

A Soviet Grab for the High North?

USSR, Svalbard, and
Northern Norway 1920-1953

Sven G. Holtmark

Institutt for forsvarsstudier (IFS) Tollbugt. 10, 0152 Oslo 1, Norge

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Editor: Rolf Tamnes

Trykk: Hamtrykk A/S. Distribuert gjennom Forsvarets overkommando
Distribusjonssentralen.

ISSN 0333-3981

FORSVARSSSTUDIER

7/1993

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1. Introduction	5
2. 1920-1939: The emergence of Soviet interests in the High North	14
1920-1924: The USSR and the Svalbard Treaty	14
1925-1939: Territorial claims and economic interests .	25
3. 1939-1944: The awakening of Soviet strategic interests in the High North	35
1939-1941: The appearance of an activist attitude ...	36
1942-1944: Svalbard again at the periphery	46
4. 1944-1945: Molotov stakes his claims on Svalbard	50
Molotov's <i>démarche</i> of 12 November 1944	51
The bureaucratic foundation of Molotov's initiative ..	57
Norway searches for a solution	64
5. 1945-1947: Foreshadows of the Cold War	77
Summer 1945: Soviet bureaucrats on the offensive ..	78
Western perspectives on the High North	91
Spring 1946: Molotov under pressure	101
Autumn 1946: Molotov makes his move	111
February 1947: Norway turns the tables	117
6. 1947-1953: The return to <i>status quo</i>	124
Soviet reactions to Norway's preemption	125
Soviet strategic reassessments	130
Back to square one	134
1951: Moscow on the defensive	145
1953: Molotov's Svalbard foray <i>post mortem</i>	153
7. Concluding remarks	155

1. Introduction

At 2 a.m. on 12 November 1944, the Soviet Commissar for Foreign Affairs Viacheslav M. Molotov presented the Norwegian Minister for Foreign Affairs Trygve Lie with far-reaching proposals for a change in the international legal status of the Svalbard (Spitsbergen) archipelago in the High North of the Arctic Ocean.¹ Lie had come to Moscow to finalise a number of agreements underlining the spirit of cooperation and alliance which, on the face of it at least, characterised the relationship between the Norwegian government-in-exile and the Soviet government after more than three years of struggle against the common enemy. Being totally unprepared, Lie was shocked and deeply worried by Molotov's proposals. Molotov demanded,

¹ There is some confusion over the terms *Spitsbergen* and *Svalbard*. In Norwegian usage (since 1969) the name Spitsbergen applies only to the largest island in the archipelago. Until 1969 this was called Vestspitsbergen (Western Spitsbergen). Svalbard is the name of the whole of the archipelago as defined by the Treaty of 1920, including the distant Bear Island which is located approximately halfway between Spitsbergen and the North Cape. In this respect Norwegian usage is in accordance with the letter of the Treaty. The important point to bear in mind is that the term Svalbard, in Norwegian usage and according to the Treaty, covers all islands within the area defined by the Treaty. English speakers tend to prefer the term *Spitsbergen* to the unfamiliar *Svalbard*, although for instance *Encyclopedia Britannica* defines the terms in accordance with Norwegian usage.

Russian usage is different. "Shpitsbergen" (old name "Gru-mant") is used in Russian to denote the "main" archipelago, while Bear Island (Ostrov medvezhii) is normally listed as a separate entity. Cf. the terminology used in L.D. Timchenko, *Shpitsbergen: Istoriia i sovremennost*, Kharkov, 1992. In the following text I will use Svalbard to denote the entire area as defined by the Treaty, except when referring directly to Russian sources or statements.

inter alia, that the Paris Treaty on Svalbard of 1920 should be declared null and void, that sovereignty over Bear Island should be transferred to the Soviet Union, and that the main Spitsbergen archipelago should be administered as a Soviet-Norwegian *condominium*, i.e. that it should come under joint Soviet-Norwegian control.

Molotov's overture led to hectic activity on the part of the Norwegians, and there followed an exchange between the two governments. In the first phase of the negotiations the Norwegians tried to take the initiative from the Soviets, and presented their own counterproposals for a solution. This policy, which was heavily influenced by the advice of the Norwegian Ambassador in Moscow, Rolf Andvord, culminated in the Norwegian draft declaration of 9 April 1945. In this document, which went a long way towards accommodating the most important Soviet demands, the Norwegians expressed their agreement in principle to an arrangement for joint Soviet-Norwegian defence of the Spitsbergen island.

In the ensuing years the Svalbard question was one of the key elements influencing Norwegian policy towards the Soviet Union. It also seems clear that it speeded up the erosion of the benevolent attitude towards the Soviet Union which characterised Norwegian political circles during and immediately after the war. However, the offensive Soviet attitude during the Svalbard negotiations of 1944-47 contrasts with the basic stability and absence of serious tension which characterised Norwegian-Soviet cohabitation on Svalbard for most of the period under review.

Much has been written about Svalbard in Norwegian-Soviet relations by Norwegian historians. However, previous historiography has been based on Norwegian and, to a significant although lesser degree, British and American sources. This study is based mainly on Soviet material from the archives of

the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation.² These documents have only recently been declassified and made available to Russian and foreign scholars. Indeed, the archives themselves were until 1990 practically closed for independent historical research.

The focus is on *Soviet* policy. The study encompasses the period from 1920 to 1953, with emphasis on the years 1944-51. With regard to this period of Soviet attempts to alter Svalbard's international status, I shall discuss some aspects of Norwegian policy as well. Norwegian historians have studied the "Svalbard question" from the Norwegian perspective from its beginning in 1944 until the decision taken by the Storting (Parliament) in February 1947 to close the matter as a subject for bilateral Norwegian-Soviet discussions. Attention has also been focused on the following years, when Svalbard continued to play a role in Norwegian, Soviet and Western military-strategic and foreign policy deliberations. Soviet sources throw additional light on the views and conduct of some of the Norwegian officials, in particular Trygve Lie, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, and Rolf Andvord, the Ambassador in Moscow. An attempt will be made to relate my own findings to the main conclusions of earlier studies.³

² *Arkhiv Vneshnei Politiki Rossiiskoi Federatsii* (AVPRF, Foreign Policy Archives of the Russian Federation), Moscow. I would like to thank Dr Igor V. Lebedev, Director of the Department of History and Records of the Russian Ministry for Foreign Affairs, for his forthcoming attitude during my numerous visits to the MID archives. I am equally grateful to Dr Lebedev's deputies and the rest of his staff.

³ For the period up to 1925, the basic work is Trygve Mathisen, *Svalbard i internasjonal politikk, 1871-1925*, Oslo, 1951. For the wartime period the most detailed study is Olav Riste's discussion in the second volume of his "*London-regjeringa*". *Norge i krigsalliansen 1940-1945*, Oslo, 1979. When Riste wrote his study, parts of the collections of the Norwegian Ministry for Foreign Affairs

The study will focus on the following aspects:

1. *The Soviet rationale.* What kind of deliberations and motives guided Soviet policy? The chronological aspect is obviously important: Soviet motives changed, along with the evolution of Soviet military and foreign policy capabilities, the Soviets' perception of the world situation, and Norway's place in it. Rolf Tamnes, in one of his studies of Svalbard in international politics, has argued that Svalbard in the postwar period was at the periphery

were still closed. This is why Riste had to leave some questions unsolved. The best coverage of Norwegian policy in the years 1945-47 is in Knut Einar Eriksen, "Svalbardspørsmålet fra krig til kald krig", in *Historiker og veileder. Festskrift til Jakob Sverdrup*, Oslo, 1989. Rolf Tamnes has given a synthesis of Svalbard's place in great power strategy in a long-term perspective, cf. his *Svalbard og stormaktene. Fra ingenmannsland til Kald Krig, 1870-1953*, in *Forsvarsstudier/Defence Studies*, No. 7, Oslo, 1991. Another important synthesizing study is Nils Morten Udgaard, *Great Power Politics and Norwegian Foreign Policy. A Study of Norway's Foreign Relations November 1940-February 1948*, Oslo, 1973. These works contain references to literature dealing with various aspects of the Svalbard question. The newest and most comprehensive Russian work on Svalbard from the perspective of international law, is L.D. Timchenko's study, op.cit. (cf. note 1). Another work on Spitsbergen in international relations which deserves to be mentioned here because of its references to international literature, although it is of less direct relevance to my study, is Elen C. Singh, *The Spitsbergen (Svalbard) Question: United States Foreign Policy*, Oslo, 1980. For attempts at syntheses, see also various works by Willy Østreng, for instance *Det politiske Svalbard*, Oslo, 1975. In the following footnotes interested readers will find references to a number of more specialised studies, many of them by the authors mentioned above.

of Cold War and super power tensions.⁴ I will argue that this was even more the case in the interwar period. Even during the Second World War Svalbard attracted only occasional attention from the military decision makers on the Allied side.⁵ Further developing Tamnes' argument about Svalbard's *potential* significance in great power politics, I will argue that Svalbard was repeatedly the object of geopolitical considerations, but that interest tended to dwindle when the *general* considerations of the diplomatic geopoliticians were confronted by more down-to-earth military-strategic deliberations of the military establishments of the great powers as well as Norway.

The "potential importance of Svalbard's geographic location" ("beliggenhetens potensiale")⁶ remained dormant, and none of the great powers was willing to risk much in order to alter radically the *status quo* in the area. In the early post-Second World War period, Soviet efforts to alter Svalbard's international status were checked by the possible adverse effects an offensive policy might have had on far more important Soviet foreign policy goals, and by the lack of any strong arguments in favour of forcing through the Soviet demands against Norwegian opposition. Soviet policy with regard to Svalbard was basically static, and aimed at the perpetuation of the *status quo*. The initiatives from 1944-47 failed to alter this pattern permanently.

The activists⁷ claimed that control over the waters between Svalbard and the mainland of Norway was crucial to the protection of the Soviet Union's lines of communication with the North

⁴ Rolf Tamnes, *Svalbard mellom Øst og Vest. Kald krig og lavspenning i nord 1947-1953*, in *Forsvarsstudier/Defence Studies*, No. 4, 1987, Oslo, 1987, p. 5

⁵ Cf. the discussion in Olav Riste, "London-regjeringa" (cf. note 3), Vol. II.

⁶ Rolf Tamnes, *Svalbard mellom Øst og Vest* (cf. note 4), p. 5.

⁷ For lack of a better term, I will use the word *activist* to characterise the attitude of a group of bureaucrats who made persistent efforts to convince the foreign policy leadership of the need to institute a vigorous and offensive policy towards Norway.

Atlantic. Thus Svalbard was seen within the context of the problem of the *straits* linking Russian waters with the Atlantic Ocean, i.e. a northern pendant to the problem of the Baltic and Black Sea entrances. Despite this reference to the age-old Russian fear of being locked out from the High Seas, the attempt to initiate a forceful Soviet policy towards Svalbard failed when confronted with the harsh reality of material limitations, global and regional political considerations, and operational realities.

2. *The Soviet regional approach.* Soviet documents suggest that Molotov's Svalbard initiative was part of, or a scaled-down version of, a broader scheme for increasing the Soviet Union's presence and influence in the High North. More specifically, the Svalbard question was linked to ideas circulating within the Soviet foreign policy and military bureaucracies about a semi-permanent military presence in Northern Norway. The Soviet documents reveal that immediately after the Second World War there was massive support both within the General Staff and within the MID bureaucracy in favour of seeking some kind of "defence arrangement" for Northern Norway, including transfers of Norwegian territories to the Soviet Union. These ideas correspond to western wartime and postwar notions of Northern Norway, and in particular the county of Finnmark, as a "grey zone" where "legitimate" Soviet security concerns might spawn Soviet demands for a role in the defence of the area. In 1944-45 it was not evident that Northern Norway belonged to a western "sphere of interest" or responsibility.

3. *The Soviet decision-making process.* Where did Soviet policy originate, and who influenced the final decisions? It is often assumed that the Soviet decision-making process under Stalin was heavily dominated by the top political level, with Stalin and his few key advisors themselves making decisions on even minor questions. Even if this were so, the origin of the information and policy proposals upon which the top leaders acted is a no less important question. Although it might be that the top leaders did, in fact, take the formal "decisions", even on questions of limited significance within the global context of Soviet foreign policy, it might be argued that the bureaucrats who supplied Molotov or even the *instantsiia* (i.e. Stalin and the politburo) with proposals for

decisions or policy initiatives were just as important as the handful of top decision makers. The study reveals that MID bureaucrats on all levels, with partial support from the military establishment, represented the driving force behind the attempts to "revitalise" post-Second World War Soviet policy on Svalbard and Northern Norway. The activists' ideas were rejected by the top level in the MID and in the CPSU, i.e. by Molotov, Stalin and the Politburo.

4. *Soviet-Norwegian interaction and perceptions.* How did the two countries' policies influence each other's actions, and how did their perceptions of each other's intentions relate to reality? I will argue that the deliberations of the MID bureaucrats were guided by a number of basic misconceptions of Norwegian and Western attitudes. There were numerous examples of "wishful thinking" on the Soviet side. The Norwegians and the "Anglo-Saxons" were much better at discerning Soviet policy and intentions. This study reveals that Trygve Lie, who wanted the Norwegians to continue the policy which he himself had initiated in London, played an active role as an informal advisor to the Norwegian government after he was elected Secretary General of the United Nations in 1946, but that he also advised the *Soviets* about Norwegian attitudes and policy on at least two occasions.

5. *The role of third parties.* This study will also focus on the role of third parties, mainly the United States and Great Britain. American policy on the Arctic regions was a decisive influence on the Soviets' Svalbard policy.⁸

⁸ My discussion of British and American attitudes is based on secondary sources. US attitudes are summarised in Rolf Tamnes, *The United States and the Cold War in the High North*, Oslo, 1991. Tamnes' book contain full references to the literature on this and related topics. The evolution of British policy is most fully discussed in Knut Einar Eriksen, "Great Britain and the Problem of Bases in the Nordic Area, 1945-47", *Scandinavian Journal of History*, Vol. 7 (1982), No. 7, pp. 135-163; and Knut E. Eriksen & Magne Skodvin, "Storbritannia, NATO og et skandinavisk forbund", *Internasjonal Politikk*, 1981, No. 3, pp. 437-511.

The present study is the first attempt by Russian or western scholars to make extensive use of documents from the former Soviet Ministry for Foreign Affairs to analyse Soviet policy towards Svalbard. One can easily predict that material from other Russian archives which are for all practical purposes still closed, as well as further research in the Foreign Policy Archives of the Russian Federation, will bring to light additional documents to add to the present analysis and even alter some of the conclusions. In fact, my own research in the MID archives continues to bring to light new evidence about the Svalbard question and other aspects of Soviet policy towards Norway. There is also no doubt that with access to the military archives, and to documentation on the deliberations of the CPSU Politburo, it should be possible to better answer the question of why the initiatives of the MID activists and the General Staff were *not* realised.⁹ However, I believe that the richness of the sources which have been collected so far justifies the publication of a preliminary study on a topic which has always attracted considerable interest beyond the limited circles of specialists on Russian studies, foreign policy or Arctic affairs.

I would like to thank Knut Einar Eriksen, Tom Kristiansen, Helge Pharo, Olav Riste, Jakob Sverdrup and Rolf Tamnes for help, suggestions and advice during the writing of this study. Lars C. Jenssen, Irene P. Kulblik, and Amita Lovett were assigned the tasks of proofreading and transforming the text into

⁹The military documentation is in the archives of the Russian General Staff and the Archives of the Ministry for Defence. The most important parts of the Politburo papers are in the so-called Presidential Archives or in the process of being transferred to the former CPSU archives. They are for the time being inaccessible. Other parts of the CPSU archives are less relevant to this topic.

readable English. Thorstein Medhus was responsible for the technical aspects of preparing the manuscript for print.

2. 1920-1939: The emergence of Soviet interests in the High North

On 15-16 February 1924 the Soviet trade representative in Norway, Madame Alexandra Mikhailovna Kollontai, signed an agreement and exchanged notes with the Norwegian government about the establishment of full diplomatic relations between Norway and the Soviet government. After lengthy discussions the two parties agreed on a *quid pro quo* arrangement, whereby the Norwegian government recognised the Soviet government *de jure*, receiving in return the Soviet government's declaration that it accepted the 1920 Paris Treaty on Svalbard. The Soviet Union declared that it did not object to the stipulations of the Treaty, and the Norwegian government undertook to solicit the signatory powers' agreement to Soviet adherence.¹⁰ At this point the Soviets had no clear perceptions of their interests on Svalbard, and the Soviet Commissar for Foreign Affairs, Georgii V. Chicherin, only hesitatingly agreed to Kollontai's idea of linking the two questions. For the rest of the interwar period Svalbard remained largely outside the scope of Soviet military-strategic considerations, but gradually developed into a major source of coal for Russia's northern regions. Only the prospects of war prompted some MID bureaucrats to highlight Svalbard's real or imagined military-strategic significance.

1920-1924: The USSR and the Svalbard Treaty

Until the Western Powers at the Paris Peace Conference decided to give Norway sovereignty over Svalbard, the archipelago had been regarded as a no-man's-land, *terra nullius*. In 1871, when

¹⁰Cf. Trygve Mathisen, op. cit. (cf. note 3); and Egil Danielsen, *Norge-Sovjetunionen. Norsk utenrikspolitikk overfor Sovjetunionen 1917-1940*, Oslo, 1964, pp. 108-123.

for the first time the Russians took part in diplomatic discussions about Svalbard's international status, the Czarist government opposed a Swedish-Norwegian proposal to transfer the archipelago to Norwegian sovereignty. From the turn of the century onwards interest in Svalbard's economic potential developed rapidly, and the need to create an administrative regime for the archipelago became obvious. At meetings in 1910 and 1912 representatives from Russia, Norway and Sweden reached agreement on a formula for joint Russian-Swedish-Norwegian administration of Svalbard. Czarist Russian policy on Svalbard was aimed at keeping the area outside the range of the great powers' disputes, and making sure that the area remained *terra nullius*, or at least that any arrangement ensured that Russia's presence and influence in the area was equal, or preferably superior, to that of the other great powers.¹¹

The outbreak of the First World War disrupted the negotiations on Svalbard's international status. The matter was returned to briefly at the Russian-German negotiations in Brest-Litovsk in 1918, where a supplementary German-Russian protocol to the peace agreement stated that as soon as possible after the conclusion of the war the two parties should ask the Norwegian government to secure the continuation of the international conference on Svalbard. The protocol also stated that the two parties should work for a settlement which would give them equal rights on the archipelago.¹² The clause was certainly the result of a German initiative, not a Russian one.

Finally, in the course of the peace negotiations in Paris after the war the Norwegians succeeded in persuading the Western Powers that Svalbard ought to be part of the Kingdom of

¹¹Cf. Trygve Mathisen, op. cit. (cf. note 3).

¹²The document in question is printed in volume I, pp. 166-183, of *Dokumenty vneshnei politiki SSSR (DVPSSSR)*, a Soviet collection in 22 volumes of diplomatic correspondence covering the years 1917-1939, published in Moscow 1957-1993.

Norway. Russia, which at the time was excluded from the international diplomatic community, took no part in the negotiations and was not among the signatory powers. Under the terms of the Treaty on Svalbard of 9 February 1920, Norway was granted "the full and absolute sovereignty" over Svalbard (including Bear Island), although Norway's rights over the archipelago were subject to a number of restrictions. Among the most important of these stipulations was the Treaty's Article 9, which obliged Norway

not to create nor to allow the establishment of any naval base in the territories [covered by the Treaty] and not to construct any fortification in the said territories, which may never be used for warlike purposes.

The Treaty further stated that

The nationals of all the High Contracting Parties shall have equal liberty of access and entry of any reason or object whatsoever to the waters, fjords, and ports of the territories [covered by the Treaty]; subject to the observance of local laws and regulations, they may carry on there without impediment all marine, industrial, mining and commercial operations on a footing of absolute equality.

The Norwegian negotiators, who were acutely aware of the paramount importance to Norway of good relations with Russia notwithstanding their strong dislike of the revolutionary regime in Moscow, demanded the inclusion in the Treaty of a clause which granted Russian nationals and companies "the same rights as nationals of the High Contracting Parties" until the recognition by the signatory powers of a Russian government would permit Russia to adhere to the Treaty (Article 10).¹³

¹³ The text of the Treaty is printed in English in Ellen C. Singh, *op. cit.* (cf. note 3).

Soviet policy on Svalbard in the years leading up to the Norwegian-Soviet agreement of February 1924 was the outcome of a process of frequently confused discussions within the Soviet foreign policy apparatus. There was no agreement on the political, economic or strategic significance of the archipelago. This confusion and the lack of articulated policy was partly a reflection of physical realities: the archipelago's geographical remoteness, as well as its extremely adverse climatic conditions and its limited economic potential (and complete lack of revolutionary potential). Svalbard is located in a part of the world which had always played a peripheral role in overall Russian foreign policy. Furthermore, the general orientation of the new Soviet regime's foreign policy necessarily left Svalbard outside the focus of the decision-makers' attention. Soviet foreign policy in the early post-revolutionary years concentrated on a few overriding aims of a *formal* nature. Foremost among these aims were the efforts to break the western powers' diplomatic blockade and restore Bolshevik Russia to the position Czarist Russia had enjoyed at least since the times of Aleksandr II - as one of the recognised world powers. Soviet policy towards Norway and with regard to Svalbard was set within this context. It reflected, therefore, an *instrumentalist* approach, which relegated Svalbard (as well as Norway as one of the *small* powers) to pure means in the Soviet government's efforts to achieve more fundamental foreign policy aims. Soviet foreign policy in these years was directed towards *governments* and *peoples*, not territories.

In protesting against the 1920 Treaty, the new regime in Russia tried for a while to obstruct the implementation of an arrangement which had been negotiated without Russian participation. The motivation was largely one of prestige. Given the lack of strong Russian economic interests on Svalbard (Russia was in any case granted equal rights with the signatory powers), and the absence of any population with which to realise the early Soviet regime's dream of exporting their

revolution, only strategic interests could have driven the Soviet government to conduct a forceful Svalbard policy in their relations with Norway.

The lack of efforts on the part of the Soviet foreign policy leadership to introduce military-strategic considerations into the Svalbard question, not only reflected the general preoccupation of the early post-Civil War Soviet regime with diplomacy rather than military strategy, but also reflected the almost non-existent state of the Russian Navy when the seven-year cataclysm of war, revolution and civil war finally came to an end about 1920. The condition of the Russian Navy was in turn just one aspect of the state of extreme weakness in which Soviet Russia found itself when the communist regime set out to consolidate its power. More specifically, no major Russian warships regularly sailed the waters of the High North; in fact, there were few such ships left in the Russian Navy.¹⁴ Nor did the Russians give much priority to the development of a naval capacity in these waters when the Russian Navy was slowly being reconstructed in the 1920s. The Baltic and Black Seas were seen as much more important.¹⁵ This lack of Soviet awareness of the potential military-strategic significance of the Arctic regions was also reflected in the Finnish-Soviet Peace Treaty of October 1920, which assigned the Petsamo (Pechenga) area to Finland "for all times to come" (*na vechnye vremena*),¹⁶ although it had not been part of the Grand Duchy of Finland prior to 1917. An

¹⁴ Donald W. Mitchell, *A History of Russian and Soviet Sea Power*, London, 1974, p. 356.

¹⁵ Discussions of Soviet policy on Svalbard do not always take into account the fact that the pre-eminence of the Soviet Northern Fleet is a phenomenon strictly linked to the post-Second World War period. Cf. Willy Østreng, *Det politiske Svalbard* (cf. note 3), pp. 60-63.

¹⁶ *DVPSSSR* (cf. note 12), Vol. III, document No. 137, Finnish-Soviet Peace Treaty of 14 October, 1920.

interest in the military-strategic dimensions of the Svalbard question would have been almost purely theoretical, bearing no relation to existing technological and operational realities. On the face of it there were few reasons to make the Soviet government pay much attention to Svalbard.

As soon as the Soviet government learned about the signing of the Treaty on Svalbard, Chicherin sent protests to the Norwegian and Allied governments. The Soviet government declared that it could not recognise the Treaty, as Russia had been excluded from the negotiations which led to the signing of the Treaty. The Soviet government had not been consulted, notwithstanding Russia's traditional interest in Svalbard. The aim of the Soviet protests of 1920, which Deputy Commissar for Foreign Affairs Maksim Maksimovich Litvinov aptly characterised as purely "platonic", was basically to uphold the Soviet government's prestige, and to keep the door open for later Soviet proposals for a final settlement. A further Soviet note of protest in early 1923 aimed at slowing down the ratification process in Norway and the other signatory countries.¹⁷ The initial Soviet response to the signing of the Paris Treaty reflected the traditional Russian stance on the archipelago, i.e. that Svalbard's international status could be negotiated only with Russian participation.¹⁸ Only gradually did the Soviet foreign policy leadership realise that the dispute might serve to force

¹⁷ AVPRF, f. 0116, p. 102, d. 38, l. 6, Litvinov to Surits, 6 January, 1923.

¹⁸ A degree of personal continuity within the Russian foreign policy apparatus may have played a role. Andrei V. Sabanin, a diplomat from 1908 and an expert on international law, had influenced the handling of the Spitsbergen question before the First World War, and continued his career in the NKID after the revolution. From 1920 to 1937 Sabanin was the head of the Commissariat's Legal-Economic, from 1931 Legal, Department.

Norway to agree to an early *de jure* recognition of the Soviet government.

The Soviet government created an interdepartmental working group which was assigned the task of articulating Soviet interests and policy on Svalbard. As late as January 1923 the group had not been able to produce any concrete ideas, political or economic. Maksim Litvinov complained that if the Norwegian government were to present proposals for a settlement, the Soviet government would have difficulties submitting their own counterproposals. Lacking guidelines for a policy to handle the new situation which had been created by the signing of the Treaty in 1920, Litvinov argued that the Treaty should be abrogated, and an international conference should be organised to settle the matter. If absolutely unavoidable, the Soviet government could accept Norwegian sovereignty over Svalbard if the Soviet government could set the preconditions.¹⁹

It was uncertain, however, what these preconditions should be. When Jakub Surits, the Soviet trade representative in Norway, told Litvinov that a renegotiation of the Treaty was out of the question, Litvinov repeated that "it is still unclear to us what we could and should achieve" with regard to Svalbard. At the same time Litvinov was clearly moving towards accepting Norway's sovereignty over Svalbard, arguing that it was far from obvious that it would be in the interests of Russia if Svalbard were to revert to a no-man's-land rather than being under Norwegian jurisdiction. After all, Norwegian control over Svalbard was less injurious to Russian interests than the archipelago's belonging to one of the other powers.²⁰

The wavering Soviet attitude towards the Svalbard question was highlighted in the correspondence between Georgii Vasilie-

¹⁹ AVPRF, f. 0116, p. 102, d. 38, l. 6, Litvinov to Surits, 6 January, 1923.

²⁰ AVPRF, f. 0116, p. 102, d. 38, l. 10, Litvinov to Surits, 3 February, 1923.

vich Chicherin, the Commissar for Foreign Affairs, and the independent-minded Alexandra Kollontai, who had succeeded Surits as Soviet trade representative in Norway. From the summer of 1923 Kollontai argued that Soviet acceptance of the Paris Treaty of 1920 should be made conditional on Norwegian *de jure* recognition of the Soviet government.²¹ Chicherin argued the opposite: the Norwegians, in his opinion, were far from enthusiastic about the newly won "sovereignty" over Svalbard, which to them meant only additional costs and no privileges.²² To the Soviet government, on the other hand, an invitation to accede to the Treaty would mean a welcome measure of international recognition - being treated like "an internationally recognised Government" - and at the same time make it more feasible for the Soviet government to defend Russian interests on Svalbard. Chicherin concluded that "nobody would understand that we should demand compensation in the form of recognition *de jure* for a service rendered to us" (i.e.

²¹ From the fragments of Aleksandra Kollontai's diaries which were published in *International affairs* in 1988-89, it appears that the person who suggested to Kollontai that Soviet recognition of Norway's right to Spitsbergen should depend on Norway's *de jure* recognition of the Soviet government was Olav Scheflo, a left-wing socialist who one year later became one of the leaders of the newly created Norwegian Communist Party. According to Kollontai, Scheflo suggested the linkage in late November 1922. Cf. *International affairs* (Moscow), 1988, No. 12, p. 106. However, Kollontai's diaries, in the printed version, are of questionable historical value, both because of the arbitrary cuts in the text, and because the original diaries were "edited" by Kollontai herself in the 1940s. I have not consulted any of the versions of the diary which are now available in Moscow.

²² As a general evaluation of Norwegian attitudes, this was misleading. For examples of negative Norwegian reactions to the Treaty's limitations of Norway's rights, see Rolf Tamnes, *Svalbard og stormaktene* (cf. note 3), pp. 28-29.

being allowed to accede to the Treaty). The linking of the two questions, according to Chicherin, would "block our accession to the Treaty".²³ Chicherin's order of preference was thus clear: accession to the Treaty as a means of elevating Soviet Russia's international position was far more important than the defence of potential, although undefined, Soviet "interests" on Svalbard.

Kollontai, in her answer to Chicherin, argued that Soviet recognition of Norway's rights to Svalbard was of primary importance to Norway, while the benefits of this to the Soviet government would be rather dubious. Soviet willingness to accede to an international agreement which had been negotiated without Russia's participation could be interpreted as a sign of weakness, rather than as a step towards international recognition. Kollontai concluded by emphasizing that the Svalbard question offered the Soviet government the possibility of pressing the Norwegians for early *de jure* recognition of the Soviet regime.²⁴

Kollontai's approach was soon adopted by Chicherin and the Soviet leadership as Soviet policy towards Norway with regard to *de jure* recognition and Svalbard. On 20-23 November 1923 the Commissariat's Collegium ("Kollegiia", the highest decision-making body of the *Narodnyi komissariat inostrannykh del*, NKID) decided to agree to a "positive solution" to the Svalbard question on the condition that diplomatic relations between Norway and Soviet Russia would be established.²⁵ Thus the way was cleared for the declaration and exchange of notes in February 1924. However, and basically because of the United States' refusal to recognise the Soviet government, the Soviet Union was only allowed to accede to the Treaty in May 1935.

²³ AVPRF, f. 06, op. 2, p. 22, d. 266, l. 43, Chicherin to Kollontai, 23 September, 1923.

²⁴ AVPRF, f. 0116, p. 102, d. 44, l. 6, Kollontai to Chicherin, 5 October, 1923.

²⁵ AVPRF, f. 06, op. 2, p. 22, d. 266.

It is clear from the Soviet documents that Alexandra Kollontai was the principal architect of the Soviet Government's policy in the Svalbard question. Although adhering to general guidelines from Moscow, she herself strongly influenced these guidelines. Apart from that she showed a high degree of independence and initiative, in the end provoking reprimands from Chicherin for having overstepped her authority and for not having kept the NKID duly informed about the negotiations.²⁶

From the Russian point of view the merits of her policy line are open to doubt. Spurred by Kollontai, the Soviet government conducted a policy which in the end clearly departed from pre-revolutionary Russian policy on the Svalbard question. Prior to the First World War, *geopolitical*²⁷ considerations had been prominent in Russian thinking on Svalbard. The essence of the

²⁶ The early years of Soviet diplomacy benefited from the dedicated service of a number of brilliant and highly educated personalities - Chicherin, Litvinov, Vorovskii, Kollontai, and others. The correspondence between them was lively, often arrogant and ironic, in stark contrast to the strong guiding role of the Moscow centre which characterised internal Soviet diplomatic correspondence under Molotov and Vyshinskii.

²⁷ Using the term "geopolitical" I have in mind a way of thinking in matters of foreign policy which is ultimately oriented towards the actual, potential or alleged military value of sea, land or air territories. Geopolitics thrives on a higher level of generalisation than *military-strategic* reasoning, which should be based on operational analyses or at least considerations. Geopolitics tends to be the favoured field of diplomats, political scientists and diplomatic historians. This study seems to prove that geopoliticians should at an early stage ask for the assistance of military professionals when they decide to proceed from the essentially map-based exercise of geopolitics to the complex world of military-strategic evaluations. For a more stringent analysis of "the geopolitical image of great power politics", see Rolf Tamnes, *The United States in the High North* (cf. note 8), p. 18.

Czarist Russian policy had been to seek a solution which would secure a degree of Russian influence and control over Svalbard, while keeping the archipelago outside the range of great power politics and conflicts. During the Kristiania conferences on Svalbard prior to the First World War the Russian delegates supported the idea of joint Russian-Norwegian-Swedish administration of Svalbard, which none the less should formally remain a no-man's-land and neutral.

