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Uncertain Trust

The British-Norwegian Defence Relationship

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Introduction

The essay will examine the historical and current relationship between the United Kingdom and Norway in the defence realm. The first section deals with the background and with the links that have been forged between the two countries over the decades, especially during the period since the Second World War. The second and third sections examine developments in the 1980s and the current situation. The conclusion offers some suggestions for strengthening the British-Norwegian defence link.

There is clearly an asymmetry in the relationship between the two states, though the difference is less than that which existed when Norway became independent in 1905. Nevertheless, Norway has after 1940 been in the position that its small population has been unable to provide security for a large country situated in an increasingly strategically important position. It has had to rely on others to supply part of its security needs and to a great extent Norway has looked to Britain for such help. The historical account shows that whilst the defence of Norway has been of interest to the United Kingdom, it has never been an overriding priority for the British who have had their eyes fixed more on Continental Europe or on events further afield, such as in the Middle East or Far East. British actions as a provider have rarely come up to the expectations of the Norwegian consumers of security.

Despite any disappointments, Britain remains an important source of security for Norway. The Norwegian need of Britain has grown in the 1980s as the Soviet navy has expanded and as the United States, under President Reagan, decided to «face up» to the Soviet challenge. Assistance from non-superpower allies such as Britain became more valuable for the Norwegians as it would not mean United States' involvement in Northern Europe at an early stage in a period of tension. At the same time, the United Kingdom threw off most of its colonial and

post-colonial responsibilities and concentrated its defences in the North Atlantic and Europe. It recognised the possible threat to the British Isles, as well as to NATO generally, from the concentration of Soviet military power in the Kola Peninsula after 1970. Yet British priorities in defence expenditure have remained stubbornly tied to the Central Region in Germany. Indeed, it can be argued that the share of resources devoted to the maritime part of British defence and to the Northern area has, if anything, declined in recent years. ¹⁾ Any increased British involvement in the defence of Norway is more a factor of the propensity, shown over the last fifteen years, for more of Britain's military resources to become devoted to NATO activity, especially that in the Northern area. Of this, Norway benefits directly from a sizeable proportion and remains an option for another large element.

Membership of NATO for almost forty years has given Britain and Norway a more realistic view of what to expect from each other in the defence field. The United Kingdom is no longer the main provider of outside assistance for Norway – that role has been taken over by the United States. However, there are a number of decisions to be taken by British governments within the next decade that will determine the extent of Britain's ability to come to Norway's aid. These include the rate of surface ship replacement, the tempo of the conventional submarine programme, air defence arrangements and the future of the amphibious forces. It should be remembered when making these decisions that they affect not only a very loyal ally but also contribute to the forward defence of the British Isles.

Norwegian security cannot just be seen in military terms. It also depends on the success of the country's foreign policy and, to an important extent, on the general diplomatic involvement within which the country is operating. Relations between the superpowers and the level of tension within Europe are important determinants of security for a small power such as Norway. It is therefore important that, when dealing with foreign policy issues with a security implication, Norway has the full support and understanding of its NATO allies. Britain, as a traditional ally and near neighbour of Norway, has a crucial role to play here. It is important that Norway is not obliged to deal with the Soviet Union bilaterally on vital issues – such as the status of Svalbard or restrictions in the seas around Norway – and that even in those cases that are of necessity bilateral – such as the Barents Sea demarcation dispute – Norway is supported by its close allies.

The level and kind of allied military and diplomatic support for Norway is going to depend partly on the Norwegian contribution to their own defence. The Norwegian effort has to be strong enough to make reinforcement credible and worthwhile in time of crisis. The present Norwegian Chief of Defence and his predecessor have both expressed concern that cuts in the increase in the level of defence spending are weakening important elements of the Norwegian military structure.²⁾ Decisions favourable to Norway on the defence programmes mentioned above are less likely to be taken by British governments if they felt that they are filling in for what Norwegian taxpayers should be providing. No doubt the Norwegian parliament will have this in mind when it decides on the defence budget for the coming five years.

The relationship between Britain and Norway, even in the defence field, has been a historic one. The two countries are geographically separated by water but often it has been these common seas that have united them. An account of the two states' defence relations since the Second World War will demonstrate their closeness. However, the record of the United Kingdom as a provider of Norway's security has been an uneven one. Even though there are recent indications that many concerned with the defence of Britain have started to see Norway as a forward frontier for their own country's security, this has not necessarily led to a greater share of the United Kingdom's defence resources being devoted to that area.

The Historical Record

Before the Second World War, Norwegian foreign and security policy rested on the country's isolation and on the protection of the British navy. In 1835, a Norwegian general, J.G. Meidell, wrote

«it could never accord with England's interest to see the United Kingdoms of Norway and Sweden conquered by Russia. We can therefore assume that we in such a war would have England as an ally.»³⁾

Britain guaranteed Norway's territorial integrity in 1855, was instrumental in helping Norway to independence in 1905 and successfully supported the candidature of the Danish Prince Carl, who had married an English princess, for the Norwegian throne.

The British government and Crown played an important role in the negotiations for a Norwegian Integrity Treaty signed in 1907 and politicians in Oslo saw «the British guarantee» as being necessary to hold at bay the Russian threat.⁴⁾ During the First World War, Norway became what Professor Riste has described as «the neutral ally» of Britain⁵⁾ with much of the county's merchant marine in the service of the United Kingdom.⁶⁾ Indeed, in 1917 a Tonnage Treaty was signed with the British by the Norwegian Shipowners' Association supported by the Norwegian government.⁷⁾ Norway followed Britain in economic matters in the inter-war period, coming off the Gold Standard in 1931 and obtaining a trade agreement with the United Kingdom after the 1932 Ottawa Agreements had reorganised trade relations within the British Empire.⁸⁾

The invasion of Norway in 1940 demonstrated the dangers of Norway's dependence on a «British Guarantee» supported by only minimal preparation. The Royal Navy had undertaken minelaying in Norwegian territorial waters from 1939 to early 1940 and, during the same period, there had been some British preparation for an expeditionary force on

the Narvik-Kiruna line. The United Kingdom's attempts to repulse German forces in Norway were flawed in execution⁹⁾ and were secondary to the main battlefield on the European Continent. When the British abandoned the Norwegian campaign, they left a feeling of bitterness among the leaders of their faithful «neutral ally». Prime Minister Nygaardsvold expressed this attitude in his memoirs:

«we had believed that England in her own interest would have done what could be done to throw the Germans out of Norway.»¹⁰⁾

The Norwegian Campaign showed the difficulty of translating that belief into reality. Despite some naval victories and local triumphs, «the chief satisfaction in the campaign (lay) in the successful disengaging of our forces and their subsequent withdrawal by sea».¹¹⁾ British and other allied troops had not exercised in Norway and thus suffered from the effects of the inhospitable weather and stark terrain and were confronted by troops from a country that had planned its attack. The Norwegians had not prepared for British reinforcement and their own defence effort was, of necessity, rather desultory. The result has been given as a classic example of:

«Henry Kissinger's assertion about what happens when a neutral state makes its defence dependent on the assistance of other countries; the result is a combination of the disadvantages of both neutrality and alliance. Concern about its non-alignment prevents such a state from making joint defensive preparations with a would-be protector. And at the same time the expectation of assistance reduces the requirement for national defence preparedness.»¹²⁾

Ironically, events subsequent to Britain's withdrawal from Norway threw the two countries together more closely than before. The king, government, remnants of the armed forces, merchant marine and national bank of Norway took refuge in the United Kingdom for the rest of the war and played an active part in the fight against Nazi Germany. While these national forces had as their main aim the liberation of Norway, they realised that they had to subsume themselves on most matters to the allied prosecution of the war, even when that caused them difficulties on the home front.¹³⁾ Norwegian service units in the United Kingdom came under British operational control and an agreement bet-

ween Stalin and Foreign Minister Eden had tacitly placed Norway in the British sphere of influence in the post-war world.¹⁴⁾ Once the Soviet Union entered the war, Norway's military situation altered: the nearest allied soldiers were, from then onwards, to be found in the USSR, on Norway's northern border. Indeed, it was these troops that first liberated parts of Norway when they crossed into Finnmark on 18 October 1944, though it was a primarily British and American Allied Expeditionary Force, headed by a British general, that occupied the rest of Norway after the German capitulation on 8 May 1945. For the following month the Commander-in-Chief, General Andrew Thorne, exercised allied authority in Norway, as outlined in agreements made in May 1944 between the British government and the Norwegian government-in-exile.¹⁵⁾ The question arose as to the continuation of a British military presence in Norway after the King and government returned to Oslo. Once again, the United Kingdom had prior commitments elsewhere and did not want to over-extend itself fighting a war against cornered and possibly dangerous German troops on Norwegian territory when the Continent of Europe was meant to be the focus of operations. In particular, the British were conscious of their lack of air cover in the region, the dangers of overstretching their sea lines of communication and the by then well-known difficulties in fighting land battles on Norwegian terrain (all factors that were later to surface in NATO calculations about the reinforcement of Norway in the post-war period). In the end Britain sent administrative units and liaison missions to Norway.

