore wonder, why it was not in a country such as one of these that the Bridging the Gap tradition was reinvigorated?

We argue that this is no coincidence and that history and geography matter in a way that is under-appreciated in the literature. State traditions and histories, as well as their geographical exposure, shape the nature of the "gap" and therefore the relationship between scholars and practitioners. That is, liberal institutions must be put in context to understand the confidence, or the lack hereof, with which scholars believe the gap can be bridged. The American Republic lends itself to penetration by society in a way that the small kingdoms of Northern Europe historically have not. This also makes the American state a weak state, comparatively speaking. Denmark and Norway are of course much less powerful on the world stage, but their state structures are two of the most well-preserved examples of Europe's strong state tradition: with centralized institutions beholden to strong policy elites much less susceptible to the whims of academic opinion. We shall examine four facets of this strong state and what it has meant for local bridging the gap experiences, in each respect prefacing with some thoughts on the American weak state tradition.

The Strong State Institutions of the Machtstaat

America's central government has historically been weak vis-à-vis its peripheries, that is, the federal states and, in time, a burgeoning society from which organized interests seek to impact on public policy. The central government was not designed to be strong but emerged from a colonial British experience where, as the English institutions modernized, sometimes under the violent strain of religious strife, colonial institutions were largely left intact. Thus, as the customary and incrementalist institutions of Tudor Britain faded in Britain, they remained in the Americas (insert reference[4]).

America's revolution brought a commitment to human rights and liberty, but it did not change the Middle Age-character of its political institutions: separated powers but shared functions. That is, where Europe turned to centralized power and separated functions, in the newly founded United States, executive power was shared among several institutional actors, just as the power to legislate was shared not least between Congress and the judicial review powers of the Court. Where the United States proved particularly innovative, far outpacing its European partners, was in opening the state for political participation (insert reference[5]). The federal center in the United States was thus simultaneously progressively open and institutionally hampered in its ability to rationalize and develop public policy.[6]

This contrasts with Denmark and Norway where state formation took place under absolute monarchy during the 16th and 17th., a time during which Denmark and Norway formed part of the same Union[7]. King Frederik III of Denmark-Norway gained absolute power in 1660, while the legal basis for the new system of government was reinforced by the Royal Law (*Kongeloven*) of 1665. The Royal Law – which was the first written constitution in Europe to provide a legal basis for absolutism – dissolved the former Council of the Realm (*rigsrådet*), consisting of members of the nobility, which previously had controlled the financial, military, and legislative dispositions of the King (Østerud 1981). It also established the line of succession (thus depriving the nobility of its former right to elect the royal successer), and

[4] Huntington, Political Order in Changing Societies.
[5] Fukuyama
[6] XXX
[7] Norway was subordinated to Danish overlordship by the King in Copenhagen (Østerud 1981).

bestowed unrestricted powers on the King. The King thus gained supreme authority in all matters of state, incl. the right to have a standing army, wage war, conduct foreign policy, levy taxes, and to appoint and dismiss all state officials (Jespersen 1989). Previously, the King had shared this power with the nobility, while the latter also had enjoyed tax immunity and exclusive rights to the offices of the state as well as land ownership. With the Royal Law of 1665, the 'old' nobility not only lost its seat and power in the Council of the Realm, but also these exclusive rights and privileges. The King could now appoint, and issue noble titles to, anyone he saw fit. The absolute power of the King was further reinforced by King Christian V's Law of Precedence of 1671, which abolished the old nobility's social hierarchy of lineage and birth in favour of one primarily based on loyality and service to the Crown. As argued by Østerud (1981), "contrary to the old nobility, this new aristocracy was thus established to support the Crown: the new "fiefs" were neither independent nor hereditary but were to be regarded as civil or military offices connected to monarchical sovereignty" (p.141).

From the outset, the Scandinavian *Machtstaat* was therefore strong and dominant *vis-à-vis* its peripheries and designed as an instrument of power "to ward off the rival claims of both internal and external enemies" (Daalder 1991, p.2). Unlike the American state, the absolutist state of Denmark-Norway was not created to protect the individual citizen's "life, liberty and pursuit of happiness", but put in place to maintain and safeguard the King's stronghold on power. This required independent military strength on behalf of the monarch and an effective system of tax collection to finance it – so that the King would no longer be dependent on the nobility and its seigneurial cavalry to form the backbone of the Union's military infrastructure (Østerud 1981). In the Scandinavian *Machtstaat*, the bureaucracy therefore developed early and under the premise of being solely responsible to – and a faithful servant of – the Crown, while responsible government, and thus society's access to impact on public policy, developed late (Daalder 1991). In fact, this system of absolute monarchy was not replaced until 1814 in Norway and 1848 in Denmark.