Accepting the stipulations of the Paris Treaty, the Soviet government accepted the principle that Russia had no more rights or privileges on Svalbard than the other great powers. Because of her material and political weakness in these early post-revolutionary years, Russia was not in a position to force a change in the major stipulations of the 1920 Treaty. However, the relative ease with which the Soviet government agreed to the *quid pro quo* arrangement of February 1924 also reflected the absence on the Soviet side of an awareness that the archipelago itself offered economic or strategic assets.

The Treaty's Article 10, which provided Russia with equal economic opportunities and rights on Svalbard independently of its adherence to the Treaty, excluded the possibility of convincing economic arguments in favour of Soviet accession to the Treaty. And last but not least, at this stage the Russians mined no coal on Svalbard.

Consequently, Svalbard was not considered to be of much interest to the Soviet Union, and both Chicherin and Kollontai, notwithstanding their disparate interpretation of Soviet versus Norwegian interests with regard to Svalbard, took the same basic approach. They both viewed the dispute over Svalbard solely within the framework of Soviet Russia's efforts to gain international recognition and as a vehicle to further this aim.

However, Kollontai's policy, which became Soviet policy, was of doubtful value even if one accepts her purely *instrumentalist* approach to the dispute. When Italy and the United Kingdom recognised the Soviet regime in early February 1924,

it was clear that Norwegian *de jure* recognition was only a matter of time. At this point, the Norwegians were keenly interested in establishing full diplomatic and commercial relations with Russia, while the importance to the Soviet government of Norwegian recognition was limited compared to the immense international ramifications of the Italian and British decisions.

Thus the Soviet decision in 1924 to accept the provisions of the Paris Treaty on Svalbard reflected the young Soviet regime's fight for international recognition, while traditional perceptions of Russian interests in the area were disregarded or simply not present in the discussions.²⁸ The Soviet approach was purely *instrumentalist*, using the Svalbard controversy to strengthen the Russian bargaining position vis-à-vis the Norwegian government.

1925-1939: Territorial claims and economic interests

While the Soviets adjusted easily to the real world and accepted the 1920 Treaty, other aspects of their Arctic policy in the interwar period gave rise to numerous Soviet-Norwegian disputes and conflicts. The most serious among these were related to Soviet decrees which excluded Norwegian (and other foreign) seal hunters from the White Sea and from hunting

²⁸ No rules without exceptions: in April 1923 Kollontai argued that it might be in the interest of the Soviet government to support Norwegian sovereignty over Svalbard, as a counterbalance to British hegemony in the area. She did not, however, use this argument with any force, and it was not reflected in the correspondence between NKID and Kollontai from the summer 1923 onwards. AVPRF, f. 0116, p. 102, d. 43, l. 45, Kollontai to Litvinov, 9 April, 1923.

inside the 12-mile sea boundary which the Soviet Government had declared in May 1921.²⁹

In the mid-twenties the Soviet government gradually developed an Arctic policy which had ramifications far beyond the largely economic aspects of the unilateral declarations of May 1921. The Soviet government's decision of 15 April 1926 to declare all territories north of Soviet territory as belonging to the Soviet Union was of far-reaching consequence. By thus introducing the *sector line* as the basis for delimitation in the Arctic Sea, the Soviets prepared the ground for the complex and difficult talks on the maritime boundary in the Barents Sea, which since the 1970s have been a crucial element of Soviet-Norwegian relations. An exception was made for territories which were already recognised as belonging to another power, i.e. for Svalbard.³⁰ The Soviet government's decree was substantiated by the publication of a small booklet called *On the right to the northern polar regions*, written by V.L. Lakhtin and supplied with an authoritative foreword by Sabanin, the head of

²⁹ Interested readers are referred to Egil Danielsen, op. cit. (cf. note 10), and to Kåre Valle, *En oversikt over konfliktene mellom Norge og Russland om selfangsten i Østisen i tidsrummet 1893-1926*, an unpublished thesis for the degree Cand.polit. in political science, University of Oslo, 1957. The relevant volumes of the *Dokumenty vneshnei politiki SSSR* (cf. note 12) also contain some documents which shed additional light on the dispute and how it was (more or less) solved.

³⁰ The decree of 15 April 1926 is published in *DVPSSSR*, Vol. IX, doc. No. 130. The decree defines the western sector line as 32°4'35" longitude East of Greenwich, while the Paris Treaty defines Svalbard between 10 and 35 Eastern longitude. The present Soviet sector line has been moved slightly to the West, due to the acquisition of the Petsamo district from Finland after the Second World War. Kvitøya (White Island) is the easternmost island in the Svalbard archipelago. Cf. p. 140.

the NKID Legal-Economic Department. In July 1928 Sovnarkom decided to develop scientific activity in the Arctic regions, and to plan for the establishment of meteorological stations on Novaia Zemlia, Severnaia Zemlia - and Franz Joseph Land.³¹

The April 1926 decree worried the Norwegians, not least because it meant that the Soviet Union claimed sovereignty over this archipelago of numerous small islands situated to the north of Novaia Zemlia and to the east of Svalbard.³² When in the summer and autumn of 1928 the Norwegian government received information about an increase in Soviet activities in the Arctic, it decided formally to notify the Soviet government that the Norwegian government could not accept the Soviet decree with regard to undiscovered islands in general, and Franz Joseph Land in particular.³³ The Norwegian reservation notwithstanding, the disputed archipelago was in January 1929 made part of Arkhangel'skaia *oblast*, and on 29 July 1929 an expedition based on the ship *Georgii Sedov* hoisted the Soviet flag on one of the islands.³⁴

In August 1930 the Politburo instructed the NKID to secure the Norwegian government's "unambiguous recognition" of Soviet sovereignty over the archipelago.³⁵ However, the Soviets

³¹ Sovnarkom's decree of 31 July, 1928.

³² Cf. documents in the archives of the Norwegian Ministry for Foreign Affairs (hereafter referred to as NMFA), dossier P D 9 26/16.

³³ NMFA, P 9 D 26/16, Ministry to Kollontai, 19 December, 1928. The Norwegian rationale was purely economic. Norwegian fishing and hunting interests exerted strong pressure on the government to protest against the Soviet decision.

³⁴ *DVPSSSR* (cf. note 12), Vol. XII, document No. 235.

³⁵ The Politburo's decision is paraphrased in AVPRF, f. 05, op. 10, p. 67, d. 107, ll. 31-32, Krestinskii to Stalin, 14 November, 1930.

were eager to reach some sort of agreement with the Norwegians which would ease tension over the archipelago.³⁶ Several ideas were discussed. If the Norwegians refused to accept a Soviet offer of hunting and fishing rights in the archipelago for 10-15 years as compensation for recognition, the ultimate Soviet position would be to accept Norwegian recognition of Soviet sovereignty over Franz Joseph Land only, not over the rest of the territories covered by the decree of 1926.³⁷ It was also considered, and even hinted to the Norwegians, that a positive outcome to the long-standing discussions on a Soviet-Norwegian non-aggression treaty would facilitate a solution of the dispute over Franz Joseph Land,³⁸ although it was finally decided not to link the two questions.³⁹ Thus the Soviets were still playing the *Arctic card* in order to drive home foreign policy initiatives related to slightly more hospitable regions. In order not to

³⁶ In the summer of 1930 the Norwegian seal hunting ship *Isbjørn* was arrested in the waters of the archipelago, and the Norwegians delivered a protest on 8 August.

³⁷ DVPSSSR (cf. note 12), Vol. XIII, document No. 317, Stomoniakov to Kollontai, 12 September, 1930.

³⁸ NMFA, 40 E 99, message to legation in Moscow, 9 September, 1930; and DVPSSSR, Vol. XIII, N. 334, Litvinov to Kollontai, 2 October, 1930. The idea of a Norwegian-Soviet non-aggression treaty was introduced by Alexandra Kollontai in February 1928. Despite Mowinckel's strong desire to come to agreement with the Soviets, the talks came to nothing. The basic reason for the failure was that the Soviets wanted an agreement on non-aggression similar to the treaties they were in the process of concluding with a number of their neighbouring states, while the cautious Norwegians were only interested in an agreement on mediation and arbitration. The talks, which never acquired the form of formal negotiations, were utterly undramatic and cordial.

³⁹ AVPRF, fond: *Arkhivno-spravochnaia biblioteka Skandinavskikh stran*, op. 22, p. 1, d. 12, "Kratkij obzor sovetsko-norvezhskikh otnoshenii 1917-1954gg", l. 18.

sharpen unduly the conflict with the Norwegians, the *Glavsevmorput* (Main Administration of the Northern Sea Route), which in the 1930s was in charge of all Soviet activity in the Arctic regions, was ordered to prevent the Norwegians from illegally hunting and fishing in the area of the archipelago, but never to use armed force. The NKID also instructed the *Glavsevmorput* to supply the Norwegians with meteorological data from the archipelago.⁴⁰

Soviet activity on Svalbard developed in accordance with the general increase in Soviet activity in the Arctic regions. An attempt was made to start the geological exploration of Bear Island in the summer of 1920, but it was not until 1925 that the Soviets sent their first geological expedition to Spitsbergen proper.⁴¹ From then on the Soviet government systematically acquired parcels of land and existing coal mines from British, Swedish and Dutch interests, until they were ready to start mining on their own in 1931. Motivated by the task's "big political-economic importance for the country", the Council of Labour and Defence, chaired by V.M. Molotov, decided on 25 March 1931 to launch the organisation of coal mining on Svalbard.⁴² From its start in 1933 the Soviet production of coal on Svalbard, under the auspices of *Arktikugol*, rapidly increased until it equalled and even in some years surpassed that of the Norwegians. With a peak in 1937 of over 454,000 tonnes, the production gradually decreased to about 270,000 tonnes in 1940.⁴³

As part of the overall development of their presence on Svalbard, the Soviets decided in 1931 to install a small radio

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ L.V. Pechurov, *Shpitsbergen*, Moscow, 1983, pp. 92-93.

⁴² A copy of the decision in the AVPRF, f. 06, op. 9, p. 62, d. 936, ll. 74-75.

⁴³ Cf. Adolf Hoel, *Svalbard. Svalbards historie 1596-1965*, Oslo, 1966, Vol. I, p. 417.

transmitter on one of the islands. This led to a rather sharp Soviet-Norwegian exchange of notes. The Norwegians demanded that the Soviets comply with a set of preconditions, while the Soviets argued that the Treaty's Article 4 (on the operation of "wireless telegraphy stations" on Svalbard) did not authorise the Norwegians to intrude into this purely Soviet matter.⁴⁴ The Norwegian Ministry for Foreign Affairs finally advised that the dispute should be resolved through direct contact between Arktikugol and the relevant Norwegian authorities.⁴⁵ In 1936-37, Soviet request for permission to store Svalbard coal in Northern Norway for the use of Soviet ships was turned down by Norwegian authorities, who feared that this might compromise Norway's neutrality in case of war between the Soviet Union and any of the other great powers. After the Norwegians delivered their official, and negative, reply on 29 July 1937, the Soviet Minister to Norway expressed his understanding of the Norwegian position, and made it clear that the Soviet government would not insist. Iakubovich also said that he hoped that similar requests from other powers would be treated in the same way. A request from a Dutch firm in the summer of 1938 was, in fact, also turned down.⁴⁶

The increased Soviet activity on Svalbard did not mean that the area had been given priority in Soviet foreign policy or strategic thinking. When in September 1932 Andreas T. Urbye, the Norwegian Minister in Moscow, tried to discuss a number of matters related to Svalbard with Litvinov, who by then had succeeded Chicherin as Commissar for Foreign Affairs, he reported home that Litvinov had not familiarised himself with

⁴⁴ DVPSSSR (cf. note 12), Vol. XV, documents Nos. 245, 249, 257.

⁴⁵ NMFA, H 63 G 2/24, Ministry for Foreign Affairs to Ministry of Trade, 25 August, 1932. For more details, cf. Adolf Hoel, *op. cit.* (cf. note 43), Vol. I, pp. 359-61.

⁴⁶ For more details, cf. NMFA, H 2 G 1/37.

the dispute over the radio transmitter and other questions related to Svalbard which worried the Norwegians.⁴⁷ Soviet interests on Svalbard prior to the outbreak of the Second World War were mostly economic, and the available documentation does not imply that the Arctic played any important role in Soviet military-strategic thinking. A NKID memorandum of November 1944, prepared in connection with Trygve Lie's visit to Moscow, emphasised that the decision to accede to the Treaty in 1935 was based on the need to secure Soviet economic and legal rights on Svalbard. Strategic considerations had apparently not been taken into account.⁴⁸ Although only Norway and the USSR continued to pursue economic activities of some significance on Svalbard in the 1930s, the Soviets did not attempt, and most likely did not intend, to formalise this process of "bilateralisation"⁴⁹ through a revision of the 1920 Treaty.

Nonetheless, the development of the Soviet Arctic in the 1930s laid the foundation for the later attempts to obtain a change in Svalbard's international status. This also involved the Soviet Navy. The reconstruction and expansion of the Soviet Navy which started with the introduction of the five-year plans in 1929 also laid the foundation for Soviet naval activity in the High North. In 1933 the Baltic-White Sea channel was opened, and in the same year the Northern Flotilla was founded. In 1937 the unit was renamed the Northern Fleet. Construction of the naval base at Poliarnoe in the Kola fiord started, and the established centres of Murmansk and Arkhangelsk were further developed. However, as late as 1936 the Northern Flotilla was of limited size and had no ocean-going capability. According to one source it comprised three destroyers, three submarines, a number of tankers and icebreakers, and a small number of

⁴⁷ NMFA, legation in Moscow to Ministry, 21 September, 1932.

⁴⁸ AVPRF, f. 0116, o. 27, p. 128, d. 22, ll. 38-43, Vetrov et al. to Molotov and Dekanozov, 25 November, 1944.

⁴⁹ Cf. Tamnes, *Svalbard og stormaktene* (cf. note 3), pp. 36-37.

aircraft.⁵⁰ The naval historian in question, Donald W. Mitchell, maintains that the Arctic prior to the Second World War "had never been a main theatre of interest to the Russians". Although not completely neglected in Russian and Soviet naval thinking, it had been regarded as less important because of its limited population and poorly-developed resources.⁵¹ Therefore, according to Mitchell, neither "the Russians nor the Germans had any real appreciation of the strategic potential of the Arctic theatre" before hostilities erupted between Germany and the Soviet Union in 1941.⁵² After the end of the Russian-Japanese war, and with the evolution of the French-Russian-British entente in the early years of the twentieth century, the Baltic, the Black Sea and the Mediterranean, but not the Arctic regions, were at the centre of Russian naval strategic thinking.⁵³

The experience of the First World War did not change this picture, despite the fact that more goods were delivered by Russia's allies along the northern route (mainly to Arkhangelsk and Murmansk) in the years 1914-1917 than during the Second World War. Part of the reason for Soviet Russia's lack of interest in developing the naval capacity in the North should be sought in the evolution of its relationship with Germany and the western powers respectively, after the revolution. The importance of securing the communication lines through the northern waters became apparent only when the Soviets realised that Hitler was not a transitional figure and that Germany, not Britain, would be the enemy in a coming war. The creation and

⁵⁰ Donald W. Mitchell, op. cit. (cf. note 14), p. 421.

⁵¹ Cf. also the discussion in Jens Petter Nielsen, "Ønsket tsaren seg en isfri havn i nord?", *Historisk tidsskrift* (Oslo), 1991, No. 4, pp. 604-621.

⁵² Donald W. Mitchell, op. cit. (cf. note 14), p. 421.

⁵³ Jürgen Rohwer, "Alternating Russian and Soviet Naval Strategies", in Philip S. Gilette and Willard C. Frank, Jr., eds., *The Sources of Soviet Naval Conduct*, Lexington/Toronto, 1990, p. 99.

development of the Northern Flotilla and the Northern Fleet from the mid-1930s reflected, therefore, the change in Soviet perceptions of the nature of the threat which took place during Litvinov's period in office.

Prior to the battle of Tsushima in 1905 Russia had been one of the world's major sea powers. Russian naval thinking had consequently focused on the development of a balanced high-sea fleet comparable, with regard to the composition of the fleet and the task it was assigned, to the fleets of the other great powers. These imperial ambitions lived on in Soviet naval thinking through the 1920s⁵⁴, but had gradually to give way to the severe economic and technological limitations of the early Soviet period. At the end of the decade the "new school" in Soviet naval thinking replaced the *classicists* and their strategic concepts. From now on, and until the pendulum swung back on the eve of the Second World War, the role of the Soviet Navy was seen primarily as one of supporting the operations of the Army. Emphasis was put on "an active coastal defence carried out with simple naval weapons that could be produced without great industrial expense". The new operational concepts included "the massive use of mines, small submarines, torpedo boats and aircraft". These strategic and operational concepts were reflected in the naval construction programmes of the first two five-year plans.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Cf. the Soviet demands at the Rome conference in February 1924, when the Soviet representatives demanded consent for a Soviet navy of 491,000 tonnes, only slightly less than the quota of 525,000 tonnes which both the United States and Great Britain had been permitted at the Washington conference of 1921-22. See Jürgen Rohwer, op. cit. (cf. note 53), p. 102.

⁵⁵ Jürgen Rohwer, op. cit., pp. 102-3; see also Donald W. Mitchell, op. cit. (cf. note 14), pp. 370 *et passim*; Eric Morris, *The Russian Navy: Myth and Reality*, London, 1977, p. 19; and Bryan Ranft and Geoffrey Till, *The Sea in Soviet Strategy*, London, 1983,

The third five-year plan which was launched in 1938 put heavy emphasis on the development of the Navy. The programme reflected the return of the *classicist* approach in Soviet naval thinking. The shipbuilding programme, which has been compared to President Roosevelt's naval construction programme of the summer of 1940,⁵⁶ aimed at the building of a "powerful and balanced surface fleet", which could "serve as a real extension of Soviet diplomacy".⁵⁷ However, the 1938 programme had yielded only limited results when the war in Europe erupted, and the urgent need to strengthen the Army and the Air Force once more forced the Soviet government to postpone the development of a modern, balanced high-sea fleet. In October 1940 the building of all large ships was halted, while the building of destroyers, submarines and small combat ships was accelerated.⁵⁸ Thus at the outbreak of the war the Soviet Navy was limited in respect of both the quantity and quality of its material, and the basically defensive and shore-bound strategic concepts of the 1930s still dominated Soviet naval thinking. Within such a framework, the distant Svalbard archipelago was not thought to be of great interest.

p. 85.

⁵⁶ Jürgen Rohwer, *op. cit.* (cf. note 53), pp. 104-05.

⁵⁷ Eric Morris, *op. cit.* (cf. note 55), p. 21.

⁵⁸ Jürgen Rohwer, *op. cit.* (cf. note 53), p. 106.

3. 1939-1944: The awakening of Soviet strategic interests in the High North

The rising tension in Europe in the late 1930s brought to an end Svalbard's privilege of being outside the scope of the great powers' military-strategic considerations. The eve of the outbreak of the Second World War in September 1939 saw the first of repeated attempts from various quarters to convince the Soviet foreign policy leadership of the need to implement a more vigorous policy in defence of Soviet military-strategic interests, real or alleged, on Spitsbergen and Bear Island. In the summer of 1941, and after the outbreak of the Soviet-German war, these basically geostrategically motivated efforts finally resulted in a half-hearted Soviet proposal to occupy Svalbard by Allied forces, in order to safeguard the communication lines in the Arctic and to implement the Soviet idea of opening a front in Northern Norway. However, even in 1941, when the first Western convoys to the Soviet Union forced their way through Arctic waters, these geostrategically motivated ideas failed to convince the Allied military decision-makers. The Soviet population on Spitsbergen was evacuated together with the Norwegians, and for the rest of the war there was no Soviet activity on any of the islands. Contrary to what is often suggested the war did not demonstrate the strategic importance of the Svalbard archipelago including Bear Island. Quite the opposite - Svalbard played a minor role in Allied or German strategy, and was far outside the operational range of the shore-bound Soviet Northern Fleet. The key to the various Soviet wartime initiatives concerning Svalbard should therefore be sought in the schemes of a number of activist bureaucrats in the MID apparatus, whose geostrategically motivated arguments were not based on military-strategic planning or operational analyses of Svalbard's role in Soviet defences.

1939-1941: The appearance of an activist attitude

It seems that the first person to try to draw the attention of the Soviet foreign policy leadership to the need to review Soviet policy on Svalbard because of the imminence of war was the Secretary at the Soviet consulate in Barentsburg, Luzanov.⁵⁹ During a meeting in late July 1939 with A. I. Plakhin, the leader of the Scandinavian Department, and in a subsequent memorandum, he presented a number of proposals which were aimed at strengthening the Soviet position on the archipelago.

Luzanov noted that Svalbard so far had been discussed "only as an additional source of coal" for Northern Russia, i.e. that strategic considerations had not been taken into account. Deploring this state of affairs, Luzanov based his memorandum on

the immensely (iskliuchitelnoe) important military-strategic position and significance of the Spitsbergen islands as a Navy base which controls the entire region [i.e. the Barents Sea and Soviet lines of communication].

As the Germans were allegedly strengthening their position in these northern waters, Luzanov presented a whole package of measures which required implementing in order to strengthen Soviet influence and control over Spitsbergen and Bear Island. These were mainly of an economic nature, but aimed partly at creating preconditions for the presence of Soviet personnel

⁵⁹ When the Soviet legation in Oslo in January 1939 was ordered to provide "spravki" on a number of topics for use by the decision-makers in the Commissariat, the list of assignments included information about Svalbard and the work of the Arktik-ugol. When the legation received new additional assignments in September and October 1939 (i.e. after the outbreak of the war), questions related to Spitsbergen were not on the list. Cf. AVPRF, f. 0116, op. 21, p. 121, d. 398, l. 2, Bezhanov and Kobetskii to Nikonov, 9 January, 1939; and *ibid.*, l. 160, Frolov's note, undated.

outside the confines of existing coal mining sites, on Bear Island in particular. Luzanov's memorandum contained no hints that he was thinking in terms of a revision of the basic stipulations of the Paris Treaty.⁶⁰ The Soviet consulate did not receive any immediate response from the Commissariat, and continued to argue that it was necessary to strengthen the Soviet presence on Svalbard, for both strategic and economic reasons, even after the publication of the Ribbentrop-Molotov agreement and the outbreak of the war.⁶¹

Presumably as a direct result of Luzanov's initiative, Pavel D. Orlov of the Scandinavian Department was ordered to write a memorandum on "Spitsbergen and its importance to the USSR", to be finished before the end of August.⁶² The Commissariat also asked the consulate in Barentsburg and other institutions to send papers on Svalbard to the Commissariat,⁶³ and Plakhin warned against giving the Norwegians a pretext to restrict Soviet activities on Spitsbergen.⁶⁴

Finally, in early December 1939, the Scandinavian Department proposed a number of measures along the lines suggested

⁶⁰ AVPRF, f. 0116, op. 21, p. 121, d. 398, ll. 83-90, Luzanov to Plakhin, 5 August, 1939.

⁶¹ AVPRF, f. 0116, op. 21, p. 121, d. 397, ll. 18-21, Volnukhin and Luzanov to Dekanozov, 30 October, 1939.

⁶² AVPRF, f. 0116, op. 21 (1939), p. 121, d. 400, ll. 15-17, "Plan raboty...".

⁶³ AVPRF, f. 0116, op. 21, p. 121, d. 397, l. 5, Kartashev to Lozovskii, 16 August, 1939; *ibid.*, l. 13, Plakhin and Orlov to Luzanov, 19 October, 1939.

⁶⁴ AVPRF, f. 0116, op. 21, p. 121, d. 395, ll. 35-36, Plakhin to Lozovskii, 8 September, 1939. Plakhin discussed the desirability of denouncing the so-called Ålesund concession of 1926 which gave Norwegian seal hunters the right to hunt for seals in certain parts of Soviet territorial waters, but warned against the adverse foreign policy effects of a Soviet initiative to abrogate the agreement.

by the consulate. However, the measures aimed basically at improving the working conditions and the efficiency of the Soviet consulate, and only indirectly reflected the *military-strategic* concerns which had motivated Luzanov. It is also interesting to note that the Scandinavian Department proposed organizing an interministerial conference on Svalbard without the participation of the military. Nor did the *Skandinavskii otdel* suggest measures which would contradict the stipulations of the 1920 Treaty.⁶⁵

One may preliminarily conclude from the available evidence that the consulate's initiatives in 1939 did not produce much response from Moscow in terms of a profound reevaluation of Svalbard's significance, neither economic, nor strategic. The emphasis in the consulate's proposals on Svalbard's allegedly immense "strategic importance" reflected the civilian MID bureaucrats' tendency to think in geostrategic terms without regard to the operational and technological realities. Although the relevant documentation from the General Staffs of the Army and Navy is still inaccessible, one can safely assume that the initiatives of the consulate and the Scandinavian Department in 1939 were independent of any deliberations which may have taken place within the military establishment.

The German occupation of Norway in the spring of 1940 brought more substance to the deliberations over Svalbard's actual or potential strategic significance. It is not clear who took the initiative to renew the question in the spring of 1940. A memorandum to Deputy Commissar Lozovskii of 16 May from Orlov, who was now acting head of the Scandinavian Department, is the first evidence which places the *strategic* concerns at the centre of the argument at this high political level. Apart from stressing strongly the economic importance to Northern

⁶⁵ AVPRF, f. 0116, op. 21, p. 121, d. 397, ll. 22-25, Orlov to Lozovskii, 1 December, 1939.

Russia of the coal from Spitsbergen,⁶⁶ Orlov warned that one of the warring parties, "in the first instance England", might occupy Spitsbergen. Taking into account the importance of Spitsbergen and Bear Island for the defence of Soviet marine communication lines and "our northern borders", Orlov concluded that one should "immediately initiate the necessary preventive measures in order to defend our interests on Spitsbergen, as well as on Bear Island".⁶⁷

In early June NKID asked Viktor Plotnikov, the Soviet Minister in Oslo,⁶⁸ and the consulate on Spitsbergen to supply as much information about Svalbard as possible. On 1 July NKID received a message from the Soviet consulate, which concluded that Svalbard should be taken under Soviet "protection" (*arkhipelag Svalbard neobkhodimo vziat pod sovetskoe pokrovitelstvo*). The letter from Volnukhin and Luzanov was triggered by a question from the Norwegian Governor in Longyearbyen, who had allegedly asked Volnukhin "whether the Soviet Union would allow the Germans to occupy Svalbard, taking into account that the Soviet Union had also guaranteed Norway's sovereignty over Svalbard".⁶⁹ The Consul and his Secretary warned that German occupation of Svalbard would have grave consequences for the Soviet Union. They ended their

⁶⁶ Orlov argued that it would take approximately 800 trains to transport from the Donbas to Northern Russia the equivalent of the 300,000 tonnes of coal which were produced on Spitsbergen each year.

⁶⁷ AVPRF, f. 0116, op. 22, p. 122, d. 13, ll. 25-26, Orlov to Lozovskii, 16 May, 1940.

⁶⁸ Plotnikov remained in Oslo after the German occupation of Norway, but the "polpredstvo" was transformed into a General Consulate, and Plotnikov assumed the title of Consul General.

⁶⁹ The 1920 Treaty contains no guarantees of this kind. Maybe Volnukhin misunderstood; the Governor may have said "acknowledged" and not "guaranteed".

letter by appealing to the NKID leadership to consider their proposal.⁷⁰

A few days later, Molotov received a lengthy memorandum on Svalbard. The document was basically a presentation of the history of Svalbard's international status (including Bear Island), tracing the Svalbard question up to the Soviet accession to the Paris Treaty in 1935. Molotov read the memorandum, underlined key issues and dates, and sent it to the archives. It should be noted that the memorandum emphasised that Bear Island, as opposed to Spitsbergen, had been historically regarded as Russian territory.⁷¹

In the summer of 1940 the Commissariat for Foreign Affairs commissioned two additional memoranda, one on Spitsbergen and a separate one on Bear Island. The two documents were of an almost purely historical character, and from their content and conclusions one can only infer that the European war had led to a new interest in the archipelago. However, the memorandum on Spitsbergen refers to Bear Island in a way which points directly to one of the elements in Molotov's November 1944 initiative:

It should be noted, that neither the Czarist nor the Soviet government (until to-day) regarded Bear Island as a separate, independent question, but always as part of the general Spitsbergen question. This, no doubt, was a mistake.⁷²

Vice-Commissar Lozovskii's assistant Novgorodov, who wrote the memorandum, was not the first to criticise NKID for not having instituted a separate Soviet policy on Bear Island. A

⁷⁰ AVPRF, f. 0116, op. 22, p. 122, d. 13, l. 16, Volnukhin and Luzanov to Lozovskii, 17 June, 1940 (received in NKID on 1 July).

⁷¹ AVPRF, f. 0116, op. 22, p. 122, d. 4, ll. 1-7, "Spravka po voprosu o Shpitsbergene", without signature, 5 July, 1940.

⁷² AVPRF, f. 06, p. 22, d. 266, "Spravka o Shpitsbergene", l. 35. The memorandum on Bear Island is in the same dossier.

memorandum from December 1922 made a similar point, arguing that "Bear Island, in contrast to Spitsbergen" used to be regarded as Russian territory. The Soviet protests of 1920 against the Paris Treaty should have pointed to the particular status of Bear Island as compared to the general Spitsbergen question.⁷³

The Soviet Consul in Barentsburg continued to argue for a more offensive Soviet policy on Svalbard. In letters to Lozovskii of 12 and 26 July Volnukhin repeated and further developed the previous arguments. By now the Consul's arguments had become predominantly military-strategic. Volnukhin argued that a power possessing military bases on Spitsbergen and Bear Island would be in control of the exit from Northern Russia to the Atlantic. The importance of this had been enhanced by the closing of the straits between the Baltic Sea and the North Sea. Volnukhin argued that either Germany or Great Britain could be expected to take effective control over Svalbard at any time, thereby creating a serious threat to Soviet communication lines and Northern Russia in general. Volnukhin concluded that the Soviet Union should dispatch naval units to Spitsbergen and Bear Island and take the whole of Svalbard "under its protection". The Norwegians on Spitsbergen should be transported to mainland Norway immediately upon the arrival of the Soviet vessels.

Although Volnukhin's letters referred to the current military and political situation in Europe, he added a geological argument in order to prove that the entire archipelago was, as a matter of fact, part of Russia (from the geological point of view, so to speak). He also mentioned the mood of Soviet workers on Spitsbergen, who allegedly felt that "Spitsbergen ought to be

⁷³ AVPRF, f. 0116, p. 102, d. 43, l. 85.

Soviet", and were confused and depressed by the lack of decisive Soviet action.⁷⁴

Volnukhin's urge for more "decisive" action was given support from the NKID's Scandinavian Department. In early August Orlov and Androsov, a senior official in the Department, sent a strongly worded message to Deputy Commissar Lozovskii, indicating the possibility that Germany might create military bases on Spitsbergen. Orlov and Androsov also called attention to the German military buildup which had started in Northern Norway, implying that the presence of German military bases in both mainland Northern Norway and Spitsbergen/Bear Island would present an acute danger to the security of Northern Russia. Warning against unsatisfactory "half measures", Orlov and Androsov recommended that the Svalbard archipelago should be occupied "by units of the Red Army" for the duration of the war and until the "period of complete normalisation of international relations". Like Volnukhin, the representatives of the Scandinavian Department went beyond arguments of a military-strategic nature, reminding Lozovskii that Norway's sovereignty over Svalbard was the result of the "Versailles system", which in turn was an "element of Anglo-French and American imperialism".⁷⁵

The documentation about the reaction of Molotov and his deputies to the advice from their subordinates is still inadequate. However, one may assume that Molotov, whose overriding priority at this time was not to disturb relations with Germany, was unwilling to complicate matters by taking action on Svalbard which would undoubtedly give rise to German irritation. One can also assume that NKID employees on the

⁷⁴ AVPRF, f. 0116, op. 22, p. 122, d. 13, ll. 40-44, Volnukhin to Lozovskii, 12 July, 1940; *ibid.*, ll. 45-49, Volnukhin to Lozovskii, 26 July, 1940.

⁷⁵ AVPRF, f. 0116, op. 22, p. 122, d. 13, ll. 50-52, Orlov and Androsov to Lozovskii, 3 August, 1940.

level of Volnukhin or even Orlov were not well-informed about the subtleties of Soviet policy and intentions towards Germany.

The German attack on the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941 meant that for the first time Svalbard's military-strategic potential became the subject of serious examination by the Allied military leaders.⁷⁶ On the Soviet side, arguments of the kind which had been forcefully but vainly presented by the consulate in Barentsburg and by the Scandinavian Department finally managed to command the attention of the top political and military leadership.

