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BEHIND COLD WAR CURTAINS: DENMARK'S CLANDESTINE ARMS SHIPMENTS AND COVERT INTERVENTIONS

Abstract: *This article delves into the realm of covert diplomacy, emphasizing the often-overlooked role of third-party covert interventions in the realm of international relations. Specifically, it sheds light on Denmark's involvement in facilitating arms shipments, a role that extended beyond mere cooperation and involved concealed actions, alliance-strengthening, and clandestine settlements. The analysis highlights the unique nature of Denmark's clandestine collaborations, which involve lower initial investment costs, potentially raising concerns about reliability. It underscores how these partnerships allow for flexible, follow-up agreements that minimize conflicting obligations. While larger states possess superior capabilities in uncovering hidden events, the paper also recognizes that smaller nations can generate productive results through covert actions. Its potential to deliver strategic actions, which can lead to sudden realignments and disrupt the diplomatic and military strategies of other nations, underscores its impact on global politics. The article extends the literature on third-party covert interventions by showcasing how third parties, such as Denmark, can secure additional benefits.*

Keywords: *Third-party covert interventions, Clandestine diplomacy, Iran-Contra Affair, Middle -East, Denmark*

Introduction

Clandestine intervention and the wider context that patterns of third-party covert intervention generate is lacking in research. Covertly cooperating conceal the most intense forms of rivalry enables adversaries to function within a sort of behind-the-scenes

environment while maintaining the facade of restricted competition. However, within this spectrum, there are also nations that aren't engaged in direct conflicts but, employed to extend their influence. Leaders can create coercive leverage by generating risks and reducing decision. Covert interventions involve an external power providing lethal aid or participating in combat in ways that make the source invisible or, at worst, plausibly deniable (Carson, 2016).

Further, clandestine collaborators invest fewer initial costs in setting up the partnership, which can raise concerns about their consistency before the fact (Snyder and Borghard, 2011). Partners can more readily assist follow-up agreements based on these commitments to prevent conflicting obligations (Kuo, 2019). While States with greater power possess an unparalleled capacity to uncover and decipher hidden events (Carson and Yarhi-Milo, 2017), the role of smaller nations may also produce productive results.

My argument is that Denmark's involvement in facilitating arms shipments in Iran-Contra Affair not only granted it access to military resources on behalf of Israel but also contributed to strengthening its alliance with the USA during the Cold War. Denmark's role was significant as it acted as a loyal ally, aiding several countries in carrying out covert actions that contradicted official policies, all in an effort to conceal their activities from other allies while pursuing a clandestine settlement.

This article seeks to define the role of third-party covert interventions in the competition for influence, filling a significant gap in existing scholarship. There are two main contributions: The first contribution aims to enhance comprehension and make a contribution to the literature concerning third-party involvement in covert intervention. It illustrates how third parties can play a role in acquiring additional gains for themselves. The second contribution seeks to offer an Israeli perspective based on primary sources regarding the Danish partnership, shedding light on how it was portrayed in Danish media once revealed. These sources also provide insights into the utilization of Denmark's naval resources for the covert operation. Using Israeli archival material and official correspondence and reports from an assortment of meetings at the highest level of the Israeli government has made it possible to increase the amount of information available.¹ The research also includes material from the

¹ It has been challenging to definitively ascertain the extent of Danish involvement in the Iran-Contra Affair, as clear evidence from archival records remains elusive.

Danish National Archives, specifically the folder from the Danish Ministry of Defense (Forsvarsministeriet, Ministersekretariatet, Arkivserie: Emneordnede sager, 1976–1992). However, no direct information on Denmark's involvement in arms shipments was uncovered, aside from some general contacts. Consequently, most relevant material was sourced from the Israeli archives. Using Israeli archival documents, official correspondence, and reports from high-level Israeli government meetings has made it possible to expand available knowledge on these events. The archival material not only sheds light on the extent of Danish involvement in the Iran-Contra Affair but also suggests broader Danish participation in the covert global arms trade.

The structure of the article is organized as follows. It begins with an exploration of covert diplomacy's role in international relations, emphasizing the significance of intelligence in shaping the conditions for clandestine interactions between nations. The background of the Iran–Contra Affair sets the stage for understanding covert operations and their implications. The article delves into Denmark's involvement in covert arms shipments, illustrating its adeptness in conducting discreet missions, such as arms transfers to Iran, radar equipment transportation, and participation in the Cold War politics. It examines the diplomatic consequences of the Iran–Contra Affair, showcasing how covert actions can lead to strategic realignments that disrupt the diplomatic and military strategies of other nations. The conclusion underscores the multifaceted nature of covert diplomacy and the critical role of covert intervention in influencing international relations.