The enduring relevance of this *Machtstaat* tradition is still evident in both countries where political elites are supported by a strong and extensive state apparatus comprised of career bureaucrats who are expected to be loyal and responsive to the sitting government irrespective of their political affiliations. In contrast to the US, there are thus few elective and political appointments in government, and while certain functions have been delegated to lower levels of government, the latter remain accountable to the central level. Power has thus been deconcentrated, but not decentralized (Christensen 2024). The insulated and self-reliant traits of the *Machtstaat* are also reflected in the two Nordic states' quest for academic knowledge in policy-making. While US scholars such as Nye (2009) and Desch (2019) worry about the 'plenthora of private think tanks' growing in size and number in Washington, Denmark and Norway have a long tradition of establishing publicly funded research-based sector institutions that through means of indirect control and influence offer expertise to government. Examples hereof include the Norwegian Defense Research Establishment (est. 1946), the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (est. 1959), the Danish Institute of International Affairs (est. 1967), and the Danish Institute for International Studies (est. 2003). Until recently, the directors of these institutions have, without exception, been senior officials from the ministeries of Foreign Affairs and Defense to ensure a high level of political responsiveness (Wicken 1997; Due-Nielsen 1993; Skånland 2009; Sjaastad 2009).

The United States has never been threatened by conquest. The world wars of the 20th century took place overseas, demanding a tremendous American effort of power projection once the United States decided to intervene, but never threatening the conquest of the United States by a rival state, be it Japan, Germany, or the Soviet Union. The advent of nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles to carry them caused a rethink in the United States of its vulnerability, but the argument that these technological advances really meant the "demise of the territorial state" in an indirect way reflected an American experience more than an international reality (insert reference[8]).

The favorable geographical position of the United States has historically led the country to consider the Americas as a zone wherein other powers should not meddle, while it has searched for ways to influence key events in the world's largest landmass, Eurasia. Whether the United States should take aim of Eurasia's heartlands or its coastal rims, and whether it should respect the "stopping power of water" or seek to overcome it, these are debated questions (insert reference[9]). The sum hereof is not a fixed answer but rather a vigorous strategy debate that offers also openings for analysts and scholars.

Denmark and Norway's geographical locations are less favorable, and both countries have, in effect, had their territory occupied and conquered on numerous occasions, most recently by nazi Germany during the Second World War. As expressed by John Christmas Møller, a Danish politician then in exile in Britain, who was to become Denmark's Minister of Foreign Affairs upon his return in 1945: "No one knows the German problem as well as Germany's neighbours – both large and small..(..)..German aggression, the German will to rule over and dominate others – well, that sums up a thousand years of Danish history" (Møller 1945, p.xx).

While Norway is home to a more rugged and inaccessible geographical landscape than that of Denmark, it, too, has suffered from this kind of geopolitical exposure with long periods of external domination, incl. forced unions with Denmark and Sweden. It was only in 1905 that Norway gained its independence for then to be occupied again by Germany 35 years later in 1940 (Bjørgo et al. 1995; Lidegaard 2004; Berg 1995; Fure 1996; Sverdrup 1996).

The Danish and Norwegian *Machtstaats* were therefore born out of, and still operate within, a geopolitical context that is significantly different from that of the United States. There is no "stopping power of water", and if there is one thing historical experience has shown, it is that other powers *do* meddle, and that such 'meddling' can have fatal consequences for the state if it is not careful looking out for its interests and survival. For this reason, Denmark and Norway both joined the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) during the Cold War, but they did so in a way that allowed them to remain sensitive to their geopolitical exposure. During the accession negotiations, both countries refused to accept a permanent peacetime stationing of American soldiers and nuclear weapons on their territory – a position that was elevated to the official policy of both states (Villaume 1995; Hanhimäki 1997; Bjereld et al. 2008; Preston 2021; Rynning 2024).