After liberation, the Norwegian government had to pay attention to its relations with the Soviet Union. The «Main Principles of Norwegian Foreign Policy», adopted by the exiled government in May 1942 and which recommended closer ties with North Atlantic nations such as the US and Britain, demonstrated the Atlanticist thinking of its ministers and indicated the importance that would be attached to the United States in the post-war world. Whilst neither of these factors necessarily detracted from a close Norwegian link with the United Kingdom, they must have given pause for consideration of the relative value of that relationship, especially as the British war record had shown Norway to be well down its list of priorities.

However, at the end of the war Norway's functional defence cooperation was still primarily with the United Kingdom. Norwegian for-

ces had British kit from their wartime experience. Norway had 52 ships (with 8 000 men) 80 aircraft (2,000 men) and a 4,000-man independent brigade as well as some 13,000 paramilitaries trained in Sweden and an estimated 40,000 members of the Resistance.¹⁶⁾ This seemed scarcely to suffice for immediate Norwegian needs, especially as the British asked for – and the Norwegians provided a brigade-plus for occupation duties in Germany. Norwegian experience in the occupation of Germany influenced the organization and training of the post-war Norwegian forces. The United Kingdom re-equipped the Norwegian forces, partly as a means of getting them on the road to defence self-sufficiency, partly to continue British influence in Norway and incidentally as a way of disposing of surplus stocks, albeit at very modest prices.¹⁷⁾ The United Kingdom provided Vampires for the Norwegian Air Force, equipment for two reduced Infantry Divisions for the army, and ships for the navy. Advisers were sent to the Norwegian National Defence College and to the Norwegian Ministry of Defence and the British offered important training facilities for Norwegian officers, thereby helping to fashion their operational and tactical thinking.

In 1942 the Norwegian High Command had unsuccessfully tried to extract from the British a promise of a six-month provision of forces after liberation. By May 1944, the Norwegian Government-in-Exile had come to the conclusion that, as Norway lacked a strong enough industrial base, it would have to obtain its military equipment elsewhere and that this should be the same materiel produced by the Great Power from which it would be natural to obtain support in a possible future war.¹⁸⁾ This hope turned to reality with the signing of an agreement on the *Assistance by the United Kingdom in the Equipment and Training of the Norwegian Armed Forces* in January 1945, which provided Norway with the major elements of a new air arm and started a naval purchasing programme. As well as agreeing that some of its troops should be trained and equipped by the British Army in Germany, the Norwegian parliament decided in 1946 to purchase NKr 300 million worth of arms from Britain over a three-year period. By February 1946 there were 806 Norwegians having military training in Britain and 230 British personnel in Norway.¹⁹⁾ A number of Norwegian researchers were working in the United Kingdom on sonar and radar development by the end of the war.²⁰⁾

British-Norwegian defence relations in the period from 1945 to 1948 were more ambiguous than might have been expected at the end of the war. On the one hand the Norwegians had purchased at bargain rates a considerable amount of equipment from the British – to the evident satisfaction of both sides.²¹⁾ On the other hand, Norway had reverted to a neutralist policy with the intention of «building bridges» between the Western powers and the Soviet Union. It was therefore perhaps not wise to have a too overtly close relationship with the United Kingdom. Indeed, by 1946 the Norwegian government had asked Britain to withdraw most of its personnel from the country.

On the British side, there was the feeling that Norway's policy of bridgebuilding had to be treated with some caution. In the words of one researcher:

«During 1945–1947, the main objective of British policy toward Scandinavia was to tie Denmark and Norway as closely as possible to the British sphere of interest, and also to steer the direction of Swedish foreign policy in a more westerly direction.»²²⁾

The Norwegian military was bound to the United Kingdom by the functional links mentioned above, the British economy was «the key» to that of Norway,²³⁾ and the ruling Norwegian Labour Party through the latter's International Department and the International Socialist Conference.²⁴⁾ By February 1947 some 4,000 Norwegian troops had joined the British occupation forces in Germany, were placed under British command and were kitted out by Britain. In June 1947 Royal Navy units – with the First Sea Lord and the Commander of the Home Fleet – were sent to Norway for port visits.²⁵⁾

What concerned the decision-makers in the Foreign Office during 1945 and early 1946 was Norway being too influenced by Sweden and its policy of neutrality. By mid-1946 British officials had become more sympathetic towards the Swedes as they were seen to exert their own independence in the Baltic region – and to buy western arms.²⁶⁾ Indeed by early 1947 the British ambassadors and defence attachés in Scandinavia were reporting the possibility of Swedish Bofors factories being established in Denmark and Norway and producing British armaments under licence for all three Scandinavian states.²⁷⁾ This would have not

only encouraged a common Scandinavian defence plan but would also have helped any joint defence with Britain of the region. This strand of Foreign Office thinking was all for encouraging Norwegian and Danish cooperation with Sweden on the grounds that the Swedes would eventually drop their pretence of neutrality. The British Ambassador to Norway, Laurence Collier, was more sceptical. He considered it crucial to keep Norway under British influence and in 1946 had advised the London government to do everything to get the Norwegians «into our pocket both militarily, and, to a large extent, politically as well». ²⁸⁾ He rejected the idea that a common Scandinavian defence union would be to Britain's advantage saying this could only be so if

«Sweden, as the leader of the three states, could be relied upon to adopt an attitude towards potential enemies of Great Britain which would at least be no weaker than that to be expected of Norway; and both past history and present experience indicate the opposite supposition.» ²⁹⁾

Robin Hankey, Head of the Northern Department in the Foreign Office, asked for and received an assessment from the Chiefs of Staff (COS) on Scandinavian defence questions in 1947. ³⁰⁾ In this, the COS outlined the strategic importance of Scandinavia for the West should there be an East-West war. The area provided sites for advanced air bases and for early warning. Naval and air operations in the Baltic and northern waters could be covered by the West and the region could provide men and material. For these reasons the area had to be denied to the Soviet Union. The COS thought that, in a Scandinavian defence bloc, the ability to resist the Soviets «would be somewhat increased» and they suggested that the Scandinavians should be encouraged towards defence cooperation, perhaps on a secret basis. It was recognised that, even together, the Scandinavian states unaided would not be able to resist the Soviet Union and that they would be unlikely to attempt defence collaboration

«unless they receive specific guarantees of immediate and effective support, including military aid, from the Western Powers in the event of war.» ³¹⁾

In a subsequent meeting of the British Ambassadors to the three Scandinavian capitals, held in Stockholm on 29 November 1947, it was considered that there would have to be standardisation of armaments

with Britain and that co-ordination could be based on the Swedish arms industry linked with the British. It was thought that the three governments would condone staff discussions between their military – as long as they were kept secret.³²⁾

The problems for Britain of all these arrangements were threefold. First, there was Collier's point that a Scandinavian defence association may not turn out to be in the interests of the West. Secondly, even if such an agreement was in the West's interests, the three Scandinavian governments might not have been able to support such an arrangement. Finally, there was the question of Western support in time of war. Whilst the COS report had hinted at «support from British or U.S. air forces and carrier forces», it was generally recognised that any British help for Scandinavia would be minimal and that, in a war, the priority for the United Kingdom, as well for the United States, would be the battlefield on the European Continent.

In this context, it seems that British policy towards Norway was, by 1947, one born of hope. It was hoped that some covert Scandinavian defence arrangement would strengthen the defence of Norway, though it was realised that such an agreement could fall apart if it became public. It was hoped that a Scandinavian defence association, led by Sweden, would be pro-Western, though the British Ambassador to Norway thought otherwise. It was the hope of the Scandinavian military that such an association would, if attacked by the Soviet Union, receive Western aid, though Britain could promise little support in such a case. It was hoped that this web of aspirations, assisted by the remaining strands of wartime cooperation, would tie Norway to Britain for the time being until the opportunity arose to bring the country firmly into the Western camp.