Covert diplomacy and the role of Intelligence

Covert diplomacy considered rational by scholars because it can also lead to mutually beneficial outcomes, especially when all sides involved need to make domestically difficult concessions (Brown and Anthony S Marcum, 2011). Covert diplomacy can also lead to strategic shock, resulting in abrupt realignments that disrupt the diplomatic and military strategies of other nations (Kuo, 2019). As follows, the role of intelligence plays an essential part in establishing the necessary conditions for the implementation of clandestine diplomacy. The acquisition and assessment of information about other nations serve as a valuable resource for states interested in taking action or effecting changes within their regions. The exchange of intelligence among states can serve as the foundation for building trust between foreign leaders, a process that often evolves slowly over extended periods.

Furthermore, intelligence can identify potential mutually beneficial engagements and make the case for forging early connections between nations. This proactive approach can enable reaching out and establishing political relationships by participating in events that signify future potential (Lapid, 2020; Shavit, 2018; Scott, 2004; Scott & Jackson, 2004; Shpiro, 2006; Bungert, Heitmann, & Wala, 2003; Lander, 2004; Tuinier, 2021; Jones, 2014; Jones, n.d.; Hart-Davis, 2011). Additionally, it represents a viable policy choice that can either stand as an independent strategy or complement other methods, including military force. Throughout history, traditional statecraft frequently featured the amalgamation of diplomatic endeavors, covert actions, and intelligence gathering within a single framework, managed by the same individuals (Carson & Yarhi-Milo, 2017; Scott, 2004).

The literature relating to the relationship between intelligence and IR also acknowledges clandestine operations conducted for strategic policy objectives, which are further categorized into sub-themes. Covert intelligence operations represent one of the tools employed by states to assess where they should invest for future benefit and how to construct a successful strategy. The actual impact of covert operations is influenced by a multitude of factors. States must carefully balance their broader foreign policy objectives with the nature of their affairs with other nations. The specific goals of the state must be weighed against potential negative consequences. Covert operations are inherently controversial due to their lack of transparency, as some argue that they can be exploited to advance one state's interests at the expense of others (Dylan, 2017; Stempel, 2007; Richelson, n.d.; Jeffreys-Jones, 1989; Odom, 2003; Lowenthal, 2019).

According to Gentry (Gentry, 2021) the motives can be categorized into three clusters, which are the following: (1) statesmen's perceived diplomatic needs in response to the international political and security contexts they confront; (2) statesmen's assessments of their intelligence services' capabilities; and (3) motives that revolve around leaders' personal objectives or their relationships with spies and diplomats, often intertwined with matters of trust.

This division was similarly discerned in the context of the interplay between diplomacy and intelligence gathering, encompassing both official and unofficial phases. Diplomats often engage in overt intelligence collection when reporting on political or economic matters. They gather information openly rather than through clandestine or covert means. The key

distinction between intelligence and diplomatic operations lies in this difference in the collection method. Diplomacy and covert action both serve as tools for implementing policy objectives, however over time, the roles of diplomats and intelligence officers have grown apart, and these professionals have recognized the differences, even when they collaborate closely. Clandestine diplomacy encompasses more than just covert action; it involves the institutional capacities of intelligence services that not only facilitate covert actions but also convince high-ranking national leaders that intelligence agents can play a diplomatic role and influence how these agents engage in diplomatic activities (Jervis, 2010; Gentry, 2001).

The generally accepted definition of covert action emphasizes two essential criteria. Covert actions are a tool of foreign policy, as they aim to influence events in other countries, and the identity of the sponsoring party remains undisclosed or unacknowledged (Cormac, 2022). Soviet officials employed the term 'active measures' to encompass a wide range of both overt and covert activities. They were more inclined to adopt the concept of plausible deniability, making it easier to disavow any involvement in these actions (Gioe, Goodman and Frey, 2019; Andrew and Mitrokhin, 1999). Clandestine officers, in addition to their traditional diplomatic missions, played a prominent role in leading counterterrorism efforts through covert action. This shift reflects the transformation of diplomats in the field, aligning with a foreign policy increasingly driven by counterterrorism objectives (Long, 2022; Berridge, 2015; Pruitt, 2008). While adversaries engage in ongoing resistance against each other, using secrecy as a means to facilitate this resistance, covert operations allow states to turn a blind eye. States that aware of covert activity share an interest in preserving the appearance of a restricted conflict, nevertheless they also respond by concealing and otherwise disregarding it.

In general, the literature on covert action lacks theoretical and a cohesive approach of third party and the successes it may reap in clandestine cooperation. Covert action frequently complements larger overt state actions, and it can be misleading to concentrate exclusively on the covert aspect when conducting analysis (Cormac, Walton and Van Puyvelde, 2022). Covert action is intricately connected to broader foreign policy and national security objectives. It doesn't function as an independent policy tool; instead, it is an integral part of a manifold structure in which the pursuit of policy objectives involves a collaborative and integrated approach (Carson, 2018; Long, 2022).