[8] John Herz, "The Rise and Demise of the Territorial State."
[9] Mackinder, Spykman, Mearsheimer, XXX

Secrecy and Elitism

The central institutions of the United States were formed in an era of expansive opportunity and limited social conflict. The original opportunity was continental expansion from the eastern seaboard westwards, which involved violent conflict and great human loss, but which from a state perspective was an unequal fight. The United States confronted either indigenous forces (Indians) or overseas powers having to cope with the "stopping power of water." There was, therefore, less need to develop a "national security state" dedicated to state survival. Likewise, there was no need to dislodge an entrenched aristocratic elite from the inner offices of the state, as the United States already had done so with the revolution.

American liberalism, in Louis Hartz's famed expression, thus became the "submerged faith" of a country that felt confident in its ability to recruit any domestic talent to its public bodies and its pervasive mission of Americanism (insert reference [10]). The country still experienced social conflict, naturally, but the ease with which the United States could open its institutions and also trust the power of Americanism to prevail in a land of opportunity, contrasts starkly with Europe's history of state secrecy and elitism.

The central institutions of the Danish-Norwegian *Machtstaat* were, in turn, formed during a period of limited opportunity and increasing social conflict. In 1660, the Danish-Norwegian Union was exhausted after a long series of reoccurring wars with neighbouring Sweden; there was no territorial expansion, in fact, the Union had just been forced to accede large parts of its territory as a part of the peace negotiations with Sweden; and its state treasury was at the verge of national bankruptcy (Østerud 1981). Since the aristocratic *coup d'etat* of 1536, the Union had been governed through a system of constitutional checks and balances between the King and the nobility (represented in the Council of the Realm). After the devastating defeat by Sweden, the new emerging societal classes (such as the growing commercial bourgeoisie) increasingly questioned and challenged the priviledged position of the nobility and blamed them for the dire state of affairs that the Union now found itself in (Kjølsen and Sjøqvist 1970). This provoked 'a bloodless revolution' where these other societal classes went up against the nobility and offered King Frederik III a hereditary monarchy and the possibility of drawing up a new constitution – an opportunity that the King used to the fullest to create a powerful national 'security state' (Østerud, 1981). Although the King – as a part of the new system of absolute monarchy – successfully dislodged the entrenched aristocratic elite from the inner offices of the state, the historical legacy of secrecy and elitism centered around the Crown (and later, central government) persisted (Mouritzen 1998; Lidegaard 1996).

This was not least due to externally imposed concerns for state survival. The Second World War taught both countries, and particularly Norway, a harsh lesson in realpolitik – and brought the political and administrative elites of both countries in close contact with their British and American counterparts (Riste 2003). In this way, the secretist and elitest tradition of the *Machtstaat* gained a transatlantic component. A noteworthy example relates to the official Danish policy of not accepting the stationing of American nuclear weapons on Danish territory in peacetime. In 1957 a small elitest group comprising the Danish Minister of State and Foreign Affairs and the Director of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs secretly breached this official state policy and allowed the US to station nuclear weapons in Greenland. According to the Danish constitution, the government was required to inform and

[10] Louis Hartz, The Liberal Tradition in America: An Interpretation of American Political Thought since the Revolution.

consult the Foreign Affairs Committeee of the Danish Parliament hereof, but no such orientation took place. It was not until after the end of the Cold War that this controversial agreement was revealed to the public by a Danish researcher (DIIS 1997).

In contrast to the open and penetrable institutions of the United States, Danish and Norwegian foreign and security policy-making has therefore historically taken place in small, enclosed circles of trusted decision-makers. The existence of a strong, professional bureaucracy allowed both states to maintain the secretist and elitist trait of the *Machtstaat* tradition through the transition from absolutist monarchy to parliamentary democracy. This is particularly the case in the area of security and defense where the corporate cultures of the ministeries remains strong; there are few organised interests; and the use of commissions or hearings to manage societal interests is less developed (Grønnegaard 2024).

Value Promotion or Foreign Policy Adaptation?

Americanism combined with the opportunities conferred by great power has constituted a broad invitation for widespread participation in foreign policy debates. If foreign policy was an opportunity, the direction of policy could be set by ideas and values with which most Americans were familiar, that is, the ideas and values of Americanism.