In June and July 1941, i.e. immediately after the Germans launched their attack, the Soviet government proposed to their British Allies a joint expedition to Spitsbergen, in order to establish an Allied military presence on the archipelago. The Spitsbergen expedition was presented as part of a broader Soviet scheme to create a new theatre of war in the High North, which would also include military operations on Norwegian territory.⁷⁷

The idea of an Allied expedition to Spitsbergen was first raised by Molotov himself on 15 July 1941 during a conversation with Sir Stafford Cripps, the British Ambassador in Moscow. The available evidence, which unfortunately is somewhat limited, suggests that the Soviet initiative did not grow out of a carefully executed strategic and operational analysis of Svalbard's strategic potential. In a telegram about the conversation with Sir Stafford Cripps to Ivan M. Maisky, the Soviet Ambassador to Britain, Molotov paraphrased himself as having told Cripps that

⁷⁶ The most thorough discussion of Svalbard in Allied strategy during the Second World War is in the two volumes of Olav Riste's *"London-regjeringa"* (cf. note 3).

⁷⁷ For more details, cf. *ibid.*, Vol. I, pp. 134-37; and Sven G. Holtmark, *Mellom "russerfrykt" og "broygging"*. *Sovjetunionen i norsk utenrikspolitikk, 1940-45*, p. 72 et passim.

it would be desirable if the English together with us took control over Spitsbergen, where at the moment there are 1500 Soviet workers, and also over Bear Island. This would be useful for Anglo-Soviet military operations in Northern Norway. It would also significantly facilitate air communications between the USSR, England and the USA.

In a later telegram Molotov told Maisky that

during the negotiations we discussed the possibility that the English take Spitsbergen with their own forces, as a convenient point for military action in Northern Norway.⁷⁸

The version contained in Molotov's published minutes of his conversation with Cripps puts the emphasis on the defence of the lines of communication. In this version, Molotov told Cripps that the creation of naval and air bases on Spitsbergen and Bear Island "would secure the creation of reliable communications between the USSR and England and between the USSR and the USA".⁷⁹ Ivan Maisky underlined the same points when the Spitsbergen expedition in mid-August was discussed at a British-Soviet-Norwegian meeting of diplomats and officers. Maisky wanted an assurance from the British that the lines of communication with the West would be kept open, otherwise, he said, "we will have to find another route".⁸⁰

It is still too early to draw more than tentative conclusions about Soviet motives and long-term aims in this early phase of the war against Germany. However, the fact that the Soviets proposed a *joint Allied* expedition, and the evolution of the

⁷⁸ AVPRF, f. 06, op. 9, p. 62, d. 936, l. 39 (?), "Spravka. O Shpitsbergene i ostrove Medvezhem (po materialam 10 Otdela)", i.e. extracts from telegrams of July 1941.

⁷⁹ *Sovetsko-angliiskie otnosheniia vo vremia Velikoi Otechestvennoi voiny 1941-1945*, Vol. I, Moscow, 1983, document No. 22.

⁸⁰ NMFA, 36.6/10 A, Vol. I, Skylstad's minute from the tripartite conference on 12 August 1941.

Soviet position during the discussions which took place in the summer of 1941, seem to support the view that the Soviet proposals did not primarily reflect long-term strategic plans which could be seen as expressing the annexationist elements of the 1939 and 1940 recommendations, or as preceding Molotov's initiative of November 1944. In fact, the Soviets quickly dropped the initial idea of sending Soviet troops to the archipelago, proposing instead to supply weapons to the Soviet miners on Spitsbergen. At the beginning of the discussions, Anthony Eden told Lie that Maisky had authorised him to say that the Soviet government had "no territorial claims of any kind upon Norway, nor would they ever have them".⁸¹

Nothing emanated from this less ambitious idea, and in the autumn of 1941 the Soviets agreed to and took part in the evacuation of Norwegian and Russian civilians from Spitsbergen.⁸² The Russians may have been convinced by British arguments that an Allied occupation of Svalbard would have limited or no relevance for the question of keeping open the lines of communication with Russia, and that the islands themselves, as a matter of fact, were of no great strategic importance.⁸³ For the remainder of the war the Soviets made no attempts to establish themselves on the archipelago.

⁸¹ Olav Riste, *Svalbardkrisen 1944-1945*, in *Forsvarsstudier/Defence Studies 1981*, Oslo, 1982, p. 32.

⁸² Volnukhin's report about the evacuation is in the AVPRF, f. 0116, op. 23a, p. 123a, d. 1, ll. 1-12. Cf. also Martin Kitchen, *British Policy Towards the Soviet Union During the Second World War*, London, 1986, p. 87.

⁸³ Cf. the British position as discussed in Riste's works quoted above. This view was stated clearly by the British participants at the meeting on 12 August.

1942-1944: Svalbard again at the periphery

Although the German occupation of Norway and the Soviet Union's entry into the war had brought Northern Norway, and even Svalbard, into focus, a number of factors tended to diminish the strategic and operational relevance of the archipelago as the war continued.

The Soviet Navy's expansion programme, launched in 1938, had not fundamentally changed the strictly shore-bound role of the Soviet Northern Fleet. Admiral Nikolai G. Kuznetsov was from 1939 Commissar of the Commissariat of the Navy (which had been independent since 1938), and Commander of the Soviet Navy during the war. He has recalled that as late as the summer of 1940 discussions about the role of the Northern Fleet focused on the defence of the coastline and the Kola inlet.⁸⁴ When the Germans attacked the USSR in June 1941 the strength and capabilities of the Northern Fleet, which was commanded by Rear Admiral Arsenii G. Golovko, were strictly limited. Operating from bases in Murmansk and Poliarnoe (and with summer bases at Arkhangelsk, Molotovsk and Belomorsk), it consisted according to one source of not more than eight destroyers, three torpedo boats, a somewhat larger number of motor torpedo boats, subchasers and icebreakers, and 27 submarines.⁸⁵ This was hardly a fleet which could make any meaningful use of bases on distant Spitsbergen or Bear Island. During the war the Northern Fleet never operated as a unit under the direct command of the supreme naval authorities. It was regarded as a supporting leg of the Army, subordinate until late August 1941 to the Northern Front, and from then on

⁸⁴ Mary Dau, *Sovjetunionen og Danmark, 1944-1949*, Copenhagen, 1969, p. 270, note 2.

⁸⁵ Donald W. Mitchell, op. cit. (cf. note 14), p. 423.

operating under the command of the Karelian Front.⁸⁶ It was not supposed to conduct operations on its own on the High Seas. The fact that in the March 1940 cease-fire agreement with Finland the Soviets were so willing to evacuate the Soviet troops from Pechenga and return the area to Finland, can only be understood as reflecting a Soviet conviction that the High North would not become a vital theatre of operations for Soviet forces if the Soviet Union were to become involved in the ongoing great power war.

From June 1941, the Soviets concentrated on supplying and developing the Army and the Air Force, and most of the decisive battles were fought on the huge plains in the depth of the Russian and Ukrainian land mass. In this perspective Scandinavia and Norway were at the periphery, and not until the summer of 1944, when Soviet forces were already rapidly moving towards the Soviet western borders, did the Soviet leaders turn their attention to the far northern flank. Stalin's ideas from December 1941 about Norway's position after the war as part of a British zone of influence suggest that his ambitions in Norway, and probably the rest of Scandinavia proper, were strictly limited. The basically defensive Soviet approach to Scandinavia at this time was further underlined by his hint that he would like to see some kind of international guarantee that the outlets from the Baltic Sea would be kept open.⁸⁷ In January 1942, when President Roosevelt hinted to the Soviet Ambassador in Washington that it might be "necessary" and "just" for the Soviets to have an ice-free port in

⁸⁶ Jacob W. Kipp, "The Second Arm and the Problem of Combined Operations: The Russian-Soviet Experience, 1853-1945", in Philip S. Gillette and Willard C. Frank, Jr., eds., op. cit. (cf. note 53) p. 149.

⁸⁷ Mary Dau, op. cit. (cf. note 84), pp. 13-14. Molotov had brought up the matter of the Baltic Straits in his November 1940 talks in Berlin.

Northern Norway, "maybe at a place like Narvik", which could be connected to Soviet territory by a "corridor", the Soviet answer was prompt and unambiguously negative. On 18 January Molotov instructed Ambassador Litvinov to tell Roosevelt that the Soviet government interpreted the President's suggestion to mean that the Soviet Union should "occupy" Narvik. Litvinov should further tell the American President:

In connection with this the Soviet Government deems it necessary to inform the President that the Soviet Union does not have, and has never had, territorial demands of any kind on Norway, and that it therefore cannot accept the proposal to occupy Narvik with Soviet forces.⁸⁸

The imminence of war in Europe in the summer of 1939, then the German occupation of Norway, and finally the German attack on the Soviet Union, had forced the Soviets for the first time to discuss Svalbard seriously within a military-strategic framework. However, it was only the prospect of peace and a radically altered postwar balance of power which produced the first and only serious Soviet attempt to draw the Svalbard archipelago into the Soviet Union's defence perimeter. Contrary to widespread opinion, the experiences of the Second World War had largely demonstrated the military-strategic *irrelevance* of Svalbard under the prevailing political and technological conditions.⁸⁹ Only the immensely increased international prestige and ambitions of the victorious USSR, and future

⁸⁸ *Sovetsko-amerikanskii otnosheniia vo vremia Velikoi Otechestvennoi voiny, 1941-1945: Dokumenty i materialy*, Vol. I, Moscow, 1984, documents Nos. 66, 67, 73. Cf. also Olav Riste, "An Idea and a Myth: Roosevelt's Free Port Scheme for Norway", in *Americana Norvegica IV: Norwegian Contributions to American Studies*, Oslo, 1973.

⁸⁹ Cf., however, Trygve Mathisen, *Svalbard in the Changing Arctic*, Oslo, 1954, pp. 44-45.

military, technological and political prospects, brought Svalbard for a time closer to the centre of Soviet global interests.

4. 1944-1945: Molotov stakes his claims on Svalbard

Molotov's proposals for a fundamental change in the international status of the Svalbard archipelago, which he presented to Trygve Lie in the early hours of 12 November 1944, came as a bolt from the blue. Molotov's initiative, which appears to have been the result of a last-minute decision, reflected efforts by his subordinates in the Commissariat for Foreign Affairs and by the head of the *Glavsevmorput* to introduce a more "active" policy towards Norway. The MID bureaucrats linked the Svalbard question to a need to review the Soviet-Norwegian border and to establish a Soviet military presence in Northern Norway. Although military-strategic concerns were prominent in Molotov's arguments and in internal MID documents, it appears that the initiative did not originate with the military authorities. It seems even likely that the General Staff was not informed about Molotov's *démarche*.

Having recovered from the initial shock, the Norwegian government attempted to define the terms of the ensuing negotiations, and presented its own counterproposals for a solution. By appearing forthcoming and full of understanding for Molotov's proposals, the Norwegians hoped to appease the Soviets and avoid even harsher Soviet demands. The Norwegian strategy culminated on 9 April 1945, when Ambassador Andvord sent to Molotov the draft for a Soviet-Norwegian declaration on Svalbard. The draft document declared *inter alia* that the defence of Svalbard should be the joint responsibility of Norway and the Soviet Union.

Molotov's *démarche* of 12 November 1944

At noon on 18 October 1944, soldiers of the Red Army's 45th Division, 131st Infantry Corps of the 14th Army, crossed the Norwegian border at Grense Jacobselv, east of Kirkenes. One week later units from General Shcherbakov's 14th Army liberated Kirkenes as part of the Karelian Front's general offensive in the High North. The battle for Kirkenes was the last big battle of the Karelian Front's offensive, and the fighting subsided when the Soviet troops reached the river Tana. The Red Army established itself only in the north-easternmost part of the country, although there was no clear understanding among the Allies that the liberation of Norway should be the task of the western powers.⁹⁰ Nor did the agreements on jurisdiction and administration in liberated territories, which the Norwegian government concluded with the western Allies and the Soviet Union, define or limit the territory which might be liberated and administered on a preliminary basis by Norway's Allies.⁹¹

A more than tentative evaluation of the motives behind the Soviet decision to cross the Norwegian border must await

⁹⁰ For a brief discussion of general aspects of Northern Norway's place in the wartime strategy of the great powers, see Olav Riste, "Nord-Norge i stormaktspolitikken, 1941-1945, in *Forsvarsstudier. Årbok for Forsvarshistorisk forskningssenter*, Oslo, 1987, pp. 40-58. Cf. the same author's more comprehensive discussion in his "London-regjeringa" (cf. note 3), Vol. II, p. 157 *et passim*. In a memorandum from early May 1944 Christopher Warner in the British Foreign Office noted that "there is no agreement with the Russians as to Norway being an Anglo-American sphere of operations [...]". Cf. Sven G. Holtmark, *op. cit.* (cf. note 77), p. 106, note 8.

⁹¹ The text of the agreements is printed in Riste, "London-regjeringa" (cf. note 3), Vol. II, pp. 401-10.

additional Soviet archival materials.⁹² Soviet studies on the topic, and the memoirs of the Front commander Meretskov and other leaders of the operation, not surprisingly conclude that the crossing of the border on 18 October was dictated by operational necessity. Western analyses have tended to support this view, arguing that there are no signs that the crossing of the border was linked to any further *political* designs with regard to Northern Norway.⁹³ Stalin's suggestion to Churchill in October 1944 that the Soviets and the British might cooperate in operations in Northern Norway (the British would presumably

⁹² So far I have not been able to locate much material of direct relevance in the AVPRF. Most likely the archives of the General Staff and the Russian Ministry of Defence hold the answer to the questions about the political background to the Soviet liberation of Eastern Finnmark in October-November 1944.

⁹³ A number of authors have dealt with various military and political aspects of the "Petsamo-Kirkenes operation". The following are just a few important works, but these also give references to further reading. The historian A.M. Noskov provides a fairly detailed picture of the planning of the operation in his *Norvegiia vo Vtoroi mirovoi voine*, Moscow, 1973. K.A. Meretskov discusses the operation in his memoirs and in various articles, for instance in "Voiska perekhodiat granitsu", in *Cheres fiordy*, Moscow, 1964. James F. Gebhardt provides a picture of the military operations in his *The Petsamo-Kirkenes operation: Soviet Breakthrough and Pursuit in the Arctic, October 1944*, issued by the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College as No. 17, 1990, of the series *Leavenworth Papers*. Yehlel Rapoport summarised available Soviet and western literature in his study *Soviet operations in North-Norway in 1944-45: Plans and Motives*, unpublished M.A. thesis from the Department of Russian Studies of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1978. The fullest picture of the operations as seen by the Norwegian government-in-exile in London and by the western Allies is provided in Olav Riste, "London-regjeringa" (cf. note 3), Vol. II.

provide naval support) has been seen as an additional sign that at this stage the Soviet leader did not intend to make all of Northern Norway an exclusive Soviet area of operations.⁹⁴

Trygve Lie, although aware of the possibility that Soviet troops might pursue the Germans into Norwegian territory, was informed about the presence of Soviet troops in Norway only on 25 October.⁹⁵ He was then already *en route* via Stockholm to Moscow where he hoped to finalise a set of agreements on Soviet-Norwegian military cooperation in the North. In the following months, the presence of Soviet troops on Norwegian territory heavily influenced the Norwegian government's reactions to Molotov's initiative. Soviet documents imply that the fear among the Norwegians that the Soviet government might use their troops to exert pressure on them was not entirely unfounded.

At 1 a.m. on 12 November 1944 Trygve Lie was asked to come to Molotov's office in the Kremlin.⁹⁶ After an exchange of remarks on various topics in world politics, Molotov said that "at the moment the Soviet government is more interested in another element of our mutual relations", i.e. the 1920 Paris Treaty on Svalbard. The Treaty had been negotiated "without and against the Soviet Union", and this "discriminating" situation was no longer tolerable. The Treaty, therefore, could not remain in force. Until 1920 Spitsbergen had been a no-

⁹⁴ Olav Riste, "London-regjeringa" (cf. note 3), Vol. II, pp. 229-230. Cf. also Nils Morten Udgaard, *op. cit.* (cf. note 3), pp. 62-63.

⁹⁵ Trygve Lie, *Hjemover*, Oslo, 1958, p. 148.

⁹⁶ The following is based on the minute from the conversation in the Molotov files in the AVPRF, f. 06, op. 6, p. 41, d. 538, ll. 12-19. See also Lie's own version in Trygve Lie, *op. cit.*, pp. 155-173. Lie's and Andvord's notes from the conversations are in the archives of the Norwegian Ministry for Foreign Affairs, dossier 36.6/10 A, Vol. I.

man's-land, and Bear Island had been "practically" Russian territory.

Molotov's arguments were economic and strategic. Prior to the war, coal from Spitsbergen had been of immense importance to Northern Russia. Apart from that, "the Soviet Union's only exit to the sea in the west passes Spitsbergen". The Soviet Union had an obvious interest in the archipelago, while some of the signatory powers, such as Italy and Japan, had nothing whatsoever to do with the area.

Only two countries, Norway and the Soviet Union, have real interests in the waters of this area, and they should reach an agreement on this, and throw the Treaty into the wastepaper basket.

Arguing that the Soviet government had been "forced" to agree to the Treaty in 1924, Molotov continued:

The Soviet government will in due course raise before those interested the question of reviewing and abrogating the Treaty. But he [i.e. Molotov] would inform Lie in advance, so that the Norwegian government should be the first to know. This is because the Soviet government is of the opinion that this question concerns primarily two countries - Norway and the Soviet Union. The Soviet government want to reach an agreement with the Norwegian government. The role of other countries will be a passive one.

Thus Molotov made it quite clear that the problem of Svalbard's international status should be solved primarily on a bilateral basis. The western Allies should be presented with a *fait accompli*, although their consent would be needed in order to

achieve the formal abrogation of the Treaty.⁹⁷ Molotov then went on to present the Soviet proposals:

[...] the Soviet government proposes that the Spitsbergen Islands, which until 1920 were no-man's-land, should be administered after the abrogation of the Treaty jointly by the two countries as a condominium (v poriadke kondominiuma). Bear Island should belong to the Soviet Union, because since long before 1920 it had in practical terms been a Russian island. If Norway and the Soviet Union can solve this question on this fair basis, it would correspond to both countries' security interests in the North, as well as satisfy our countries' economic interests. It would also remove the discrimination against the Soviet Union, which was inherent in the ill-conceived (zlopoluchennaia) Treaty.

On Lie's remark that it would be impossible to deal with this question without "our Allies", Molotov answered that he would not "hurt" (obidet) Great Britain (typically, he did not mention the United States!), but that he was absolutely certain the Allies would not object if the Norwegian and Soviet governments agreed between themselves.

At the end of the conversation, Lie said that he would have to discuss the matter with the other members of the Norwegian government. He would then give his instructions to the Norwegian Ambassador in Moscow, Rolf Andvord.

The Soviet minutes from the conversation with Lie and Andvord, written by Molotov's interpreter Pavlov and thereafter approved by Molotov himself, are close to the version which was presented by Lie and Andvord in their reports on the

⁹⁷ It appears that Gromyko was instructed on 16 November to inform Stettinius about the conversation, but that this instruction was recalled due to Molotov's intervention. AVPRE, f. 0116, op. 28, p. 131, d. 28, ll. 1-2, handwritten comment on Zhdanova's "spravka" of 22 April 1946. For a partially diverging interpretation of Molotov's initiative, see Olav Riste, "London-regjeringa" (cf. note 3), Vol. II, pp. 318-19.

conversation, and by Lie in his memoirs.⁹⁸ Parts of the Soviet and Norwegian minutes are almost identical; both the Soviet and Norwegian versions, for instance, include Molotov's statement that the Treaty deserved to be thrown "into the wastepaper basket". The only somewhat significant difference seems to be the absence in Molotov's minutes of the reference to the connection between the Soviet Union's situation in the North on the one hand, and the problem of the Dardanelles on the other. According to Lie's colourful description in his memoirs Molotov said:

*We must reach an agreement, because as the situation is now, the Soviet Union is locked in. He [i.e. Molotov] stood up and got a map, put his clenched fist on the Dardanelles and said: Here we are locked in. He moved his hand to Öresund: Here we are locked in. Only in the North is there an opening, but this war has demonstrated that the supply lines to North-Russia can be broken or hindered. This will not repeat itself in the future.*⁹⁹

Andvord's minute, which he set up immediately after the conversation, does not explicitly say that Molotov made the comparison to the Dardanelles or Öresund, although Molotov allegedly made the statement that the USSR "is locked in".¹⁰⁰ Nor do Trygve Lie's supplementary comments to Andvord's minutes from late December 1944 contain references to the Black Sea and Baltic Straits. Lie, on the other hand, implies that Molotov hinted at the existence of American bases on Iceland and Greenland.¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ Trygve Lie, op. cit. (cf. note 95), pp. 155-159.

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 159.

¹⁰⁰ NMFA, 36.6/10 A, Vol. I, Andvord's minutes from conversation on 12 November 1944.

¹⁰¹ NMFA, 36.6/10 A, Vol. I, Lie's memorandum of 29 December, 1944.

Although the strategic parallel is obvious -- in both cases it was for the Soviet Union a matter of securing the exit to the open seas -- the available Soviet documentation of Molotov's initiative does not contain explicit references to the issue of the Dardanelles. There was also a striking discrepancy between the tough Soviet policy towards Turkey from the spring of 1945 onwards and the lack of determination which characterised Soviet policy on Svalbard. This is not all that surprising: while there were severe and indisputable military-strategic implications for the Soviet Union regarding the question of who controlled the entrances to the Black Sea, the relevance of Svalbard in the matter of securing the waters of the High North was questionable. A memorandum of October 1944, which will be discussed extensively below, draws a parallel with "the much more complicated question of the 'Danish' straits", but does not propose linking the two questions.¹⁰²

The bureaucratic foundation of Molotov's initiative

Although the Soviet documentary evidence is not conclusive, it appears that the decision to raise the Svalbard question was made shortly before the conversation took place. The general circumstances of the conversation -- Lie was called to Molotov in the middle of the night, a few hours before he was scheduled to leave for Stockholm -- suggest that this was a last-minute decision. When Stalin was presented with the plan for Lie's visit in the early days of November, he was informed for instance that the NKID planned to discuss with Lie some minor problems of cooperation between Soviet and Norwegian authorities in the

¹⁰² AVPRF, f. 116, op. 28, p. 20, d. 5, ll. 1-18, Zhdanova's "Kratkaia spravka...." of 27 October, 1944.

parts of Finnmark county which were being liberated by the Red Army. But Svalbard was not mentioned.¹⁰³

Molotov's initiative, on the other hand, should be seen against the background of ideas under consideration in the NKID apparatus and in other government offices.

In a letter dated 11 November 1944, the head of the *Glavsevmorput* (the Northern Sea Route Directorate), Rear Admiral Ivan D. Papanin, reminded Molotov of the economic and scientific importance of Spitsbergen prior to the war. Papanin concluded:

I strongly urge you, Viacheslav Mikhailovich, to secure Spitsbergen island for the Soviet Union (ostavit o. Shpitsbergen za Sovetskimi Soiuzom) during the talks with Norway, as a base for scientific activity in the extreme points (v krainikh tochках) of the western sector of the Arctic and in order to exploit the [natural resources on the island], which are of great economic importance to the USSR.¹⁰⁴

Thus, Papanin's reasons were *economic* and *scientific*. Strategic considerations were apparently absent from his mind. It seems likely that Molotov read Papanin's letter only after his meeting with Trygve Lie on 12 November. It is quite possible, on the other hand, that Papanin had raised the topic with Molotov or people in the NKID apparatus before he wrote his letter.

Glavsevmorput was much more than an organisation in charge of the Northern Sea Route: it was in fact involved in all kinds of economic and scientific undertakings in the Arctic regions. Ivan Papanin, who directed the organisation from 1939 to 1946, was one of the foremost leaders in Soviet Arctic development.

¹⁰³ AVPRF, f. 012, op. 5, p. 64, d. 152, ll. 5-7, "Tovarishchu Stalinu I.V."

¹⁰⁴ AVPRF, f. 0116, op. 27, p. 128, d. 22, l. 53, Papanin to Molotov, 11 November, 1944.

Molotov read the letter, and forwarded it to his deputy Dekanozov without any written comments. Dekanozov, who was present at Molotov's meeting with Lie together with Molotov's interpreter Pavlov, signed his own memorandum on Svalbard on 11 November. In all likelihood this document constituted Molotov's main background support during the discussion with the Norwegian Foreign Minister.

As usual in NKID background briefings, a lengthy historical argument formed the major part of Dekanozov's memorandum. Dekanozov emphasised Russia's strong historical links with Spitsbergen. Bear Island, according to Dekanozov, had "from the earliest times been regarded as Russian territory". Prior to the First World War Russia had supported the principle that the Spitsbergen archipelago (i.e. except Bear Island) was *terra nullius*, and the Soviet government had therefore from 1920 to 1923 repeatedly protested against the Paris Treaty of 1920. Dekanozov also indicated the economic importance of the high-quality Spitsbergen coal for Russia's northern regions and Soviet shipping in the North.

Taking into consideration the Soviet Union's economic interests on Spitsbergen, and "Bear Island's extreme (iskliuchitelnoe) strategic importance both for the security of the Soviet mines on Spitsbergen, and in order to safeguard Soviet communications in the North", Dekanozov presented a number of recommendations. The Soviet government should reestablish its legal rights on Spitsbergen as soon as possible.

At the same time one should reach an agreement with the Norwegian government that the Soviet Union should have the right, if it deems it necessary, to organise one or more naval and air bases [...] on the main Spitsbergen archipelago [...].

It would also be necessary to agree on

the building of a naval base on Bear Island in order to defend our rights on Spitsbergen and to safeguard the movements of Soviet ships of the Northern Fleet.¹⁰⁵

Dekanozov also proposed to reopen the Soviet consulate as soon as possible. This last recommendation indicates that Dekanozov still thought in terms of Spitsbergen as Norwegian territory.¹⁰⁶

Finally, a senior staff member in the 5th European Department, Tatiana Zhdanova, concluded at the end of October a lengthy treaty "On the question of the Russian-Norwegian border".¹⁰⁷ This memorandum, even more than the one written by Dekanozov, is fundamentally an example of "applied history". Starting with Aleksandr Nevskii, the great Novgorod ruler in the 13th century who won battles against the Swedes and the Germans, Zhdanova organised her materials in order to prove that the present Soviet-Norwegian (i.e. until October 1944 the Soviet-Finnish) border was the result of complex historical circumstances and not entirely satisfactory to the Soviet Union. She discussed in detail the Treaty between Russia and Sweden-Norway of 1826 which forms the basis of the present border, and quoted the Czar's Minister for War, who in the year 1900 stated that Russia's border with Norway in the North "was artificially drawn not to our benefit", and that there was "a natural wish on our part to correct this part of our border".

In her concluding remarks, Zhdanova linked the Svalbard question to the Soviet Union's interests in northern Scandinavia:

¹⁰⁵ Most likely he had in mind both the merchant fleet and the Navy.

¹⁰⁶ AVPRF, f. 06, op. 9, p. 62, d. 936, ll. 40-48, "Po voprosu o Shpitsbergene i Medvezhem ostrove".

¹⁰⁷ AVPRF, f. 116, op. 28, p. 20, d. 5, ll. 1-18, "Kratkaia spravka k voprosu o russko-norvezhskoi granitse", signed by Zhdanova on 27 October, 1944.

Of course, the question of our exit to the Atlantic Ocean and the entrance to us from the Atlantic *includes the Spitsbergen question* [Zhdanova's underlining], together with the much more complicated problem of the "Danish" straits. The first of these, i.e. the Spitsbergen question, is historically and, what is much more important, practically linked with the Lapland question. One can say that Spitsbergen constitutes one side of the channel which connects the Atlantic Ocean with our arctic regions. This channel used to be a very broad one, but it has to a significant degree been "squeezed" by the evolution of aviation. In this way, the question of reviewing our border with Norway is closely linked with the review leading to a decision on the Spitsbergen question.

The fact that Petsamo (Pechenga) was returned to the Soviet Union from Finland, did not, in Zhdanova's opinion, solve the problem of the "channel" to the Atlantic. Thus Zhdanova argued along the lines which had been introduced by the Soviet Consul in Barentsburg in 1939 and 1940, but introduced the development of modern aviation as an additional reason to alter the *status quo* in the High North.

Zhdanova was aware, however, that raising the Soviet-Norwegian border problem would adversely influence the discussions in progress with the Allies over, inter alia, Poland and the Balkans. It would also "automatically" lead to a resurgence of the idea of "Northern Unity", i.e. "the creation in one form or another of a bloc directed against us, which would be practically led by England".

Zhdanova concluded:

Taking into account the foreign policy benefit which the Red Army's participation in the liberation of Northern Norway has brought us, it would be appropriate to exploit the Norwegians' need for a counterweight, through friendship with the USSR, to the English attempts to achieve a "portugalisation" of Norway. In the course of the war England has gained almost complete control over Norway. i.e. it appears that it would not be difficult for us to reach an agreement with the Norwegians on joint [sic] cooperation on the defence of Northern Norway; on the building of naval and air

bases, necessary railways etc. Otherwise the English will do this. The creation of this kind of close postwar Soviet-Norwegian cooperation, which would ensure for the Soviet Union appropriate permanent influence in Norway, would leave the possibility of raising the problem of a correction to the Soviet-Norwegian border at a more suitable moment.

The most astonishing part of Zhdanov's proposal is her assumption that it would be easy to reach an agreement with the Norwegian government on the joint defence of Northern Norway. This was certainly a basic misinterpretation of Norwegian attitudes. Although members of the Norwegian government and other influential people were extremely careful about airing their anxiety over Soviet expansionism in the North, their propagation of the idea of "bridge building" was balanced by a solid dose of traditional "russophobia", reinforced to a certain degree by the Soviet military presence in Finnmark. Trygve Lie was basically distrustful of Soviet long-term intentions, despite the Soviets' high opinion of him which reflected his pragmatic understanding of the need to accommodate Soviet interests.¹⁰⁸ Even cautious hints along the lines proposed by Zhdanov would certainly have alarmed the Norwegians, and immediately led to a reevaluation of the Norwegian foreign and security policy doctrine.

Zhdanov was not alone in arguing that Soviet participation in the liberation of Northern Norway should not only serve the common goal of victory over Germany. Mikhail S. Vetrov, the dynamic functioning head of the 5th European Department, i.e. Zhdanov's immediate superior, argued against the participation of Norwegian "police troops" from Sweden in the liberation of Norwegian territory. Such participation, according to Vetrov,

¹⁰⁸ The interaction among Norwegian governing circles between the ideology of "bridge building" and the ingrained "russophobia" is one of the central theses of my earlier quoted work, *Mellom "russerfrykt" og "brobygging"* (cf. note 77).

would give these troops an opportunity "to repress possible revolutionary [and anti-government] sentiments in the Norwegian population".¹⁰⁹ On the other hand Vetrov did support the idea of transferring Norwegian troops from Britain to the Soviet Union, on the precondition that these troops should come under Soviet operational control, and also be trained and "educated" by the Soviets. The presence of such Soviet-controlled Norwegian military formations on Norwegian territory "might prove to be of positive value to us".¹¹⁰

Zhdanov's highly optimistic, from the Soviet point of view, interpretation of Norwegian attitudes towards the Soviet Union was reflected in the Soviet evaluations of the Norwegian Foreign Minister, Trygve Lie. At this point, and for some years after he became Secretary General of the United Nations, Lie was one of the Soviets' favourite politicians in the West. In a briefing paper prepared for his visit in November 1944, Lie was praised for his staunch opposition to the idea of Nordic cooperation, and for his positive attitude towards the Soviet Union. According to this paper, Lie understood that close relations with the Soviet Union were the only way Norway could avoid being completely politically and economically dominated by Britain.¹¹¹

One can conclude, therefore, that Molotov's initiative was set in the context of attempts by his subordinates and other interested authorities to introduce an ambitious scheme of close

¹⁰⁹ It is interesting to note that A.M. Noskov has a similar argument in his book on Norway in the Second World War. Cf. Noskov, op. cit. (cf. note 93), p. 160. Noskov implies that the police troops from Sweden were planned to be sent to the areas liberated by the Red Army in order to prevent any anti-governmental movements among the population.

¹¹⁰ AVPRF, f. 0116, op. 26, p. 126, d. 10, ll. 42-44, Vetrov to Dekanozov, 18 October, 1944.

¹¹¹ AVPRF, f. 012, op. 5, p. 64, d. 152, ll. 3-4, "Kratkaia spravka".