Secret alliances typically generate strategic uncertainty rather than strain, as the clandestine nature of the relationship is often suspected by other nations. Potential adversaries are left uncertain about what is required to effectively deter or defeat a target, which encourages them to exercise greater caution (Kuo, 2019). Secrecy muddles the transparency of the commitment, thereby softening potential criticism from leaders of third-party states and domestic publics (Carson, 2016). Hence, the appealing prospect for a friendly nation lies in reaping the advantages of clandestine collaboration with allies, all the while optimizing these benefits, enhancing influence, and aligning closely with the central ally who, in return, provides appropriate rewards for this discreet cooperation. Foreign policy actors utilize these perceived "successes" to craft and convey strategic narratives about their nation's identity as a global actor, and influence the discourse and conduct of other actors, both within their nation and on the international stage, all while nations attempt to conceal their capabilities and intentions from potential rivals (Andrew, 1996; Cormac, Walton and Van Puyvelde, 2022; Slantchev, 2010).

Iran–Contra Affair Background

The Iran-Contra Affair recounts how developments in two distinct regions prompted the United States and Israel to engage in a bold agreement involving the delivery of arms to Iran. This risky covert arrangement encompassed multiple allied nations and, upon its revelation, culminated in a political and diplomatic maelstrom. Over time, it was revealed that, yet again, the countries of the region were unable to balance their interests and achieve their political goals secretly, without compromising regional relations. As revealed during these years the Iran-Contra Affair involved a complex grouping of States with differing and conflicting national interests which made it difficult to uncover and thereby disclose the details all of its networks and channels.

After the fall of the Shah in 1979, the US was looking for an approach to establish connections with the new regime in Iran. Officials hoped to be able to counter perceived Soviet influence in Iran and to reach out to moderates who would rise to power after the death of the ailing Ayatollah Khomeini. Specifically, the US wanted to find a way to free the American hostages that Iranian-backed radical Shiite groups had seized in Lebanon. Even more significant for the American administration were Saddam Hussein's aggressive

ambitions in the region. The Iraqi leader not only accused Washington of collaborating with the Tehran regime in the 1980's but also directed his policy toward confrontation with Israel, America's closest ally. For Saddam Hussein, a final victory over Israel would require a confrontation with the United States (Bengio, 2002).

When Iraq invaded Iran in September 1980, the balance of power in the Middle East was threatened (Mackey, 2003). Israeli's were acutely aware of the war as Israel often suffered from a restless Middle East. Under the Shah, Iran had been an important Israeli asset. In response to the changing reality on the ground, Israel wanted to preserve communications with the new regime in Iran and if possible, to curb Saddam Hussein's expansion. The Iraqi leader had ordered the invasion of Iran in September 1980 hoping to win a quick victory. But Iranian forces soon halted the Iraqi advance. By mid-1982, Tehran had recovered territory lost in the initial fighting and launched its own invasion of Iraq. The US strategy had been to contain the war between Iraq and Iran so that it would not spill over to affect US interests in the region, even if it meant prolonging the conflict by supplying both sides. To meet their own foreign policy needs, senior ranking Israelis initiated a bold scheme which included meeting primary American interests as well.²

In order to win US approval for the Israeli initiative, a series of meetings were held between Israeli and American government officials. A meeting of major importance took place when Israeli Defense Minister Yitzhak Rabin asked David Kimche, Director General of the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to query the Americans about an agreement. Acting on behalf of the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Kimche met with Robert McFarlane, President Reagan's national security adviser in London. McFarlane agreed to cooperate with the Israeli initiative. As part of the agreement, Israel supplied weapons to Iran from the IDF warehouses and McFarlane approved the replenishment of any shortages (Shiffer, 2021). Within a clandestine arrangement unfolded involving the United States, Israel, Iran, Nicaragua, and Lebanon. This covert operation commenced with the transfer of American and Israeli weaponry, discreetly loaded onto ships and planes bound for Iran. In response, Iran executed a financial transaction to the United States. This monetary inflow was subsequently diverted by the U.S. government to provide support for anti-government rebels in Nicaragua.

² It is known that Israeli companies and Iranian regimes negotiated arms deals as early as the war between Iran and Iraq broke out. Several individuals involved in the affair explained that Israeli military industry and government were involved in the transfer of weapons between Israel and Iran and with the knowledge of the American government.