Easy confidence in the ability of the United States to pursue a value-based foreign policy suffered in the 1960s and 1970s. Graham Greene foresaw in 'The Quiet American' of 1955 how American ideals in Vietnam could be in for a bruising, and the retreat from value-based policy was consummated in the Nixon presidency's retreat from Vietnam and general focus on European-style balance of power politics. The cynicism of such politics does not sit well with the American public, contributing to Richard Nixon's political fall and later, when he sought to stabilize power at a moment of upheaval, to President Bush's rejection at the polls. President Bush's rival and successor, Bill Clinton, offered new confidence in America's mission.

The fate of Americanism in a changing world has constituted an opening for the engaged scholar. To an extent, Denmark and Norway, the quintessential strong states, have also pursued values in their foreign policy, thus inviting societal engagement. Peace, cooperation, and conflict resolution are hallmark values of Danish and Norwegian foreign policy (T.B. Olesen & P. Villaume 2005; N. Petersen 2004; K.E. Eriksen & H. Pharo, 1997; R. Tamnes, 1997), with Norway's investment in peace diplomacy earning it the epithet, coined by a former American diplomat, of "the world's largest non-governmental organization."

However, the regional context has afforded the two small states little opportunity to advance their values. In the early 20th century, both countries attempted to maintain a low profile and pursue neutrality, only to find themselves overrun by an expansionist Germany. Their accession to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), of which they were both founding members, was compelled by circumstances and as such not a 'free choice'. Subsequently, during the Cold War, it became evident that maintaining a balance of power was essential for the capacity to pursue their values. Of particular importance was the Nordic balance of power: with Sweden, a militarily capable but neutral country, situated in the middle, Finland was under Soviet influence, while Denmark and Norway were members of NATO. This Nordic balance was pursued by the two countries. The reservations expressed in their NATO policies served to maintain the balance of power and, ostensibly, provided

Finland with a degree of relief. The concept of establishing the Nordic region as a low-voltage area or a nuclear-free zone was similarly intended to serve this balance of power.

The result is that both countries, despite their ingenuity in promoting ideas, have operated within strict geopolitical boundaries. They lacked the resources to challenge these boundaries, and thus their ideas were designed to soften them. From the perspective of the interaction between experts and practitioners, it can be seen that both countries established clear boundaries for their foreign policy with the objective of securing and promoting their support for a Nordic balance. A normative condition emerged whereby the political level was more receptive to ideas that sought to promote de-escalation in the region, as opposed to ideas that sought to strengthen Western alignment.

In the aftermath of the Cold War, Denmark and Norway exhibited a high degree of alignment with the United States in terms of their global roles and responsibilities. In the context of the 2001-2021 war in Afghanistan, it was of paramount importance for Norway to serve as a reliable ally. Concurrently, Denmark played a pivotal role as the European Gurkha's of the American Empire (NOU 2016; Mariager & Wivel 2019).

In regard to security policy, Denmark and Norway are relatively small states, and their security policy is largely influenced by the prevailing thinking within NATO and the United States. Consequently, independent Danish and Norwegian security policy thinking is seldom implemented, and it is primarily in areas that are of minimal priority for the United States that Denmark and Norway have been able to pursue their own values (K. Sarapuu, B. Thorhallsoson, A. Wivel 2021). This results in new and different ideas encountering significant challenges in gaining traction within the two countries' security policy decision-making centers.

Europe between Weimar and Washington

The lesson from the *Machtstaat* and current geopolitical conditions is that Europe cannot hope to imitate Bridging the Gap lessons from the United States. There is widespread frustration in the United States with the weakness of this bridge, with blame going to each side of the gap, but there remains the hope and belief that the bridge can be built if only people and institutions seek it. In Europe, the condition is shaped differently by strong states and a weak European center. As we are about to see, Europe's possible future is probably better described by Plato's ill fate or Weber's downbeat search for heroic individualism than the US search for institutional progress.

Europe's Mobilization

Russia's war on Ukraine has torn into Europe's belief in continental peace and stability, abetted by growing concerns over the sustainability of America's commitment to Europe's defense. NATO can thus report how its once infamous 2% of GDP defense spending target will be attained in Europe in the course of 2024—though, admittedly, with the overall spending level hiding considerable national variations.[11] Europe is outspending the United States in overall aid to Ukraine.[12] The United States remains the critical backbone of military

[11] https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_222664.htm
[12] https://www.ifw-kiel.de/topics/war-against-ukraine/ukraine-support-tracker/

aid to Ukraine, but European allies have taken the lead in a number of important respects, such as with the delivery of cruise missiles, tanks, and F-16 fighter aircraft, and in allowing Ukraine to use Western weapons to strike deep into Russian territory for military purposes.

