

## ***BUILDING SHELTER IN WASHINGTON: THE POLITICS OF SMALL STATE ENGAGEMENT***

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### Abstract

*Shelter has resonance in small state diplomacy in Washington. As a way of engaging with the policy and political communities in the US small states can undertake activities to advance their interests. Small states, to make shelter meaningful, must be noticed. Small states can both be the recipients of shelter as well as help the sheltering state form policy views by introducing norms and concepts. Norway's engagement with the US has been an exemplar of a small state that has assiduously worked at promoting its interests. It has engaged in defense activities that further bolster its relationships; it buys US weapons, it makes small deployments, engages in troop exchanges, and it conducts policy discussions helpful to defense planners. Norway also engages in international peacemaking that provides access to US decision makers. Together these things have created a stable and dependable bilateral relationship in Washington. Other small states, perhaps New Zealand, should be guided by Norway's example as they seek to politically manage shelter.*

### Key findings

- The need for smaller states to manage shelter has deepened
- Norway excels in managing the politics of shelter
- Understanding what Norway has done can serve as a guide for other smaller states
- Comparing Norway and New Zealand's management of the politics of shelter serves as a useful guide

### Executive summary

Norway's diplomacy in Washington offers a good example of the management of the politics of shelter. Through a diversified portfolio of initiatives and diplomatic positions Norway has been successful in being both relevant and finding voice in foreign and defense policy matters with both the US executive and legislative branches. Other small states might well look to Norway's success in considering how to best manage the politics of shelter.

*What is the problem?* Some 177 diplomatic missions in the US vie for attention and consideration. Standing out in a crowded field presents challenges for small states in particular. Failure to gain



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access to policymakers and legislators creates a risk to the maintenance of small state shelter. The challenge is how to best manage the politics of shelter.

*What should be done?* Small states should look to those small states that have succeeded in achieving access to senior policymakers and legislators and effectively manage the politics of shelter. For example, New Zealand with its emphasis on free trade and climate change has a policy mix that finds diminished voice in Washington today. Looking to Norway might well offer some insights on how to improve access and visibility.

## Analysis

States seeking shelter by aligning with the US face the challenge of managing the politics of shelter. The many small states seeking shelter with the US vie for political attention and access. Similarly, decision makers in Washington must manage numerous small states desire for shelter. With 177 embassies in the US some states, both large and small, will inevitably be prioritized over others. Tasked with standing above the crowd small state policymakers and diplomats must find ways that lead Washington to prioritize their state over others. The divided US government makes the problem of priority more complicated still, as the co-equal executive and legislative branches vie with one another for influence.

No small state (with the exception of Israel) has done a better job of managing the politics of shelter than Norway. Norway has effectively managed the politics of shelter by a using a *diversified* approach including:

- 1) Having a formal alliance with the US through NATO,
- 2) Signaling a willingness to be proactive on defense issues and defense spending,
- 3) Advocating and enacting international norms broadly appealing to the US,
- 4) Engaging in peacemaking activities in areas relevant to US interests,
- 5) Creating links with US domestic politics, and
- 6) Energizing the Norwegian-American diaspora.

The smaller states, effective in managing the politics of being noticed and considered relevant, ultimately succeed in gaining shelter. Norway's example of managing the politics of shelter serves as a guide for others to consider and perhaps emulate.

Since 1971 Norway has wisely used its natural resources, particularly oil and gas, to underwrite numerous government initiatives. A temptation exists to explain Norway's success as a small state to the discovery of oil and gas. This mistaken judgment clouds the analyst's perspective and hides from view Norway's success in effectively managing the politics of shelter.

Norway as a founding member of NATO secured its most vital alliance relationship. As a longstanding member Norway has deeply integrated into NATO's architecture and has developed the habit of interacting with NATO counterparts. Norway's defense spending, relative to many other NATO countries, has been good. It withstands the accusation of free-riding better than most other small states with a defense budget that nears 1.6% of GDP in 2018. Norway's defense acquisitions include several major US weapons platforms such as the P-8 Poseidon and F-35 Joint Strike Fighter. In addition, the development of the Joint Strike Missile by Kongsberg and Raytheon compliment and deepen US/Norwegian defense links. Norway has used its NATO membership to



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promote its defense relationship with the US through, for example, a series of ongoing bilateral working groups (i.e. US-Norwegian Study Group) between Norwegian and US defense personnel on topics of particular pertinence to the US (e.g the Arctic). These workshops help deepen the relationship, by creating institutional and interpersonal links, as well as provide useful information on relevant topics. Some 100 Norwegian military personnel work and study in the US annually. Roughly 300 US Marines rotate through Vaernes Garrison near Trondheim, deepening the US commitment to Norway; they also attract visiting members of the US Congress.