In the early stages of the ever-revolving arms deal with Iran, the Israeli side was represented by three main actors: Amiram Nir; Yaakov Nimrod; and Al Schwimmer. Nir was the adviser to the Israeli Prime Minister on international terrorism. Nir was also a confidant of the American National Security Council staff member Oliver North whose trust he had gained. As the central figure on the Israeli team, Nir was provided with top-secret eavesdropping and communication devices by the Americans for every meeting he had with the Iranians in Europe. The Mossad branch in Paris also prepared Nir for each of his meetings with the Iranians and equipped him with its own communication devices (Shiffer, 2021). One of the first contacts with Iran took place in Switzerland and further meetings took place in Germany and France. A meeting in July 1985 in Hamburg included the participation of senior Iranian officials who met with Nimrodi, Schwimmer and David Kimche alongside Adnan Khashoggi³ with his son and son-in-law and Manucher Ghorbanifar who also served as an interpreter (Shiffer, 2021).

Between mid-1985 and late 1986 Iran also received US military intelligence to offset the military intelligence it had been giving to Iraq. Having once sold arms to Iran under the Shah, Israel resumed arms shipments to Tehran, including shipments of spare parts for the Iranian fleet of F-4s. (Senate Report, 1987). However, Israel was not the only country to sell arms to Iran. With America's silent consent, American allies in Europe also sold weapons to Tehran. Through various channels, Iranian officials received over 2,000 US tube-guided, optically-guided, wire-guided (TOW) anti-tank missiles, 18 US Hawk anti-aircraft missiles, and several US Hawk spare parts (Brands, 2011; Fayazmanesh, 2008).

Interestingly, as early as July 1983, a special national intelligence assessment prepared by Iraq revealed suspicions about US intentions in the Persian Gulf. Iraq remained convinced that the US was prolonging the war by allowing Israel to supply weapons to Iran (Brands, 2011; Fayazmanesh, 2008). An assessment by American intelligence concluded that "Iraq actually lost the war with Iran (Brands, 2011). Indeed, in February 1986, Iranian forces took control of the peninsula in southeastern Iraq, limiting Iraqi access to the Persian Gulf and endangering Basra and key supply routes (Hiro, 1991). In response to Iran's successful military offensive which reached beyond the expectations of US officials, there were serious discussions and differences of opinion regarding the risk management options. American diplomats encouraged France and Italy to be the conduits for selling Baghdad the

³ Adnan Khashoggi, a known Saudi businessman well connected to the Saudi royal family.

necessary US weapons to counter Iranian supremacy in the field. The Gulf countries, such as Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, supported these efforts by deciding to subsidize the Iraqi war effort financially. In addition, Iran was prevented from obtaining weapons or spare parts (Brands, 2011). An Iraqi defeat, noted Secretary of State George Shultz, would be a 'strategic disaster for the United States'.

In the Israeli government, Prime Minister Shimon Peres; acting head of the National Unity government Yitzhak Shamir and Defense Minister Yitzhak Rabin, were the decision makers in the clandestine affair. The agreement was kept secret even at the highest levels of the Israeli security establishment. The affair was only disclosed to the Cabinet when it was revealed in late 1986. On November 3, 1986, a news report was published in the small Lebanese newspaper "A-Sapir" regarding a secret arm deal between the US, Israel and Iran, in the framework of which American hostages held by Hezbollah were released.⁴ The chain of events and the unexpected turns of war challenged the arms agreement. The affair was 'safe' as long as it was secret. When the media exposed the affair, the public response altered the path the US and its allies would take. The risks were too high to continue to engage with this unofficial policy. Rabin stopped the arms deal with Iran only in 1988 after he was informed by military intelligence that Hezbollah was using Israeli weapons against the Israeli soldiers in Lebanon (Bergman, 2007).

With the disclosure of a series of reckless decisions, the affair received condemnation from the Israeli media and public. A description was given of how Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres was persuaded to provide anti-tank missiles and Hawk anti-aircraft missiles to the Iranian army while Iran waged war against Iraq. A number of Israelis were criticized for secretly working with the American administration behind the back of the American Congress. Engaging in a war against Iran and exchanging weapons for the release of hostages from Lebanon was seen as a violation of the United States' official policy. The transfer of funds received from the agreement to Nicaragua's contra rebels was in defiance

⁴ In May 1986, McFarlane arrived with Nir and North with forged Irish passports in Tehran, but they were unable to meet with the heads of the Iranian government. Disagreements within the Iranian government along with political rivalry led senior Iranian official, Ayatollah Hussein-Ali Montazeri to leak the arms deal to Sheikh Muhammad Ismail Khaliq, who was the Iranian representative in Lebanon. Khaliq delivered the information to the editor of a Lebanese weekly newspaper led to the disclosure of the affair. In the chain of events, a middleman in the arms deal who had in his possession papers that corroborated the details of the transaction between Iranian and Israeli representatives, was arrested. The Germans arrested the middleman and leaked the information. In a separate event, a plane containing weapons and operating in Nicaragua, crashed. All members of the crew died except for a single person who admitted that he was sent on behalf of the CIA. The Iran-Contra Affair resulted in the deaths of several other people. An American investigator studying the affair died in a plane crash, while an Israeli, whose identity remains unknown, died mysteriously in South America. See רונן ברגמן, נקודת האל-דזור: 7.מדיניות הישראל מול איראן וחזבאללה (אור יהודה: כנרת זמורה ביתן, 2007), ע' 130-132 (Bergman, 2027).