"We live in a time of existential crisis," the EU's Global Strategy of 2016 declared, and since then things have not improved.[13] The EU has responded by improving its armor of ambitions and supporting organization, including most recently a Commissioner for Defence and Space (Lithuanian Andrius Kubilius) who must help deliver on Commission President Urusla von der Leyen's ambition to realize a European Defence Union by 2030. This projected union is largely about defense industry where increased and coordinated investment must both aid Ukraine beyond what Europe literally has in store (i.e., in warehouses) and provide for Europe's own conventional defense. It is a large ambition involving difficult issues related to the EU's legal framework, core funding, and global supply chains. It is an ambition to move the EU beyond stop-gap measures—for instance by retooling existing instruments such as the Peace Facility for Ukraine support—and to make Europe a producer of defense capacity, as opposed to a consumer mainly relying on imports. The ambition makes clear that Europe's defense industrial foundation is no longer fit for purpose: it is in need of a "paradigm shift."[14]

Shifting paradigms is what university-based research is about. It is about drawing boundaries of knowledge and, in occasional and extraordinary efforts, about breaking these boundaries and causing new views of the world. Supposedly, therefore, Europe is in a ripe condition for research-policy partnerships in matters of security and defense. Could it be, therefore, that Europe is ready for "bridging the gap" efforts and the policy wisdom they are supposed to engender?

An Unlikely Bridge

Such a turn of events is possible, though not likely. It is possible because the EU funds several important Horizon-program mechanisms through which researchers can engage in European issues, because the European Parliament channels public concerns into EU decision-making, and because of Europe's wider pluralist traditions. Going by these traditions and the history of European integration and cooperation, we might expect a type of corporatism to form in the European security and defense field whereby there certainly would be a barrier to participation but where the system is set up to garner consensus on issues of concern to the state. Conceivably, if European research universities wanted to be part of such a system, they could organize and become part of the policy area. The EU already promotes university alliances within its so-called "European Education Area," an incipient Europeanization of the sector that could be exported to other domains that education.[15] Thus, defense Europeanization could see the promotion of area studies, strategic studies, anthropology, and government-university interaction programs—all in line with the recommendations of the Bridging the Gap literature.

However, it is an unlikely turn of events for a couple of reasons. The United States may be a penetrated and weak state, but its federal state has a clear prerogative when it comes to defense, and it also has a long-standing debate on what the "stopping power of water" means for its wider foreign policy identity and direction. All of this facilitates engagement beyond

[13] https://euagenda.eu/publications/shared-vision-common-action-a-stronger-europe-a-global-strategy-for-the-european-union-s-foreign-and-security-policy
[14] https://www.csis.org/analysis/europe-needs-paradigm-shift-how-it-supports-ukraine
[15] https://education.ec.europa.eu/education-levels/higher-education/european-universities-initiative

the policy-academia "gap." Europe is differently weak in terms of political center and strategic debate. Defense is a national prerogative, and national defense efforts are largely coordinated via NATO. The EU is constitutionally barred from encroaching upon NATO's collective defense role. The industrial dimension on which the planned EU defense union is built is also riveted by national standards and champions. EU members have signalled an ambition to make "Europe" more selfreliant in terms of defense capacity building, but they have split on the critical issue of whether this means that key EU programs, such as the European Defence Fund, should be open to outside suppliers.[16] Neither the United Kingdom nor the United States—critical players in Europe's defense—are part of the EU. Moreover, and despite all the good intentions, funding for defense industrial reform is limited.[17]

Adding pain to injury, so to speak, is Europe's lack of a strategic debate akin to the US debate on overseas engagement. Europe's strategic debate, if such it can be labeled, tends to concern peace and stability objectives, reflective of the EU's promise to overcome conditions of war and armed rivalry. The EU has for this reason been labeled a "normative power" upholding norms of multilateral cooperation and political reconciliation.[18] When awarding the EU the prestigeous Nobel Peace Prize in 2012, the Nobel committee motivated the decision with reference to the EU as a "peace congress" promoting "fraternity" between nations.[19] Military-strategic and politico-military debates unfold in narrower decision-making circles centered around NATO cooperation. European allies have contributed to these debates, as alliance history shows, but it also shows a European political proclivity for messaging a policy of détente, cooperation, and peaceful transformation in the public domain.[20] German Chancellor Sholz's announced "paradigm shift" (*Zeitenwende*) of February 2022 in reaction to Russia's invasion of Ukraine was widely noted for this reason: it announced not only defense investments but also a changed mindset in Europe's midst. Skeptics missed no opportunity to point out that such a paradigmatic change would be long in coming.[21]