The events in early 1948 – the agreement to found the Brussels Pact (19 February), the Communist coup in Prague (25 February) and Stalin's proposal of a defence agreement with Finland (27 February) – did not provide such an opportunity, though they affected the willingness of Norwegian decision-makers to veer to the West. The discussions that preceded the five-power Brussels Pact signing on 17 March included consideration in Britain as to whether the Scandinavian states should be part of this West European defence arrangement. The Foreign Secre-

tary, Ernest Bevin, had originally favoured their inclusion but Collier, in Oslo, had warned that lack of British and American aid to Scandinavia in case of a conflict was «an inhibiting influence on the Norwegian government so long as they are uncertain what, if any, Anglo-American plans exist for dealing with an eventual Soviet invasion». ³³⁾

With the Communist coup d'état in Prague and the Soviet offer of a treaty with Finland, Britain's hand on the question was forced. Halvard Lange wanted to know from Britain what help would be available for Norway if it was attacked by the Soviet Union and he expressed fears that the Soviets would request Norway to sign a treaty similar to that being negotiated with Finland. Bevin used the occasion to involve the United States in the European defence debate. He contacted the State Department on 11 March 1948 about his concern that Norway might «go under» unless an Atlantic Pact were established and underlined that

*«all possible steps should be taken to forestall a Norwegian defection at this time, which would involve the appearance of Russia on the Atlantic and the collapse of the whole Scandinavian system.»*³⁴⁾

For Britain, the answer to the problem of Norwegian security was that to the general European security conundrum: the United States. Indeed, in March 1948 Bevin suggested a unilateral American guarantee for Scandinavia – but got no positive response.³⁵⁾

However, until late 1948, Norwegian politicians were not willing to commit themselves to the Atlantic road. This was partly because the implications of such a commitment only became clear as negotiations continued in Washington. A main reason was that they were obliged to discuss an alternative – the proposal for a Scandinavian Defence Union with Denmark and Sweden. This was just the option that the British Foreign Office had been encouraging during 1947 and in 1948 two reports by the British COS stressed the importance of Sweden in the defence of Scandinavia and again underlined the value of the peninsula in the defence of Western Europe.³⁶⁾

The problem arose for Britain in April 1948 with the realisation that the Scandinavian Defence Union alternative was not going to be in the form they hoped – secret, pro-Western and reliant on British arma-

ments. It seemed that the negotiations would be at government level (rather than between the military) and would be based on a presumption of neutrality.

The British Foreign Office considered two lines of action during the Scandinavian negotiations: the first was somehow to entice the Norwegians and Danes back into the Western fold and away from neutralism; the second was to induce the Swedes to be more sympathetic to the West.³⁷⁾ The British were faced with the dilemma of whether they should offer arms sales to the Swedes to pull them round to the Western side or whether they should cut off all military supplies on the grounds that the Swedes – if they were truly neutral in any conflict – could eventually use the weapons against Britain. The prospect of a Scandinavian Defence Union magnified that quandary.³⁸⁾

By the summer of 1948, the British government had decided to pursue the strategy of enticing Norway – and to a lesser extent Denmark – away from the Scandinavian option towards an Atlantic commitment. It was agreed with the Norwegians to allow the Scandinavian discussions to play themselves out by demonstrating to the public the incompatibility of Sweden's position and Norwegian needs.³⁹⁾ However, even by September 1948 most of the decision-makers in Britain (as in the United States) still wanted some arrangement to associate Sweden with a Western grouping⁴⁰⁾ – a position that seemed to undermine the agreement with the Norwegians. This notion of some sort of special relationship for Sweden was seen in a plan advanced by Robin Hankey in the late summer of 1948 – and rejected by Halvard Lange as undermining his government's strategy.⁴¹⁾ Even as late as January 1949, Hankey was putting forward another compromise plan whereby the Scandinavian states would not be part of the Atlantic Pact but Norway and Denmark would be associated with Pact members in certain areas and under certain conditions. It is interesting to see what the Head of the Northern Department in the British Foreign Office considered to be most important about Norway for Britain's security: the arrangements included a promise by the Norwegians to prevent shipping hostile to the Atlantic Treaty powers from infiltrating their coastline; the Norwegians were to undertake to defend their territory and independence against aggression; and would make provisional plans with British and American Service Staffs so that aid could be given in case of aggression. In return,

Britain and the US would supply arms, equipment and technical advice.⁴²⁾ By February 1949, British officials had accepted that the Swedes would not be moved from their position of wanting a neutral Scandinavian Defence Union with no ties to the West and that the Norwegians preferred membership of an Atlantic Pact to this. Norway and Denmark were invited to sign the North Atlantic Treaty.

This episode has been dealt with in some detail as it is crucial to the formation of British-Norwegian relations within NATO. A number of points arise from the events outlined above.

First, during a period when Norway was formulating its post-war security policy, the United Kingdom was seen by the Norwegians – and by others such as the Americans and the Soviets – as the natural provider of Norwegian security. This was accepted by the British but by 1948 it was already clear to them that they would need American support to continue that role in Europe.

Secondly, while Scandinavia was seen – especially by the military in Britain – as being of strategic importance for the United Kingdom, it was still regarded as a theatre subsidiary to Continental Europe. This naturally affected British attitudes towards the Scandinavian states' defence choices. As Britain did not have the wherewithal to provide for the security needs of Scandinavia, its politicians and officials were reluctant either to make promises or even to hint at future help. Indeed, at various points throughout 1947 and 1948, they encouraged the Norwegians to find extra security from their Swedish neighbours. This helped create a genuine alternative for Norway's defence – that of a Scandinavian Defence Union. Key decision-makers in Norway lacked the willingness to take their country into such a neutral union, unattached to the West. In the end, another opportunity arose as the United States and the West European powers negotiated an Atlantic Pact.

These events thus represent a rapid change of the security opportunities open to Norwegian politicians – their «menu for choice». During 1947 and early 1948, Britain – Norway's traditional supplier of security – was busy making defence arrangements with its Continental European neighbours but they did not offer Norway the opportunity to join this grouping. Instead, the Norwegians were steered, even by the British, towards a Scandinavian option, one which such ministers as Lange and Hauge were unwilling to adopt as a solution. Meanwhile,

the chance arose (though not without some prompting by the likes of Bevin and Lange) for an Atlantic answer for Norway's long-term security problems, one underwritten by the might of the United States.

The Norwegian acceptance of this option has been seen as being in the tradition of looking to the Atlantic powers for security. The main change in 1949 was that Britain had demonstrated once again (it had already done so in 1940) that it could and – in contrast to 1940 – would not try to guarantee Norwegian security by itself.

Finally, despite any prevarication over the appropriate security arrangements for Scandinavia, the British still showed during 1947 and 1948 that they considered Scandinavia to be of military and diplomatic importance to them. They may not have had the resources to promise the Norwegians and Danes for their defence but they still thought the area worth defending – by the Swedes or Americans, if not with British help. However, the political side had to be considered. To have allowed small states such as Norway and Denmark to deal with the Soviet Union by themselves and possibly to have been pressurised or blackmailed by the Soviets, would have smacked too much of the flavour of appeasement. Robin Hankey summed up Britain's attitude towards Norway and Denmark in late 1948 in a report for the Minister of State at the Foreign Office which is worth quoting at length. He claimed that Norway and Denmark without Sweden

«are almost a pure liability and if it were not for their shipping and their resources which we need and more particularly if it were not for the question of our occupying the Faroes, which I presume must be done by agreement, there would be something to be said on purely military grounds for leaving the Scandinavian Powers out of an Atlantic Pact if we cannot have all three of them in it in some form, but we also have to look at the question from the political angle – i.e. if we do not draw the Norwegians and Danes into the Atlantic Pact, left in isolation they will pursue a weaker attitude to the USSR which is not in our interests therefore we must hope to draw the Norwegians and Danes under the Atlantic Pact umbrella and hope that a spell of isolation for the Swedes will induce the Swedes to attach themselves to the Scandinavian Powers at a later date, by which time Norway and Denmark will be better partners for Sweden, having the backing of the West.»⁴³⁾

From this it can be concluded that, at the end of 1948, the main British interests in Norway were commercial – its shipping and resources – and diplomatic – not having the country bend to the Soviet will. The Chiefs of Staff may have found some military objectives to add to the list but none that they were unhappy about leaving to the Swedes to protect.

Norway's accession to the North Atlantic Treaty in 1949 can be seen in British terms in the context of the above points. The British did not expect that Norwegian membership of the Atlantic Alliance would demand from them any greater commitment to the defence of the country. If anything, the opposite was the case. Certainly, the United States was thought of as a provider for Norwegian materiel needs and, as seen in Hankey's report, some officials even hoped that Sweden would still take up its Scandinavian security duties. It is therefore not surprising that when the Norwegians formulated their «bases policy»⁴⁴⁾ in February 1949, the British did not object. After all, they had no plans for establishing bases in Norway in peacetime and any British protest might have raised Norwegian expectations on that point.

The 1950s, especially the early part, saw little change in this level of commitment to Norway, with two exceptions. Much of the period from 1949 to 1951 was taken up with the issue of the Norwegian contribution to the British forces occupying Germany, which the Norwegian government was being pressed to bring home, and that of the NATO command structure for Northern Europe.

After the signing of the North Atlantic Treaty, negotiations were started about the organisational structure of the new alliance. What emerged, as far as the Norwegians were concerned, was a Northern European Regional Planning Group (NERPG) with Denmark, Norway and the United Kingdom as members. This represented a compromise between the Norwegian position of wanting the United States as a full participant and that of the United Kingdom of wishing the group to consist of Denmark and Norway.⁴⁵⁾ Norway was also a member of the Ocean Group, reflecting its naval interests. Nevertheless, the reluctance of the British to join the NERPG and their final decision to come in from political considerations, showed a continuation of the approach towards Scandinavia expressed in Hankey's report (see above p. 13).