Unusual for many smaller powers Norway has used its soft power to advance international norms of international poverty alleviation and peacemaking. Norway's overseas development assistance (ODA) continues to be strong, in 2017 it neared 1% of gross national income (GNI). Support of international peacemaking has been linked to mediation and peacemaking efforts in places often closely associated with US interests. Norway has led peacemaking efforts in Israel/Palestine, Guatemala, Haiti, Colombia, and the southern Philippines. Even when peacemaking occurs outside the areas of traditional US interests, such as Sri Lanka, it proved valuable to Oslo's relationship with the US. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice often sought out Norwegian counterparts during their visits to Washington; she often requested briefings on the state of Sri Lankan peace talks. Such frequent one-on-one contact with the US Secretary of State gave Norwegian leaders unusual access in which a broad range of security and non-security matters could also be raised.

In addition to these international links Norway has succeeded in working with a domestic US constituency to advocate on their behalf. Some of the roughly 4.5 million Norwegian Americans, many in Minnesota and North Dakota, maintain an interest in Norway. The Norwegian ambassador spends most of his time, when traveling in the US, to these heavily Norwegian northern states. In fact, starting in 1974 the longest running country-to-country military exchange runs between the Minnesota National Guard and Norway. The result of these connections means that Norway can count on the congressional delegations of Minnesota and North Dakota to be broadly informed and supportive of their issues. In addition, the Congressional Friends of Norway caucus has been active since at least 2009.

Norway has effectively used its geographic and natural resources wisely to leverage its relationship with the US. Moreover, Norway has also pursued diplomatic goals that reflect its values and build connections with those countries similarly disposed to the liberal international order. Not all states share Norway's geography or natural resources, but many share similar values, and could use these similarities in building and enhancing the politics of shelter.

How do other states compare to Norway's success in managing the politics of shelter with the US? Taking a moment to examine New Zealand might be illustrative. New Zealand no longer has a formal alliance with the US as a result of differences around nuclear weapons, although New Zealand and US have signed the *Washington declaration* renewing some defense links. In addition, New Zealand participates in the UKUSA, or Five Eyes, intelligence sharing agreement. Second, during the election campaign of 2017 the National party signaled a willingness to increase defense spending (which in 2016 was at 1.13% of GDP), but that looks in doubt now with the new Labour coalition government. Thirdly, New Zealand had been a champion of the international trade norm of free trade – arguably the centerpiece of New Zealand's foreign policy - but with Trump's ascendance that norm appears less useful. New Zealand does not have a strong reputation as a peacemaker, despite its involvement in the Bougainville peace process and later deployment to the Solomon Islands. New Zealand's net ODA in 2017 was 0.230% of GNI, whereas the current DAC



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average runs at 0.31% of GNI. Even still, New Zealand continues to have a good reputation amongst Americans. The glowing aura in the US built up around New Zealand during the popularity of the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy persists, for example. Popularity does not translate, however, into political access and outreach. That and the smallness and disparate nature of the New Zealand diaspora mean that there is little domestic advocacy on New Zealand's behalf. In sum, New Zealand's political management of shelter today seems on less firmly grounded than Norway's. Of the three substantive areas where New Zealand engages with the US, defense, development and trade, none currently give New Zealand much currency in Washington, American affection for New Zealand notwithstanding. New Zealand could do more to better manage the politics of shelter.

The successes of other small states in managing the politics of shelter in Washington will, of course, vary. Those states that have not done as well in managing shelter as either Norway or New Zealand may need to redouble their efforts.

### Why does this matter?

Global insecurity created by the rise revisionist the powers Russia and China, America First and Donald Trump, and continued instability in the Middle East all underscore the importance of shelter for smaller powers. Many smaller powers find themselves stuck with Trump's America, for better or worse. The broader calculus of managing the politics of shelter with the US has not appreciably changed even with the rise of Trump. Looking to those states that have demonstrated the highest capacity to manage the politics of shelter serve as a roadmap. The lessons to draw from Norway's example of effectively managing the politics of shelter include diversifying the engagement in Washington, and building on the back of both government expenditure and less costly policy activities (i.e. Norway both spends on its own defense as well as runs policy working groups). Equally, the crack in relations experienced between the US and New Zealand shows the importance of finely tuning one's political management to meet the situation.

### What should small states do?

- *Re-examine engagement with Washington in light of shifting environment*
- *Diversify foreign policy settings; consider increasing expenditure on defense and ODA*
- *Identify areas where smaller state expertise adds value*
- *Focus on uncontroversial linkages*
- *Identify shared domestic US interests*
- *Continue work on supporting and creating international norms*

### Conclusion

Norway's building and maintenance of shelter rests on robust defense spending and a range of far less expensive efforts in the US. Taken together they create an arguably robust sheltered space in which Norway can operate. Of course, Norway's defense spending would be higher without NATO. So the additional costs of shelter are those born from maintaining domestic engagement with the US. Uppermost in costs are scanning the environment for opportunities and threats and acting to take advantage of opportunities and minimize the threats. Norway has effectively and efficiently a diversified policy and diplomatic portfolio that help ensure the US will shelter Norway in hard times.



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*Oh, a storm is threat'ning  
My very life today  
If I don't get some shelter  
Oh yeah, I'm gonna fade away  
War, children, it's just a shot away*



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