Soviet-Norwegian cooperation, including the joint defence of parts of Northern Norway and Svalbard. Apart from the outsider Admiral Papanin, this activist lobby included Mikhail S. Vetrov, functioning head of the 5th European Department, and Tatiana Zhdanova, responsible *referent* for Norwegian affairs. Of even greater significance at this point, however, was the participation of Vladimir Dekanozov, one of Molotov's deputies who was in charge of Norwegian affairs at this time.¹¹²

Molotov, nevertheless, was apparently no more prepared to discuss the details of the matter than Lie. Both Lie and Andvord argued that Molotov gave the impression of being poorly prepared to discuss the matter. Apparently unable to understand his predecessors' motivations, he asked his subordinates immediately after the meeting with Lie to find "all documents" which could explain why the Soviet Union had decided in 1935 to sign the Paris Treaty; "the result [of the inquiry] to be reported *to me*".¹¹³

Norway searches for a solution

Rolf Andvord's first advice to the Norwegian government was to attempt to make the Soviets accept a multinationalisation of the issue. In his analysis of the probable reasons for Molotov's initiative, Andvord stressed the strategic factor, arguing (like Zhdanova) that modern aviation had radically enhanced the strategic significance of the Svalbard archipelago for the defence of the Soviet Union's maritime activity in the North. Andvord warned against leaving Molotov's initiative without an accommodating and prompt response: this could lead to even more far-

¹¹² Dekanozov was closely connected to the security apparatus, and had been Soviet Ambassador to Germany on the eve of the Soviet-German war.

¹¹³ AVPRF, f. 06, op. 9, p. 62, d. 936, l. 48.

reaching Soviet demands. Andvord also stressed the paramount importance of having friendly relations with the USSR, and a negative Norwegian response *or* further Soviet demands would certainly undermine the relationship. Andvord proposed, therefore, that the Norwegian government should declare that a final solution could only be reached after the conclusion of the war, when the government was back in Norway. This solution, however, should be the result of international rather than bilateral negotiations. The issue could, for instance, be referred to the forthcoming general peace conference. Andvord hinted that the Norwegian government would have to accept some version of the Soviet proposals, but that Norway should be given compensation in the form of equivalent territories and hunting opportunities.¹¹⁴

After Lie's return to London, a special group was appointed to formulate the Norwegian government's response to Molotov's initiative.¹¹⁵ Arnold Ræstad, a specialist on international law and an advisor to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, agreed to the Soviet view that the war had demonstrated that the Treaty's Article 9 (that Svalbard should not be used "for warlike purposes") could not be upheld. Ræstad further suggested that a defence arrangement for Svalbard could be linked to the kind of regional security systems under international (Security Council) control which had been discussed at Dumbarton Oaks, although he was far from clear about what Svalbard's status would be within the system.¹¹⁶ It is important to note that Ræstad and Andvord agreed on the need to revise Article 9, i.e.

¹¹⁴ NMFA, 36.6/10 A, Andvord's P.M. of 21 November, 1944, with additions of 26 November.

¹¹⁵ Cf. Riste, "*London-regjeringa*" (cf. note 3), Vol. II, for a more detailed discussion of the deliberations of the Norwegian government.

¹¹⁶ NMFA, 36.6/10 A, Ræstad's memorandum of 5 December, 1944.

they were from the outset inclined to accept the military-strategic rationale of the Soviet proposal. Andvord in particular, but also Ræstad, was prepared to accept the legitimacy of the Soviet demand for the inclusion of the Svalbard archipelago, in one way or another, into the postwar Soviet defence system. They both rejected the alternative of leaving the Soviet *dé-marche* without a response or of refusing to enter into discussions with the Soviet government.

The special working group met on the weekend of 9-11 December to formulate a Norwegian response. The results of their deliberations were sent to Andvord on 12 December, in the form of a detailed exposé which he should present orally to Molotov.¹¹⁷

Acting on these instructions, Andvord was received by Molotov on 29 December and presented the Norwegian response. Andvord appeared forthcoming and cooperative: he stressed at the outset that the Norwegian government understood that the Soviet Union had "special interests" on Svalbard. Andvord further told Molotov that his government agreed that events during the war had shown that the neutralisation of Svalbard did not satisfy the interests of "the two primarily interested powers", Norway and the Soviet Union, and that the other signatory powers would supposedly agree to a cancellation of Article 9 (the demilitarisation clause) of the Treaty. This would clear the way for the use of the archipelago for military purposes, within the framework of "a global or regional system". Emphasizing that any agreement on Svalbard would need the consent of the Norwegian Storting, Andvord concluded:

The Norwegian government is ready to discuss with the Soviet government the possibility of concluding an agreement between Norway and the Soviet Union on military utilisation of the

¹¹⁷ NMFA, 36.6/10 A, draft of telegram to Andvord, j.nr. 27819/44.

Spitsbergen Islands, including Bear Island, taking into account the security interests of the Soviet Union.

However, any such agreement would come into force only if the other interested powers declared their consent to an abrogation or reformulation of Article 9. In order to achieve this, the Norwegian government would be willing to make with the Soviet Union a joint appeal to the other powers as soon as the Soviet and Norwegian governments had reached an agreement.

Molotov's response was noncommittal. Repeating his historical arguments from the previous conversation, he emphasised even more firmly the strategic importance of Spitsbergen with regard to the Soviet Union's lines of communication in the northern waters. He also made a short reference to the fact that German soldiers had attacked the Soviet Union from Norwegian territory. He did not, however, suggest that Northern Norway should be included in the discussions.

Molotov stressed that the Soviet government was not interested in a solution "based on the Paris agreement". He reiterated the main Soviet demands: joint control of the Spitsbergen islands and the transfer of Bear Island to the Soviet Union.¹¹⁸

Molotov's cold reaction to Andvord's declaration prompted the Norwegians to take one more step towards accommodating the Soviet demands. Andvord was instructed to say that the Norwegian government would be willing to discuss a revision of the entire Treaty *after* Norway and the Soviet Union had reached an understanding on a defence arrangement. Thus the Norwegians suggested a two-step approach: first the Soviet and Norwegian governments should agree on a defence arrangement,

¹¹⁸ AVPRF, f. 06, op. 6, p. 41, d. 536, ll. 12-16, minutes from Molotov's conversation with Andvord on 29 December, 1944. Andvord's statement as recorded in Molotov's minutes was in accordance with the instructions he had received from London.

and thereafter they should notify the signatories of their desire to revise the entire Treaty. The renegotiated treaty would incorporate the Soviet-Norwegian understanding on the defence of the archipelago.¹¹⁹

The next meeting between Molotov and Andvord took place on 25 January 1945, apparently on Andvord's initiative. The Norwegian Ambassador continued to underline that the Norwegian parliament, after the liberation of Norway, would have the final word on any change in the status of Svalbard, and that a Norwegian-Soviet agreement on cancellation of or a change in the Paris Treaty would need the consent of the other interested powers. Andvord continued to talk about the need to reach an agreement on "safeguarding the security needs of both countries", which should then be presented to the other interested powers for approval. Did this mean, Molotov asked, that

the Norwegian government proposes to start negotiations about joint defence of Spitsbergen and Bear Island [but that prior to] the signing of the agreement [...] one would have to consult the interested powers [...]

Andvord confirmed that this was a correct interpretation of the Norwegian government's point of view. He made it clear, however, that the Norwegian government would find it difficult to agree to bring into the negotiations the idea of a "condominium", i.e. joint Soviet-Norwegian administration and sovereignty.¹²⁰

Andvord's report to London about the conversation departs significantly from the Soviet version. According to Andvord,

¹¹⁹ NMFA, 36.6/10 A, instruction to Andvord approved by the government on 10 January, sent to Moscow on the same or one of the following days, without date or journal number. Cf. also Arne Ording's memorandum of 20 January, and a telegram to the embassy in Moscow of the same day.

¹²⁰ AVPRF, f. 06, op. 7, p. 38, d. 573, ll. 2-6, minutes from Molotov's conversation with Andvord on 25 January, 1945.

what he did was basically to confirm the Norwegian proposal of 29 December. According to Andvord, Molotov understood that the Norwegian government was willing to discuss "a security arrangement". Thus Andvord's report did not mention that the idea of "joint Soviet-Norwegian defence" of Svalbard had been brought into the discussions, and that Molotov had been given reason to believe that the Norwegian government supported this approach.¹²¹

On 29 January Andvord was asked to come to Molotov's office, where Molotov read to the Norwegian Ambassador a prepared statement. Referring to Andvord's "proposals" of 25 January, the statement opened by reiterating the now well-known Soviet arguments about the bias of the Paris Treaty and the strategic and economic importance to the Soviet Union of Spitsbergen and Bear Island. The statement concluded:¹²²

The Government of the U.S.S.R. have studied with great attention the Norwegian statement conveyed to the People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs, M.V.M. Molotov, on the 25th January this year by M. Andvord, to the effect that:

1. The Norwegian government propose to negotiate on joint military defence¹²³ of the Islands of Spitsbergen and Bear Island, and. [sic]

¹²¹ NMFA, 36.6/10 A, Andvord to NMFA, 25 January 1925 (received in London in March?); Andvord to NMFA, 29 January 1945.

¹²² In the following I quote from a version in the English language which is printed in Olav Riste, "*London-regjeringa*" (cf. note 3), Vol. II, pp. 417-18.

¹²³ A more precise translation of the Russian phrase in Molotov's statement would be "propose to agree on joint military defence". Cf. AVPRF, f. 06, op. 7, p. 38, d. 573, ll. 11-16, minutes from conversation with Andvord on 29 January, 1945.

2. The Norwegian Government propose to consult the Allied Governments concerned about proposals worked out by the two Governments.

The Government of the USSR announce their agreement to the proposals submitted by the Norwegian Government and wish to propose on the basis mentioned above that negotiations should at the same time be carried out concerning the exploitation by the USSR and Norway of the coal and other resources on Spitsbergen, as well as concerning the necessity of abrogating the Treaty of the 9th February, 1920.

When Andvord said that the expression "joint military defence" had not been used in the instruction he had received from the Norwegian government¹²⁴, Molotov quoted Andvord's own statement from 25 January. Andvord then agreed that this did not deviate from what he had actually said. Andvord also told Molotov that he thought that the Norwegian government was thinking in terms of a Norwegian-Soviet military arrangement, without third country participation, but that he must consult his government about this.

Molotov told Andvord that the Soviet government still supported the idea of a "condominium", but that for the time being it would be satisfied if the two countries could agree on the need to cancel the Treaty without raising the question of a "condominium" or the kind of arrangement that should replace the present regime. Andvord told Molotov that he would do his best to convince the Norwegian government of the need to accept the Soviet proposals. The Norwegian Ambassador also said that he felt that his government would not object to a cancellation of the Treaty as such, but that one should bear in mind the need to consult other interested powers.

Andvord made it clear, however, that the Norwegian government did not want to raise the issue of cancelling the

¹²⁴ i.e. the instructions he had received prior to his meeting with Molotov on 25 January.

Treaty while negotiating a joint defence arrangement with the Soviets. In that case the Norwegian government "would have to approach the interested powers. This was exactly what the Norwegian government wanted to avoid".¹²⁵ This was in line with the Norwegian government's strategy of reaching an agreement with the Soviets on the defence of the archipelago before the signatories were notified about the USSR's and Norway's desire to abrogate the Treaty.

As was the case after the 25 January meeting, Andvord's reports to London about the conversation were not entirely accurate. The first telegraphic report, which was written and sent immediately after the meeting, did not quote the essence of Molotov's statement. According to that message, the Soviets accepted "our proposition about a security arrangement followed by an approach to certain Allied powers".¹²⁶ The written report, which Andvord brought with him when he came to London in late February, quoted Molotov's statement in full. In that version, Andvord objected to the inclusion of the expression "joint military defence", although he agreed that this might have been what the Norwegian government actually had in mind. Andvord did not, however, make it clear in his report that the idea was in fact his own, and that he had accepted Molotov's version of what had been said on 25 January.¹²⁷

The report about his conversation with Molotov which Andvord brought with him to London spawned hectic activity in the Norwegian foreign policy apparatus. The result of these deliberations was a set of instructions, agreed by the Norwegian government, which were then sent to Andvord. Acting on these instructions, Andvord was received by Molotov on 31 March,

¹²⁵ Cf. note 123.

¹²⁶ NMFA, 36.6/10 A, Andvord to NMFA, 30 January 1945, j.nr. 2791/45.

¹²⁷ NMFA, 36.6/10 A, Andvord's minutes from the conversation, dated January 29, 1945.

and presented an oral statement which had been prepared in London. In this statement the Norwegian government accepted the Soviet proposition of 29 January as the basis for further talks. The oral statement contained a number of "observations" concerning the organisation of the joint Norwegian-Soviet defence of Spitsbergen and Bear Island, the exploitation of coal mines, and procedures for the future abrogation of the 1920 Treaty.¹²⁸ Andvord also suggested that the two parties could sign a declaration based on what had been agreed and on Andvord's statement including the "observations".

Molotov expressed his satisfaction with the Norwegian message, which could serve as a basis for further negotiations. He promised to scrutinise Andvord's statement and give an answer.

Trygve Lie, however, had instructed the Ambassador to "keep the initiative",¹²⁹ and on 4 April Andvord received telegraphic instructions to deliver to the Soviets the Norwegian government's proposal for a joint declaration. On 9 April Andvord sent the document to Molotov. In a letter accompanying the declaration, the Norwegian Ambassador emphasised that Trygve Lie would leave London for San Francisco on April 15, and that he hoped the declaration could be signed before then.¹³⁰ The decision not to await the formal Soviet reaction to Andvord's statement and "observations" of 31 March reflected the Norwegians' intention of not letting the Soviets

¹²⁸ For an English version of Andvord's statement, see Riste, "London-regjeringa" (cf. note 3), Vol. II, pp. 417-18.

¹²⁹ This was underlined in the instructions Andvord received before he left London for Moscow in mid-March. NMFA, 36.6/10 A, Vol. I, Skylstad to Andvord, 16 March, 1945.

¹³⁰ An English version of the proposed declaration is printed in Riste, "London-regjeringa" (cf. note 3), Vol. II, p. 419. The following quotes are according to this version. Andvord's accompanying note is in AVPRF, f. 06, op. 8, p. 42, d. 687, l.1.

dictate the terms of an agreement. Andvord was of the opinion that a joint declaration along the lines of the 31 March statement was "the absolute minimum" of what the Soviet government would accept.¹³¹

Because the Norwegian proposal of 9 April 1945 formed the basis for the future discussions, it is necessary to present its content in some detail.

In the document's preamble it was declared that Norway and the Soviet Union had agreed that the neutralisation of the Svalbard archipelago was "impractical" and "in direct conflict with the interests of the two countries". It was further stated that the two countries wanted to make

an arrangement with regard to the use of the Archipelago for military purposes which may serve both to promote the security of the two countries and to be a regional link integrated in an international security organisation.

The agreement should be made pending consultations with the governments of France, Britain, the United States, Canada, Sweden and the Netherlands, and it should be "subject to the approval of a final arrangement by the Norwegian Storting".

The Declaration's Article 1 stated that the "defence of the Archipelago of Svalbard is the joint responsibility of Norway and the Soviet Union".

According to Article 2, the defence measures should be

in accordance with arrangements which may be made by an international security organisation of which both parties are members.

¹³¹ NMFA, 36.6/10 A, Vol. II, Andvord to Lie, 3 April, 1945. It appears that Lie received this letter only *post factum*, i.e. after 9 April.

Article 3 declared that all permanent installations should be situated on land "belonging to or which will be expropriated by the Norwegian Government".

According to Article 4, the two parties should "observe the principle of equality on all points" with regard to their relations in military affairs.

Article 5 stated that the two parties

will make agreements on the nature, extent and equipment of the permanent installations and on the composition of the forces which are to man them, on the question of command, on war establishment etc.

Article 6 stated that the distribution of the costs should be agreed.

Article 7 declared that

the fact that defence is undertaken in the particular interest of either Norway or the Soviet Union, will not in itself imply that the other party is to be considered a belligerent.

Finally, the 8th and last Article stated that the abrogation of the 1920 Treaty, "concerning which negotiations will later take place", would eventually take place in accordance with the rules of international law. States which had fought against the Soviet Union, Norway or their Allies, should not be consulted.

Thus, the Norwegian government declared its readiness to make an agreement on the joint Soviet-Norwegian defence of Svalbard, although the idea of joint possession, "condominium", was rejected.

Although the Norwegians received no response to their proposal,¹³² the draft declaration was scrutinised by the group

¹³² On the same that Andvord sent the note with the declaration, Vetrov sent Vyshinskii his drafts for a joint declaration and an answer to the Norwegian declaration of 31 March. I have not been able to locate these documents (I hope to find them in the Vyshin-

of MID personnel which dealt with Norwegian affairs. On 16 April Vetrov and Bazarov forwarded to Deputy Commissars Vyshinskii and Dekanozov their comments on the Norwegian text. Vetrov and Bazarov argued that the declaration should contain a statement to the effect that the Paris Treaty could no longer be considered valid, and that Norway and the Soviet Union should declare the Treaty abrogated. They objected to the expression "for military purposes" in the preamble, and proposed to insert a statement that "the promotion of security in the area of the Spitsbergen archipelago is the common task of Norway and the Soviet Union". They wanted to delete the paragraph in the preamble about the agreement being made pending consultations with the signatories, and to replace it with a statement that the Allied signatory powers had been informed about the Norwegian-Soviet declaration. Articles 2 and 3 should preferably be omitted, "in so far as it has been decided, that the Declaration should not mention the question of who will have the right of sovereignty over Spitsbergen".

Bazarov and Vetrov proposed the exclusion of the last two Articles, because the declaration itself would have the effect of declaring the Treaty invalid. There is a certain logic in this argument with regard to Article 8, which stipulated future multilateral negotiations about the abrogation of the Treaty. The exclusion of Article 7, however, could not reasonably be justified by reference to the abrogation of the Treaty. It seems likely that what Vetrov and Bazarov had in mind was the need to keep open the question of the Archipelago's international status, cf. their comments on Articles 2 and 3. Finally, they proposed to add a paragraph about the exploitation of coal on Spitsbergen, "which in the future should be carried out by

skii file).

Norwegian and Soviet owners on the basis of absolute equality".¹³³

The Norwegian draft declaration of 9 April 1945 marked the culmination of the Norwegian government's efforts to "keep the initiative" and accommodate the Soviet demands on Svalbard. From April 1945 until Molotov raised the matter again in the summer of 1946, the Russians made no serious efforts to finalise a Soviet-Norwegian agreement on Svalbard. This did not mean, however, that the Soviet foreign policy establishment ceased to take an interest in the matter. It only meant that Molotov felt that the Norwegian response had been fundamentally satisfactory, and that the Norwegian government had gone a long way towards committing itself to a far-reaching accommodation of Soviet interests on the archipelago. In this situation, there was no need to complicate the more important questions related to the peace settlement in Central and Southern Europe by bringing Soviet ambitions on Svalbard to the formal attention of the western great powers. After 9 April, therefore, the Soviets were in no hurry to finalise the talks with the Norwegians. The Norwegian government had agreed to the most important Soviet demand, i.e. a Soviet military presence on the islands.

¹³³ AVPRF, f. 0116, op. 27, p. 128, d. 22, ll. 1-4, Vetrov and Bazarov to Vyshinskii and Dekanozov, 16 April, 1945; and Vetrov's draft declaration of the same date.

5. 1945-1947: Foreshadows of the Cold War

From April 1945 to the summer of 1946 there were no Soviet-Norwegian talks on Svalbard. When the Soviets returned to the matter in August and November 1946, they were prepared to accept the basic principles of the Norwegian draft declaration of 9 April 1945. In early 1947 the Soviets were on the point of beginning formal negotiations with the Norwegian government based on that document. However, the extensive speculation in the international press about Soviet intentions towards Svalbard which followed an inspired article in *The Times* on 10 January, and finally the Norwegian Storting's decision of 15 February not to accept further negotiations on the basis of the April 1945 draft declaration, forced the Soviets to postpone a final settlement of the matter.

The same Commissariat bureaucrats who had presented part of the original rationale for Molotov's initiative in November 1944, continued throughout 1945 and 1946 to encourage the foreign policy leadership to conduct a more offensive policy towards Norway. Apart from encouraging the decision-makers to seek a solution to the Svalbard question, they continued to argue the need for the establishment of Soviet military bases in Northern Norway, and for changes to the Soviet-Norwegian border. Their efforts were endorsed by the General Staff, but were ultimately rejected by Molotov. Soviet policy towards Norway became ever more caught up in the evolution of East-West relations, and the Soviets gradually realised that their room for manoeuvre was strictly limited.

Summer 1945: Soviet bureaucrats on the offensive

Andvord had delivered his note on 9 April 1945. From 25 April to 10 May Molotov participated in the negotiations in San Francisco. In the ensuing months international conferences and pressing global issues apparently removed the Svalbard question and Norwegian affairs in general from the Soviet decision-makers' main agenda. Molotov was compelled to leave the Svalbard question to his subordinates. It is not clear whether Molotov mentioned the issue when he met Trygve Lie in San Francisco. Although there is no trace of this in the minutes of his talk with Lie on 7 May,¹³⁴ a document from the British Foreign Office implies that Lie asked for Molotov's opinion of the draft declaration. In this version, Molotov answered that he would return to the matter when he went back to Moscow.¹³⁵

Although strategic considerations were prominent in the Soviet efforts to get a revision of the Svalbard Treaty, there are few indications in the documents from the Commissariat for Foreign Affairs of any cooperation between Molotov and his subordinates, and the General Staff or other military bodies. The military authorities were apparently much more interested in arrangements which would give them a permanent foothold on the mainland of Norway. In a letter to Dekanozov of 24 January 1945, the Deputy Chief of the General Staff, General Aleksei I. Antonov, detailed the expenses which the Red Army had incurred in Norway. According to General Antonov, the Norwegian government ought to compensate the Soviet government by deliveries-in-kind, or with gold, or

¹³⁴ AVPRF, f. 06, op. 7, p. 2, d. 30, l. 146, minutes from Molotov's brief meeting with Lie on 7 May, 1947. A memorandum from July, 1945, which will be discussed later, presents the evolution of the negotiations up to 9 April, implying that no new authoritative instructions had been issued since that date.

¹³⁵ Olav Riste, "London-regjeringa" (cf. note 3), Vol. II, p. 330.

by giving to the Soviet Union on long-term lease territories which are necessary and important from the military point of view, with the right [for the Soviet Union] of erecting military constructions and creating bases.

The list of such "territories" included Spitsbergen and Bear Island, and the sea ports of Kirkenes, Tromsø, Vadsø, Vardø and Hammerfest.¹³⁶

Apart from documenting that the highest Soviet military authorities were not averse to the idea of a permanent Soviet military presence not only on Svalbard but also on mainland Norway, the letter gives the impression that General Antonov was not informed about the discussions underway on revisions to the Svalbard Treaty. It is impossible to know, without access to the files of the General Staff, to what degree an elaborate and authoritative analysis of the political and military aspects of an attempt to create Soviet bases in Northern Norway, Spitsbergen and Bear Island underlay the General's suggestion.

Dekanozov sent Antonov's memorandum to Vetrov, who then forwarded it to the Commissariat's Economic Department. At this stage, at least, the document was apparently *not* sent to Molotov, and it is unclear how the Commissariat for Foreign Affairs reacted to it. The General Staff's initiative was nevertheless in line with ideas which were very much alive among the foreign policy bureaucrats. While Molotov was concentrating on the more important European and global questions, his subordinates continued to press for a more offensive Soviet policy towards Norway. From early June 1945 onwards, a number of interrelated initiatives revived Zhdanova's October 1944 proposal to create a permanent or semi-permanent Soviet military presence in the northern parts of mainland Norway. A letter of 4 June from Rear Admiral Stepan G. Kucherov, the

¹³⁶ AVPRF, f. 012, op. 6, p. 81, d. 168, ll. 6-9, Antonov to Dekanozov, 24 January, 1945.

Chief of the Navy Staff (*Glavnyi morskoi shtab Voennomorskogo Flota*), provided Vetrov with an opportunity to press for a more active Soviet policy. In his letter, which was addressed to Dekanozov, Kucherov expressed concern about the presence of a significant number of German troops in Northern Norway. The Germans were only gradually being disarmed, and they were under no strict control. German vessels under German command were taking part in the mine-sweeping of Norwegian waters. German naval officers stationed in Tromsø were handing over German operational documents to the British, while Soviet members of a Soviet-Norwegian military delegation which had visited Tromsø had been unable to learn anything of interest.¹³⁷ Kucherov also stressed that the Norwegian military authorities were completely subordinated to the British, and were simply carrying out British requests. The Norwegians and the Allies, on the other hand, had a number of requests for the Soviets. They pressed, *inter alia*, for fast repatriation of the circa 45,000 Russian former PoWs who were in camps in the area around Tromsø; they requested Soviet ships to transport the prisoners home, etc.

Kucherov proposed that the Soviet government should "create a special staff in Norway, which could then immediately start to work on the problems which have been accumulating there". This staff should include representatives from the Commissariat for Defence, from the Navy Commissariat, from the Commissariat for Foreign Affairs, and from General Golikov's Repatriation Commission. Admiral Kucherov stressed that the group should be sent to Norway as soon as possible, in order to arrive in Tromsø while the German Navy staff elements were still

¹³⁷ The unexpected arrival of the group created some concern among the allies. Cf. *General Thornes rapport om frigjøringen av Norge*, Oslo 1955, pp. 41-42.

there.¹³⁸ It should be noted, however, that Admiral Kucherov did not suggest that the Soviet Union, for strategic or other reasons, should expand its *military* presence in Northern Norway by establishing military bases or by expanding the area controlled by Soviet troops.

Vetrov, who was asked to comment on Kucherov's letter, repeated Kucherov's description of the situation in Northern Norway. His conclusions, however, were more far-reaching. Arguing that the Norwegian-Soviet agreement of 16 May 1944 on jurisdiction and administration in territories liberated by Allied troops "does not limit the areas which can be occupied by one or other of the Allied powers", he supported Kucherov's plan to create a group of Soviet representatives in Norway, but also suggested that the Soviet government

give instructions to the General Staff of the Red Army to immediately move troops of the 14th Independent Army which are stationed in Northern Norway into the north-western part of Norway, up to and including Narvik.¹³⁹

Deputy Commissar Lozovskii supported Vetrov's initiative and sent an almost identical letter to Molotov. Repeating Vetrov's recommendations, he ended the letter by suggesting that the Norwegian government and the Allied Command in Norway should be informed about the movement of Soviet troops into north-western Norway only when the operation was under way.¹⁴⁰

On the same day that Vetrov gave his recommendations to Lozovskii, based on Admiral Kucherov's letter, he sent Molotov,

¹³⁸ AVPRF, f. 0116, op. 27, p. 127, d. 11, ll. 234-236, Kucherov to Dekanozov, 4 June, 1945.

¹³⁹ AVPRF, f. 0116, op. 27, p. 127, d. 10, l. 15, Vetrov to Lozovskii, 8 June, 1945.

¹⁴⁰ AVPRF, f. 0116, op. 27, p. 127, d. 11, p. 239, Lozovskii to Molotov, 11 June, 1945.

on his own initiative, a separate memorandum about Svalbard. Characterising his initiative as necessary to "protect our property" after the German surrender in Norway, he proposed sending to Spitsbergen and Bear Island not only an expedition to examine the state of Soviet coal mines and equipment, but also "to prepare [...] the reconstruction of the mines and the organisation of naval bases". Units of the Navy should be sent to Spitsbergen and Bear Island with this expedition, bringing with them "whatever is needed to create garrisons" to protect Soviet property. The Norwegian government should be informed of the dispatch of the expedition, and about the stationing of Soviet garrisons. Asking for Molotov's instructions, Vetrov concluded:

If the proposed measures are carried out they will to a significant degree help to finally resolve the Spitsbergen question.¹⁴¹

A letter to Molotov from the Commissar for the coal industry, Vasilii Vakhrushev, strengthens the impression of a lack of effective coordination between the Commissariat for Foreign Affairs on the one hand, and other commissariats and authorities dealing with Svalbard on the other. Vakhrushev, who sent his letter on 8 June, i.e. the day that Vetrov wrote his two memoranda to Lozovskii and Molotov, asked for Molotov's approval of his plan to send a group of specialists to Spitsbergen to prepare the reopening of the coal mines. Molotov gave his approval, and Vetrov was instructed to take the necessary steps to implement the plan.¹⁴²

Although Molotov had received and added his comments to the revised version of the Norwegian draft declaration prepared

¹⁴¹ AVPRF, f. 0116, op. 27, p. 128, d. 22, p. 5, Vetrov to Molotov, 8 June, 1945.

¹⁴² AVPRF, f. 0116, op. 23, p. 123, d. 13, l. 6, Vakhrushev to Molotov, 8 June, 1945.

by Vetrov and Bazarov on 16 April,¹⁴³ he did not respond to Vetrov's letter of 8 June. Vetrov, ordered to implement a decision which might conflict with his own more ambitious scheme, made a further attempt to move the decision-makers in his direction. In a letter to Lozovskii of 19 June, Vetrov emphasised that his initiative had been taken independently of Vakhrushev's letter, and that it had "political" rather than "economic" aims. Measures to secure Soviet interests should be used "to implement on Spitsbergen and Bear Island initiatives of a political and military-strategic nature". Vetrov warned against separating the Soviet economic interests "from the question of creating a naval base on these islands and of establishing our garrisons", and concluded that the implementation of Vakhrushev's plan should be postponed.¹⁴⁴

However, Vetrov did not succeed in stopping Vakhrushev's expedition. Lozovskii himself sent the necessary letters to Vakhrushev and the Navy Commissariat, and the expedition left for Spitsbergen in mid-September 1945. The tasks organised for the expedition, and also its composition in terms of personnel, seem to imply that this was, in fact, primarily a civilian affair.¹⁴⁵ The result of the expedition's work on Spitsbergen provided the basis for the Sovnarkom's decision on 29 August 1946 to rehabilitate the Soviet mines on Spitsbergen.

Molotov's failure to respond did not discourage his subordinates from taking further initiatives. In early July Vetrov and Zhdanova wrote two memoranda to the Deputy Commissars who

¹⁴³ AVPRF, f. 06, op. 8, p. 42, d. 687, l. 9, Vetrov to Podtserob, 25 June, 1945; *ibid.*, ll. 27-28, version of 16 April draft with Molotov's comments.

¹⁴⁴ AVPRF, f. 0116, op. 27, p. 127, d. 22, ll. 7-8, Vetrov to Lozovskii, 19 June, 1945.

¹⁴⁵ The names and assignments of the participants, together with the list of tasks to be carried out, are included in AVPRF, f. 0116, op. 23, p. 123, d. 13, ll. 12-14.

dealt with Norway, Vyshinskii and Lozovskii, trying once more to link a solution to the Spitsbergen question with the question of Soviet bases in Northern Norway. The first of the memoranda, called "Memorandum on the creation of naval and air bases in Northern Norway as a link in a general security system" and signed on 3 July, repeated (literally) Zhdanova's arguments from October 1944. The conclusion was also the same: it would be easy to reach an agreement with the Norwegian government on the common defence of Northern Norway and the creation there of Soviet military bases, strategic railways, etc. Once permanently established in Norway, the Soviet government could raise the need to revise the Soviet-Norwegian border at an appropriate time.¹⁴⁶ The memorandum on Spitsbergen and Bear Island, written by Vetrov and Zhdanova and signed on 4 July, reiterated the arguments which Dekanozov had presented to Molotov prior to the meeting with Trygve Lie in November 1944. Vetrov and Zhdanova emphasised the strategic importance of Spitsbergen and Bear Island, and concluded that the agreement with Norway on joint defence of the archipelago should be finalised. The 1920 Treaty should be abrogated, albeit through consultations with "the main Allied powers", and only Norway and the Soviet Union should have the right to exploit the natural resources on Svalbard.¹⁴⁷

At this point Vetrov received welcome support from the General Staff on the matter of necessary changes to the Soviet-Norwegian border. On 14 July and in response to a request from

¹⁴⁶ AVPRF, f. 0116, op. 27, p. 127, d. 5, ll. 33-35, "Spravka. K voprosu: O sozdanii voenno-morskikh i vozduzhnykh baz SSSR v Severnoi Norvegii, kak zvena v obshchei sisteme bezopasnosti", 3 July, 1945.

¹⁴⁷ AVPRF, f. 0116, op. 27, p. 127, d. 22, ll. 16-18, "Spravka. K voprosu: Ob otmene Parizhskogo Dogovora o Shpitsbergene i o sovместnoi zashchite Shpitsbergena i ostrova Medvezhii Sovetskim Soiuzom i Norvegiei", 4 July, 1945.

Vetrov, the Deputy Chief of the General Staff, Lt. General N. Slavin, set out in a letter the Army leadership's "ideas (soobrazheniia) on the Varanger fjord region and the Varanger peninsula". The letter had been approved by General Antonov, the Chief of the Red Army's General Staff.¹⁴⁸

The memorandum opened by stating that the experiences of the war had shown "the necessity (neobkhodimost) of improving our strategic situation" in the northern border region. The General Staff then proposed solutions to this basic security problem which would have the effect of moving the Soviet-Norwegian border westwards, away from the important Pechenga and Murmansk regions. One possibility would be to reach an agreement with the Norwegians on "long-term leasing" of Bear Island and the parts of Northern Norway which bordered the Pechenga *oblast*. The alternative would be to receive Norwegian territory as compensation for the Soviet efforts to liberate Eastern Finnmark.¹⁴⁹ The need to "improve" the Soviet strategic position in the High North being "obvious", the General Staff suggested that the Commissariat for Foreign Affairs should broach the topic with the Norwegians through diplomatic channels.