of Congress.⁵ It was clear that Israel wanted the backing of a superpower for its clandestine diplomacy to protect and preserve its interests in the region, part of which was to strengthen the existing cooperation with its allies. It was clear that the US was the essential force behind the operation. What was less clear were the details of the peripheral but significant contributions of a number of smaller, less powerful States whose involvement was sometimes obscured by the more powerful actors and against the backdrop of an intricate and hidden web of connections and interests.

Danish Involvement in Arms Shipments

Upon the revelation of the affair and the events that followed, the Israeli Defense Minister visited Copenhagen as part of ongoing cooperation between the two countries.⁶ During his diplomatic visit to Denmark in December 1986 the Israeli Minister of Defense Yitzhak Rabin held meetings with the Prime Minister of Denmark, Paul Schluter, the Danish Minister of Defense, Hans Engell, the Danish Chief of Staff, Admiral Sven Egil Thiede⁷. An article appeared in the Danish press asserting that the reason for Rabin's visit was to discuss Danish involvement in arms shipments to Iran. It was reported that, according to Danish sailors, the *Arctic Circle* left Yugoslavia and after arriving in the Red Sea, the name of the ship was changed. After 13 days, the ship arrived at Bandar Abbas in Iran. The article further stated that Owner Torben Palle Hansen of the shipping company was not able to present any evidence of arms shipments, however, he did say that the ship was carrying a dangerous load from the Red Sea to Iran (ISA, 9712/16: 01.12.1986).⁸

⁵ For the Americans, the spread of communism in South America was a concern. They saw military aid support for the right-wing contra rebels who were fighting against the Marxist government in Nicaragua as an opportunity to act on their concern. While the American Congress refused to send arms to support the rebels, there were those who were open to supporting the rebels outside of the legal channels.

⁶ The tradition of cooperation between the Mossad and the intelligence services in Denmark was maintained over the years. In the 1990's, this cooperation made it possible for Israeli Attorney Uri Slonim, adviser to the Minister of Defense on Missing in Action (MIA) matters, to hold secret negotiation meetings in Denmark. Slonim met in Denmark with the two brothers of Mustafa Dirani, the head of the military arm of the Lebanese organization "Amel" who held the Israeli pilot, Ron Arad after his kidnapping in 1986. Both brothers were in Denmark on refugee visas. The Danish intelligence services were aware of these meetings and kept them secret. In a separate operation, Mustafa Dirani was snatched by Israel to be used as a bargaining chip with the suspicion that Arad had been transferred into Iranian hands. According to the head of the international division of the Mossad in Europe, Arle Sharaf, the Mossad could operate very freely in Denmark while cooperating fruitfully with Danish intelligence services. Nils Schmidt the deputy of the Danish intelligence services in Copenhagen greatly helped the relationship between the countries. He also acted as an essential contact in joint operations by the intelligence agencies in Danish territory. See Arale Scherf, *Revelations from the Mossad* (Modiin: Kinneret, Zmora, Dvir Publishing House, 2022), pp. 115- 116; Uri Slonim, *A Knock at the Door The Story of My Secret Work With Israeli MIAs and POWs* (New York: Wicked Son, 2022).

⁷ As early as the late 1950s Israel identified the growing influence of the Danish companies such as KAMPANX as a valuable opportunity. The company had secured significant contracts in Kuwait and the Gulf countries, particularly in large-scale infrastructure projects such as building ports and laying railroads. Notably, KAMPANX also contributed to the construction of the strategic port of Latakia in Syria. See Israeli Embassy in Tehran to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Jerusalem, 26.08.1961, Israeli State Archives, 15 - 37 448 /

⁸ I will use the abbreviation 'ISA' to refer to the Israel State Archives in the citations for brevity. This will help maintain clarity and consistency throughout the text.

A statement issued by the Israeli Defense Minister while in Copenhagen said that Israel was not involved in the weapons shipments and that Rabin's visit to Denmark centered on coordinating security measures to counter terrorism. According to statement, the Danish sailors stated that they never saw weapons and therefore had no proof that they were part of an arms shipment operation. An Israeli Embassy press release stated that during meetings with Danish colleagues Rabin blamed Syria for funding and training terrorist groups such as Abu Nidal's organization (ISA, 9712/16: 01.12.1986). Two months later in February 1987, the Danish Defense Minister made an official visit to Israel. Defense Minister Richard Osterman referred to Syria's intervention in Lebanon and the difficulty of implementing decisions to send UN peacekeeping forces (ISA, 9712/14: 24.02.1987).