On Europe's Weak Republic and the Heroic Individual

Under these conditions of a necessary but frustrated search for enhanced defense as well as a political tradition beholden to transformative hope rather than strategic debate, Europe is at risk. Academics who venture into the political arena to prescribe policy adjustment could all too easily be labeled political prophets and treated accordingly. Max Weber foresaw this in his dissection of political and academic ethics, and Plato experienced it as his mentor, Socrates, was put to death by an intolerant republic.

Plato drew back from public engagement, as we saw, and Weber admonished academics to think twice before entering into the political. Since the risk of politicization begins also in the classroom, universities might not be advised to set up departments or centers of area studies,

[16] https://carnegieendowment.org/posts/2024/03/understanding-the-eus-new-defense-industrial-strategy?lang=en
[17] https://www.iiss.org/online-analysis/military-balance/2024/08/european-union-defence-ambitions-a-reality-cheque/
[18] References
[19] https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/2012/press-release/
[20] Rynning NATO book + references to détente years and dual track.
[21] John Helferich, "The (false) promise of Germany's Zeitenwende," *European View* 22, no. 1 (2023): 85–95; Bastian Giegerich and Ben Schreer, "*Zeitenwende* One Year On," *Survival* 65, no. 2 (2023): 37-42; Angela Stent, "Germany and Russia: Farewell to Ostpolitik?", *Survival* 64, no. 5 (2022): 27-38; Rafal Ulatowski, "The Illusion of Germany's *Zeitenwende*," *The Washington Quarterly* 47, no. 3 (2024): 59-76.

strategic studies etc., because these institutional innovations will draw academics to policy engagement. Better then to remain focused on basic research, as the Humboltian imperiative has it.

The weakness of the European "republic" lies in its contested nature with a weak center and a limited tradition for strategic debate. In such a contested environment, as the Danish and Norwegian *machtstaat* experience suggests, governments will seek to control the defense debate by relying on state sources of expertise and a limited number of state-supervised think tanks placed in geographical proximity of key government institutions. In this controlled environment decision-makers can better cultivate an elite consensus within politically acceptable bounds. At a European level, which would mean in Brussels, the diversity of institutional access to policy thinking, might be greater, but Brussels would remain a contested center where the key players, governments, to a great extent remain in control of their national frameworks.

Weber may represent the most appropriate window to this condition. Socrates' doom resulted from the power politics Machiavelli much later would see no way out of, but perhaps there is some limit to power in the liberal character of European cooperation. Most European governments are inherently liberal, and both the EU and NATO likewise build on liberal principles. The sum of it is a liberal arena contested from many directions.

Weber found such a contested "republic" a weak framework for bridging the gap or, as some might say, for speaking truth to power. The weakness was related to political contests, meaning it was not sure that the liberal ground would hold. In the end, the Weimar Republic could not hold. But his point was wider than this. It was that the organization of knowledge for policy impact was bound to be politicized. An alliance of European research universities seeking voice in matters of European defense development would be sucked into controversial questions of whether they are for or against confrontation with Russia, for or against Israel's control of Gaza, for or against a human rights policy in China. The space for oganized knowledge bridging into society is negligible, whereas the risk of controversy is certain.

The wider implication hereof, building on Europe's condition and the *machtstaat* legacy, is that Europe should not hope to advance policy thinking by organized knowledge exchanges. In matters of defense, Europe's universities should mind the gap: the organization of sectoral alliances or research centers dedicated to strategic or area studies carry great risk. Instead, Europe should begin with what Weber, Arendt, and others called for: the cultivation of personalities that are able to weigh the political consequences of their thinking. It is to put the individual, not organization, at the heart of the matter; it is to call for enhanced attention to — and funding and support for— ethics, choice, and political responsibility.