From the military point of view, the optimum solution would be to move the border to the river Tana and the Tana fjord, i.e. to transfer the whole of the Varanger peninsula and the area south of the Varanger fjord (Varanger and Sør-Varanger municipalities) to the Soviet Union. In addition to the presence of the Soviet military on Bear Island, this would create the preconditions for the establishment of a "huge land and sea based strategic defence area" (*bolshaia sukhoputnaia i morskaiia*

¹⁴⁸ AVPRF, f. 0116, op. 27, p. 128, d. 20, l. 9, Slavin to Dekanozov, 14 July, 1945.

¹⁴⁹ A peculiar argument: the Soviets should be compensated by receiving territories bigger than the small part of Norway which was liberated by the Soviet troops!

strategicheskaiia zona prikrytiia), reaching from the Spitsbergen islands to the Kola peninsula. The minimal solution would be to lease the Varanger area from Norway for a term of 25-50 years.¹⁵⁰

Vetrov, together with Bazarov, the head of the Commissariat's Legal Department, also sent to Lozovskii a version of the Norwegian draft joint declaration, with comments. The proposed text was in several respects closer to the original version than Vetrov's earlier draft of 16 April. Vetrov and Bazarov no longer objected to the idea that the joint Soviet-Norwegian defence measures should be a link in the "International Security Organisation". They also accepted the original Norwegian proposal that the declaration should be of a temporary character, pending consultations with those of the original signatory powers which had not been at war with the Allies. However, the new version of the declaration omitted those parts of the original Norwegian proposal which implied that Svalbard was to remain under Norwegian sovereignty. On the other hand, Vetrov and Bazarov accepted the principle that an abrogation of the Paris Treaty must be agreed "in accordance with the rules of international law" and should be the object of future negotiations.¹⁵¹ Thus, Vetrov and Bazarov implicitly accepted that Norway and the Soviet Union could not unilaterally declare an annulment of the Treaty.

Bazarov sent a separate memorandum on what had been done "to secure Soviet economic interests on Spitsbergen and Bear Island" to Lozovskii. He concluded with a number of proposals, aimed at resuming Soviet economic ventures on the islands as soon as possible. With regard to Bear Island, Bazarov presented an ambitious economic programme. The creation of Soviet economic activity here, according to Bazarov, deserved "special

¹⁵⁰ AVPRF, f. 0116, op. 27, p. 128, d. 20, ll. 10-12, Slavin's memorandum of 14 July, 1945.

¹⁵¹ AVPRF, f. 116, op. 28, p. 21, d. 11, ll. 2-5.

attention".¹⁵² In addition the Commissariat for the Coal Industry had emphasised the economic importance of the Spitsbergen coal in letters to Lozovskii and Vetrov. Apparently unaware of the process which was under way in the Commissariat for Foreign Affairs, Vakhrushev and his subordinates presented a number of recommendations "in case" the 1920 Treaty were to be revised. A new regime on Svalbard should secure for the Soviet Union the right to conduct economic activity according to Soviet law, and without having to pay taxes and duties to Norway.¹⁵³

Vetrov also received welcome support from the Soviet Ambassador to Norway, Nikolai D. Kuznetsov, and from the TASS news agency, who reported that the Norwegians were rapidly developing their activity on Spitsbergen, and that a Norwegian garrison was stationed on the island.¹⁵⁴ According to these reports, the Norwegians were planning a large expedition to Spitsbergen. The workers hired for employment on Spitsbergen had allegedly been warned that the conditions would be "as in a military campaign" (*oni budut nakhoditsia v usloviakh voennogo pokhoda*). Vetrov sent a message to Lozovskii, arguing that this was even more alarming when seen in the context of developments in Northern Norway, where the British had forbidden the Norwegians to continue clearing German minefields in Finnmark and Troms, and had stopped the removal

¹⁵² AVPRF, f. 0116, op. 27, p. 128, d. 22, ll. 44-49, "Spravka o merakh, napravlennykh k zashchite ekonomicheskikh interesov SSSR na Shpitsbergene".

¹⁵³ AVPRF, f. 0116, op. 27, p. 128, d. 22, l. 19, Novikov to Vetrov, 9 July, 1945; l. 23, Vakhrushev to Lozovskii, 9 July, 1945.

¹⁵⁴ A small Norwegian garrison had remained on Spitsbergen after the end of the war. Kuznetsov's letter, and other evidence in the AVPRF, clearly contradicts the theory that the Soviets thought that the British, not the Norwegians, were stationed on the island. Cf. Willy Østreng, *Det politiske Svalbard* (cf. note 3), pp. 68-73.

from towns of "military warning mechanisms in the windows and doors and in the shops' display windows".¹⁵⁵ In addition, 150,000 Germans were still in the Tromsø region, and no date had been set for their withdrawal.

Vetrov reminded Lozovskii of his message of 8 June to Molotov, to which he had not received any response, and argued that the Soviet Union should "immediately return to Spitsbergen", in view of the "Soviet-Norwegian negotiations under way on a new status for Spitsbergen" and also because of what was going on in Spitsbergen and Northern Norway. This "return" should include the despatch of naval units, in order to set up garrisons and prepare the creation of naval bases. At the same time preparations should be made to reopen the Soviet coalfields. Finally, it was necessary to reach agreement with the Norwegians as soon as possible "about publication of the joint Soviet-Norwegian declaration on the abrogation of the Paris Treaty on Spitsbergen". The Norwegian government should be informed about the despatch of the Soviet expedition, "in order to avoid unwanted incidents which might take place because of the presence [...] of a Norwegian garrison on Spitsbergen".¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁵ This is an interesting case of misinterpretation of the other party's intentions. According to General Thorne, the Allied Commander in Norway, the Soviets did not help to clear mines in the area of responsibility of Colonel A.D. Dahl, the Norwegian Commander in Finnmark. Colonel Dahl consequently requested assistance from the Allied Command in Oslo. The request was declined, "in order not to create frictions with the Russian Headquarters in Kirkenes". However, in the end the Soviet Commander in Kirkenes agreed that German PoWs under Allied supervision should do the mine clearing in the Soviet area. Cf. *General Thornes rapport om frigjøringen av Norge* (cf. note 137), p. 49.

¹⁵⁶ AVPRF, f. 0116, op. 27, p. 128, d. 22, ll. 27-28, Vetrov to Lozovskii, 21 July, 1945.

The next day, i.e. on 22 July, Lozovskii sent a letter to Molotov. In this he supported Vetrov's proposal, although he did not say anything about publication of the joint declaration. Molotov, in turn, apparently agreed in general terms with Lozovskii's proposals, but asked for further study of the matter.¹⁵⁷ Molotov was not prepared to make a decision on the joint declaration on Spitsbergen or on the military-strategic elements of the various proposals which had been put forward by his subordinates. On 6 August Vetrov brought to Lozovskii's attention a list of "unresolved questions" which needed Molotov's decision, among them Vetrov's earlier proposals for Spitsbergen. Molotov apparently responded by giving his agreement to the Spitsbergen expedition proposed by Vakhruhev and the Commissariat for the Coal Industry.¹⁵⁸

Thus, up to July-August 1945 the bureaucrats in the Commissariat for Foreign Affairs and the Deputy Commissars dealing directly with Norway had produced a number of proposals aimed at a more active Soviet policy in respect of Svalbard and Northern Norway. Their efforts had received strong support from the Soviet military authorities. More surprisingly, in their efforts to revitalise the Svalbard negotiations they had found an ally in Trygve Lie, the Norwegian Foreign Minister. In late July Lie brought up the Svalbard question on his own initiative in a conversation with the Soviet Ambassador in Oslo.

Lie told Kuznetsov that he wanted to discuss with him "a very secret and very important question", i.e. Svalbard. As the Soviet government had not responded to the Norwegian draft declaration of 9 April, the text apparently "did not satisfy Mr. Molotov". Because he understood that this question was "very

¹⁵⁷ AVPRF, f. 0116, op. 27, p. 128, d. 22, l. 29, Lozovskii to Molotov, 22 July, 1945, with Molotov's comments added.

¹⁵⁸ AVPRF, f. 0116, op. 27, p. 128, d. 22, l. 30, Vetrov to Lozovskii, 6 August, 1945; and l. 31, Vetrov to Lozovskii, 9 August, 1945.

important to the Soviet Union", Lie proposed to resume the "negotiations" which had been initiated during his stay in Moscow in November 1944. Lie also agreed with Kuznetsov that the talks should be held in Moscow.¹⁵⁹ Lie's own version of this conversation is different. According to the memorandum he put on paper some days after the conversation, Lie had limited himself to telling Kuznetsov that the matter was being discussed in the Storting, and that the British and American Ambassadors had been informed.¹⁶⁰ Assuming Kuznetsov did not invent his own version of Lie's remarks, it is no wonder that in Moscow Lie had a reputation for "understanding the need for Soviet-Norwegian cooperation", and "sympathising" with the Soviet Union.¹⁶¹

Despite this pressure from several quarters, the Soviet decision-makers were unwilling to take any further action over Svalbard or Northern Norway. This hesitation suggests that the Soviets were increasingly beginning to understand that there could be international repercussions if they took action to renew negotiations over Svalbard. On 7 August, after the 5th European Department had sent Molotov a draft Soviet-Norwegian declaration, "the final solution of the problem was postponed to a politically favourable moment".¹⁶² On the border question, the Norwegians themselves proposed in August 1945 that the demarcation process should be postponed to the following year,

¹⁵⁹ AVPRF, f. 0116, op. 27, p. 127, d. 8, ll. 52-53, Kuznetsov's minute from conversation with Trygve Lie on 25 July, 1945.

¹⁶⁰ NMFA, 36.6/10 A, Vol. II, Lie's minutes of 30 July, 1945.

¹⁶¹ AVPRF, f. 0116, op. 34, p. 136, d. 6, ll. 65-66, Abramov to Dekanozov, October 1945.

¹⁶² This according to a MID memorandum from April 1946. AVPRF, f. 06, op. 9, p. 62, d. 936, l. 110, "Kratkaia spravka. O prokhozhenii voprosa ob Arkhipelage Shpitsbergen", 22 April, 1946. I have not been able to locate the draft mentioned in the memorandum.

thus relieving the Soviets of the necessity of taking a decision on this issue.

Western perspectives on the High North

Allied policy since the summer of 1944 showed that there was general agreement among the western Allies that Northern Norway was of more immediate strategic importance to the Soviet Union than to the western powers. In order not to antagonise the Soviets, it was therefore decided that as far as possible Norwegian forces, not British and American, should be sent to the North. This was also in accordance with Soviet preferences which were signalled from Moscow in the late autumn of 1944 and in the winter of 1945. In the summer of 1944 it was decided in SHAEF that the Allied Commander in Northern Norway should be an experienced British officer, but that the forces under his command should as far as possible be Norwegian. Even this decision was revised in March 1945, when the Norwegian Colonel O.H. Munthe-Kaas was appointed Allied Zone Commander for Nordland and Troms counties. It was further decided to exclude Colonel A.D. Dahl, the Norwegian Commander in Finnmark, from the British-led Allied command structure which was being established for the rest of Norway.¹⁶³

However, in the spring of 1945 the Soviet press started to criticise the allegedly slow and hesitant disarmament of the Germans in Northern Norway. In late May, when General Thorne decided to replace Colonel O.H. Munthe-Kaas with the British Brigadier F.W. Sanders as Allied Zone Commander in Tromsø, and to send a British brigade and a Royal Navy cruiser to the town, this reflected his fears that the Soviets would send

¹⁶³ Olav Riste, "London-regjeringa" (cf. note 3), Vol. II, pp. 233-34.

their own troops to the area to exercise control over the Germans. The Soviets continued to express their dissatisfaction with Allied policy in Northern Norway. At the end of July the Soviet Government raised the topic of the Germans in Northern Norway in a note which was delivered to the British and the Americans during the Allied summit meeting at Potsdam. The note pointed to the presence of a large number of armed Germans in Northern Norway, and asked the Allied Command in Norway to look into the matter.¹⁶⁴ The British answer may have served to allay Soviet concerns. The British informed the Soviets that there were about 170,000 German PoWs in the whole of Northern Norway. The Germans were concentrated in specific areas, and they were all disarmed, except for two per cent who had been allowed to keep their weapons in order to maintain internal order and discipline.¹⁶⁵

In the summer of 1945 the British in Oslo, among them the British Ambassador, Sir Laurence Collier, started to worry about Soviet long-term intentions in Northern Norway. British intelligence indicated that the Soviets had plans to occupy the whole of Northern Norway after the German collapse. There are indications that General Thorne, the Allied Commander in Norway, shared that concern. The British Ambassador was of the opinion that when they arrived in Finnmark the Soviets had had no intentions of moving beyond the positions they had established in November 1944, but he did not exclude the possibility that they might have changed their plans when the German resistance collapsed.¹⁶⁶ It certainly did not ease the western Allies' concern when in mid-June 1945 a Soviet Colonel reported to their headquarters in Oslo, indicating that he

¹⁶⁴ AVPRE, f. 0116, op. 27, p. 127, d. 2, ll. 3-4, note addressed to Strang, 25 July, 1945.

¹⁶⁵ Riste, "London-regjeringa" (cf. note 3), Vol. II, p. 235.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., pp. 234-35; *General Thornes rapport om frigjøringen av Norge* (cf. note 137), p. 42.

was the forerunner of a group that wanted to be attached to the military command in Norway. When Eisenhower ordered that no official relationship should be established, the Soviets did not revert to the matter.¹⁶⁷

There was a widespread tendency among the western Allies to view Norway, and Northern Norway in particular, as a "grey zone" where the western powers would be forced to acquiesce if the Soviets decided to demand a more prominent role for themselves as supervisors of the country's political and military affairs. In a September 1944 analysis of Soviet intentions towards postwar Europe, US Assistant Secretary of State Adolf Berle concluded that the Soviets would want to have governments "acting in substantial compliance" in a number of East and Central European countries, and "possibly also [...] Norway and Denmark although the degree of influence in both places will be far less than in the other countries mentioned".¹⁶⁸

Another American analysis from about the same time was close to reality in its description of possible Soviet intentions towards Northern Norway. The report, which was commissioned by Secretary of the Navy James V. Forrestal and finished in February 1945, portrayed Western Europe as an area where the United States and Great Britain would have stronger influence than the Soviet Union. However, the situation in Norway, and in particular Northern Norway, would resemble that of Eastern Europe: heavily dominated by the Soviets. The report concluded

¹⁶⁷ Geir Lundestad, *America, Scandinavia and the Cold War 1945-1949*, Oslo, 1980, p. 45; cf. also Vojtech Mastny, *Russia's Road to the Cold War. Diplomacy, Warfare, and the Politics of Communism, 1941-1945*, New York, 1979, pp. 288-289. Not having access to the Russian military archives, I have not been able to establish the relationship between these Soviet moves and the initiatives of the Commissariat bureaucrats discussed on the preceding pages.

¹⁶⁸ Geir Lundestad (cf. note 167), p. 39.

that, despite the lack of any indications of aggressive Soviet designs on Northern Norway,

the acquisition of a common frontier with that country [Norway] in the Far North and the proximity of Norwegian territory to Murmansk, Russia's only ice-free port opening directly on the high seas, give Norway a very special place in Russian eyes.

The Soviet Union would most likely recognise the primacy of British influence in most of Norway, but

it appears quite possible that the Russians will seek a pact with Norway which will provide for joint Norwegian-Soviet defence of northern Norway against any third power.

The idea that the northern part of Norway in particular would be an area of stronger Soviet influence than the rest of Western Europe was also reflected in a message from Under Secretary of State Joseph Grew to Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson and Under Secretary of the Navy Ralph A. Bard on 20 February 1945.¹⁶⁹ In May 1945 the Northern European Division of the State Department undertook its first comprehensive report on the situation in Norway. Referring to Norwegian uneasiness about Soviet intentions in the North, it stated:

it is quite possible that as a minimum concession they [the Soviets] will request free port privileges at Kirkenes and the right to construct a rail-road to Petsamo.¹⁷⁰

Although unaware of the discussions which had been going on in the Soviet bureaucracy since October 1944, Norwegian government circles were constantly worried that the Soviets would use their armed presence in Norway for political or more far-reaching military purposes. Their fears were allayed only when the Soviet troops left Norway in September 1945. Colonel

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., pp. 39-40.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 46.

A.D. Dahl, the Norwegian military Commander in Finnmark, repeatedly warned that there were indications that the Russians were preparing to move further into Northern Norway, possibly with the aim of taking Narvik.¹⁷¹ In November 1944 he gave an evaluation of Soviet intentions which was not too far removed from the arguments presented by Tatiana Zhdanova the previous month, and subsequently repeated in reports and documents of the 5th European Department and in letters from the General Staff. Noticing signs that the Soviets were establishing themselves permanently in Eastern Finnmark, Colonel Dahl concluded:

There is a great danger that they [i.e. the Soviets] will never move out, and that they regard Sør-Varanger to the end of the Varanger fjord and the River Tana as their sphere of interest, and plan to move their border to this line.

In April 1945 Dahl reported to the Norwegian High Command that the Russians "without doubt" planned to move towards Troms county.¹⁷²

The western powers continued to conduct a policy of non-provocation in Norway. American plans in 1945-46 to establish bases for the US Air Force in Norway, were shelved partly because of the fear that the Soviets might institute countermeasures in Finnmark and demand a *quid pro quo* in the form of their own air bases in the country.¹⁷³

The Soviets, obviously aware of the Norwegians' anxiety, tried to relieve their fears on at least two occasions. During his stay in Moscow in November 1944, Lie was told by Dekanozov

¹⁷¹ Cf. Olav Riste, "London-regjeringa" (cf. note 3), Vol. II, pp. 203, 230.

¹⁷² Sven G. Holtmark, op. cit. (cf. note 77), pp. 201-202.

¹⁷³ Rolf Tamnes, *The United States and the Cold War in the High North* (cf. note 8), p. 36; Geir Lundestad, op. cit. (cf. note 167), pp. 65-66.

that the new Soviet-Norwegian border would be identical with the previous Norwegian-Finnish border. Then, in March 1945, P.D. Orlov, the former head of the Scandinavian Department and the 5th European Department who was now attached as political advisor to the Chairman of the Allied Control Commission in Finland, reportedly told Ambassador Andvord that the Soviet-Norwegian border should be demarcated as soon as possible, to counteract "German propaganda".¹⁷⁴

On 19 October 1945 Aleksandr N. Abramov, the new head of the 5th European Department, sent a message to Dekanozov warning *against* new Soviet initiatives on Svalbard. According to Abramov, the international press had published "inspired" reports about alleged Soviet plans to "take" Spitsbergen. There were also press rumours that the question had been raised by the Soviet Union during the Potsdam Conference. The obvious aim of these reports, Abramov argued, was "to force us to declare our point of view (tochka zreniia) on Spitsbergen at the present, for us unfavourable, moment". The Americans, who were negotiating the acquisition of military bases on Greenland and elsewhere, would try to present their actions "as a countermeasure against Soviet intentions towards Spitsbergen". The announcement of the Norwegian-Soviet declaration on Spitsbergen and Bear Island should therefore be postponed until a more appropriate moment, which could be "when the Americans have agreements on the long-term lease of military bases on Greenland".¹⁷⁵ Another memorandum from October 1946 mentions that "the question of a Soviet-Norwegian declaration on Spitsbergen was postponed until the finalisation of US (sic)

¹⁷⁴ Olav Riste, "London-regjeringa" (cf. note 3), Vol. II, pp. 201, 234.

¹⁷⁵ AVPRF, f. 0116, op. 27, p. 128, d. 22, l. 50, Abramov to Dekanozov, 19 October, 1945.

negotiations about bases on Iceland".¹⁷⁶ Despite this lack of precision, these documents provide strong evidence that Soviet policy on the Svalbard question was directly linked to their perception of American efforts to create military bases on the North Atlantic islands. The Soviets also kept a close eye on the Norwegian-American discussions about the withdrawal of American personnel from Jan Mayen, and Ambassador Kuznetsov was instructed to verify whether the Americans had honoured their pledge to leave the island.¹⁷⁷

From the very beginning of their discussions with the Russians the Norwegians had been aware of the potential link between Soviet policy on Svalbard and the question of American or British postwar military bases on Iceland and Greenland. In December 1944 Arnold Ræstad had argued that the Soviet rationale would be weakened if the United States withdrew from their bases on Iceland and Greenland after the war.¹⁷⁸ It was apparently not until late 1944 that the Soviets began to develop a policy to counter possible American demands for an extension in some form of the wartime agreements with Iceland, and with Denmark about Greenland.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁶ AVPRF, f. 116, op. 29, p. 23, d. 15, ll. 1-2, "Po voprosu o Shpitsbergene. Spravka", 1 October, 1946.

¹⁷⁷ AVPRF, f. 0116, op. 27, p. 127, d. 11, ll. 313-14, Abramov to Dekanozov, 7 December, 1945; and *ibid.*, d. 8, ll. 90-91, Kuznetsov's minutes from his conversation with Trygve Lie on 30 November.

¹⁷⁸ Cf. note 116.

¹⁷⁹ It seems that the Soviet leadership became aware of the Soviet-Danish agreement on Greenland of 9 April, 1941, only in late December 1944, when Gromyko sent to Moscow a copy of the agreement, together with information about the US-Icelandic agreement. Dekanozov ordered his subordinates to produce a report on the topic, and also suggested writing a suitable article to be printed in *The War and the Working Class*, which served as the

The Americans did indeed intend to secure their military presence in Iceland and on Greenland after the war. In the summer of 1945 the American government had still not formally raised the question of renegotiating the two agreements with a view to create permanent military bases on Greenland and Iceland. However, in August 1944 the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff had already concluded that the United States should attempt to acquire military facilities on Iceland, preferably on a long-term lease.¹⁸⁰ During the war Greenland had been regarded as one of the places where the United States might want to have military bases after the war, and it was not only the Soviet government which expected the Americans to seek a permanent arrangement on the island. Henrik Kauffmann, the Danish Minister in Washington and the one who had negotiated and signed the 9 April 1941 agreement, remarked in late October 1945 that "he had always assumed that we [i.e. the United States] would do so".¹⁸¹

In October 1945 the United States finally presented to the Icelandic government their request for the long-term lease of three base areas on Iceland.¹⁸² The Soviet government was informed about the American *démarche*. However, there was strong opposition in Iceland to allowing a permanent American military presence, and in November of the same year the Icelandic government informed the Americans that it was not

mouthpiece of the NKID in foreign policy matters. AVPRF, f. 085, op. 29, p. 122, d. 19, l. 1, Gromyko to Dekanozov, 2 January 1945, with enclosures and handwritten comments.

¹⁸⁰ Thor Whitehead, "Icelandic security policies, 1945-1951", paper presented to the XX Nordic Historical Conference in Reykjavik 10-14 August 1987, p. 5.

¹⁸¹ *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS)*, 1945, Vol. IV, p. 580.

¹⁸² Tor Whitehead, op. cit. (cf. note 180), p. 6; cf. also *FRUS*, 1945, Vol. IV, p. 953.

ready to enter negotiations on the proposed terms. Exchanges were resumed in 1946, and resulted in the US-Icelandic agreement of October 7, 1946. This terminated the defence agreement of 1941 but allowed for the interim use of Keflavik airport by American forces.¹⁸³ However, it was not until 1951 that the American and Icelandic government signed a permanent agreement which regulated the presence of United States forces on Iceland.

The Soviets made it quite clear that American efforts to acquire postwar bases in Iceland might trigger off similar Soviet demands. An article in March 1946 in *Red Fleet*, the official newspaper of the Navy Commissariat, referred to international press reports about American efforts to acquire the right to establish permanent naval and air bases on Iceland. In accordance with the time-honoured practice in the Soviet press of letting third parties formulate Soviet concerns, the Navy journal emphasised that public opinion in Iceland felt that "if the USA were permitted to establish the bases, other powers might put forward claims to bases in this region." Rolf Andvord, the Norwegian Ambassador in Moscow, immediately linked the article to the Svalbard question, and wondered "to what degree the State Department is aware of the link between these two questions, and what weight the United States in general assign to Soviet aspirations in the Svalbard archipelago".¹⁸⁴ In 1945-46 the Soviets also tried to buttress Icelandic opposition to a base agreement by dramatically increasing their purchases of fish, Iceland's main export.

With regard to Greenland, matters developed differently. When Kauffmann informed the Danish government in October 1945 that the United States might request rights to postwar bases on Greenland, he was instructed to tell the Americans that the

¹⁸³ Tor Whitehead, op. cit., p. 12; *FRUS*, 1945, Vol. IV, p. 953.

¹⁸⁴ *Krasnyi Flot*, 3 March 1946; and NMFA, 36.6/10 A, Andvord to Lie, 8 March, 1946.

Danish government was "horrified" at the prospect of receiving such a request from the United States government. The main reason was that the Danes feared that such a request would immediately be followed by Soviet demands for bases on Bornholm.¹⁸⁵ After this rather strong Danish message, both parties let the matter rest, and formal negotiations on Greenland between the Danish and American governments were not resumed until 1947 when the Danes took the initiative to terminate the agreement of April 1941.¹⁸⁶ However, in May 1946 the Danish Minister for Foreign Affairs, Gustav Rasmussen, allegedly told Molotov that the Danish government had conducted negotiations with the Americans on the transfer to Denmark of all US military establishments on Greenland. Rasmussen also informed Molotov that the Americans wanted to establish a station at Thule, in the extreme north-west of Greenland, and also to take over British facilities on the Faroe Islands.¹⁸⁷ The American proposal to buy Greenland from Denmark, presented in December 1946 as one alternative in a message from the Americans to the Danish government, was noted in the Soviet press in the following months. In 1951 Denmark and the USA signed an agreement which forms the basis for the present American military presence on the island.

¹⁸⁵ *FRUS*, 1945, Vol. IV, p. 581. The Soviets had occupied Bornholm on the last day of fighting in Europe. The British were of a similar opinion, maintaining that the American demands for bases in the Northern Atlantic would induce the Soviets to request military bases in Northern Europe. The evolution of the British position is discussed in detail in Knut Einar Eriksen, *op. cit.* (cf. note 8). Cf. also Mary Dau's book, *op. cit.*, (cf. note 84).

¹⁸⁶ See pp. 133-134.

¹⁸⁷ NMFA, 36.6/10 A, Rolf Andersen's minutes from his conversation with Danish Minister for Foreign Affairs Gustav Rasmussen on 8 July, 1946.

With regard to Jan Mayen, the Americans declared in March 1945 that they intended to withdraw their personnel as soon as the war was over. However, the Soviet demands for Svalbard apparently made the Americans change their mind, and instead of evacuating, additional American forces were sent to the island. The withdrawal of United States personnel from the island was deferred "pending settlement of the question of proposed Soviet bases in the North Atlantic". However, after Norwegian pressure the Americans succumbed, and their forces left the island in February 1946.¹⁸⁸

Spring 1946: Molotov under pressure

Despite the gradual realisation among Soviet foreign policy-makers of the international repercussions of renewing the Svalbard negotiations, or of Soviet initiatives aimed at some sort of defence arrangement including parts of Northern Norway, Molotov and his deputies continued to receive proposals for a more decisive Soviet policy on Norway from the group of "activist" bureaucrats. Despite his warnings on 19 October against a renewal of the Svalbard talks, in November (possibly December) 1945 Abramov sent a new message to Dekanozov, which basically repeated his well-known recommendations on Svalbard and Northern Norway. Discussing the outcome of the Norwegian general election of 8 October 1945, which had brought in a majority Labour Party government, Abramov concluded that the Norwegian government's foreign and domestic policy would "have to take seriously into account the fact that Norway and the USSR are direct neighbours with a common border". Although Norway would be heavily oriented towards Britain and the United States, in view of "the Norwegian-English and Norwegian-American contradictions" the

¹⁸⁸ Geir Lundestad, *op. cit.* (cf. note 167), pp. 67-68.

Norwegians would feel the need to seek a counterbalance through "the development of economic and cultural cooperation with the Soviet Union". Although there were anti-Soviet tendencies in the ruling circles of the Norwegian Labour Party, Trygve Lie would continue as Foreign Minister in the new government. All these factors, Abramov concluded, "no doubt provide the preconditions for a solution of a number of basic practical questions which exist between the two countries". He continued:

First of all, we have questions like the demarcation of the Soviet-Norwegian border, the Spitsbergen and Bear Island question, the possible creation of Soviet-Norwegian naval and air bases in Finnmark etc., Soviet-Norwegian cooperation in securing the peace in the north-western corner of Europe.

According to Abramov, it was necessary to bear in mind Norway's military-strategic importance: on the one hand as a possible bridgehead for aggression against the Soviet Union in the North-East and as Britain's eastern defence line ("forpost"), and on the other hand as a link in the lines of communication between the Soviet Union, England and the USA.¹⁸⁹

In October 1945, after the Norwegian government on a number of occasions had presented proposals to the Soviets for

¹⁸⁹ AVPRF, f. 0116, op. 34, p. 136, d. 6, ll. 65-66, Abramov to Dekanozov, November (December), 1945. It is interesting to note that at his time Abramov and Vetrov brought up the idea of starting talks with the Danish government on "common safeguarding of the security in the western part of the Baltic Sea (the creation of military bases on the island of Bornholm and the establishment of a regime for the straits)". AVPRF, f. 085, op. 29, p. 121, d. 8, l. 2, Abramov and Vetrov to Novikov, 9 October, 1945. However, there is a striking contrast between the cautious deliberations in respect of Denmark and Norway and the strong pressure in respect of the Dardanelles which the Soviets had been exerting on Turkey since the spring of 1945.

a final demarcation and regulation of the new Soviet-Norwegian border, Abramov argued that a Soviet-Norwegian Border Convention could not simply perpetuate the conditions of the various agreements which had regulated the Norwegian-Finnish border. According to Abramov, a Soviet-Norwegian agreement should include "the question of common defence (okhrana) and safeguarding (obespechenie)" of Norwegian territory bordering on the Soviet Union. In these areas there should be agreement on the creation of Soviet naval and air bases, surrounded by "neutralised zones". An agreement on Soviet bases could be included either in "secret articles" of the Soviet-Norwegian Border Convention, or in a separate secret protocol. The Soviet Union should receive the territories on which the bases would be established on a 20-25 years' lease, as compensation for "Soviet support for the Norwegian government in the fight against the Germans". Trygve Lie should be invited to Moscow for the negotiations.¹⁹⁰

The idea of linking the creation of the new Soviet-Norwegian border regime to broader talks about joint defence arrangements, was supported by Novikov in a letter to Molotov in mid-February 1946. Novikov wanted these talks to take place in Moscow between the Commissariat and the Norwegian embassy, with the aim of negotiating a comprehensive Border Convention and an agreement on the defence of Norwegian territory bordering the Soviet Union. Molotov ordered Novikov to discuss the matter with Dekanozov.¹⁹¹ However, ultimately Molotov decided not to follow the advice of his subordinates. In the spring of 1946 the decision was taken to agree to the Norwegians' proposal to create a mixed Soviet-Norwegian Commis-

¹⁹⁰ AVPRF, f. 0116, op. 27, p. 127, d. 5, ll. 43-45, Abramov to Dekanozov, 28 December, 1945.

¹⁹¹ AVPRF, f. 06, op. 6, p. 42, d. 692, l. 2, Novikov to Molotov, 9 November, 1946, with Molotov's annotation.

sion, with the task of demarcating a border based on the previous Finnish-Norwegian border.

With regard to Svalbard, the available Soviet documents suggest that Soviet policy from then on was strongly influenced by their perceptions of the American efforts to establish permanent bases on Iceland and Greenland. The Soviets had postponed finalising their talks with the Norwegians so as not to give the Americans additional arguments in their negotiations with the Danish and Icelandic governments.

However, in March 1946 Molotov reverted to the matter, giving the 5th European Department instructions to prepare for a reopening of the discussions "after the conclusion of the First General Assembly" of the United Nations. The Department gave Molotov a revised version of the Norwegian draft declaration of 9 April 1945. This was basically the same text which had been sent to Molotov in early August 1945.¹⁹² A memorandum prepared by Zhdanova suggests that no substantial action had been taken since the decision in August 1945 to postpone finishing the negotiations with the Norwegian government.¹⁹³ Although in March Molotov briefly mentioned to the Norwegian Ambassador that the negotiations should be concluded,¹⁹⁴ the Soviets did not make any move until the summer of 1946. In fact, in the spring of 1946 the Soviets feared that the *Norwegians* wanted to finalise the discussions. In March an offer from a Norwegian citizen to the Soviet Trade Representative in Oslo to buy a parcel of land on Spitsbergen¹⁹⁵ was interpreted as

¹⁹² AVPRF, f. 116, op. 29, p. 23, d. 15, ll. 11-13, Novikov to Molotov, 11 March, 1946, with text of the declaration enclosed.