This arrangement did not last long. After the outbreak of the Korean War, it was realised that the command structure of NATO would have to be more substantive than planning groups, if it was to be prepared for the expected Soviet onslaught. It was agreed fairly early on that there should be a regional command – under the Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR) – for the Northern Region. Once again the British showed reluctance to become involved. They wanted a Scandinavian to head the Northern Region command – the Norwegians wanted an American. The compromise was a British admiral in the top post and with direct responsibility for the naval side, with an American Air Force General providing the Chief of the Air Staff, reflecting USAF interest in Norway.⁴⁶⁾ When Northern European Command was activated on 2 April 1951, the US was finally brought directly in to the defence of Norway and, in the perceptive words of Rolf Tamnes,

«(o)n the other hand, the British in many ways faded out of the picture. As long as the Northern European Planning Group still existed, the meetings...had been an important tool for nailing the British down. This official cooperation forum was now abolished, and not even a British Chief of Northern Command could really compensate for the lost linkage to London.»⁴⁷⁾

The general attitude towards Scandinavia shown by the British during the NATO institutional arrangements was also demonstrated in their approach to war plans. In NERPG discussions, they insisted that the main threat in the Northern Region would not be maritime – about which they, as a major maritime power, might feel obliged to do something – but overland where the main burden of defence would be taken up by the Norwegians and the Swedes, should Swedish neutrality be breached.⁴⁸⁾ The NATO Medium Term Plan of 1950 set forth the objectives in the Northern Region of holding off a Soviet attack at key points in Denmark and at the «Skibotn line» in North Norway. Allied forces would then be reinforced and re-supplied in order to push back the Soviet invaders. Despite the importance of holding given positions in Norway and Denmark, no plans were made for the United States or Britain to contribute directly to this effort, except for a small British contribution from BAOR to the Danish-Norwegian covering force in North Germany. Indeed the British attitude demonstrated that their priorities were very much with the Central Front. Since 1947 a Norwegian brigade group had been part of the British Army of the Rhine (BAOR).

Originally based in the Harz area, the brigade was brought north in 1950 to become part of the South Jutland Covering Force. The Norwegian Minister of Defence, Jens Chr. Hauge, who had strongly advocated such a move, wished for a British augmentation of the Norwegian and Danish troops but met with stiff opposition from the British who preferred to maintain their defences further to the west – and to the south. In the end, the United Kingdom contributed an armoured car regiment – not a brigade as hoped – and the Norwegian brigade returned home in 1953.⁴⁹⁾

As far as NATO plans were concerned in early 1950, it can be said that, given the poor state of Norway's defences, there was an implicit expectation of direct allied military assistance at an early stage. Geography and history pointed to Britain for such help but the lesson of history was also that Britain would disappoint Norway and favour a Continental commitment.

What contribution to the defence of Norway were the British willing to make? The maritime area was one of British strength and Norwegian need. As mentioned, the United Kingdom government attempted to avoid commitment even here and in this they were helped by the failure to appoint the Supreme Allied Commander Atlantic until 1952, partly as a result of their own intransigence. Defence planning for the seas off Norway thus lagged behind that on land. However, it was clear from the Medium Term Plan that the Scandinavian states would, at some stage during a war, need reinforcing and supplying, so sea lanes would have to be kept open. It might be presumed that the Royal Navy may have taken an aggressive approach to the nucleus of the Soviet fleet based in the Kola Peninsula and the Baltic.

In fact, the British response was somewhat modest and defensive. After all

«(b) by 1949, British naval policy was to concentrate on classical convoy protection, using carriers to provide both fighters... and anti-submarine aircraft.»⁵⁰⁾

What the British were prepared to undertake was the securing in wartime of the sea lane to the Northern Region and they committed a

cruiser and some 59 destroyers and large escorts for that task in 1950.⁵¹⁾ As NATO plans were developed, it was clear that the British would play an important role in the strike fleet in the East Atlantic, though even here the British contribution was secondary to that of the United States and was denuded throughout the 1950s by defence cutbacks. The British element in the planned wartime NATO strike fleet in 1952 was assessed as follows:

Table One⁵²⁾

	UK	US	TOTAL
Heavy Carriers	2	4	6
Battleships	1	1	2
Cruisers	—	4	4
Destroyers	15	21	36
Submarines	—	2	2

It should be remembered that these figures reflect *wartime* strengths. At the outbreak of war, and for the first two to three weeks, this fleet was more likely to have been purely British.

Furthermore, one of the five tasks of the first six weeks of war set down by the Admiralty Plans Division in 1953 was «ensuring the supply and possible reinforcement of the NATO allies in Scandinavia to prevent its use as an enemy base against the UK». ⁵³⁾ During this year, the Royal Navy's carrier and cruiser forces came under verbal attack from Duncan Sandys, the Minister of Supply, in the various rounds aimed at reducing defence expenditure. Sandys particularly had the navy's air arm in his sights and it is interesting to read his reasons. At a meeting on 10 November 1953, he listed the three purposes for which naval aircraft were needed: (1) the defence of Norway, (2) offensive operations in the Baltic and North Sea and minelaying in enemy waters, (3) the protection of Atlantic convoys against the Soviets. He declared that the last two functions could be carried out by land-based aircraft and the American fleet, whilst the first role «bore no relation as a matter of strategic priority to the defence of Western Europe or of the United Kingdom». ⁵⁴⁾ A year earlier the Director of Naval Air Warfare in the

Admiralty had made an equally pungent point about Britain's naval air resources:

«the plain fact is that we haven't enough air strength to meet even vital commitments and must therefore lean heavily on the US Navy. However much we may try to delude ourselves to the contrary, we cannot delude the Americans.»⁵⁵⁾

In reality, in an important area of operations for the defence of Norway, the British lacked adequate resources and some British ministers lacked the commitment.

Duncan Sandys re-emerged in 1957 as Minister of Defence and began a thorough review of Britain's defence commitments and expenditure. The 1957 Defence White Paper made telling general points:

«...the time has now come to revise not merely the size, but the whole character of the defence plan. The Communist threat remains, but its nature has changed; and it is now evident that, on both military and economic grounds, it is necessary to make a fresh appreciation of the problem and to adopt a new approach towards it.»

«It is therefore in the true interests of defence that the claims of military expenditure should be considered in conjunction with the need to maintain the country's financial and economic strength.»⁵⁶⁾

The White Paper concluded that «Britain has been bearing a disproportionately large share of the total burden of Western defence», that «(t)he role of naval forces in total war is somewhat uncertain» and that, although it was necessary for NATO to maintain substantial naval forces and maritime air units», Britain's contribution «will have to be on a somewhat reduced scale».⁵⁷⁾

One area where Britain was later to make a contribution to Norway's defence posture was that of amphibious warfare. The early 1950s saw financial pressure on British Combined Operations and a reduction in the craft available for amphibious warfare to the extent that «the 1956 demand for an amphibious landing in Egypt found Britain woefully

ill-prepared»⁵⁸⁾ However, after the Suez escapade, amphibious operations came back into favour with the permanent reactivation of 42 Commando in 1959 and the reestablishment of 41 commando in 1960.⁵⁹⁾ At that stage, the Royal Marines were oriented more to the Mediterranean. Until 1954 they had not exercised in Norway, then only in the south of the country (in defence of the Baltic Approaches) and on a small scale.

The first allied exercise involving Norway in the 1950s was Main Brace in 1952, a maritime operation mainly involving Denmark but with some operations in southern Norway. The major allied exercise of 1953 – Mariner – was also naval and involved anti-submarine warfare (ASW).

In summary, the 1950s saw a continuation of the trend established in the late 1940s – a shying away by Britain from any serious commitment to the defence of Norway with the United States taking on an increasing burden. Extra air power was to be provided by the USAF. If war came, the Strike Fleet would eventually be dominated by the US Navy and by the early 1950s the British were retreating from providing any meaningful naval air strength off Norway, leaving the Americans to fill the gap. The United Kingdom continued its reluctance to provide ground troops for Norway, British amphibious operations there were desultory and most of the exercises were maritime and aimed at securing the Baltic Approaches. The one service committed to the defence of Norway was the Royal Navy and this spent the 1950s revising its plans and responding to spending cuts. The two areas of difference from the 1940s was the presence of a British officer as NATO's commander for the Northern region and the beginning of allied exercises – including British troops – on Norwegian soil. Even these were there more because of the attraction of the terrain for training rather than as a result of reinforcement plans. It is little wonder that Norway looked increasingly to America for assistance.

The 1960s saw an increased Norwegian need to defend their country and a greater willingness of their politicians to devote resources to defence. The emerging concept of flexible response gave credence to a full conventional defence of Norway and the authorities there instituted a programme of exercises and planned for the reinforcement of North Norway. These developments opened up greater opportunities for an

allied contribution to Norwegian defence which was increasingly being seen as a serious response to a growing Soviet threat.

The 1960s was a transitional period for British defence. It saw a greater concentration of resources so that by the end of the decade the United Kingdom had become a European power with a few residual «out-of-area» (i.e. out of the North Atlantic-West European area) commitments compared with the position in 1960 when the country still undertook a number of wide-ranging operations in the colonial and post-colonial world. The granting of independence to most of Britain's colonies; balance of payment and economic problems; the possibility of Britain joining the European Communities; American involvement in the Middle East, squeezing out the British as the leading Western nation there; the end of the confrontation between Malaysia and Indonesia were all factors that lessened British defence opportunities «out-of-area». The election of a Labour government in 1964 produced an administration willing to overhaul British commitments to fit the country's reduced economic circumstances and to cut the total resources devoted to defence. While the overall effort was smaller, the share of it available for the European theatre was greater and this allowed an enhanced British activity in the Northern Region. Although Britain's contribution to the defence of the Northern Region by the end of the decade was still modest compared with, for example, the commitment to West Germany, it is clear that the 1960s saw an important change in British priorities and that this opened up the possibility of a greater effort in Norway thereafter.