Conclusion: More Europe, More Risk, More Research

European leaders searching for defense capacity and influence no doubt hope that they will master the art of "strategic surprise," praised by both Eisenhower and Zhukov. However, it is quite possible that they could gain military muscle but lack the foresight to translate it into desired political outcomes—as is the case for the current Russian leadership. This troublesome perspective results from an assessment of how knowledge and institutions interact. We do not suggest that Europe is converging politically with Russia, or that there is

something inherently wrong with the nuts and bolts of Europe's defense organization—treaty foundations, institutional issues, the industrial base, the military forces. Rather, we are suggesting that European leaders could come to insulate themselves in a type of centralized decision-making arena characterized by elite consensus and a dearth of critical outside knowledge.

The Bridging the Gap literature inspired by the American experience would suggest that Europe could resort to various institutional developments to promote political wisdom. Individual researchers could think in terms of political dilmmas and consequences, all in historical context; universities could promote such thinking via their educational and research priorities; and government could invest in academic-policy exchanges instead of relying overwhelmingly on policy savvy think tanks.

Our revisiting of the *machtstaat* tradition in Europe and the contours of Europe's recent defense mobilization lead us to the conclusion that such Bridging the Gap measures are unlikely to work in Europe and could expose Europe to political risk. Vulnerability and exposure, as the Scandinavian *machtstaat* taught us, provoke a search for balanced power and strict normative limits on the ideas that can come to guide policy. Policy elites, acting to protect the national interest in a contested environment, have taken control of the decision-making arena and established strict limits of access. This, of course, is very visible in the *machtstaat* history of Denmark and Norway, and Europe could be different. However, the formation of a European decision-making arena—be it in the EU or in a Europeanized NATO—will likely reproduce the condition whereby elites strive to take control of policy by way of institutional and normative limitations. This is so because a European decision-making arena cannot be seen to challenge national priorities head on—a prospect that would sow dissent and invite extenral meddling—and because national policy elites will be very wary of a potential loss of influence and, relatedly, the public perception that they have lost control.

The contested nature of the political arena in Europe, as well as its exposure to geopolitical risk, even outright war, means that Europe's condition in important respects resemble that of the Weimar Republic more than the current American Republic. If Europe's leaders seek to bridge the gap to academic and other sources of outside defense expertise, they should thus look to their own past as much as, or perhaps more than across the Atlantic. If they pay scant attention to this challenge, if they believe that things are under control, then engaged thinkers outside the policy arena will likely be propelled to choose between Plato's choice of reclusiveness and Machiavelli's wholesale adoption of the language of power. Neither option will do much to improve the quality of European defense decisions. In the Plato option, knowledge will be removed from the policy arena; in the Machiavelli option, there will be no outside knowledge.

Of course, European leaders will be well advised to test the remedies advocated by the Bridging the Gap literature: more area studies, more strategic studies, more anthropology, and more public and private money channeled into facilitating the meeting of academic and policy experts. It would be foolish to rule out any positive effect hereof in Europe. However, it would be equally foolish to believe it would build lasting and important bridges. Europe's condition is special. Weber's experience and reflections—as those of Karl Popper and everyone who worked in this Aristotelean tradition—suggests that Europe, if it wishes to build bridges, must let go of its proclivity to build institutions and define rules and instead nurture a certain character of individuals who dare challenge centralized institutions, who do

not scare from scathing criticism launched either by policy insiders or revolutionaries who abhor the pragmatism of policy engagement, and who stay the course.

Europe, if it is to grow both military muscle and political wisdom, must nurtue people who think in terms of historical context and political dilemmas, who are trained in ethics, and who are exposed to multiple academic and political environments. It must recall that institutions in Europe tend to be drawn into the control of policy elites, or to be rejected. It must invest in the development of individual character because, as Henry Kissinger has said, the engaged observer is a lonely figure who cannot heed institutional masters but only their understanding of the political context.[22] Without character, lonely analysts will seek an opium of intellectual certitude that can appeal to crowds, as Raymond Aron added, but which will betray the restrained advice that is possible in Europe's *machtstaat* context.[23]

Rather than seeking inspiration primarily from the voluntarist insights generated in the American context, Europeans should look to their own past, to how it shapes its current political condition of continued elitism, and how it demands a rediscovery of the traits and characters that enable heroic individuals to speak truth to Europe's power.

[22] Reference til Does America Need a Foreign Policy
[23] Reference til The Opium of the Intellectuals

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