¹⁹³ AVPRF, f. 0116, op. 28, p. 131, d. 28, ll. 1-2, Zhdanova's spravka of 22 April, 1946.

¹⁹⁴ According to Norwegian documents. I have found no trace of this conversation in the AVPRF.

¹⁹⁵ AVPRF, f. 0116, op. 28, p. 130, d. 20, l. 1, Kummykin to Novikov, 23 March, 1946.

part of a subtle Norwegian plan to renew the talks which had ended in April 1945. On Abramov's recommendation, the Trade Representative was instructed not to "force" (*forsirovat*) the matter.¹⁹⁶ In July 1946 Trygve Lie reportedly advised the Soviets to leave the Svalbard question in abeyance, if they wished to avoid American countermoves in Iceland.¹⁹⁷

In the meantime Molotov's subordinates in the Ministry for Foreign Affairs (the Commissariat was renamed in March 1946) became increasingly worried by the development of Norway's relations with the western powers. In early June 1945 a number of reports and memoranda initiated by the Soviet Ambassador to Norway, Nikolai D. Kuznetsov, presented a broad analysis of Norway's political and economic international relations, and indicated the need for a more active Soviet policy towards the Norwegian government. As this assessment provides an additional clue to the hesitant Soviet attitude on the Svalbard question, I will outline its main contents.

In the Soviet view, the Norwegian government conducted its foreign policy within the following framework: on the one hand, it was restricted by an exceedingly strong British influence based both on British strategic interests and on the close Norwegian-British political and military cooperation which had continued after the war, and on the other hand, by genuine Norwegian efforts to continue the policy of "bridge building" and to develop relations with the USSR. Kuznetsov in particular stressed the fact that the Norwegian government was struggling to avoid becoming involved in political schemes which might

¹⁹⁶ AVPRF, f. 0116, op. 28, p. 130, d. 20, l. 2, Abramov to Novikov, 25 March, 1946; *ibid.*, letter from NKID to the Ministry for External Trade (MET) of 4 April, and from the MET to the NKID of 6 May.

¹⁹⁷ According to a document from the British Foreign Office, as paraphrased in Knut Einar Eriksen, *op. cit.* (cf. note 8), p. 153, note 53.

compromise its efforts to develop relations with *all* the great powers. For this reason the Norwegians were for instance allegedly resisting British and Swedish pressure to support the creation of an anti-Soviet Scandinavian bloc. Despite the need to accommodate strong British interests, the Norwegian government was perfectly aware of the role of the USSR in international politics:

the Norwegian government strives to strengthen relations with the Soviet Union, but in a way which will not produce dissatisfaction on the part of other states, primarily the United States and England.

In Kuznetsov's opinion, the "struggle for Norway" was at the core of the efforts of the western powers to increase their influence in the whole of Scandinavia.¹⁹⁸

Kuznetsov also argued that Norwegian conservative politicians and business circles were of the opinion that the Soviet Union would be of increasing importance as a market for Norwegian exports. There was allegedly "a wide feeling" that the Soviet Union would eventually take over the role which Germany had played before the war, politically and economically.¹⁹⁹

The Norwegians, according to Kuznetsov, were perfectly aware that Norwegian independence could only be secured if there were good relations between Norway and the Soviet Union. Even in military questions, therefore, the Norwegians

¹⁹⁸ AVPRF, f. 06, op. 8, p. 41, d. 681, ll. 83-85, Kuznetsov to Molotov, 25 July, 1946.

¹⁹⁹ AVPRF, f. 07, op. 11, p. 119, d. 311, l. 1, "Spravka. Vneshniaia politika Norvegii", signed by Kuznetsov on 8 June, 1946. This is part two of the Ambassador's general report for 1945. Kuznetsov had presented the same argument in late 1945, urging the Soviet government to respond positively to the declared desire of the Norwegian government to develop Norwegian-Soviet trade relations.

wanted to balance their close cooperation with the British by developing ties with the USSR. This could mean Norwegian procurement of Soviet weapons, the sending of Soviet instructors to Norway and Norwegian officers to Soviet military training institutions, and the development of closer contacts between the Soviet and Norwegian military leaderships. Although the Norwegians would not, according to Kuznetsov, agree to participate in a "military bloc" with the Soviets (Kuznetsov did not specify what kind of military bloc he had in mind), one could initiate forms of direct cooperation, such as joint mine sweeping in North-Norwegian waters.²⁰⁰

Kuznetsov did not include a solution to the Svalbard question in his recommendation on steps which should be taken to strengthen the Soviet Union's position in Norway. Implying that too strong a pressure might jeopardise the fundamentally friendly attitude of the Norwegian government, he argued that

this matter [i.e. the Svalbard discussions] has become much wider, having already outgrown the framework of Soviet-Norwegian relations. The Norwegians, who want to keep these islands for themselves, have made the Svalbard case a topic of concern to all the great powers, and in particular to England and the USA.²⁰¹

Kuznetsov's evaluation of the Norwegian government's attitude was based partly on information provided by the new Norwegian Foreign Minister Halvard Lange²⁰² at a closed session of the

²⁰⁰ AVPRF, f. 07, op. 11, p. 19, d. 308, l. 9, "Dokladnaia zapiska o neobkhodimykh meropriatiakh po ukrepleniiu otnoshenii s Norvegiei", signed by Kuznetsov on 6 June, 1946.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² On 30 January 1946 Lie accepted the nomination to become the first Secretary General of the United Nations Organization, and Halvard Lange succeeded him as Minister for Foreign Affairs. The Soviets were initially uncertain about Lange's political profile. In February 1946 Kuznetsov argued that Lange was committed to

Storting on 14 May. In his speech, which had somehow been reported to Kuznetsov, Lange suggested that the question might be considered from a new angle as both Norway and the Soviet Union were members of the United Nations, an approach which had been suggested by the British in November 1945. Lange also said, however, that according to Rolf Andvord this would be unlikely to satisfy the Russians, who continued to see the Svalbard question as primarily a Soviet-Norwegian affair. Lange's presentation to the Storting also documented the fact that the Norwegian government was acutely aware there might be a direct link between the Svalbard question on the one hand, and the American proposals on Iceland and Greenland on the other.²⁰³

Kuznetsov's report was read by Molotov, who forwarded it to Vyshinskii, Dekanozov and Novikov.²⁰⁴ The document prompted the new head of the 5th European Department, Aleksandr Abramov, and his subordinates Vetrov and Maevskii,

continuing Lie's foreign policy line, "i.e. to do everything to avoid Norway becoming an additional factor contributing to the disaccord between the great powers". AVPRF, f. 0116, op. 28, p. 132, d. 39, ll. 4-5, Kuznetsov's "spravka" on Lange, 1 February, 1946. The Soviets rapidly became highly critical of the new Norwegian Foreign Minister. In a lengthy evaluation from mid-1948 of Lange the politician, he is characterised as a "convinced anglophile" and an enemy of the Soviet Union. Cf. AVPRF, f. 0116, op. 37, p. 148, d. 37, ll. 39-46, Afanasiev to Abramov, 16 August 1948, enclosing Loginov's *spravka* on Lange.

²⁰³ The verbatim reports were received in the NKID from Kuznetsov on 17 and 18 June, 1946. They are strictly in accordance with what Lange actually said in the Committee on Foreign Affairs on 8 May, and at the closed session of the Storting on 14 May. AVPRF, f. 012, op. 7, p. 112, d. 329, ll. 10-11, extract from Lange's declaration of 14 May, 1946.

²⁰⁴ Cf. Molotov's signature on a copy of the document in AVPRF, f. 06, op. 8, p. 41, d. 681, l. 61 *et passim*.

to compose for Molotov an alarming report on developments in Norway. The first sentences of the document read:

The question of strengthening our position in Norway demands an immediate solution. We cannot accept that Norway, which has a common border with us and which is of great significance with regard to safeguarding our security in Northern Europe, should be completely included in the sphere of influence of the anglo-saxon powers, Britain in particular.

However, British efforts to press the Norwegians into participating in the British anti-Soviet schemes met resistance in Norway, where the Soviet Union still occupied a strong position in public opinion and in influential political circles. In March 1946, therefore, the Norwegian government had allegedly decided "at a secret meeting" to strengthen political and economic ties with the Soviet Union in order to counterbalance the British influence. Halvard Lange had reportedly told the Storting that the Norwegian government wanted to develop ties with the Soviet Union, but that the Soviet government's policy vis-à-vis Norway hindered these efforts.

In view of all this, according to Abramov, the Soviet government should consider initiating a whole series of new political, economic and cultural moves in order to exploit the Norwegian desire for closer relations with the Soviet Union. First of all, Ambassador Kuznetsov should be instructed to sound out the attitude in political and governmental circles

towards the possibility of concluding an agreement of alliance and friendship (*dogovor o soiuze i družbe*) between Norway and the USSR, exploiting for this purpose the agreement with Norway on common defence of the Spitsbergen islands and Bear Island.²⁰⁵

²⁰⁵ AVPRF, f. 07, op. 12, p. 26, d. 339, ll. 1-7, "O nashei politike po otnosheniiu k Norvegii", signed by Abramov, Maevskii and Vetrov on 2 July, 1946. The document bears Molotov's comment, dated 7 July, "To be discussed" (*Nado obsudit*).

It seems therefore to have been assumed within the Ministry *apparat* in the summer of 1946 that there already existed a *de facto* agreement between Norway and the Soviet Union on the common defence of Svalbard, despite the absence of a Soviet reaction to the Norwegian draft declaration of 9 April 1945.

Among the group's ideas there was also a proposal to open Soviet consulates in Kirkenes, "Tromsø or Vardø", Trondheim and Bergen, "in order to strengthen our ability to control (v tseliakh usileniia kontroliia za) Norway's western coastline", and to reach agreement on leasing an airport "for use by our civil aviation".²⁰⁶

Mikhail A. Silin, the head of the personnel department and a member of the Collegium of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, supported the idea of exploring the "desire in political and government circles in Norway" for an "agreement on alliance and friendship" with the Soviet Union. He objected to the idea of opening additional Soviet consulates, because this would lead to Norwegian requests for permission to open a number of new consulates in the Soviet Union. Apart from these measures, and in line with the traditions in Soviet foreign policy, Silin believed strongly in the effect of "correct information" and "cultural ties" as vehicles for strengthening the Soviet Union's position in Norway.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁶ Ibid., Abramov, Maevskii and Vetrov, 2 July, 1946.

²⁰⁷ AVPRF, f. 0116, op. 28, p. 129, d. 5, l. 34, Silin to Lozovskii, 11 July, 1946. There is a certain similarity to contemporaneous American evaluations of Soviet intentions in Norway. In a letter of 25 January 1946 to Under Secretary of State Acheson, the United States Ambassador in Oslo talked about the "ideological struggle" which was going on in Norway as well as in other countries, and he also made recommendations for measures to be taken. Among the most important were the strengthening of the information service at the embassy and the gathering of intelligence on the Soviet Union and on local communists. Osborne, just like

Molotov read the memorandum, and signalled that he would discuss its ideas with his subordinates. However, he became occupied with a number of more urgent tasks, such as the Paris Peace Conference and the first General Assembly of the United Nations, and it appears that the memorandum was never discussed.²⁰⁸

Autumn 1946: Molotov makes his move

When Molotov met Halvard Lange in Paris on 2 August 1946, he expressed the hope that the two governments would "find the time to conclude the talks on Spitsbergen". He did not, apparently, remonstrate when the Norwegian Foreign Minister made the point that "there was no need to hurry", and that it might be appropriate to consider the idea of joint defence "in the light of the demands of the Military Staff Committee of the United Nations". Molotov made it clear, however, that it was now up to the Soviet government to produce a response to the Norwe-

Kuznetsov, argued that Norway's position was important. A study from the North European Division of the State Department from July 1946 described Soviet policy towards Scandinavia as "designed to strengthen its [i.e. the Soviet Union's] relations with the countries in that area, to increase their economic dependence on the USSR and thereby make them less likely to oppose Soviet proposals in the United Nations, to weaken the influence of the western powers in Scandinavia, particularly that of the UK, and to prevent the establishment of a close political relationship among Norway, Denmark and Sweden which might lead to the creation of a northern bloc." Cf. Geir Lundestad, *op. cit.* (cf. note 167), pp. 58-59.

²⁰⁸ This is according to a later letter from Novikov to Molotov; AVPRF, f. 0116, op. 36, p. 140, d. 5, ll. 5-6, Novikov to Molotov, 5 January, 1947.

gian draft declaration of 9 April 1945.²⁰⁹ When Lange and Molotov met a few days later they discussed only matters relating to the Peace Conference.²¹⁰ Mikhail Vetrov concluded a few days later that Molotov and Lange had discussed "the publication of the declaration about joint defence of the Spitsbergen archipelago",²¹¹ and that the Soviet side had left in abeyance the idea of a "condominium".²¹²

The renewed Soviet interest in Svalbard was related to the Soviet government's decision of 29 August 1946 to resume coal mining on Spitsbergen. The Council of Ministers approved an ambitious programme for the development of Soviet economic enterprises in Barentsburg, Grumant City and Pyramiden, including the establishment of housing for workers and a radio communications network. This decision was the outcome of the exploratory work of the expedition sent to Spitsbergen in September 1945, and was motivated by the need to produce coal for the northern fleet and Russia's northern regions.²¹³ The Soviet decision to step up its activities on Spitsbergen also apparently reflected its growing concern over an alleged rapid expansion of the Norwegian presence on the island. The officials

²⁰⁹ AVPRF, f. 06, op. 8, p. 2, d. 11, ll. 10-16, minute from Molotov's conversation with Lange on 2 August, 1946. There is no significant discrepancy between this document and Lange's version, in NMFA, 36.6/10 A, Lange's minutes of 2 August, 1946.

²¹⁰ AVPRF, f. 06, op. 8, p. 2, d. 11, ll. 31-34, minute from Molotov's conversation with Lange on 7 August, 1946.

²¹¹ AVPRF, f. 0116, op. 28, p. 130, d. 20, l. 8, Vetrov to Dekanozov, 4 September, 1946.

²¹² AVPRF, f. 0116, op. 28, p. 130, d. 20, l. 14, Vetrov to Dekanozov, 5 September, 1946.

²¹³ AVPRF, f. 116, op. 29, p. 23, d. 15, Council of Ministers' decision No. 1951 of 29 August, 1946. The decision also contained a secret addition. This, however, is not included in the copy I was allowed to consult.

of the 5th European Department were however not well versed in the state of Soviet economic affairs on Spitsbergen, and in late July they asked the Ministry for the Coal Industry for information.²¹⁴ It turned out that nothing had been done since the return of the September 1945 expedition sent to Spitsbergen to investigate the state of Soviet installations.²¹⁵

It was evident there was great concern for Soviet *economic* interests on Spitsbergen when Molotov discussed the whole question with Halvard Lange and Terje Wold, the chairman of the Storting Committee on Foreign Relations, on 16 and 18 November. Apart from Molotov and his interpreter Pavlov, the head of the Second European Department and member of the Ministry's Collegium, Kirill V. Novikov, was present during the conversations in New York.

Molotov began by reminding them that he had told Andvord that the Norwegian draft declaration of 9 April 1945 was acceptable in its main features (*v osvoynom priemlem*). Stressing that he wanted to discuss the whole problem "informally" before the "written negotiations" commenced, Molotov then presented the Soviet government's point of view.

1. Spitsbergen and Bear Island should be treated as a whole, i.e. any agreement should relate to Bear Island as well as to the main Spitsbergen archipelago.

2. The Soviet Union was not only interested in the military aspects, but also in the economic ones, i.e. the regulations for the exploitation of coal on the islands. Molotov emphasised that the northern districts of the Soviet Union, and in particular Soviet merchant shipping in the North, could not manage without coal from Spitsbergen. Any alternative source would be

²¹⁴ AVPRF, f. 0116, op. 28, p. 131, d. 28, l. 5, Abramov to K.I. Pochenkov, 25 July, 1946.

²¹⁵ AVPRF, f. 0116, op. 28, p. 131, d. 28, l. 6, Pochenkov to Abramov, 26 August, 1946. Cf. p. 82.

further away. Molotov did not specify exactly what he had in mind - he only wanted to tell the Norwegians that "the Soviet government is interested in the question of the coal on Spitsbergen and wants a corresponding paragraph to be included in the draft declaration".

3. In respect of the Norwegian proposals of March-April 1945 for the joint defence of the archipelago, Molotov apparently wanted the Norwegians to confirm the various elements. He did not object to the stipulations in the Norwegian draft about the Soviet-Norwegian defence arrangement being a link in the security system sponsored by "the International Security Organisation", although he argued that the original wording should be retained, i.e. to avoid identifying the United Nations as this "International Security Organisation". He also wanted the Norwegians to confirm that the arrangement would be a regional link in the system sponsored by the "Organisation".²¹⁶

4. Molotov wanted to exclude the paragraph in the Norwegian draft which stated that all military installations should be on ground which was to be expropriated by the Norwegian government. Molotov argued that this paragraph was superfluous, "in so far as the question of sovereignty is not brought up

²¹⁶ In a letter to Vetrov of 29 December 1946 the functioning head of the Legal and Treaty Department, Pereterskii, argued that the Declaration should not link the Soviet-Norwegian defence arrangement to the "International Security Organisation", because matters relating to the defence of the archipelago should be "independently" decided by the USSR and Norway, i.e. a reflection of the original Soviet attempt to bilateralise the issue. AVPRF, f. 0116, op. 28, p. 131, d. 28, ll. 11-15, Pereterskii to Vetrov, 29 December, 1946.

in this document". He did not respond when Wold reminded him of his first idea of Spitsbergen as a "condominium".²¹⁷

5. Finally, Molotov returned to the procedures for a renegotiation of the 1920 Treaty on Svalbard. He did not object when Lange emphasised that abrogation and renegotiation of the Treaty would have to be done in accordance with the rules of international law and taking into account the views of the signatory powers (apart from Japan and Italy, which both the Norwegians and the Soviets wanted to exclude from the process).

However, Molotov proposed that the declaration should not mention *which* countries should take part in future negotiations on a new Treaty. Some countries which had not taken part in the negotiations in 1919-20 could be invited to the talks, such as Finland, while some of the original signatory powers (in addition to Japan and Italy) might be excluded. Although pressed by Wold, Molotov refused to specify which countries he had in mind (except Finland). One is tempted to conclude that Molotov was strongly disposed to obtain the Norwegians' consent to an international conference on Svalbard not limited to the signatory powers, at which countries of the emerging socialist bloc would support the Soviet view.

Wold and Lange did not define their position on any of the points which Molotov raised. They did, however, signal that the Norwegian government, and even less the Storting, could hardly agree to the inclusion of Bear Island in the talks, and they also underlined the importance of Spitsbergen coal to the Norwegian economy. They tried, in vain, to force Molotov to explain the reasons for his suggestion that the Norwegian-Soviet declaration should not mention by name the countries which should take

²¹⁷ AVPRF, f. 06, op. 8, p. 2, d. 13, ll. 25-29, Molotov's minute from conversation with Lange and Wold on 16 November, 1946.

part in a renegotiation of the Svalbard Treaty. Lange also suggested that the talks could start in the latter half of January 1947. The Norwegian government would then have the opportunity of consulting the Storting, which would convene on 11 January. Molotov, not surprisingly, preferred the venue of the talks to be Moscow.²¹⁸

On the same day as his first meeting with Lange and Wold, i.e. 16 November, Molotov sent telegraphic instructions to Moscow to present a revised version of the Norwegian draft declaration of 9 April 1945 for Stalin's consideration. The document, which reflected the Soviet view presented by Molotov during his conversations with the two Norwegians, was approved by Stalin a few days later.²¹⁹

When Molotov met Trygve Lie on 1 December, the latter told Molotov, apparently on his own initiative, that he had been informed about Molotov's conversations with Lange and Wold. Lie added that he had "strongly advised Lange to continue [Lie's] line [...], i.e. continue the talks with the Soviet government". Molotov once more confirmed that the Norwegian draft declaration could be accepted with some minor changes, and that Norway and the Soviet Union "had nothing to quarrel about".²²⁰

²¹⁸ AVPRF, f. 06, op. 8, p. 2, d. 13, ll. 30-37, Molotov's minutes from a talk with Lange and Wold on November 18, 1946. Lange's and Wold's version of the talk, in NMFA, 36.6/10 A, Vol. III, does not significantly deviate from the Soviet minutes.

²¹⁹ AVPRF, f. 012, op. 7, p. 112, d. 329, ll. 13-14, Dekanozov to Stalin, 16 November, 1946, with enclosure.

²²⁰ AVPRF, f. 06, op. 8, p. 2, d. 13, ll. 54-60, Molotov's minute from conversation with Lie on 1 December, 1946. It appears that there were two meetings between the two on this day, as there are two sets of minutes, only one mentioning Svalbard.

February 1947: Norway turns the tables

Having established the preliminary Norwegian reactions to the Soviet proposals, Novikov presented Molotov with a paragraph-by-paragraph discussion of the Norwegian draft of 9 April 1945, outlining the amendments and changes to the original text which he hoped would be adopted during the forthcoming negotiations. According to Novikov, the conversations with Lange and Wold had made it clear that the Norwegian government was prepared to continue negotiations on the common defence of Svalbard. The basis for the negotiations should be the Norwegian document of 9 April 1945. Novikov argued that the text was basically acceptable, and that only minor changes ought to be made in order to reach a final agreement.

On the question of whether Bear Island should be included in the declaration and the defence arrangement, Novikov argued (correctly) that according to Norwegian usage and the 1920 Treaty the expressions "Svalbard" and "Spitsbergen archipelago" which were used in the Norwegian text, included both the main Spitsbergen archipelago *and* the isolated Bear Island. The separate mention of Bear Island could, therefore, be omitted in the joint declaration, although "the future Agreement on Common Defence" must define what was meant by the expressions used.

With regard to the inclusion of the Soviet-Norwegian defence arrangement in the system of the "International Security Organisation", Novikov argued that

our active participation in the UNO and the obligations we have accepted with regard to this organisation, makes it impossible for us to object to the inclusion in the Declaration of a reference to the United Nations Organisation.

The Soviet Union, according to Novikov, wanted to exclude Canada and the Netherlands from future talks on a Svalbard Treaty. The Norwegians, on the other hand, wanted to include Sweden, and for this reason could not accept the formulation

that talks should be held between "the interested Allied powers". Novikov suggested that the Soviet negotiators should propose a compromise solution, whereby the talks would include (apart from the USSR and Norway) France, Britain, the USA, Sweden, and other "directly interested powers".

The Soviet Union would have to accept continued Norwegian sovereignty over Svalbard, and should even be prepared to accept the inclusion of a statement to this effect into the declaration.²²¹ The paragraph in the Norwegian draft declaration stating that military installations should be built on Norwegian government land or on territories to be expropriated by the Norwegian government, would have to be omitted or reformulated in order to make sure that the erection of military constructions on Soviet-owned land would not lead to the expropriation of these sites by the Norwegian government.

Concerning the safeguarding of Soviet economic interests on Svalbard, the declaration should state that Soviet citizens and organisations should enjoy the same rights and privileges as their Norwegian counterparts. These Soviet demands, Novikov argued, did not contradict the stipulations of the existing Treaty. The Soviets should also, however, demand that Soviet citizens and organisations should have exclusive rights to coal-mining on their own land plots. Although the Norwegians would object to this (it also contradicted the stipulations of the 1920 Treaty), the Soviet negotiators should not yield on this point.²²²

Thus, the Soviets were willing to accept the Norwegian text as the basis for the joint declaration. In early January 1947 Molotov agreed to Novikov's proposal to reopen the Soviet

²²¹ Bear Island, nevertheless, was still treated somewhat separately. On 27 January 1947 Zhdanova signed a memorandum "On Bear Island as part of the Russian Empire", which argued that the island historically belonged to Russia.

²²² AVPRF, f. 116, op. 31, p. 26, d. 17, ll. 1-7, Novikov to Molotov, undated, probably late December, 1946.

consulate on Spitsbergen, thereby implying that he accepted Norway's sovereignty over the archipelago.²²³

At the same time Novikov reminded Molotov of the memorandum of 2 July 1946 from Vetrov, Abramov and Maevskii,²²⁴ i.e. on the need to end "the degree of passivity" which had characterised Soviet policy towards Norway since the end of the war. Arguing that the "Anglo-Saxons" continued to increase their influence in, and even their control over, Norwegian political, military and economic affairs, he proposed a set of measures aimed at strengthening the Soviet Union's position in Norway. Foremost among these was his recommendation that the negotiations on "common defence of the Spitsbergen archipelago and the abrogation of the Paris Treaty" should be finalised. When this matter was concluded, the Soviet Ambassador should be instructed to explore the possibilities for a Soviet-Norwegian treaty of "friendship and alliance". Novikov included with his letter to Molotov the draft of a Central Committee (i.e. Politburo) decision incorporating his ideas.²²⁵

While the discussions with the Norwegians were in progress, various Soviet ministries were considering a number of proposals from Norwegian owners of land on Spitsbergen who were offering their land for sale to the Soviet government. The economic branch ministries recommended the purchase of two of these plots, while the third, which was offered for sale by Norwegian citizen Artur S. Levin through an intermediary in New York, was considered to be of predominantly military-strategic interest. Asked by the 5th European Department to

²²³ AVPRF, f. 0116, op. 36, p. 142, d. 27, l. 39, Novikov to Molotov, 3 January, 1947, with Molotov's handwritten comment of 5 January.

²²⁴ Cf. pp. 108-109.

²²⁵ AVPRF, f. 0116, op. 36, p. 140, d. 5, ll. 5-6, Novikov to Molotov, 5 January 1947, with enclosed draft Central Committee decision.

evaluate its military value, Marshall Vasilevskii, the Chief of the General Staff, concluded that the plot would "be of great value" to the Soviet Navy. Although the location was far from ideal, it could be used to establish a "mobile naval base" (*manevrennaia voenno-morskaia baza*),²²⁶ an air-base for seaplanes in the summer months, and a landing strip on the ice during the winter. This would create "an advantageous operational regime" in the western parts of the Barents Sea and the Arctic. It would also improve the defence of Soviet communication lines, and extend the striking distance of the Soviet air force. Without mentioning the demilitarisation clause of the 1920 Treaty, Vasilevskii recommended starting negotiations to acquire the plot.²²⁷

Commenting upon Vasilevskii's letter, Pereterskii, the temporary head of the Ministry's Legal and Treaty Department, reminded Vetrov that Svalbard was demilitarised, and that the Soviet Union had acceded to the Svalbard Treaty in 1935. His Department had not been involved in any discussion about an abrogation of the Treaty.²²⁸ Despite this, Vetrov and Dekanozov subsequently recommended to Molotov that negotiations on the acquisition of all three plots should be started.²²⁹ In mid-January Novikov informed Molotov about the offers. Concerning the two which were of economic interest, Novikov

²²⁶The interpretation of this phrase caused me some difficulties. It was explained to me by Russian naval officers that the word "manevrennaia" suggests a degree of mobility, but that in this context it is not part of standard Russian military terminology.

²²⁷ AVPRF, f. 0116, op. 28, p. 130, d. 20, ll. 17-18, Vasilevskii to Dekanozov, 12 October, 1946.

²²⁸ AVPRF, f. 0116, op. 28, p. 130, d. 20, ll. 19-20, Pereterskii to Vetrov, 18 October, 1946.

²²⁹ AVPRF, f. 0116, op. 28, p. 130, d. 20, ll. 23-24, Vetrov to Dekanozov, 24 October 1946, with Dekanozov's handwritten comments.

recommended the Ministry for Foreign Affairs not to object to their acquisition. With regard to Levin's plot, Novikov referred to the General Staff's recommendation. He concluded nevertheless that there was no need to accept the offer "in view of the forthcoming Soviet-Norwegian agreement on common defence of the Spitsbergen archipelago".²³⁰

Thus, in late January 1947 Molotov and his subordinates in the Ministry for Foreign Affairs were ready to propose to Stalin reopening of the negotiations with the Norwegians. In a letter of 28 January 1947 Novikov reminded Molotov of the matter, and proposed starting negotiations with the Norwegians in early February. At this point Novikov was aware that the Norwegian government, allegedly under British pressure and influence, was in the process of changing its attitude towards the idea of common defence. According to Novikov, the Norwegian government had decided to resume the talks, but to decline participation in a defence arrangement which might be interpreted as a sign that Norway was heading towards participation "in the eastern bloc of states". Novikov proposed making an oral statement to the Norwegian Ambassador that the Soviet government wanted to renew the negotiations, in Moscow, "on the basis of the Declaration on common defence of the Spitsbergen archipelago which had been presented by the Norwegian side".²³¹

On 29 January Molotov signed a letter to Stalin, repeating the arguments and propositions of Novikov's message of 27 January. It is unclear, however, whether Stalin actually received this letter. In any case, Molotov apparently decided in the early

²³⁰ AVPRF, f. 06, op. 9, p. 62, d. 936, l. 1, Novikov to Molotov, 20 January 1947. From other documents it appears that Molotov asked for additional information from the General Staff.

²³¹ AVPRF, f. 0116, op. 36, p. 142, d. 27, ll. 8-9, Novikov to Molotov, 27 January 1947, with enclosed draft of oral statement to the Norwegian Ambassador.

days of February to make some further inquiries before implementation of the plan.²³²

The decision of the Norwegian Storting during a closed session on February 15 to reject the idea of a Norwegian-Soviet common defence of Svalbard preempted the Soviet initiative. However, the Norwegian parliamentarians agreed to start negotiations on the 1920 Treaty in order to make it more "satisfactory". Despite the extremely polite wording of the Storting's resolution, it was absolutely clear in its rejection of discussions with a foreign power "about the defence of a region under Norwegian sovereignty".²³³ On 17 February the Norwegian Ambassador to Moscow, H.C. Berg, delivered to Novikov a letter from Lange to Molotov containing the resolution. In his letter Lange also suggested that Norwegian-Soviet talks on a revision of the 1920 Treaty should start in Oslo, and he made it clear that the Norwegian government would publish the Storting's resolution in the near future.²³⁴

It seems likely that the Soviet delay, which gave the Norwegians sorely needed time to conclude their internal deliberations, was caused by developments set in motion by an article in *The Times* on January 10. This reported that the Soviet government had "requested facilities from the Norwegian government for military bases on Spitsbergen Island". The international press at once linked the Soviet demands to American efforts to secure

²³² AVPRF, f. 06, op. 9, p. 62, d. 936, ll. 111-112, Molotov to Stalin, 29 January 1947, with Molotov's handwritten note of 3 February "Predvaritelno prozondirovat". So far I have not been able to establish what Molotov's intention was: to informally sound out the position of the *Norwegians*, or to get Stalin's opinion before sending him the prepared letter.

²³³ The resolution is printed in Johan Jørgen Holst, *Norsk sikkerhetspolitikk i strategisk perspektiv*, Oslo 1967, Vol. II, pp. 63-64.

²³⁴ AVPRF, f. 06, op. 9, p. 61, d. 923, ll. 7-8, Russian translation of Lange's letter to Molotov of 15 February, 1947.

bases on Iceland and Greenland. On 15 January TASS published the official Soviet version of the talks,²³⁵ much to the displeasure of the Norwegian government, which published its own version a few days later.²³⁶ The Danish press and Danish politicians at once drew the parallel between Svalbard and Greenland and Iceland, and the Danish government was forced officially to deny rumours that it planned to sell Greenland to the United States. On 10 February *Krasnaia Zvezda*, the newspaper of the Soviet Ministry of Defence, published an article on the "Grenlandskaia problema" by the authoritative commentator P. Rysakov. The article, not surprisingly, attacked the rumoured US plans to buy Greenland, and stressed the strategic importance of the arctic regions.²³⁷ This renewed focus on Greenland finally compelled the Danish government to deliver a note to the United States government requesting negotiations on the abrogation of the war-time defence arrangement.²³⁸ Under these circumstances, it is hardly surprising that Molotov left Lange's letter without a reply, waiting for the "appropriate moment" to arrive.

²³⁵ Printed in Norwegian translation in Johan Jørgen Holst, op. cit. (cf. note 233), Vol. II, p. 58.

²³⁶ Printed in *ibid.*, pp. 59-61.

²³⁷ Mary Dau, op. cit. (cf. note 84), p. 154.

²³⁸ Cf. pp. 133-134.