Following the accusations reported in the Danish press, an article was published in the Swedish *Aktuellt* on January 13, 1987. It stated that Swedish companies were also involved in the arms shipments and were using Danish ships to transport the arms to Iran. The story gained an added element of standing when the Swedish reporter who published the article was found dead the next day when he was pushed onto the railway tracks and run over (ISA, 9712/14: 14.01.1987). In another article published in *Aktuellt*, it was reported that two Israeli arms dealers sold weapons to Iran via the connections that Israel had already established in Tehran during the Shah's reign. The article mentioned the transport of weapons by Danish ships (ISA, 9712/14: 07.04.1987). In addition, the Swedish press reported that a Danish ship transported Soviet weapons north from Eilat in December 1986, then returned to Denmark as soon as the cargo's identity was exposed by the Danish Seamen's Union (ISA, 9712/14: 13.03.1987). The Seamen's Union in Denmark had difficulty acquiring proof of the arms shipments to Iran. In America, *Newsweek* magazine reported that Oliver North received between 30 and 40 million dollars from the sale of American weapons to Iran. The article stated that the Danish ship *ERRIA* was used to transfer the funds out of Iran to Denmark. In response to the various disclosures concerning these arms operations, the US Congress decided to investigate. Joel P. Lisker, a member of the American Congressional Committee Investigating the Iran-Contra Affair, visited Denmark to evaluate the scope of Denmark's involvement, however president Reagan denied Denmark's involvement in the affair (ISA, 9712/08: 09.03.1987).

Denmark's involvement in arms shipments did not begin with the Iran-Contra deal. Already in 1973 and 1975 Danish ships transferred arms sold by Sweden to Iran. During these

operations, Danish shipments were disguised by labeling them as food shipments. This information was confirmed by the Iranian Minister of Defense but denied by the Swedes (ISA, 9712/08: 20.03.1987).

A report from the Israeli Embassy in Denmark included remarks on the American *Newsweek* investigation. According to the Danish captain, US Secret Service officer Thomas G. Clines gave instructions to use the *ERRIA* to evacuate American hostages from Beirut and to transport radar equipment from Israel to South Africa (ISA, 9712/16: 01.12.1986). Others suspected that the vessel was supposed to transport weapons to Iran and also to receive Soviet T 72 tanks that were in Iran's possession, tanks that Iraq had received from the Soviet Union. The Captain of the Danish ship said the ship was waiting in Oman rather than Iran (ISA, 9712/15: 27.03.1987).

According to the December 1987 findings of the special Congressional Committee the purchase of the *ERRIA* occurred in the Spring of 1986:

"...The first mission North contemplated for the *ERRIA* was for an extended covert operation. On April 28, 1986, Secord sent a KL-43 message to North proposing that the CIA charter the vessel for that purpose: '. . . Abe [Hakim] still in Copenhagen with our lawyer finalizing purchase of ship. Deal has been made after three days of negotiation. The Danish captain is up and eager for the mission—he now works for us. We are asking ... [of the CIA] for a firm fixed price contract of \$1.2 million for six months. He will probably balk at this price....' (Senate Report, 1987, p. 369).

According to the report of the Congressional Committees investigating the Iran-Contra Affair, Amiram Nir promised to supply the Contras with Eastern Bloc arms. Under secrecy, the *ERRIA* was taken to Haifa by captain Herup. The *ERRIA* arrived to Israel with false entries that were placed in the Captain's log. During October 1986, Herup loaded arms at Haifa. The Captain was told he would be conveying pharmaceutical supplies to Iran. However, the loading of pharmaceuticals did not take place and Herup was then ordered to go to Fujairah in the Gulf of Oman. Once there, the *ERRIA* waited 6 weeks for Soviet T-72 tanks to be delivered but the plan failed to materialize (Senate Report, 1987).

Diplomatic Consequences of the Iran-Contra Affair

The political consequences of the Iran-Contra deal disclosures began to manifest in Denmark almost immediately. In December 1986, Denmark's Social Democrat CD party enacted legislation banning the transport of weapons by Danish ships to the Persian Gulf. In response, Danish shipping giant A.P. Møller warned that such a law would cripple Danish shipping companies, as they would lose clients if unable to transport goods. This stance was echoed by the government, which opposed the proposed law (ISA, 9712/6: 02.01.1987). Earlier in January 1986, in a letter to Director Karsten Borch of A.P. Møller, Hans Engel expressed interest in the company's suggestions for financing new ships for the defense sector. He proposed a closer collaboration between A.P. Møller and officials from the Ministry of Defense and the Defense Command. This exchange could imply the strategic importance of Danish shipping and defense-related logistics. Particularly regarding financial assistance for constructing ships for the Danish Navy (Rigsarkivet, Forsvarsministeriet, Ministersekretariatet, 23.01.1986), which could affect legislative decisions made later in 1986.