The 1962 White Paper on defence outlined the need for the United Kingdom to have a balance between conventional and nuclear forces, not least to help implement a more flexible NATO strategy. While «flexible response» was not adopted by NATO until 1967, the Americans and the British were already thinking in such terms in the context of Berlin in 1961.⁶⁰⁾ The 1962 White Paper expressed the British intention «to make available a fair share of the forces required to fulfill that (more flexible NATO) strategy».⁶¹⁾ However, it was clear that overseas operations still vied for a large share of resources. To meet these commitments, Britain had placed emphasis on giving combined arm-groupings the strategic mobility to move troops and equipment over a long distance in short order. In the early 1960s this capability was pro-

vided by the Army's Strategic Reserve, the RAF's Transport Command and the balanced fleet including an amphibious capability based on Commando carriers (*Albion* and *Bulwark*) and, from the mid-1960s, *Fearless* and *Intrepid*, the modern assault ships.

None of this was specifically aimed at the defence of Norway but was targeted to «out-of-area» campaigns. The 1964 White Paper specifically linked the amphibious forces to the East of Suez area.⁶²⁾ Whilst elements of the Strategic Reserve had participated in exercises in southern Norway and the Baltic Approaches, all the constituent parts of these combined arms groupings lacked experience in North Norway in the early 1960s. Furthermore, most of the airfields capable of receiving large transport aircraft in Norway were in the south of the country and air superiority over these could not be guaranteed. So any European deployment of the Strategic Reserve was likely to be on the Central Front, not in Norway.

The first inkling of an improved British contribution to the ACE Mobile Force – and thus indirectly to Norwegian defence – came in 1964 with SACEUR's NORTHERN EXPRESS exercise of the AMF in Norway, to which Britain contributed a battalion and airforce elements. In the same year the United Kingdom also participated in SACLANT's TEAMWORK exercise which included elements of the Norwegian navy.⁶³⁾ In early 1965, «the problems of mounting and maintaining a campaign in Northern Norway were explored» when a Royal Marine Commando and a Royal Artillery light battery, in company with US Marines and the Norwegian Army, carried out winter warfare exercises in northern Norway. Later that year Norway and Britain took part in an antisubmarine warfare and fleet exercise and also troops from BAOR and the Territorial Army participated in a brigade group exercise in North Norway.⁶⁴⁾

The White Papers of 1967 and 1968 saw a more conscious commitment of British defence resources to Europe, including Norway. With the end of the Malaysian-Indonesian confrontation, in which British forces had been heavily involved, the British Government was able to announce that

«Our aim is that Britain should not again have to undertake operations of this scale outside Europe.»⁶⁵⁾

The Supplementary Statement of July 1967 took up a wider theme. It catalogued major developments of the previous year, as well as the end to confrontation, that had affected thinking on defence: the evolution of Government policy towards Europe, progress in revising NATO strategy, the Middle East Crisis, the need to reduce overseas expenditure and the slower rate of growth in the economy. «Major reductions in the size and cost of our forces as a whole» outside Europe were planned whilst, in Europe, the British contribution to the Alliance was to be «broadly on the same scale as at present». ⁶⁶⁾

The 1968 White Paper followed up this theme with «Britain's defence effort will in future be concentrated mainly in Europe and the North Atlantic area» and announced the phasing out of the carrier force as soon as British forces had withdrawn from East of Suez. A number of changes were planned that followed from this concentration in Europe and the North Atlantic and which supported NATO's new strategic concept, flexible response. NATO Defence Ministers established a Standing Naval Force Atlantic (STANAVFORLANT) under the operational command of SACLANT and consisting of five or six frigates, to which the United Kingdom contributed one. ⁶⁷⁾ The section on NATO exercises reported that the «Royal Marines went to Norway and the Netherlands on exercises...», that a British artillery battery assigned to the AMF had carried out cold-weather training in Norway, British army units had held smaller-scale exercises in that country and that, as a trial of air-portability, army units had been flown by Air Support Command to a number of countries, including Norway and Denmark. SACLANT's ASW exercise in the eastern Atlantic had, in 1967, included an amphibious phase with the landing of the Royal Marines in Norway. Furthermore, Britain was visited for training purposes by a Norwegian army unit, the first since 1945. ⁶⁸⁾

The consequences of these moves were more openly stated in the *Supplementary Statement on Defence Policy* of July 1968. It said:

«Our decision to withdraw British forces from South-East Asia and the Persian Gulf by the end of 1971 and to concentrate our defence effort in Europe had made it possible for Britain to offer immediate increases in the availability of some of her forces to N.A.T.O.» ⁶⁹⁾

More directly this would affect NATO solidarity with the flank countries and

«its ability rapidly to move in a multi-national force to assist the local powers in resisting attack. For this purpose the Alliance must maintain substantial naval, air and land forces, which can be quickly deployed on the flanks in case of need.»

The AMF and STANAVFORLANT – to which the British made a substantial contribution – played a special role in this support of flank areas such as Norway.⁷⁰⁾

A squadron of Shackleton long-range maritime reconnaissance aircraft was transferred from Malta to the United Kingdom, making them available for work in the Eastern Atlantic, but it is noticeable that the two commando ships with their embarked Royal Marines and assault ships with other commandos, though committed to NATO, seemed more oriented to the Mediterranean flank.⁷¹⁾ Indeed, when HMS BULWARK with the Royal Marine Commandos and Wessex 5 helicopters participated in the 1968 POLAR EXPRESS exercise in North Norway, some difficulty was initially experienced in operating the helicopters, still fitted with sand filters, within the Arctic Circle.⁷²⁾

In summary, by the end of the 1960s the potential and actual British contribution to the defence of Norway had been improved by a number of decisions, that is:

- the creation of STANAVFORLANT, and the British participation in it (of relevance for the defence of the seas round Norway);
- The deployment of an additional squadron of Shackletons (to be replaced, eventually, by Nimrods) for long-range maritime reconnaissance;
- the increase in the armed component, winter training and strategic mobility of the AMF, helped by the British contribution;
- the committing to NATO of the Royal Navy commando ships and assault ships, with embarked Royal Marine Commandos; and the designation of 45 Commando, from December 1969, as the Mountain and Arctic Warfare Unit.
- the creation of a pattern of NATO exercises in Norway and its adjacent seas, in particular those involving the Royal Marine Commandos.

Balanced against these factors was the decision to phase out attack carriers and the initial inexperience of British troops operating in cold climates.

The truth of the matter was that whilst more British resources may have been *available* for Norway by the late 1960s they were not committed *exclusively* to the reinforcement of that country. Indeed, the British effort on NATO's Southern Flank had an equal – if not more pressing – call on these defence resources. Both flanks were, of course, still subsidiary to the main British effort in Europe – on the Central Region. Furthermore, there was little committed by the British specifically to Norway: more often, increased resources were for the Northern Flank generally with Denmark and the Baltic Approaches exercising a strong claim for priority.

The 1970s saw a further reorientation in Britain's defence away from a substantial presence in the Mediterranean and towards the Northern Flank. This move was in part determined by the mounting Soviet naval and air presence on the Kola Peninsula and the Baltic, partly as a response to a Norwegian and Danish needs, but to a great extent it was driven by a economic necessity.

In 1970, the newly-elected Conservative government decided to phase out HMS *Eagle*, leaving only the *Ark Royal* to provide seaborne air support for amphibious operations. Also HMS *Lion* was not to be converted to carry helicopters.⁷³⁾ On the other hand, *Hermes* was converted to the Commando role and the Nimrods started to take on their long-range reconnaissance function.⁷⁴⁾

The earlier part of the 1970s saw continued British participation in exercises affecting Norway. In September 1972, NATO mounted STRONG EXPRESS, the largest exercise since its formation. It covered the Atlantic, the Channel and North Norway, involved 64,000 men, 300 ships and 700 aircraft. The United Kingdom played an important part, EASTLANT/CHANNEL and AFNORTH being British-held NATO commands. *Ark Royal*, amphibious shipping and other naval units and maritime patrol aircraft, as well as Royal Marines, were the bulk of the British contribution.⁷⁵⁾ The following year, a combined NATO Striking Fleet exercise, SWIFT MOVE, was held in the Norwe-

gian and North Seas to test the Fleet's anti-submarine warfare and air support capabilities in Northern Europe. Again, the United Kingdom provided an important complement of ships and aircraft.⁷⁶⁾

The next major defence review came in 1974/5. The 1975 White Paper set the tone of the findings:

«It was clear that only a fundamental and rigorous reappraisal of all Britain's defence commitments and capabilities could provide the Government with the necessary information to enable it to strike the right balance between the needs of the economy and the needs of defence.»⁷⁷⁾

The result was that

«NATO – the linch pin of British security – should remain the first and overriding charge on the resources available for defence; that our commitments outside the Alliance should be reduced as far as possible to avoid overstretching our forces; and that general purpose forces should be maintained as an insurance against the unforeseen.»⁷⁸⁾

The most significant contribution to the Alliance was judged to be in four areas, in the following order:

- The Central Region;
- The Eastern Atlantic and Channel Areas;
- The security of the United Kingdom and its immediate approaches, at sea, on land and in the air;
- The NATO nuclear deterrent.