6. 1947-1953: *The return to status quo*

After the Norwegian Storting's decision of 15 February 1947, and Lange's letter to Molotov which followed two days later, the Soviets made no serious attempts to revive the Norwegian-Soviet negotiations on a change in Svalbard's international status. Although MID bureaucrats continued to argue the need for a more "active" Soviet policy towards Norway, including a solution to the Svalbard question and some form of Soviet-Norwegian defence arrangement or treaty of alliance, Soviet foreign policy makers were rapidly moving towards a *defence of status quo* as the mainstay of Soviet policy on Svalbard. This general trend notwithstanding, the idea of a bilateral arrangement on Svalbard proved to be rather resilient. Only Norway's entry into the Atlantic Pact put an end to Soviet efforts to finalise the negotiations begun in November 1944. Moreover, the decision effectively ruined any hopes that still existed for a separate Soviet-Norwegian defence or alliance arrangement for *mainland* Norway. The Soviets thereafter concentrated on thwarting the establishment of allied bases in Norway, basing their efforts on the Norwegian government's declaration on that issue of 1 February 1949.²³⁹ The Soviet notes of October and November 1951 embodied the formal departure from the attempt to revise the Svalbard regime which had been initiated by Molotov in November 1944. The notes also reflected genuine Soviet fears that the western powers were in the process of establishing a permanent military presence in mainland Norway. At this point the Soviets may have realised that their attempts from 1944 to 1947 to create a separate Soviet-Norwegian agreement on Svalbard were largely misguided, in that they supplied further ammunition to the pro-western camp in Norway.

²³⁹ Cf. note 282.

Soviet reactions to Norway's preemption

In his March 1947 message to Molotov the Soviet Ambassador to Norway, Nikolai Kuznetsov, argued that the Norwegian government's change of mind stemmed from American and British pressure. He quoted Terje Wold, the chairman of the Storting's Committee on Foreign Relations, who had asked Kuznetsov to tell Molotov that "we try as best as we can to solve the Spitsbergen question to the mutual satisfaction of both governments", but, unfortunately, in this case Norway was under "the influence of the other great powers".²⁴⁰

Although Kuznetsov felt that for the time being the Norwegians would not agree to the idea of joint defence of Svalbard, he strongly advised Molotov to accept the invitation inherent in Lange's letter to start negotiations on revising the 1920 Treaty. The aim of such negotiations should be to secure Soviet economic interests on Svalbard, and to get the Norwegians to agree that a revised treaty should provide the legal basis for a "regional agreement on the defence of the Spitsbergen archipelago" between Norway, the USSR, Finland and Sweden, in accordance with Article 43 of the UN Charter. A Soviet-Norwegian declaration, and Norwegian acceptance of the need to revise the Treaty, would "make it possible for the Soviet Union, with Norway's help, to strengthen its position in the area

²⁴⁰ This is Kuznetsov's version. Did Wold actually say this? He actively took part in the phrasing of the Storting's decision, and gave his support to the new policy line, although he had supported Lie's policy. On the other hand, Wold may have wanted to take the sting out of the Storting's decision by blaming the western powers. He was not always discriminating in his choice of words.

of the Spitsbergen archipelago, and to shield itself (ogradit sebia) from the Anglo-American bloc in this area".²⁴¹

Contrary to what the Soviets thought, the British and the Americans had from the very beginning adopted a rather ambivalent attitude towards the Soviet attempts to reach an agreement with the Norwegians on Svalbard. The Norwegian Storting's decision in February 1947 was *not* the result of American and British pressure. Although both the British and the Americans had been informed about Molotov's demands soon after his initiative in November 1944, the Norwegians did not involve the western Allies in the discussion, and did not request any kind of diplomatic or political support.²⁴² In fact, as late as July 1945 prominent Americans were sympathetic to the Soviet demands. The Acting Chairman of the State-War-Navy Committee, John D. Hickerson, pointed out that the "interest of the Soviet Union in acquiring military bases" on Svalbard "is natural" in view of its wartime experience of safeguarding the convoys to Murmansk. The Joint Chiefs were of a similar opinion.²⁴³ Although the American delegation to the Potsdam Conference had been instructed to oppose Soviet demands for military bases on Svalbard if the matter were brought up during the talks, the Americans were inclined to accept an arrangement which included exclusive rights for United States bases on Iceland and Greenland as the price for Soviet bases on Svalbard. The underlying American attitude was highlighted by the President's Chief of Staff, Admiral William D. Leahy, who stated that

²⁴¹ AVPRF, f. 06, op. 9, p. 62, d. 936, ll. 121-124, Kuznetsov to Molotov, 10 March, 1947; and the embassy's report for the year 1947, in f. 0116, op. 36, p. 140, d. 9, ll. 43-44.

²⁴² Cf. Knut Einar Eriksen, "Svalbardspørsmålet fra krig til kald krig" (cf. note 3), pp. 143-144.

²⁴³ Geir Lundestad, op.cit. (cf. note 167), p. 67.

it was difficult for him to see that there were any military implications in the acquisition by Russia of bases in Bear Island and the Spitsbergen Archipelago.²⁴⁴

The British took even less interest in Svalbard, and from the beginning did not show very much anxiety over Molotov's demands. They could in any case not prevent the Russians from establishing themselves there if Moscow found it expedient to do so.²⁴⁵ In November 1945 the British suggested to the Norwegians that the Soviet demands could be diluted by proposing that a defence arrangement would have to be in accordance with Article 43 of the United Nations Charter, i.e. it would be a link in a regional defence system under Security Council control.²⁴⁶ In March 1951 the British Chiefs of Staff concluded that Svalbard was of no strategic value to Great Britain.²⁴⁷

In January and February 1947 when the Soviet demands on Svalbard were being discussed by the international press, both US and British government spokesmen declared that they took it for granted that their governments would be consulted before Norway and the Soviet Union made an agreement. They also rejected the Soviet argument that the Paris Treaty could no longer be considered valid. This did not mean, however, that the Americans at any rate were totally against a Norwegian-Soviet arrangement. Following the discussions in the international press

²⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 67.

²⁴⁵ Rolf Tamnes, *The United States and the Cold War in the High North* (cf. note 8), p. 37; Knut Einar Eriksen, "Great Britain and the Problem of Bases in the Nordic Area" (cf. note 8), p. 140.

²⁴⁶ NMFA, 36.6/10 A, Lie's minutes from conversation with Sir Laurence Collier on 5 November 1945.

²⁴⁷ The evolution of the British position is conveniently summarised in Knut Einar Eriksen, *ibid.*, pp. 158-163. Cf. also Rolf Tamnes, *Svalbard mellom Øst og Vest. Kald krig og lavspenning i nord 1947-1953* (cf. note 4), p. 18.

and the publication of the Soviet and Norwegian official statements, the Norwegian Ambassador in Washington reportedly talked to "a senior official in the State Department", who said that no decision had been taken with regard to the attitude of the United States government. The same source suggested, on the other hand, that it might be in the interest of the United States if the Soviet Union and Norway were to agree on the defence of Svalbard. The Soviet government would not then be in a position to protest against similar US efforts on Greenland and elsewhere in the Arctic.²⁴⁸ This recurrent idea of a *quid pro quo* deal reflected Svalbard's subordinate role within overall American military-strategic thinking. Although a considerable degree of attention was devoted to Svalbard in the early postwar years, it never acquired a place in US doctrines or strategic planning comparable to that of, say, Iceland and Greenland. American strategic thinking on Svalbard gradually turned towards the need to deny the Soviets access to the archipelago, although there was no need for the western powers themselves to establish bases on Svalbard. American analyses from June 1948, August 1949 and January 1952 all concluded that the United States had no interest in establishing "facilities" on Svalbard, but that on the other hand it was important to deny use of the island to any hostile power.²⁴⁹

The matter was apparently never the object of direct talks between the Soviet government and the British or the Americans. It was not discussed at the Potsdam Conference or at later bilateral and trilateral conferences, and the Soviets did not give any hint, for instance, that there was a link between their

²⁴⁸ NMFA, 36.6/10 A, Vol. IV, Morgenstjerne to Lange, 24 January, 1947.

²⁴⁹ Rolf Tamnes, *Svalbard mellom Øst og Vest. Kald krig og lavspenning i nord 1947-1953*, pp. 10-11 (cf. note 8); cf. also the same author's *The United States and the Cold War in the High North* (cf. note 8), pp. 46-49.

demands on Svalbard and their complaints in the summer of 1945 about the western Allies' policy in Northern Norway.

With his message to Molotov of March 1947 Kuznetsov enclosed a draft reply from Molotov to Lange. The gist of the draft was a firm rejection of Lange's arguments, but at the same time it accepted the invitation to start negotiations on a revision of the 1920 Treaty.²⁵⁰ Another letter from Molotov to Einar Gerhardsen, the Norwegian Prime Minister, which was drafted on Molotov's order but never sent, reminded the Norwegians that the idea of joint defence was, as a matter of fact, a Norwegian proposal. This draft letter concluded that the Soviet government had not changed its view, and that the Norwegian position as presented in Lange's letter was "unfounded".²⁵¹

I have not been able to find documents which specify the immediate reasons for the decision not to reply to Lange's letter. The need to take into account American demands for bases on Greenland and Iceland has been mentioned as one likely reason. Another reason for Molotov's hesitant attitude may have been the increasing realisation that Soviet pressure on the Svalbard question might strengthen the pro-western forces in Norway to the detriment of Soviet interests. Mikhail F. Cherkasov, a first secretary at the Soviet embassy in Norway, wrote in a report in March that "Tranmæl, Haakon Lie and other vicious anti-sovetschiki" had exploited the Svalbard question to attack the Soviet Union.²⁵² Molotov, however, continued to show an interest in the Svalbard archipelago's strategic value. The General Staff was asked for the second time to evaluate the

²⁵⁰ AVPRF, f. 06, op. 9, p. 62, d. 936, ll. 121-124, Kuznetsov to Molotov, 10 March, 1947.

²⁵¹ AVPRF, f. 06, op. 9, p. 62, d. 936, ll. 101-03, memorandum sent to Molotov on 8 March 1947, signed by deputy foreign minister Iakov A. Malik and Kirill V. Novikov.

²⁵² AVPRF, f. 0116, op. 36, p. 142, d. 27, Cherkasov to MID, most likely from March 1947.

strategic potential of the land which had been offered for sale by Artur S. Levin. The General Staff concluded that it would be "desirable" for the USSR to have air and naval bases on Spitsbergen. However, the matter would have to be investigated further on site, and General Vasilevskii therefore proposed sending a group of military specialists to Spitsbergen to study suitable locations for the construction of such bases. Military specialists ought also to be included in the staff of the reopened Soviet consulate. It is apparent from Vasilevskii's letter to Molotov that the General Staff had not produced any extensive study of Svalbard's potential as a location for Soviet military bases.²⁵³

Soviet strategic reassessments

In all likelihood the idea of Soviet-controlled military bases on Svalbard was still largely the pet of the geopoliticians in the MID bureaucracy, and not a reflection of strategic realities in the High North as viewed by the Army and Navy General Staffs or the defence Ministries. However, a more than tentative evaluation of Svalbard's place in Soviet strategic thinking in the early postwar years must await the opening of the Russian military archives for this period. The emerging Soviet interest from 1939 onwards in Svalbard in the strategic context reflected pre-Cold War notions of global warfare in general, and maritime warfare in particular. The focus was on the *defence of maritime supply routes*, i.e. the classical role of navies and naval aviation. Although Svalbard had proved to be too inaccessible and distant to be of much value for either of the belligerents during the war, technological developments in the postwar years created the

²⁵³ AVPRF, f. 06, op. 9, p. 61, d. 935, ll. 22-23, Vasilevskii to Molotov, 21 April, 1947.

possibility that the archipelago might play an additional role in the intercontinental offensive strategies of the two superpowers.

In the late 1940s and early 1950s the Soviet Navy in general and the Northern Fleet in particular were still vastly inferior to the combined forces of the western powers. Western evaluations of Svalbard's strategic value to the Soviet Union focused, therefore, on its potential role as a base for Soviet long-range aviation. In the latter 1940s American analysts argued that possession of bases on Svalbard could significantly increase Soviet ability to conduct offensive and defensive operations, although adverse climatic conditions reduced the practicability of having bases on the archipelago. In January 1947 the Chiefs of Staff claimed that a Soviet presence on Svalbard "would have an offensive potential against the United States", and make it possible for the Soviets to strike targets in the USA 5-10 years earlier than they would otherwise have been able to do.²⁵⁴ Recent breakthroughs in aviation technology and the anticipation of further advances created an atmosphere of technological optimism which also influenced evaluations of Svalbard's strategic significance. The Norwegian Defence Staff argued in February 1947 that the importance of the Arctic regions for air operations made the possession of Northern Norway, Svalbard with Bear Island, and Jan Mayen "of great strategic importance in a war between the great powers".²⁵⁵

As part of the debate about the alleged "bomber gap" in the United States in the late 1940s it was suggested that the Soviets might use bases on Svalbard for offensive operations against the American continent with TU-4 bombers, which could reach

²⁵⁴ Rolf Tamnes, *Svalbard mellom Øst og Vest. Kald krig og lavspenning i nord 1947-1953* (cf. note 4), p. 16; and the same author's *The United States and the Cold War in the High North* (cf. note 8), pp. 46-47; and Geir Lundestad, *op.cit.* (cf. note 167), p. 72.

²⁵⁵ Rolf Tamnes, *Svalbard mellom Øst og Vest. Kald krig og lavspenning i nord 1947-1953* (cf. note 4), p. 19.

targets in the USA on one-way trips. The Americans probably overrated Soviet capacity; at this stage the Soviets were scarcely capable of striking targets in the USA.²⁵⁶ The Americans also overrated the strength of the Soviet Northern Fleet:

US assessments of a growing threat from the Soviet Northern Fleet proved to be a mistake; the Soviet fleet continued to have a more defensive and local profile, and lower priority than expected was given to the Northern Fleet in the late forties.²⁵⁷

Svalbard was not of primary interest to the Soviets in the early period of the Cold War, and could never compete with, say, their focus on the Black Sea Straits. The Soviet pressure on Turkey, which began in the spring of 1945 and which was one of the main factors behind the declaration of the "Truman doctrine" in 1947, was in stark contrast to the cautious Soviet approach to Svalbard. Most likely the conclusions of Soviet military analysts mirrored those of their American counterparts: it was more important to deny the western great powers control over Svalbard than for the Soviet Union to create its own military bases on the archipelago.²⁵⁸

Not surprisingly, therefore, it was the geostrategically-minded bureaucrats of the MID *apparat* who continued to press for finalisation of the Svalbard negotiations. In early May 1947 Kuznetsov urged Molotov to reopen the talks on Svalbard, and to start talks with Norway on "a pact against German aggression". As usual, Kuznetsov presented his proposals as measures aimed at curtailing the rising American and British influence in

²⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 14; and the same author's *The United States and the Cold War in the High North* (cf. note 8), pp. 45-46.

²⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 55.

²⁵⁸ This interpretation is in accordance with previous research based on Norwegian and western sources. Cf. for instance Knut Einar Eriksen, "Svalbardspørsmålet fra krig til kald krig", (cf. note 3), pp. 157-158.

Norway.²⁵⁹ Later the same month Vetrov wrote once more to Molotov, urging him to finalise the negotiations with the Norwegians. He argued, mistakenly, that the Danish government had declared its willingness to start negotiations with the Americans on the establishment of US military bases on Greenland, and that presumably the negotiations would lead to a result "satisfactory to the USA". Vetrov concluded:

[T]his situation presents a particularly convenient occasion to renew the negotiations with the Norwegians on joint Soviet-Norwegian defence of Spitsbergen which were discontinued in February this year. The aim of the negotiations should be to solve the overdue (nazrevshee) question of the Spitsbergen archipelago, and to exert pressure on the Danish-American negotiations on Greenland.

Vetrov enclosed with his memorandum the draft of a letter from Molotov to Lange, based on the draft written by Malik and Novikov in March. The letter concluded by expressing the Soviet government's desire "to continue in the very near future and on the earlier basis the negotiations on a revision of the Spitsbergen Treaty of 1920".²⁶⁰

Vetrov's argument was based on the premise that the Danish government had accepted the idea of US bases on Greenland. This was not the case: on 27 May the Danish government had asked the Americans to start negotiations on an abrogation of the Danish-American preliminary agreement of 9 April 1941, with the aim of ending the American military presence on Greenland. When this became clear in the MID, Zhdanova and Loginov sent a note to Vetrov, repudiating his arguments in favour of renewed Svalbard negotiations. It is also unclear,

²⁵⁹ AVPRF, f. 0116, op. 36, p. 140, d. 5, ll. 22-27, Kuznetsov to Molotov, 5 May, 1947.

²⁶⁰ AVPRF, f. 0116, op. 36, p. 142, d. 27, ll. 23-25, Vetrov to Molotov, 31 May 1947, with enclosed draft of letter from Molotov to Lange.

therefore, whether Vetrov's memorandum came to Molotov's attention at all. Zhdanov and Loginov argued that this was not the proper moment to put pressure on the Norwegians. It would be interpreted as "Soviet expansionist tendencies towards Svalbard", and would make it more difficult for the Danish government to insist on the abrogation of the April 1941 agreement. A Soviet initiative on the Svalbard question should "as a minimum" be postponed until the Americans gave a negative reply to the Danish note of 27 May. Unfortunately for the Soviets, the Danish-American talks on Greenland continued without result until the creation of the Atlantic Pact, with Denmark as a member, prepared the ground for the permanent Danish-American agreement of 1951.

Back to square one

The memorandum from Zhdanov and Loginov contains the first hints that the Soviets were gradually adjusting their policies in the North Atlantic polar regions towards the maintenance of *status quo*. Zhdanov and Loginov argued that the USSR, not having military bases on Svalbard, should concentrate on fighting against any change in the existing situation in the Arctic Ocean in favour of the United States. Apart from issuing a declaration supporting the Danish position, the central Soviet press should emphasise that the retention of the American bases on Greenland would violate the existing balance of power in the region. Such a statement was obviously intended to strengthen the Danish position, and at the same time constitute a clear warning that a continued American military presence on Greenland could lead to renewed Soviet demands on Svalbard.²⁶¹

²⁶¹ AVPRF, f. 0116, op. 36, p. 142, d. 27, ll. 26-27, Zhdanov and Loginov to Vetrov, 6 June, 1947.

The prevailing attitude in the MID was one of "wait-and-see", partly hoping for a Norwegian initiative, partly expecting the "world situation" to provide an opportunity to raise the case again. In this respect the outcome of American efforts to establish permanent military bases on Greenland and Iceland would be of paramount importance. It was decided *not* to give the Norwegians the impression of Soviet impatience or pressure. The matter could be raised informally, in order to sound out the attitude of the Norwegian government, but at the same time to signal disagreement with the arguments in Lange's letter of February 15.²⁶²

The relatively optimistic Soviet interpretation of Norwegian attitudes may have been partly founded on a statement by Trygve Lie to Sergei A. Afanasiev, the new Soviet Ambassador to Norway, just after the latter's arrival in Oslo in July 1947. Lie was still not prepared to accept the Norwegian government's change of tack²⁶³, telling Afanasiev that he "regretted" that the Svalbard question had developed contrary to his intentions. He gave Afanasiev the following information:

During his stay in Oslo in March, Lie had brought to the attention of King Haakon, Gerhardsen and Lange the grave mistake which the government had committed with regard to the Soviet Union. In so far as the USA's demands for [bases on Greenland] were founded [on the need to create security for] the American continent, the Norwegians could [...] through an agreement with the

²⁶² The preceding paragraph is a synthesis of a number of documents in the AVPRF; f. 0116, op. 36, p. 142, d. 27, l. 29, Zorin and Silin to Vyshinskii; *ibid.*, l. 30, Kuznetsov to Vyshinskii, 21 August, 1947; ll. 32-37, Kuznetsov's "Spravka" to Vyshinskii, 28 August, 1947.

²⁶³ On Lie's efforts to convince the Norwegian government to continue the policy line initiated by Lie and his advisors in London, cf. Knut Einar Eriksen, "Svalbardspørsmålet fra krig til kald krig" (cf. note 3).

Soviet Union on Spitsbergen create a basis for the defence of the European continent. This would not come into conflict with the Charter of the United Nations.

Lie concluded:

I advise you [...] to be patient and await an appropriate moment to raise the Svalbard question again. Such a moment might come soon, possibly after the local elections [...].²⁶⁴

Lie tried to convince the Soviet Ambassador that the Storting's decision reflected domestic policy considerations, but that Labour Party and Communist victories in the local elections would weaken the conservative forces which stood behind it. Lie also told Afanasiev that the western powers had *not* put pressure on the Norwegians to reject the Soviet initiative. Quite the opposite: in March 1947 Lie had asked George Marshall about the American attitude, and the American Secretary of State had answered that the United States would not interfere in the matter.²⁶⁵

It seems likely that Lie's comments had the effect of giving additional weight to the view that the Soviet Union should not, for the time being, take the initiative in asking for the negotiations to be resumed.

The Soviets' adoption of a wait-and-see attitude also reflected their conviction that the Norwegians were deeply dissatisfied with the 1920 Treaty, which strongly limited and even undermined Norwegian sovereignty over Svalbard. This, together with the importance to Norway of friendly relations with the USSR, meant that *the Norwegians themselves* would bring up the

²⁶⁴ AVPRF, as quoted in f. 0116, op. 36, p. 142, d. 27, ll. 32-37, Kuznetsov's "Spravka" to Vyshinskii, 28 August, 1947. In his memorandum, Kuznetsov quoted Afanasiev's report about the conversation.

²⁶⁵ AVPRF, f. 0116, op. 36, p. 140, d. 8, ll. 108-112, Afanasiev's report from his conversation with Lie on 9 July, 1947.

question and ask for an answer to Lange's letter. When in the summer of 1947 Vyshinskii was preparing to go to New York to attend the General Assembly of the United Nations, he was briefed on this eventuality. It was also decided that Vyshinskii himself should not raise the matter.

Kuznetsov, who was instructed to write a memorandum on Svalbard for Vyshinskii, repeated his advice from March, i.e. that Vyshinskii should object to the arguments in Lange's letter, but at the same time accept the invitation to negotiate on a revision of the 1920 Treaty. Kuznetsov reiterated his earlier view that the aim of the negotiations should be to secure Soviet economic interests on Spitsbergen, and to create the preconditions for a regional defence arrangement for the Svalbard archipelago between the USSR, Norway, Sweden and Finland.²⁶⁶

The idea that the Norwegians would take the initiative and raise the issue with the Soviets when they met in New York was, of course, mistaken. After the change of course in early 1947 the Norwegian government was even more anxious than the Soviets to let the matter rest, and hoped that there would be no response to Lange's letter. Thus the Norwegians feared that the Soviets would take a new initiative, while the Soviets expected the Norwegians to take the next step.²⁶⁷

Soviet hesitation was related to the assessment of Norwegian foreign policy. This was still quite positive, but Soviet diplomats were increasingly worried about signs that the Norwegian government was reconsidering its commitment to "bridge building" and non-alignment. Throughout 1947 the reports from the Soviet embassy in Oslo emphasised that the Norwegian

²⁶⁶ AVPRF, f. 0116, op. 36, p. 142, d. 27, ll. 32-37, Kuznetsov's "Spravka" to Vyshinskii, 28 August, 1947.

²⁶⁷ The process leading up to the Storting's decision of 15 February 1947 is discussed in detail in Knut Einar Eriksen, "Svalbardspørsmålet fra krig til kald krig", (cf. note 3).

government was conducting a foreign policy based on "loyal cooperation with all the great powers, avoiding open adherence to any of the blocs".²⁶⁸ However, both the embassy reports and internal MID memoranda emphasised that the USA and Great Britain ("the Anglo-Saxons") kept constant pressure on the Norwegian government in order to tie Norway more closely to the western powers. "Norway stands at the crossroads", was the message from Ambassador Afanasiev in late November 1947.²⁶⁹ At the very end of December 1947 the Ambassador talked about the existence of a "campaign to revise Norway's foreign policy line", and concluded that Norway had already abandoned the policy of equal relations with the "two postwar international blocs".²⁷⁰

It followed from this that one of the major aims of Soviet policy towards Norway was to avoid providing arguments for the proponents of a more pro-western, anti-Soviet Norwegian foreign policy line. It should be noted that at this time the Soviets viewed the idea of Nordic political and military cooperation (under Swedish leadership but seen as inspired by Britain and the USA) as the main vehicle for pro-western, anti-Soviet currents in Norwegian foreign and security policy-making

²⁶⁸ This quote is from a report by Cherkasov, from late 1947, AVPRF, f. 0116, op. 36, p. 140, d. 3, l. 195.

²⁶⁹ AVPRF, f. 0116, op. 36, p. 140, d. 3, ll. 138-146, Afanasiev to Malik, 22 November, 1947.

²⁷⁰ AVPRF, f. 0116, op. 36, p. 143, d. 38, ll. 27-28, Afanasiev to Vetrov, 31 December, 1947. Norway was at the "crossroads", cf. Lange's speech in the Storting on 11 December 1947. Magne Skodvin, *Norden eller Nato? Utenriksdepartementet og allianse-spørsmålet 1947-1949*, Oslo 1971, pp. 62-68.

circles, and as the major counterweight to the official Norwegian "bridge-building" doctrine.²⁷¹

In February 1948 Afanasiev proposed that Lange should be told, "informally" and in cautious terms, that the Svalbard issue was still open, but that the Soviet government could not agree with the Norwegian point of view of February 1947. Afanasiev also proposed that the Norwegians should be told that extending the Soviet-Norwegian arrangement for Norwegian seal hunting in the White Sea²⁷² would have to be seen in the context of other "unsolved questions with regard to the Arctic Sea area", foremost among them the Svalbard question.²⁷³ Although Afanasiev's proposal was supported by Deputy Minister V.A.

²⁷¹ Cf. for instance Ambassador Afanasiev's report to Malik of 22 November 1947, "K voprosu o 'Skandinavskom bloke'", AVPRF, f. 0116, op. 36, p. 140, d. 3, ll. 138-46. Although the Soviet concern primarily reflected their long-standing and traditional rejection of Nordic military and political cooperation, their apprehensions were not entirely unfounded. In the immediate postwar period Scandinavian political and military cooperation was seen by the Norwegians as a more obvious alternative to the isolated non-alignment of the bridge-building doctrine, than a formalisation of the military and political links to the western great powers. Limited talks on the political level and between the military staffs of the Scandinavian countries were initiated in 1947. Cf. Magne Skodvin, op.cit. (cf. note 270), pp. 57-58; Knut E. Eriksen & Magne Skodvin, op. cit. (cf. note 8), pp. 452-57. For a general discussion of the evolution of Soviet attitudes to Nordic cooperation, see Sven G. Holtmark, *Enemy springboard or benevolent buffer? Soviet attitudes to Nordic cooperation, 1920-1955*, in the series *Forsvarsstudier/Defence Studies*, 1992, No. 6, Oslo, 1992.

²⁷² The so-called "Ålesund concession" (Ålesund-konsesjonen) from 1926, which had been renewed every year until 1940.

²⁷³ AVPRF, f. 0116, op. 36, p. 145, d. 2, ll. 4-6, Afanasiev to Molotov, 23 February, 1948.

Zorin and A. Krutikov,²⁷⁴ a number of high MID officials headed by Deputy Minister Vyshinskii decided in late February to advise Molotov that

the political situation is not sufficiently favourable (*podkhod-iashchii*) to renew the negotiations on Spitsbergen. In any case we consider it inappropriate to take the initiative on this matter.

Instead it was decided to launch a cultural-political offensive aimed at strengthening the healthy pro-Soviet elements in Norway.²⁷⁵ A proposal by Zhdanova and Abramov to revitalise the entire question by declaring a Soviet sector line in the Arctic Ocean based on the postwar border (i.e. taking into account the acquisition of the Petsamo area from Finland) left senior officials unmoved. The point in their argument was that the declaration of a Soviet arctic sector line based on the new Soviet-Norwegian border would include Kvitøya (Belyi Ostrov, White Island) and some other minor islands in the Svalbard archipelago in the Soviet sector. The two authors apparently imagined that this could be used as a bargaining card in the discussions with the Norwegians.²⁷⁶

If "the political situation" was "not opportune" in early 1948, developments throughout 1948 and up to when Norway joined the Atlantic Pact in April 1949 made the situation even less so.

²⁷⁴ AVPRF, f. 0116, op. 37b, p. 146, d. 1, ll. 8-9, Zorin and Krutikov to Molotov and Mikoian, February, 1948.

²⁷⁵ AVPRF, f. 0116, op. 36, p. 145, d. 2, l. 7, memorandum to Afanasiev and Abramov, about a conference at Vyshinskii's office on 25 February 1948; f. 0116, op. 37, p. 145, d. 4, ll. 1-3, Zorin and Kuznetsov to Molotov, 6 January, 1948, with Molotov's approval; *ibid.*, l. 4, resolution from a Deputy Ministers' conference, 17 January, 1948.

²⁷⁶ AVPRF, f. 0116, op. 37, p. 147, d. 25, ll. 5-7, Zhdanova to Abramov, 27 February, 1947; and *ibid.*, l. 8, Abramov to Vyshinskii, 28 February, 1947.

The negotiations on a Scandinavian defence union which continued until early 1949, and the simultaneous consultations with the Americans over Norwegian membership in the emerging Atlantic system,²⁷⁷ barred the Soviets from renewing a topic which would have certainly provided additional ammunition to the proponents of strong political and military ties with the western powers (the Soviets did not differentiate between the Nordic and the Atlantic options). Instead the Soviets were constantly considering what might be done to strengthen the Norwegian opponents of western alignment. The Soviet Ambassador's report for 1947, which was sent to MID in mid-March 1948, left no doubt that the Soviet Union's position in Norway was rapidly deteriorating. Afanasiev also emphasised that the Svalbard question, since it was made public in early 1947, was constantly being used by "reactionary" and "anti-Soviet" forces to undermine Soviet-Norwegian relations, and to strengthen ties with the western powers.²⁷⁸ In March 1949 Afanasiev concluded that Norway was "firmly placed in the Anglo-American bloc".²⁷⁹

Even prior to that the Soviets were convinced that Norway was in the process of joining the Atlantic system. In a memorandum to Molotov of 6 January, Abramov and Afanasiev con-

²⁷⁷ On 30 August 1948 S.T. Loginov, an attaché at the Soviet embassy in Oslo, filed a report called "On the question of Norway's participation in the Atlantic bloc". The gist of his argument was that the initiators of the idea of an Atlantic defence arrangement were bent on achieving the participation of both Norway and Denmark in the system. AVPRF, f. 0116, op. 37, p. 149, d. 38, ll. 137-143.

²⁷⁸ AVPRF, f. 0116, op. 37, p. 145, d. 8, "Otchet Posolstva SSSR v Norvegii za 1947 god", signed by Afanasiev on 16 March, 1948.

²⁷⁹ AVPRF, f. 0116, op. 38, p. 38, d. 8, l. 34, from the Ambassador's general report for 1948, sent to MID on 15 March, 1949.

cluded that the Soviet Union could not "passively" accept Norway's joining the emerging and "hostile" Atlantic bloc. On 13 December 1948 Foreign Minister Lange had allegedly declared during "a secret press conference" that the Norwegian government had decided to accept the invitation to participate in the creation of the Atlantic Pact.²⁸⁰ Declarations that the Norwegian government would not accept foreign military bases on Norwegian territory in peace-time "cannot, of course, be taken seriously". Abramov and Afanasiev came up with the idea of delivering a statement to the Norwegian government on the Soviet view of Norwegian membership in the western bloc. They hoped that:

Our declaration will strengthen the USSR's position in the Scandinavian countries, expose the Norwegian government's policy as aimed towards bringing Norway into an aggressive bloc, and will strengthen the position of the opponents of Norwegian membership of the Atlantic bloc.²⁸¹

It is interesting to note that these early Soviet assessments of the ramifications of Norway's adherence to the Atlantic bloc did not mention Svalbard. This was recalled with regret in later Soviet documents. They focused instead on the problem of "Anglo-American" military bases in mainland Norway. Nor did the two Soviet notes of 29 January and 5 February 1949, which warned against Norway's joining the Atlantic Pact, mention Sval-

²⁸⁰ This, of course, was a misleading interpretation of the attitude of Lange and the government at this point. The negotiations on a Scandinavian defence union continued until 30 January 1949. Prior to the final negotiations with the Americans which commenced in early February, the government had not taken any decision.