In accordance with the government's security doctrine Danish Defense Minister Hans Engel believed that Denmark had the ability to protect Danish ships in the Gulf region and was willing to send a naval force (ISA, 9712/14: 10.07.1987). Engel who paid a visit to the Danish units that served in the UN forces in the region, also visited Israel where he met with the Chief Military Staff and with Defense Minister Yitzhak Rabin (ISA, 9712/09: 24.02.1987). The content of the February 1987 meeting with Rabin focused on threats to Israel and on the structure of the IDF. The parties discussed the refurbishing and upgrading of 300 Danish tanks, the sale of a drones and Israeli 'Barak' surface-to-air missile to the Danish Navy (ISA, 9712/14: 15.02.1987).

A major point of concern was the long-term underinvestment in defense resources. An internal document from the Ministry of Defense noted that Denmark's spending on substantial investments was considerably lower compared to similar countries, making it difficult for Denmark, as a smaller nation, to keep pace with technological developments and rising costs. The text also stressed the importance of carefully prioritizing defense investments, particularly in selecting weapons systems that offered the best return in terms of defense capability. It firmly rejected any expectations of quick solutions to compensate

for a lack of funding. In terms of political strategy, the document emphasized the need for continued collaboration between the Social Democrats and center-right parties in shaping defense policies. This cooperation had been a foundational element despite shifting minority governments Navy (Rigsarkivet, Forsvarsministeriet, Ministersekretariatet, 22.04.1986).

Further evidence of Denmark's defense and foreign policy strategy can be observed in its risk assessment of interests in the Gulf region and the identification of necessary security measures. This backdrop may clarify the motivation behind the February 1987 visit to the Gulf by Denmark's Foreign Minister, Uffe Ellemann-Jensen. The diplomatic mission became particularly significant as ongoing revelations of Danish arms shipments surfaced, testing Denmark's commitment to renouncing the transport of military cargo. The Danish government faced mounting pressure to respond to an incident involving a weapons shipment to Sri Lanka via a Danish vessel docked in Bilbao, Spain. The Danish crew refused to transfer the explosives, ultimately abandoning the ship, which was then manned by a Spanish replacement crew (ISA, 9712/15: 06.02.1987).

Prior to these events, in early 1986, Denmark's Minister of Defense had prepared for an official visit to Spain, scheduled for March 3–6. The Ministry of Defense confirmed the details of this trip based on prior communication from the Danish Embassy in Madrid. The delegation arriving in Madrid consisted of senior officials, including the Minister of Defense, Department Heads Jacques Hermann and Mogens Frederiksen, Clerk Birgitte Lindgreen, and Captain Flemming Rytter, who served as the Minister's adjutant (Rigsarkivet, Forsvarsministeriet, Ministersekretariatet, 31.01.1986). Additionally, in April 1986, Denmark's Minister of Defense visited Madrid again to attend the IEPG meeting from April 27-29 (Rigsarkivet, Forsvarsministeriet, Ministersekretariatet, 23.04.1986). These diplomatic engagements may highlight Denmark's involvement and the evolving complexities surrounding its defense policy.

In another incident, it was reported that a Danish ship was carrying weapons from Saudi Arabia to Iraq. This disclosure was made during the Foreign Minister's visit to Saudi Arabia (ISA, 9712/15: 06.02.1987). During the Danish Foreign Minister's visit, protests against the arms shipments to Iran took place and highlighted the involvement of Danish ships in the arms shipments. In the report given to the Israeli Embassy, the Danish Foreign Minister

noted the influence of the Danish Seamen's Organization, acting on behalf of communist purposes and not necessarily from Danish interests (ISA, 9712/14: 14.01.1987).

In an extensive report received by the Israeli Embassy in Denmark⁹ on the main points of the Danish Foreign Minister's visit to the Gulf region were enumerated. Ellemann-Jensen's visit to Saudi Arabia, Oman and Yemen aimed at promoting Denmark's trade relations in the region. In addition, Denmark wished to be informed on the existing conflicts in the region. Along with applying political pressure regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Saudis also criticized Europe's attitude towards Israel. This criticism included the alleged existence of Israeli's nuclear weapons and Israel's attack against Iraq's nuclear facilities. Ellemann-Jensen replied that there was no justification for Europe to intervene since there was no clear Arab policy towards specific measures to stabilize the region. As part of the visit by the Danish Foreign Minister to Saudi Arabia, Ellemann-Jensen was asked by the Saudis to demand greater involvement of the European community in the Israeli-Arab conflict and to put pressure on Israel because of its war in Lebanon (ISA, 9712/14: 08.01.1987).