In addition, a specialist reinforcement capacity was to be maintained. There was to be no reduction in the British contribution to the AMF but other specialist elements were to be rethought. Britain's ability to reinforce the southern flank «was less cost effective than in other areas». The whole specialist effort was to be reduced and concentrated for use in the Central and Northern Regions of NATO. The result was to be:

- The UK Mobile Force, consisting of one air-portable brigade group plus support and logistic force, and an air element of the Phantom/Jaguar squadrons and three Wessex/Puma squadrons.

- An Amphibious Force, consisting of Royal Marines brigade headquarters plus three commandos (one mountain and arctic trained) and army support units; one RN Wessex helicopter squadron; HMS *Hermes* in a secondary role as a commando ship; two assault ships (one in reserve) and afloat support.

HMS *Bulwark* was to be paid off and *Hermes* was to double as an ASW carrier. Plans to order two purpose-built amphibious ships were abandoned.⁷⁹⁾

From the above tasks that had been selected for priority, all except the NATO nuclear deterrent impinged directly on the Norwegian defence effort. Central Region defence involved the Baltic Approaches; the Eastern Atlantic and Channel Areas included seas directly of Norway; the defence of the United Kingdom's approaches meant coverage of the Norwegian Sea and the specialist reinforcement effort made mention of the Northern Region. The review had improved Norway's position in Britain's defence, though what was offered had been somewhat diminished.

The reality of these cuts was demonstrated in the TEAMWORK amphibious exercise in 1976. This involved landing about 2,500 British and Dutch marines in Denmark and about 7,000 British, Dutch and American marines in Norway. Because of the lack of amphibious shipping, troops were transported in chartered car ferries, thereby limiting the number of landing sites and extending the period needed for preparation and sailing. The exercise demonstrated the pitfalls of not using dedicated amphibious ships.⁸⁰⁾ This countered the gains made by the 45 Commando, that had begun to train in Norway on a regular basis, and 42 Commando that had been made available to join them there in 1975. Royal Marine Commandos could reckon on spending time on special training courses in Norway in the winter months.⁸¹⁾

Partly as a result of the evaluation of exercises such as TEAMWORK, reconsideration was given to Britain's amphibious capability at the end of the 1970s. As well as a second Royal Marine Commando group being trained for arctic and mountain warfare, it was decided in 1978 to restore HMS *Bulwark* to full operational status.⁸²⁾ The ASW cruiser *Invincible* was expected in service for 1980, providing an extra

potential augmentation of the amphibious forces; an upgrade of the helicopter lift and light anti-tank armament for the Commandos was promised; and in 1978 agreement was reached with the Norwegians to stockpile oversnow vehicles in North Norway. The Stores Support Ship *Tarbetness* was to be converted for amphibious tasks in support of the Royal Marine Commandos.⁸³⁾ British forces performed creditably in the exercises in 1978 (NORTHERN WEDDING, COLD WINTER, ARCTIC EXPRESS) and 1979 (OCEAN SAFARI). The latter demonstrated the weakness of the NATO fleet in the Norwegian Sea without the presence of an American carrier and with the British caught between the pensioning off of *Ark Royal* and the introduction of *Invincible*.

The 1970s saw the re-orientation of British defence resources first away from out-of-area towards Europe and then from southern Europe to the Northern Region and its adjacent seas, with the Central Region remaining the focus of major effort. The decade also saw a reduction in the overall defence effort by the United Kingdom with a much more careful matching of roles and resources. Clearly Norway was an area requiring outside Allied help, increasingly so as the Soviet military presence on the Kola Peninsula continued to grow during the 1970s. It was also of importance in those tasks considered vital for Britain's survival – the defence of the approaches to these islands, the protection of the SLOC and even in defending the Central Region. The reshaping of the Royal Navy meant that it took on the ASW role in Northern Waters, leaving the US Navy to take up the strike capability at a time when it had shown a reluctance to move north of the G-I-UK gap. Thus the British naval run-down did little to reassure the Norwegians that they were not falling behind an extended Soviet line of operations. What did offer Norway some comfort was the increased involvement of the Royal Marines in the plans for reinforcing the Northern Flank. Even here, the Marines were not dedicated to Norway, the vessels that provided the commandos with their amphibiousness were not immune from the consequences of reductions in the overall defence budget, and their long-term survival – or replacement – was in doubt.

The 1980s

This decade has seen a confirmation of Britain's role in Norwegian defence. Seen from the viewpoint of Norway, as a consumer of Allied security, Britain has provided a fairly consistent share of the «imported» element in Norwegian security policy throughout the 1980s. The United States' contribution during that period has increased significantly and there has been some increase in that provided by the Federal Republic of Germany. However, the Canadian contribution has been severely curtailed. In absolute terms, Britain's involvement has grown from 1980 to 1988 and it is perhaps true to say that it has become more valued among Norwegian defence planners, partly because the falling off in Canadian support has made them appreciative of more constant allies, and partly because the greater American presence has made them wary of being dependent on just the superpower in NATO.

From the British perspective the importance of the northern part of Europe has been maintained from the 1970s and even increased. Within North Europe, Norway has become more central to British defence needs. The EASTLANT command, including the seas off Norway, has become an important operating area for the Royal Navy and the RAF; the Baltic Approaches, of which Norway provides the Northern shore, are vital in the defence of the Central Region of NATO; and Norway itself is seen by Britain as an area that should be denied to the Soviet Union for the security of the British Isles and where Britain can make a direct reinforcement contribution in the cause of Alliance solidarity.

At a time when Norwegian defence expenditure as a share of the country's National Budget has dropped compared to the 1970s,⁸⁴⁾ elements of Britain's contribution to Norwegian defence have grown during the 1980s. This increase has not always been steady and some parts of it were earlier in doubt.

The 1980 Defence White Paper opened the decade with the usual plea for cutting the cloth to suit the budget:

«The scale of our defence effort cannot be divorced from our general economic capability, and we all know that Britain is going through difficult economic times.»⁸⁵⁾

Whatever economies were planned, they scarcely interfered with Britain's capability in northern Europe. The arrival in service of the Sea Harrier gave the Royal Navy a fixed-wing aircraft embarked at sea. Whilst the first call on the Navy's resources in a war would be EAST-LANT and the Channel area,

«units could be deployed elsewhere in the NATO area. Royal Navy vessels accordingly deploy in peacetime to the Mediterranean and occasionally to the Baltic. A frigate is normally allocated to the NATO On-Call Force in the Mediterranean when it is activated».⁸⁶⁾

An examination of the Specialist Reinforcement Forces available to SACEUR and SACLANT showed that the United Kingdom contributed the following of relevance to the Norwegian area in 1980:

- AMF: the British Army provided some 1800 men, the RAF a squadron of Harrier and Puma helicopters. This multinational force was «ready to move at very short notice to a threatened flank region».⁸⁷⁾
- UKMF: a land element of about 13,500 regular and Territorial Army soldiers, including a parachute battalion; an air element of a squadron of Puma helicopters and a squadron of Jaguars. Though at that stage not earmarked for Denmark, it was likely to end up there in a crisis or war, but could, in theory, have gone to Norway.
- SACEUR's Strategic Reserve Air (SSR(A)) consisting of US and British squadrons which could have been deployed to any region of ACE. The British contribution was then three Jaguar squadrons and one Harrier squadron. One of the Jaguar squadrons and the Harrier squadron had alternate uses with, respectively, UKMF and AMF, so there was a certain «double counting» here.
- Individual Unit Reinforcements such as the Special Air Service units. Also a squadron of Buccaneers and a force of Canberra reconnaissance aircraft were to be deployed to the Northern Region and a squadron of Vulcan maritime reconnaissance aircraft, was tasked there.