²⁸¹ AVPRF, f. 07, op. 22, p. 326, d. 22, l. 1, Abramov and Afanasiev to Molotov, 6 January, 1949.

bard.²⁸² The same holds true in respect of an MID draft answer to the Norwegian note of 5 March.²⁸³ When early in the year, Ambassador Afanasiev outlined the embassy's activity in 1949 for consideration by MID, he did not suggest resuming the Svalbard discussions.²⁸⁴

Afanasiev, however, soon realised that Norway's decision to become a member of the Atlantic Pact had repercussions with regard to Svalbard. In mid-May 1949, and prompted by a report by S.T. Loginov, who had now advanced to the position of Second Secretary, Afanasiev wrote to Vyshinskii (who had just succeeded Molotov as Minister for Foreign Affairs) arguing that the inclusion of Spitsbergen and Bear Island in the Atlantic Pact's area of responsibility constituted "one of the most serious consequences of Norway's adherence to the North Atlantic Pact". Afanasiev further claimed that the inclusion of Svalbard in the Atlantic "defensive" system contradicted Article 9 of the 1920 Treaty, which prohibited the use of the archipelago "for war-like purposes" (*dlia voennykh tselei*).²⁸⁵ Loginov went even further, maintaining that the Norwegian response to the

²⁸² The Soviet statements of 29 January and 5 February, and the Norwegian responses of 1 February and 5 March, 1949, are printed (in Norwegian translation) in Johan Jørgen Holst, *op.cit.* (cf. note 233), Vol. II, pp. 65-70. The Norwegian notes, which contained assurances that there would be no foreign military bases on Norwegian territory in time of peace and when Norway was not under threat of attack, laid the foundation for the Norwegian policy of balancing the need for Allied military backing on the one hand and non-provocation in respect of the Soviet Union on the other.

²⁸³ AVPRF, f. 07, op. 22, p. 38, d. 278, ll. 9-11, unsigned letter to Molotov of 10 March 1949, with enclosed draft statement which had also been forwarded to Stalin for approval.

²⁸⁴ AVPRF, f. 0116, op. 38, p. 38, d. 8, ll. 81-85, Afanasiev's undated memorandum with enclosures.

²⁸⁵ AVPRF, f. 0116, op. 37, p. 145, d. 7, ll. 7-9, Afanasiev to Vyshinskii, 14 May, 1949.

Soviet notes of 29 January and 5 February meant that "the Norwegian government reserved for itself the right to decide the question of offering territory for [military] bases at any time, even in peace time", and that this also included Spitsbergen and Bear Island.²⁸⁶

Afanasiev, however, argued against bringing up the matter with the Norwegians. The Norwegian government's reaction might be to reconfirm its continued adherence to the stipulations of the 1920 Treaty, or to

declare its readiness to revise the Treaty. Under current conditions this could mean that as a result of Spitsbergen's new international status [the Norwegian government] acquires the right to implement military measures on the archipelago.²⁸⁷

Afanasiev's letter confirms that the Soviet attitude to the 1920 Treaty had undergone a basic transformation since Molotov's initiative in November 1944. The original Soviet aim had been to get the Treaty revised, in order to prepare the ground for inclusion of the archipelago in the Soviet defence perimeter, and in order to secure Soviet economic interests on Svalbard. The Norwegian draft declaration of 9 April 1945 had been almost completely satisfactory to the Soviets, and they had subsequently kept silent about both the idea of Spitsbergen as a Soviet-Norwegian "condominium" and the transfer of Bear Island to Soviet sovereignty. Now the Soviet position was one of defender of the *status quo* in the region: of the Treaty in general; and of the Treaty's Article 9 (the non-militarisation clause) in particu-

²⁸⁶ AVPRF, f. 0116, op. 38, p. 150, d. 2, ll. 34-37, "Norvegiia i severo-atlanticheskii pakt", sent together with Afanasiev's letter to Vyshinskii on 14 May, 1949.

²⁸⁷ AVPRF, f. 0116, op. 37, p. 145, d. 7, ll. 7-9, Afanasiev to Vyshinskii, 14 May, 1949.

lar.²⁸⁸ The new and legalistic attitude of the Soviets was revealed when in June 1950 the Norwegians informed them about a radar station which had been erected at Cap Linné for the use of civilian shipping. The 5th European Department and the Soviet military authorities argued that the building of the radar station constituted a breach of Article 9 of the Treaty because it could also serve military purposes. This argument was rejected by the Ministry's Legal Department. With support from the Ministry of Shipping, Buev of the Legal Department argued that there was a real need for the radar station, and there was no proof that the Norwegians intended to utilise it in a way which contradicted the Treaty. It was decided not to deliver a protest to the Norwegian government.²⁸⁹ When *Glavsevmorput* proposed in August that an aircraft should be permanently based on Spitsbergen, this was rejected in the MID for the reason that it might serve as an excuse for the Norwegians and the western powers to initiate much more extensive use of the islands for similar purposes.²⁹⁰

1951: Moscow on the defensive

Throughout 1950 the Soviet embassy sent alarming reports to Moscow about the increasing American and British military presence in Norway. As early as February 1950 Afanasiev

²⁸⁸ Which confirms earlier research in the field; cf. for instance Knut Einar Eriksen, "Svalbardspørsmålet fra krig til kald krig" (cf. note 3), pp. 157-158, and Rolf Tannes' various works which have been referred to extensively throughout this text.

²⁸⁹ AVPRF, f. 0116, op. 39, p. 157, d. 30, l. 7, Orlov to Golunskii, 28 July, 1950; *ibid.*, l. 8, Buev to Orlov, 4 August, 1950; *ibid.*, ll. 9-10, Orlov to Bogomolov, 5 August, 1950.

²⁹⁰ AVPRF, f. 0116, op. 40, p. 162, d. 28, l. 58, Plakhin to Zorin, 29 August, 1951.

argued that the intensive American military activity in Norway as well as "possible further demands from the American military (voenshchina) for the militarisation of Spitsbergen" would force the Soviet government to remind the Norwegians of their declarations of 1949.²⁹¹ The Soviet Ambassador also argued that Norway's membership of the Atlantic Pact meant that Norwegian territory, including Svalbard, was becoming an "operational region" for the American armed forces.²⁹² In November Afanasiev sent an alarming report to Moscow about military developments in Norway, but concluded that a formal Soviet *démarche* must be based on more conclusive evidence of plans for stationing allied forces in Norway.²⁹³ Moscow agreed with Afanasiev,²⁹⁴ and in December 1950 the Ambassador received instructions to collect and forward to Moscow

a list (podborka) of basic information and facts [...] about the preparations for bases (o podgotovke baz) in Norway and in particular in Northern Norway, i.e. send the material which would form the basis for our *démarche*, if it has to be made (esli ego pridetsia delat).²⁹⁵

Thus the idea of delivering a protest against increasing allied military activity in Norway developed gradually from early 1950. It appears that the Soviets were primarily worried by what they conceived as Atlantic Pact plans to station British and

²⁹¹ AVPRF, f. 0116, op. 39, p. 156, d. 10, ll. 1-4, Afanasiev to Vyshinskii, 21 February, 1950.

²⁹² AVPRF, f. 0116, op. 39, p. 156, d. 10, l. 12, from the embassy's general report for 1949.

²⁹³ AVPRF, f. 0116, op. 39, p. 158, d. 44, ll. 75-77, Afanasiev to Zorin, 4 November, 1950.

²⁹⁴ Cf. Aleksandrov's comments to Afanasiev's report, in AVPRF, f. 0116, op. 39, p. 155, d. 6, ll. 15-17, Aleksandrov to Zorin, 20 November, 1950.

²⁹⁵ AVPRF, f. 0116, op. 39, p. 135, d. 3, l. 32, Zorin to Afanasiev, 16 December, 1950.

American forces in mainland Norway, but it is clear that the inclusion of Svalbard in the Western Alliance's overall area of responsibility was an additional cause for concern. However, it appears that the MID's main source of information about military developments in Norway was the Soviet embassy in Oslo. The embassy, in turn, relied heavily on information from the Norwegian and international press, which the Soviet diplomats interpreted in accordance with the idiosyncratic Soviet view of the world and with the directives from the Centre in Moscow. The embassy's reports therefore contained few hard facts, consisting of questionable evidence which supported even more dubious analyses.²⁹⁶ From early 1951 Afanasiev told MID in a number of reports that Norway had been transformed into a "bridgehead" (platsdarm) of imperialist aggression towards the USSR.²⁹⁷

In early December 1950 MID asked the Navy and Army General Staffs to supply evidence about "the preparation of military bases in Norway (in particular in the country's northern parts) for foreign armed forces".²⁹⁸ The answers from the military authorities were rather evasive: both the Navy and the Army General Staffs were worried by the proliferation of military sites and bases in Norway, and in general by the intensive contacts and cooperation between Norwegian and allied military authorities. They did not, however, answer the crucial question of whether the Norwegians were in the throes

²⁹⁶ A typical example of this is a report Afanasiev sent to Orlov in late November, in which a number of UPA reports served as material for extensive theories. AVPRF, f. 0116, op. 39, p. 155, d. 4, ll. 46-48, Afanasiev to Orlov, 27 November, 1950.

²⁹⁷ As for instance in his general report for 1950, AVPRF, f. 0116, op. 40, p. 161, d. 13.

²⁹⁸ AVPRF, f. 0116, op. 39, p. 156, d. 11, l. 37, Zorin to Zarakhov and Golovko, 5 December, 1950.

of allowing permanent peacetime stationing of foreign troops in contravention of the 1949 declarations.²⁹⁹

In January 1951 the Norwegian government decided to accept Svalbard's inclusion in the area of responsibility of the newly created Atlantic command, ACLANT. The Norwegian Storting was informed about the decision. This prompted the MID to start preparing of a note of protest. A first draft was ready in early March 1951, and subsequent versions were discussed in the following months, until on 15 October Vyshinskii delivered a note to a representative of the Norwegian embassy in Moscow. The long process of drafting, discussing and redrafting the note may have reflected conflicting Soviet foreign policy considerations. The Soviet leadership realised that only limited pressure could be exerted on Norway after it became a member of the Atlantic Pact. Tatiana Zhdanova, one of the unyielding "activists", admitted in February 1951 that the Soviet Union could not put military or economic pressure on Norway. That left "information" and propaganda: in order to weaken Norway's military and political ties with the western great powers, "the myth about the Soviet Union's aggressiveness" would have to be counteracted.³⁰⁰ Thus the need to warn the Norwegian government publicly against going down the road of military integration in NATO, had to be weighed against the danger of giving ammunition to the "anti-sovetschiki" who were talking about Soviet expansionist designs against Norway.

There seems to have been four people in charge of drafting up the note. Although Vyshinskii had succeeded Molotov as Minister for Foreign Affairs, Molotov was supposed to approve the draft notes and the letters sent to the "Instantsiia" to get

²⁹⁹ AVPRF, f. 0116, op. 39g, p. 156, d. 1, ll. 39-42, Admiral Golovko to Zorin, 15 December 1950; and *ibid.*, ll. 43-48, General Shalin to Zorin, 16 December, 1950.

³⁰⁰ AVPRF, f. 0116, op. 40, p. 161, d. 18, ll. 1-4, Zhdanova's "zapiska" of 28 February 1951.

Stalin's agreement to MID's initiatives. Apart from these two main figures, the Deputy Ministers Gromyko and Zorin took an active part in drafting the documents.

The first draft, sent to Stalin in March 1951, referred to the Norwegian decision to participate in NATO's integrated command system. This meant that the Norwegian government had accepted that the Atlantic Alliance's military activities would cover Norwegian territory, "including Spitsbergen and Bear Island". MID's March action plan included an oral statement to the Norwegian government to be published subsequently in the Soviet press. In addition, Soviet newspapers were to print an article pointing out that including Spitsbergen and Bear Island in the sphere of NATO's military activity was in conflict with the Paris Treaty of 1920. At the same time the article was to stress the Soviet Union's special position and interests in the area. The aim should be

to make it more difficult for the Norwegian government to realise this military policy and to support the struggle of the opponents of this policy.³⁰¹

The Soviets had been informed by Jacob Friis, one of the Labour Party's distinguished left-wingers, that there was opposition within the Storting's Committee for Foreign Affairs to the inclusion of Svalbard in the allied command. Friis also told the Soviets that the Norwegian press had received instructions not to write about the defence of Svalbard.³⁰²

In a subsequent draft letter of July 1951 to Stalin, the arguments on the need for Soviet *démarche*, were considerably extended. In this draft it was argued that the Norwegian

³⁰¹ AVPRF, f. 07, op. 24, p. 25, d. 292, Zorin to Stalin, March 1951.

³⁰² AVPRF, f. 0116, op. 40, p. 161, d. 12, ll. 65-67, Loginov's conversation with Friis on 11 June 1951. Cf. also Rolf Tamnes, *Svalbard mellom øst og vest* (cf. note 4), p. 25.

government "in the last months" had taken a number of steps which would "make Norway a military base for the aggressive North Atlantic bloc". Agreements between the Norwegians and NATO meant that "Norway might be occupied by American and British troops".³⁰³

The content of this letter was probably influenced by an extensive report from Ambassador Afanasiev about "foreign military bases in Norway", which he sent to MID in late June. Afanasiev's detailed and alarming report concluded that

1. The Norwegian government has clearly violated the undertakings which it gave the Soviet government in 1949 that it would not allow the stationing of foreign troops in peace-time. Hauge's declaration of 21 February this year³⁰⁴ makes it clear that the government is retreating even verbally from the assurances which it gave, even though it pretends that it is still guided by them.
2. Norwegian territory is increasingly being transformed into an Anglo-American military base, as a bridge-head for an attack on the Soviet Union.

The second part of Afanasiev's report was about Svalbard. The Ambassador referred to the conflict between Article 9 of the 1920 Treaty and the Norwegian government's declaration that Spitsbergen, Bear Island and Jan Mayen island³⁰⁵ were to be included in the North Atlantic defence area.

Afanasiev did not have confirmed information that Norway or the western powers were preparing for military activity on Svalbard, although "journalistic circles" had reported that

³⁰³ AVPRF, f. 07, p. 25, d. 292, l. 8, draft letter to Stalin, July 1951.

³⁰⁴ About the "base policy" (basepolitikken) of the Norwegian government. Cf. J.J. Holst, op. cit. (cf. note 233), Vol. II, pp. 71-72.

³⁰⁵ A small island between Svalbard and Greenland, which is not part of the Svalbard archipelago.

Norwegian military aircraft had been stationed on Spitsbergen. Afanasiev argued however that the Americans were highly interested in the area, although he was unable to produce hard evidence in support of his view.

Afanasiev did not support the idea of making a statement to the Norwegian government. The Norwegians would simply "deny the facts", or refuse to enter into a discussion about Western military activity on mainland Norway. According to Afanasiev, the issue of military bases in Norway and in other countries should be brought up at international conferences. With regard to Svalbard, Afanasiev felt that the Soviet government could make a *démarche* only if it turned out that the rumours about military activity on Spitsbergen could be proved.³⁰⁶ However, Afanasiev soon changed his mind, and in two letters to Zorin in August he strongly urged the leadership to make the *démarche* about allied bases and Svalbard.³⁰⁷

Afanasiev's messages might have been symptomatic of a certain hesitation within the MID apparatus about the value and effect of a Soviet warning against allied military activity in mainland Norway and Svalbard. New draft notes and letters to Stalin were prepared. Vyshinskii's letter to Stalin with his final recommendations, together with the text of the proposed Soviet statement, was sent on 6 October or thereabouts. The basic argument was the same as the one made earlier in the year. Vyshinskii reminded Stalin of the Norwegian government's 1949 declarations, adding that "the policy of the Norwegian government directly contradicts these statements". Vyshinskii repeated that "Norwegian territory is in the process of being made into a military base for the North Atlantic Alliance", and

³⁰⁶ AVPRF, f. 07, op. 26, p. 47, d. 143, ll. 1-12, Afanasiev to Vyshinskii, 23 June, 1951.

³⁰⁷ AVPRF, f. 0116, op. 40, p. 160, d. 7, ll. 33-34, Afanasiev and Plakhin to Zorin, 14 August 1951; and *ibid.*, l. 35, Afanasiev and Plakhin to Zorin, 18 August, 1951.

NATO's area of "military activity" (voennye meropriatia) would include Spitsbergen and Bear Island. He also reminded Stalin that the Norwegians had accepted the remilitarisation of Germany.

The aim of the statement to the Norwegian government and of a subsequent newspaper article was to complicate the implementation of the Norwegian government's military policy, to facilitate the struggle of the "peace-lovers" in Norway, and to warn the Norwegian government against any military activity on Svalbard.³⁰⁸

In the two statements of October and November 1951 the Soviets used Article 9 of the Treaty to warn the Norwegian government against taking measures which would change the *status quo* in the area. Foreign Minister Halvard Lange told the British Ambassador in Oslo that

the Soviet Government had given the Norwegian Government to understand through the usual channels of the Soviet embassy in Stockholm that the Soviet Note was really aimed not at Norway but at the United States, whom the Soviet Government credited with plans for establishing bases in Spitsbergen as they had done in Iceland.³⁰⁹

The change in the Soviet attitude was demonstrated when in 1951 the Scottish Spitsbergen Syndicate offered for sale to the Soviets land on Spitsbergen. The Soviet Trade Delegation in London expressed their interest on the precondition that the seller "could produce a letter" from the British government "saying that they had no objection" to the deal.³¹⁰

³⁰⁸ AVPRF, f. 0116, op. 40, p. 161, d. 18, ll. 16-17, Vyshinskii to Stalin with enclosed draft Central Committee decision, dated 6 October, 1951.

³⁰⁹ Rolf Tamnes, *Svalbard mellom Øst og Vest. Kald krig og lavspenning i nord 1947-1953* (cf. note 4), p. 30.

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

1953: Molotov's Svalbard foray *post mortem*

The Soviet statements of 1951 did not initiate a new phase of Soviet-Norwegian discussions on the status of the Svalbard archipelago. This clearly reflected a growing understanding on part of the Soviets that further Soviet initiatives on Svalbard might strengthen the anti-Soviet forces in Norway and push Norway even further into the western camp, thus undermining basic Soviet foreign policy aims in Norway.

A memorandum of June 1953 by Georgii M. Pushkin, a Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs, presented a candid analysis of a Soviet policy which had been a failure. Pushkin proposed in his memorandum that the Soviet Union should issue a declaration that it would strictly adhere to all stipulations of the 1920 Treaty, as it had done in the past. Pushkin's arguments in support of his proposal amounted to an unambiguous criticism of Soviet policy on Svalbard. Having reminded Molotov of the various stages in the Soviet-Norwegian discussions which started with Molotov's initiative in November 1944, he continued:

The information [which was made public in January and February 1947] about our proposals on Spitsbergen and Bear Island was strongly exploited in the Norwegian and Anglo-American press to further anti-Soviet attitudes in Norway. The campaign which accompanied the issue contributed to a certain degree to preparing public opinion in Norway for membership in the North Atlantic Alliance.

The Soviet statements of 1951 had a similar effect, being exploited "by the reactionary press in Norway, USA, Britain and other western countries" to launch a new anti-Soviet campaign. This campaign had included allusions to alleged Soviet intentions to renew the demand for a revision of Svalbard's international status. The American press had therefore argued the need for Norwegian military forces to be stationed on Spitsbergen.

Pushkin concluded that the Soviet demand for a revision of the 1920 Treaty was still being used by those who wanted to

prevent "an improvement in Soviet-Norwegian relations". He proposed, therefore, that the Soviet government should declare that it "has no intention of questioning Norway's sovereignty over the Spitsbergen archipelago and Bear Island".³¹¹

A formal declaration to this effect was never, as far as I have been able to establish, delivered by the Soviets to the Norwegian government. Pushkin's letter nevertheless reflected the new Soviet state of mind with in respect of Svalbard, and represented the end of Molotov's attempts to revise the geostrategic and economic status of the Svalbard archipelago.

³¹¹ AVPRF, f. 0116, op. 42, p. 170, d. 4, ll. 28-32, Pushkin to Molotov, June 1953.

7. Concluding remarks

1. *The Soviet rationale.* During the period under review in this study, Svalbard never occupied a position of prominence in the deliberations of top level Soviet foreign policy makers. This holds true even for the period 1944-47 when Svalbard's international status was the object of Soviet-Norwegian discussions.³¹² Molotov's initiative appeared alarming to the Norwegians mainly because it concerned the integrity of a territory under Norwegian sovereignty, not because Svalbard was of economic or military-strategic importance. The way Molotov raised the issue in his conversation with Trygve Lie in November 1944, and subsequent Soviet moves and documents, suggest that the Soviets somehow did not understand this. This is consistent with the tendency, evident throughout the history of Soviet foreign policy, to ignore the political necessity for and will of small powers to uphold their territorial integrity with the same stubbornness with which the Soviets themselves were prepared to defend their own borders.

Seen from Moscow Svalbard was a secondary issue, a matter of prestige and some potential value but devoid of emotions. Although notions from the military-strategic *vocabulary* were prominent when Molotov broached the issue, the substance of such arguments tended to dwindle when discussions moved from the sphere of geopolitics to the level of military-strategic and operational *analysis*.

In the interwar period the Soviet attitude towards Svalbard evolved from detachment and uncertainty about the nature of Soviet interests in the area in the first post-revolutionary years, to efforts to develop economic activity on Spitsbergen from the

³¹² A member of Molotov's secretariat, whose name appears in the correspondence related to Svalbard, when asked in early 1939 about the handling of the Svalbard question, answered that he could not remember the issue.

early 1930s. The start of Soviet mining on Spitsbergen in 1933, which followed the general increase in Soviet activity in the Arctic regions during the second half of the 1920s, was apparently aimed at providing coal for the development of Russia's northern regions and for Soviet shipping in northern waters. The available documentation does not support the thesis that the Soviet engagement on Spitsbergen reflected a growing emphasis by the Soviet decision-makers on the region's actual or potential military-strategic value. Consequently there were no Soviet attempts prior to the outbreak of the Second World War to challenge the stipulations of the Svalbard Treaty. Although only Norway and the Soviet Union maintained a permanent presence on the archipelago, the Soviet government did not signal any ambitions to formalise this process of *de facto* bilateralisation. The Soviet accession to the Svalbard Treaty in 1935 was motivated by economic and legal arguments, not military-strategic ones.

The rising tension in Europe and finally the outbreak of the war in September 1939 spawned the first attempts within the Soviet diplomatic community to initiate a policy on Svalbard based on military-strategic considerations. However, these were the initiatives of civilian bureaucrats, although they excelled in the use of military-strategic terminology. It appears that in the early stages of the war the Commissariat for Foreign Affairs did not bother to seek the opinion of the Soviet military establishment. The relative detachment of the military authorities continued throughout the war. At no point did the Soviets make any serious attempt to establish themselves militarily on Spitsbergen or Bear Island. The ambitious schemes of Molotov and Stalin in July 1941 to open a new front in the High North, of which an Allied military expedition to Spitsbergen should be part, were allowed to lapse when they met with a conspicuous lack of enthusiasm on the part of British military authorities. It is unclear to what degree the Soviet military had been consulted before Molotov presented his ideas to the British Ambassador in

Moscow. There was, however, a lack of consistency in Molotov's arguments in favour of sending troops to Spitsbergen which seems to suggest that it reflected general geopolitical rather than military-strategic and operational deliberations.

It appears that Molotov's November 1944 initiative, which was aimed at revising Svalbard's international status, was also primarily the outcome of ideas circulating within the civilian foreign policy bureaucracy. The arguments were, at least partly, based on the doubtful premise that the struggle for the lines of communication between Northern Russia and the West had demonstrated the strategic importance of Spitsbergen and Bear Island. When the military leadership were asked for their opinion, it turned out that they were uncertain about the real or potential role of Spitsbergen and Bear Island in the future defence of the Soviet Union. The lukewarm involvement on the part of the military goes a long way towards explaining the lack of determination which characterised Soviet policy during the period when Svalbard's international status was on the agenda. It also contrasts strongly with the determination with which the Soviets pursued their interests with regard to the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles.

Whatever Molotov's main motivation may have been when he raised the Svalbard issue in November 1944, it soon turned out that the Soviets were apprehensive lest their ambitions on the Svalbard archipelago should cut across their more important foreign policy goals. Gradually it became clear that the costs of a firm Svalbard policy were potentially prohibitive, in terms of the effect on the evolution of Norway's foreign policy orientation and its interaction with aspects of the evolving East-West confrontation.

All this forced the Soviets to switch to the defence of *status quo* as the mainstay of their policy on Spitsbergen and Bear Island. The Soviet notes of the autumn of 1951 mark the culmination of this *volte-face*. From then on there was a high degree of symmetry between Soviet and western (US-British)

evaluations of Svalbard's role. While at the end of the war the Soviets made an effort to change the established situation in their favour, both sides were basically more concerned with barring the other side from establishing itself on the archipelago, than with creating their own bases.

2. *The Soviet regional approach.* The available documentation suggests that, in the last phase of the war and in the immediate postwar period, the Soviet General Staffs³¹³ were much more attracted to the idea of an arrangement with the Norwegians on the establishment of Soviet military bases on mainland Norway, than by the prospects for joint Soviet-Norwegian fortification of Svalbard. If anything, the experiences of the war strengthened this approach. While Svalbard figured in German and Allied strategy mainly as a site for meteorological stations,³¹⁴ control over Northern Norway had enabled the Germans to establish naval and air bases close to the routes of the Allied convoys to Russia.

The proposal to move the Soviet-Norwegian border westwards to the river Tana was part of a scheme aimed at altering Northern Norway's military status. The foreign policy bureaucracy, up to and including the Deputy Commissars, strongly supported these efforts. On the basis of the available documentary evidence one cannot say exactly how close to realisation these plans actually came. It seems clear however that they were rejected at the very top level, i.e. by Molotov, Stalin and their colleagues in the Politburo. The reasons were probably the same as in the case of Svalbard - a more forceful Soviet policy would have had negative effects on the bilateral and global policy level grossly outweighing the military benefits.

³¹³ The supreme staffs of both the Army and the Navy were called "General Staffs".

³¹⁴ Cf. Jon Ulvensj en, *Brennpunkt Nord. V rtjenestekrigen 1940-45*, in the series *Forsvarsmuseets sm skrift*, No. 6, Oslo 1991.

There was a clear link between the proposals on Northern Norway and the Svalbard initiative. Soviet bases on Spitsbergen and Bear Island would have constituted the extreme northern links in a system of bases stretching from Soviet territory, through Finnmark to the western coast of Northern Norway. The use of the term "regional" to characterise Soviet policy towards Northern Norway and Svalbard implies that the Soviets tended to discuss this area in terms which differed from their evaluation of the rest of the country, and which were directly linked to Soviet interests in adjacent parts of the European High North. Whereas Southern Norway was clearly seen as belonging to the Western sphere of interest, this was not the case for Northern Norway, although the Soviets were unable to see a clear demarcation between the two areas. The idea of a "condominium", which Molotov presented to Lie as the future way of administering Spitsbergen, was inherent in the proposed arrangement for Northern Norway as well. With regard to Finnmark east of the river Tana, it was argued by both the civilian bureaucrats and by the Army General Staff that for both historical and military-strategic reasons this area ought to be transferred to the Soviet Union.

This Soviet approach mirrored the tendency, widespread in the West during the war and the first postwar years, to treat Northern Norway as a "grey zone", between the western sphere of influence and the Soviet Union. Western suspicions from late 1944 to the summer of 1945 about Soviet plans to move westwards towards Narvik, were close to the truth in terms of the preferences, if not the actual plans, of the Soviet General Staffs and the foreign policy bureaucracy. Even the withdrawal of the remaining Soviet troops from Eastern Finnmark in September 1945 did not put an end to the MID activists' efforts to achieve an "arrangement" in Northern Norway. Not until the winter of 1946 was it finally decided to accept the prewar Norwegian-Finnish border along the Pasvik river as the basis for the border.

We cannot say exactly when the General Staffs and the activists in the Ministry for Foreign Affairs gave up their efforts to convince the foreign policy leadership of the need for military bases on mainland Norway. The 1947 idea of a Soviet-Norwegian "agreement on alliance and friendship" was clearly an echo of the earlier attempts to establish a defence relationship between the two countries.

3. *The Soviet decision-making process.* This study has shown that lower and middle level bureaucrats in the Soviet foreign policy apparatus were the driving force behind the attempts in the years 1944-47 to alter Svalbard's international status. The same circle of "activists" repeatedly tried to convince the foreign policy leadership of the need to establish Soviet military bases in Northern Norway, and to move the Soviet-Norwegian border westwards. The bureaucrats' persistent efforts to convince the decision-makers of the virtues of their pet projects, and their ability to obtain Molotov's attention, hardly fit the conventional view of the Soviet foreign policy apparatus as a monolithic structure where all important initiatives originated at the top.

On the other hand, the bureaucrats were mostly poorly informed about the subtleties and overriding priorities of Soviet foreign policy, and were unable to view their proposals in a broader, ultimately global, context. They did not understand, for instance, that a Soviet proposal in the summer of 1945 to move the border or to establish Soviet bases in Northern Norway would have had disastrous consequences far beyond the Soviet-Norwegian relationship. They nevertheless supplied the basis for final, top level decisions. The decision-makers were usually presented with *one* proposal, not with a set of *alternative* suggestions elaborated by the bureaucracy. If anything, this limited the decision-makers' field for manoeuvre: there would be a natural tendency to accept the prepared proposal rather than to refer it back to the bureaucratic level for reconsideration and rewriting, or to end up with a policy of inaction, as happened in respect of Northern Norway and partly Svalbard. As part of the

bureaucratic process, the Deputy Ministers played an important role as the main channel of communication between the Minister and the lower level of the bureaucracy. As a rule the proposals which reached the Minister bore the strong mark of the Deputy Minister in charge of the case.

This picture of a "normal" bureaucratic structure needs modification. Although this study has demonstrated a surprising degree of initiative and persistence on the part of lower and middle-level bureaucrats, we have seen that the top leaders decided *not* to follow their advice on Northern Norway. With regard to Svalbard, Molotov's original initiative clearly reflected the bureaucrats' proposals. In subsequent developments however, broader considerations outweighed the virtues of the activists' proposals.³¹⁵ One should *not* conclude, therefore, that the *Soviets* "wanted to establish bases in Northern Norway and to move the border westwards". The point is that there was a considerable bureaucratic pressure in favour of these proposals, and they were discussed at the very top level. As it turned out, they were rejected by Molotov and Stalin. If they had been accepted, they would have undoubtedly been implemented.

4. *Soviet-Norwegian interaction and perceptions.* The Norwegian policy from November 1944 to April 1945 of "keeping the initiative" proved eminently successful, although it was a policy of enormous risks which might equally have ended in disaster if the Soviets had demanded immediate implementation of the draft declaration of 9 April 1945. This did not happen: the Soviets were satisfied that with their draft declaration the Norwegians had agreed to a joint Soviet-Norwegian defence arrangement for Svalbard, and to discuss a revision of the Treaty in general. The finalisation of the negotiations was postponed to

³¹⁵ Cf. the argument in my previous study *Enemy springboard or benevolent buffer? Soviet attitudes to Nordic cooperation, 1920-1945* (cf. note 271), pp. 74-75.

a more "appropriate" moment. Fortunately for the Norwegian government this moment never arrived, and the Norwegians were not forced to honour their concessions. Soviet perceptions of Norwegian attitudes, which were strengthened by Trygve Lie's repeated efforts to convince the Soviets that the Norwegian government wanted a solution which was "satisfactory" to the Soviet Union, led the Soviets to believe that there was no need to hasten the conclusion of the talks.

While Norwegian and western analysts and policy-makers were often close to the mark in their evaluation of Soviet motives and intentions, the Soviet bureaucrats' proposals for an arrangement in Northern Norway reflected a gross misconception of basic Norwegian foreign policy attitudes. The Norwegian government and the western powers, at least while Trygve Lie was still in office as Foreign Minister, might have accepted a joint Soviet-Norwegian arrangement on Svalbard. But the Norwegians were certainly not prepared to contemplate the establishment of Soviet military bases in Northern Norway or an adjustment to the Soviet-Norwegian border.

The bureaucrats' ideas on Northern Norway illustrate one of the basic predicaments of the Soviet foreign policy-making structure. The bureaucrats were prisoners of their own idiosyncratic perceptions of reality, partly because they were short of independent information, and partly because they were trained to think within the constraints of an ideology which was singularly ill-suited as a basis for understanding western political thinking and social and political realities.

5. *The role of third parties.* Formally, the discussions of 1944-47 about Svalbard's international status constituted a purely Norwegian-Soviet bilateral affair. At no point did the western powers put pressure on the Norwegians to resist the Soviet demands, nor did the Norwegian government seek their support. Svalbard was not the subject of discussions between the Soviets and the British or the Americans. Indirectly, however, the United States government became a decisive actor in the drama.

From the very beginning of the discussions, Soviet policy on Svalbard increasingly reflected Soviet perceptions of American designs on Iceland and Greenland. The Soviet fear of supplying the Americans with additional arguments in support of their plans for bases in Iceland and Greenland was the single most important external factor which restrained the Soviets from forcing through their original demands of November 1944.