During his visit to Yemen, the Danish Foreign Minister raised the issue of Yemen's involvement in accommodating PLO personnel and the planes purchased by the PLO that transferred weapons to Lebanon and were camouflaged in Red Cross flags. In his visit to Oman, Danish Foreign Minister Uffe Ellemann-Jensen met with his counterpart. The Omani Secretary General stated that they did not consider the PLO as an organization which represented the Palestinians and that the PLO had no place in peace talks. However, negotiations should take place between Israel and Palestinian representatives. At the same time, the Omanis criticized Israeli policy towards the Palestinians.

During this time, Denmark's policy towards the arms shipments was decisive but was not necessarily binding. Weapons were being delivered to terrorists' groups and not only individual States. This made enforcement of the Danish policy more difficult and inconsistent. Weapons that continued to be delivered to Fatah members in Beirut via Danish ships posed a challenge to Israel and the means by which Israel sought to interact with these consequences (ISA, 9712/14: 13.02.1988).

⁹ This communication could be seen as evidence of a strong relationship of cooperation and coordination between Denmark and Israel.

On February 12, 1988 an Iraqi jet hit the Danish ship *Knte Maersk* in the Persian Gulf. Denmark considered whether to respond with legal action against Iraq as the Americans had done. The Danish Ambassador in Baghdad held a meeting with the Iraqi Foreign Minister and formally expressed Denmark's protest. The ambassador mentioned that a technician on board the ship had lost his life due to Iraq's strike on the vessel. Ultimately, an official statement indicated that the Danish ship was among several vessels in the Persian Gulf that were unintentionally affected by the Iraq-Iran war, being considered collateral damage (ISA, 9712/14: 24.02.1988). This incident led to discussions in Denmark on whether to send a naval force to accompany the Danish ships in order to protect them (ISA, 9712/14: 06.03.1988). After another incident in March 1988 in which the Danish ship *Pegasus* was caught in Italy with a shipment of weapons, the Danish members of parliament asked to advance again legislation on banning the shipment of weapons on behalf of Danish companies. According to the words of the Israeli ambassador in Denmark, a Danish "expertise" had been created in the transportation of weapons (ISA, 9712/15: 14.03.1988).

Conclusion

Denmark's covert involvement in arms shipments, as indicated by the challenging circumstances involving Iran-Contra Affair, sheds light on the state's role in the secretive realm of international affairs and influence competition. highlighting the case underlines the clandestine nature of these activities. These narratives have the power to influence the discourse and behavior of other actors, both domestically and on the international stage. Meanwhile, nations continue to navigate the delicate balance of concealing their capabilities and intentions from potential rivals. This been exemplifying Denmark's skillful use of covert interventions to advance its position. By engaging in operations that generate intrigue and speculation, Denmark not only furthers its own interests but also complicates the geopolitical landscape, illustrating the multifaceted nature of covert influence.

Denmark's involvement in third-party covert interventions illustrates its capacity to strategically utilize clandestine methods to safeguard its interests, strengthen diplomatic ties, and compete for influence on the global stage. These actions exemplify the nuanced and multifaceted nature of Denmark's foreign policy. Denmark's activity in covert interventions and its adept utilization of secret channels advanced its position in the

geopolitical landscape. Denmark's role in these operations was instrumental in not only securing its interests but also competing for influence on the global stage. Denmark's covert involvement spans several instances, starting in 1973 and 1975 when Danish vessels served as intermediaries for arms sales to Iran, working alongside Sweden. Their proficiency in covert actions is further demonstrated through activities corresponding transferring radar equipment from Israel to South Africa and participating in arms shipments to Iran. In yet another clandestine mission, a Danish ship was responsible for transporting weapons to Lebanon in March 1988.

Denmark was not without challenges in its covert endeavors. In one incident, the Danish government faced pressure to intervene in a situation involving a shipment of weapons to Sri Lanka via a Danish vessel docked in Bilboa, Spain. This highlighted the complexities and risks associated with covert operations. To enhance its influence further, Denmark's Foreign Minister, Ellemann-Jensen, embarked on a tour to the Gulf region. The primary objective of this tour was to bolster Denmark's trade relations in the region, showcasing Denmark's commitment to fostering diplomatic and economic ties. Denmark's covert diplomacy represent a multifaceted tool in the realm of international relations. Its potential to deliver strategic actions, which can lead to sudden realignments and disrupt the diplomatic and military strategies of other nations, underscores its impact on global politics. The allure of clandestine cooperation for a friendly nation is rooted in the potential to harness the benefits of working discreetly with allies. This collaboration optimizes advantages, enhances influence, and fosters a close alignment with the central ally. In return, the central ally reciprocates with appropriate rewards for this covert partnership.

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