- The UK/Netherlands amphibious force was assigned to SACLANT and had as its options for deployment, the reinforcement of Norway, Denmark and the Atlantic Islands. It had a land element of some 7000 troops, a large section of which had been trained in Arctic warfare. Oversnow vehicles were stockpiled in North Norway.⁸⁸⁾

At a time when the British amphibious force, the Royal Marines, had lost much of its world role and was being concentrated in Northern Europe, such an expensive entity could have been at risk. However, they survived, though plans to convert RFA *Tarbatness* for amphibious tasks «was no longer considered cost-effective» and the future of the vessel – as well as alternative means of providing its expected capability – was placed under review.⁸⁹⁾

A major examination of the defence programme was undertaken in the year running up to the 1981 White Paper. The results were reported in that publication and in *The United Kingdom Defence Programme: The Way Forward*,⁹⁰⁾ representing the defence review of the then minister, Mr (later Sir) John Nott. He set out as his aim:

«to re-establish in the long-term programme the right balance between the inevitable resource constraints and our necessary defence requirements.»⁹¹⁾

New programmes for the armed forces inventory would be needed to exploit new technology and tactical concepts. Unfortunately, new programmes had been those worst hit by economy drives and the consequence was an imbalance

«with too much tied up in weapons platforms – at sea, on land, or in the air – and not enough in the weapons and sensors they need to carry.»⁹²⁾

The main roles to remain were to be the strategic nuclear deterrent; a contribution to the NATO presence in the Central Region of Europe; playing a major part in the maritime defence of the Eastern Atlantic and the Channel; Specialist Reinforcement Forces; and some capacity for out-of-area operations. As a result of Mr Nott's review, the strength of the surface fleet was reduced and this had consequences for Britain's

contribution to the defence of Norway and its surrounding seas. Britain's maritime tasks were to be the containment of Soviet naval forces, hindering their deployment through the G-I-UK Gap and bearing the brunt of Soviet aggression in the Eastern Atlantic and Channel until US forces arrived; defending reinforcement and supply shipping by countering opposing forces; providing ASW support for NATO's Strike Fleet, allowing the US strike carriers to concentrate on air defence and the strike role; protection of British and NATO merchant shipping; and the deployment of the UK/Netherlands amphibious force.⁹³⁾ The planned changes not only signalled a more economic use of resources, they also mirrored Soviet naval developments. With the introduction of longer-ranged SSBNs into the Soviet Northern Fleet, the Soviet submarine-borne nuclear deterrent was more likely to be based in the Barents and North Norwegian Sea as it no longer had to deploy close to its targets in North America. Britain's disposition of its submarines was moved forward toward the G-I-UK «choke point» and greater emphasis was to be placed on shore-based high performance interception aircraft for the attrition of enemy aircraft.⁹⁴⁾

The UK/Netherlands amphibious force received some attention in the 1981 White Paper and was described as being «highly flexible» and «largely self-supporting». It could be sailed towards and held near «an area of likely operations without anticipating a political decision to intervene, or formal NATO alert measures». It did not rely on reception ports and airfields and could be «instantly ready for operations». It would be «equally effective» if deployed in North Norway, the Baltic Approaches or the Atlantic islands.⁹⁵⁾

To have had their forces so flagged in a White Paper that was looking for spending cuts seemed a vote of confidence in the Royal Marines and their reinforcement role. However, in the Secretary of State's statement of June 1981, a different story emerged. In this, Mr Nott stressed the need for quality rather than quantity in the British forces and for a re-assessment of the balance within the defence programme. In dealing with maritime tasks it was said that:

«Britain... simply cannot afford to maintain large numbers of every type of platform at the highest standards....

....if we are to maintain and improve these capabilities, we cannot at the same time sustain a surface fleet of the full present size....

What was envisaged was

«A rather smaller but modern fleet with less heavy overheads....»

....We have at present 59 destroyers and frigates declared to NATO. We shall now seek to sustain a figure of about 50.»⁹⁶⁾

Ark Royal was to be completed but only two of the three ships of this class were to be kept in service: *Hermes* was to be phased out.⁹⁷⁾ The sting for the amphibious capability was in the tail of this section:

*«Three Royal Marine Commandos will be maintained....It had already been decided that likely needs did not warrant replacement of the specialist amphibious ships *Intrepid* and *Fearless*; and these ships will now be phased out earlier, in 1982 and 1984 respectively.»⁹⁸⁾*

Without these vessels – and with no replacements in sight – the very *raison d'être* of the amphibious forces – their speed and flexibility – seemed to be in question. Could Britain do without such a force in the form in which it had emerged in the 1970s?

This question was put to the test the following year in the Falkland Islands' campaign which had a direct influence on Britain's defence posture in the North Atlantic and also provided some lessons for British forces. Partly as a result of the conflict in the South Atlantic, defence received an extra appropriation both for replacement of losses and for improvements. From 1983–86 there was an increase of about one-third, some £20 million, in money allocated to amphibious warfare and this helped to create a new fast raiding squadron (539 Assault Squadron) and to acquire the new Landing Craft Vehicle/Personnel MK4.

The lessons learned in **the Falklands** had some bearing on UK forces' roles in the North Atlantic. These were unchanged in the following White Paper (for 1983) but there was a note of emphasis that was of import for the British commitment to Norway:

«The Falklands Campaign underlined the importance of the flexibility, mobility and readiness of our forces.... Above all it made abundantly clear that successful deterrence rests crucially on the perceptions of a potential enemy.»⁹⁹⁾

In the section on the Royal Navy, prominence was given to the commitment to «the maintenance of strong and flexible naval forces» and to the Royal Marines,

«whose special expertise and versatility make them particularly valuable for tasks both within and beyond the NATO area.»¹⁰⁰⁾

One aspect of the Falklands conflict, however, intruded into the question of the flexibility and mobility of the amphibious forces. During the 1982 campaign, ships taken up from trade (STUFT) had been utilised to move men and materiel to the South Atlantic but these were no replacement for dedicated amphibious shipping.¹⁰¹⁾ As the phasing-out of the assault ships *Fearless* and *Intrepid* had been planned for the mid-1980s, the seeming success of the use of STUFT in the Falklands helped raise the question whether adapting commercial ships, taking troops by ferry and using «ro-ro» vessels might provide an alternative to dedicated shipping. Plans were advanced for container ships to be converted into Aviation Training Ships (ATS) to be used as a mobile base for amphibious operations once *Bulwark* and *Hermes* were no longer available.¹⁰²⁾ By 1985 the government was «considering a range of options for providing a future amphibious capability».¹⁰³⁾ The following year the case for transport that could do the job of dedicated shipping was made in the White Paper when, in a special section on «Amphibious Reinforcement of Norway», it was stated:

«Once the United Kingdom/Netherlands force has been committed to operations it may land directly from its own shipping across and over beaches, without any need for ports and airfields. The force has sufficient helicopters and landing craft to enable it to establish and consolidate an initial lodgement ashore. The mobility afforded by these helicopters and landing craft makes the force particularly suitable for operations in North Norway, where land movement is severely limited by fjords, poor roads...and where airfields are few and far between.»¹⁰⁴⁾

The need for dedicated amphibious resources was underlined by the BOLD GANNET exercise (3–20 September 1984) in which the UK/Netherlands amphibious force deployed to Denmark, relying heavily on STUFT. Lack of helicopter decks, rough seas and incompatible craft ruled out assault landings and the troops had to land in port. Some

similar problems with chartered ferries arose in exercise ANCHOR EXPRESS (February/March 1986) in North Norway.¹⁰⁵⁾ Already in 1985 the House of Commons Defence Committee had written that

«if you took away the amphibious shipping...you remove a lot of their (the Royal Marines) capability.... If the United Kingdom does not replace its amphibious capability, NATO's reinforcement plans for the Northern Flank will be in jeopardy.»¹⁰⁶⁾

The government has now placed a contract with Swan Hunter to examine the feasibility of extending the lives of or replacing the existing Landing Platform Docks – LPDs: *Fearless* and *Intrepid*. This, at least, is a commitment in principle to maintain the United Kingdom's amphibious capability, though in what form is still uncertain.¹⁰⁷⁾

It seems that the idea of continued dedicated vessels for British amphibious forces has been accepted. This was by no means the situation in government at the start of the decade. It looked then that replacement would go by default partly because the Royal Marines could not muster the political support they needed to stave off the Treasury axe and partly because reinforcement was seen as an expensive sideshow that could be undertaken satisfactorily by cheaper methods. After all, it seemed highly unlikely that the Royal Marines would be sent to attack a defended shore: they would most probably be deployed before a shooting war began. In this case, it seemed a viable option to pre-position heavier equipment and to bring in the troops with light equipment by helicopter. This would also quicken the deployment time. However, the amphibious vessels also provided the Royal Marines with an «out of area» capability and gave them the specialism suggested by their name. Without their amphibious capability, the Royal Marines could very quickly become integrated into the army, with Norway having to compete with the Central Front for their attention. The Falklands conflict changed the political context within which the Royal Marines were working – to their good. The general concept of replacing materiel and vessels not only became acceptable but necessary. Activities in the South Atlantic, together with the lessons of recent exercises in the North Atlantic and North Sea areas, demonstrated the weaknesses of some of the favoured cheaper alternatives to dedicated amphibious shipping. It appears that the government is now following the logic of the Defence Committee

and of its own 1986 White Paper. If this is the case, then the link between the defence needs of Norway and provision by the United Kingdom can only be strengthened.

However, this link is not only represented by amphibious forces. The specialist forces available to SACEUR and SACLANT including a British contribution and with relevance for the defence of Norway in 1988 are the following:

- AMF (Land) was provided with an infantry battalion, an armoured reconnaissance squadron and artillery, engineer, helicopter and logistic support. AMF (Air) includes one UK Jaguar squadron which is also included in the Rapid Reinforcement Plan. This is, in effect, one of two squadrons earmarked as reinforcements to BAL-TAP (NATO's Baltic Approaches Command), which could deploy early with AMF if it were deployed in that area. Similarly, the Jaguar Squadron reinforcing North Norway could join AMF if it were sent there. It should be remembered that the AMF might not be deployed in the Northern Flank at all.
- UKMF: a land force of about 13,000 men and a squadron of Jaguars. It can be deployed to parts of Denmark but Britain has informed the Danes that they might reduce or withdraw this force. As it is involved in the defence of the Baltic Approaches, its absence or presence has consequences for the defence of Norway.
- SSR(A) included 1 squadron of Jaguars and 1 Harrier squadron, with the Jaguar squadron also being included in the AMF.
- Individual units, for example SAS units, and aircraft, such as Buccaneers, which have an anti-ship role in Northern seas.
- Standing Naval Force Atlantic (STANAVFORLANT) comprising 5-9 destroyers and frigates and including a British contribution. This SACLANT force is likely to be in the Norwegian or North Sea early on in a conflict.
- Maritime Contingency Force Atlantic (MARCONFORLANT) which may consist of the Striking Fleet Atlantic, to which the British would contribute the British ASW Group 2, and of amphibious forces, that may include the UK/Netherlands amphibious force.
- This UK/Netherlands amphibious force, assigned to SACLANT, has LPD assault ships which will remain in service until the mid-1990s. Consideration is being given to providing helicopter lift

including the possibility of an aviation support ship. Six Landing Ships Logistic provide further support.¹⁰⁸⁾ This force was still available to reinforce Norway, the Baltic Approaches and the Atlantic islands, as in the early 1980s, but with the prepositioning of certain materiel in Norway and with the training in Arctic warfare, it became increasingly obvious that of the three destinations Norway was *primus inter pares*. Furthermore the Northern European Command was given priority for their deployment in SACEUR's Rapid Reinforcement Plan.

The main naval wartime task is ASW activity in the East Atlantic and Channel areas. Together with the RAF, the Royal Navy would defend reinforcement, re-supply and other essential shipping and would provide the ASW defence of NATO's Striking Fleet Atlantic. They would also protect and deploy the UK/Netherlands amphibious force and intercept and contain Soviet forces in the Norwegian Sea. To do this, the navy has available two ASW carriers, 44 front-line destroyers and frigates, four squadrons of maritime reconnaissance Nimrods and 23 attack submarines.¹⁰⁹⁾ All these activities, together with the air surveillance and interception duties of the RAF, have led to an interweaving of the strands of British and Norwegian defence through NATO.

The Current Situation

In 1940 the United Kingdom withdrew its forces from Norway, even when the campaign was going well in Narvik, because of an overriding commitment to the continent of Europe. British and NATO war plans from 1949 into the 1950s supposed a Soviet victory on the continent of Europe in a general war and considered that Scandinavia would be lost apart maybe from a bridgehead in the Stavanger area. At that time, the British government saw a limited utility in the defence of Norway and was prepared to commit only meagre resources to that cause.

The account given so far has shown how the British commitment to the defence of Norway has grown. It has emphasised a re-orientation of defence resources, first away from out-of-NATO-area to Europe and then, within Europe, from the south to the north of the continent. Such a reallocation could have been «supplier-pushed» rather than «demand-pulled». In other words, it could have been the case that the armed forces – and bureaucratic forces – had just found new northern pastures for their sacred cows as they had become excluded from traditional grazing lands. Or has it been the case that there is a genuine military threat in the northern region that affects Norway and Britain alike and to counter which it is prudent for Britain – and for Norway – to commit important elements of its military strength?

The size of the Soviet armed forces on the Kola Peninsula and their significance have been dealt with elsewhere.¹¹⁰ The question to be examined here is the extent to which the threats these forces offer to the United Kingdom might be opposed by a disposition of British power that implies an involvement in the defence of Norway and its immediate seas. To what extent has it become *necessary* for Britain to contribute to Norwegian defence?

Before answering this question, further consideration should be given to what constitutes such a necessity for Britain. If the United Kingdom were to be placed in jeopardy in the case of a war and its

government ministers clearly understood this, they would consider it «necessary» to devote enough resources to the kind of defence that would at least offer the country minimal security. This is not a statement of the obvious: after all, there are other choices such as appeasing a potential adversary. The statement reflects both the belief of British governments (as seen in their White Papers) in the overriding importance of the security of the home base, and their willingness to give a high priority to the defence of the British Isles in their plans. Thus an examination could be made of what a British government – of whatever political persuasion – might do to defend the United Kingdom against the perceived Soviet threat from the north, and how this might impinge on the defence of Norway. However, since 1949 there has been another dimension to Britain's security – membership of NATO. British governments have increasingly come to see the defence of their homeland in terms of a collective NATO defence, solidarity within the alliance and common planning within its command structure. These factors have to be included in defence-planners' calculations of what might be necessary for Britain's defence. Finally, it should be remembered that the United Kingdom's security within NATO is based on the concept of *detering* an attack by showing an ability to meet aggression should deterrence fail. Defence arrangements have to be credible enough to undermine the certainty of victory at an acceptable cost in the mind of the adversary.

What then might **Soviet war aims** be in the Far North? Any estimation of these cannot deal with specific scenarios nor can it give an authoritative account of such aims, but it can examine the broad view of Western commentators of the most likely military threat that the West, Britain and Norway in particular, might face.

There is general agreement as to what the Soviet Union will not do on the mainland of Norway. There seems little reason for the Soviets to invade part of Norway, except as a lead-in to a wider European war. As Donnelly *et al* wrote:

«It is assumed that this local assault (on Kirkenes and Varangerfjord) would be only part of a general attack on the West. It is hard to conceive of the USSR jeopardising its foreign policy objectives by displaying its hand for the puny prize of a few square km of Finnmark.»¹¹¹⁾

A recent US Presidential commission noted the increased Soviet ability «to bring conventional force to bear quickly at points on their periphery», but as yet there is no indication that the Soviet Union could perceive a benefit from such a move in Norway, the Faroe Islands or Iceland.¹¹²⁾ There is, however, a consensus that the Soviets would need to wrest control of Norwegian airfields, particularly those in the north of the country from NATO.

The main reason for the Soviets to wish to deny NATO the use of air bases in North Norway is that their availability increases the vulnerability to Western air attack of the bases on the Kola Peninsula.

However, this is not the only importance of these airfields, nor are they the only source of a threat to the Kola.

The Soviet Union could wish the use of the airfields themselves as part of a general scheme to clear the opposition out of the Norwegian Sea area early on in a conflict. Recent Soviet military reference works seem to emphasise that «command of the seas simultaneously calls for command of the air» and this may well need «control of adjacent shores».¹¹³⁾ The Soviet need for these airfields thus becomes tied to wider sea control which would have as its tasks keeping Western carriers and submarines out of strike range of Soviet strategic assets, interdicting Western sea lines of communications between North America and Western Europe and between Britain and Northern Europe, and placing in jeopardy vital Western strategic interests by attacks on the chokepoints of the Arctic TVD — the Baltic, Iceland, Greenland and North Canada.¹¹⁴⁾ In all these cases, control of the North Norwegian airfields can only be seen in the context of wider operational aims. These airfields become useful to the Soviet Union (rather than being of no use to the West, if destroyed) in connection with their submarine, maritime air and carrier operations offshore and with their amphibious landing capabilities. The importance of the seas off Norway (the Barents, Norwegian and North Seas) can be seen in the reasons given above for the Soviets wishing control over them.

How can **the West respond** and how might their response impinge on Norway's defence and any British contribution thereto? Again it is not the intention here to deal with a wide range of scenarios but to deal with the most probable elements. An important calculation is not just the possible response of the West in the Northern Region, and Norway in particular, but the likely devotion of resources by NATO to that area as compared to the Central Region.

In any general war in Europe, the north will be subsidiary to the Central Front. Commentators on Soviet military doctrine have confirmed this point:

«... it is not here in the North that in the event of war between East and West, the deciding game will be played. That honour belongs to the Central Front.»¹¹⁵⁾

«I have never yet read a Soviet book on strategy or operational art that has failed to stress the importance of putting a massive, the maximum possible, blow along the principal axis of the advance . . . straight across West Germany.»¹¹⁶⁾

If this is the case, then it is sensible for the NATO countries to have the bulk of their defensive effort concentrated in the Central Region. Seen in their most devious light,

«... the principles of Soviet military doctrine make it clear that, particularly given the need to win a war quickly, there will be a high premium on persuading NATO to deploy forces to that secondary land theatre of operations because there they will play a less important role in the developing operation.»¹¹⁷⁾

Another analyst has written that, should a war break out in the Central Front, «it would be a conflict of short duration» and, consequently, the outcome would depend greatly on the forces-in-place.¹¹⁸⁾ These quotations suggest that too great an attention by NATO to the Northern Front could take its eyes off the prize, and elaborate provision for reinforcements across the ocean makes little sense if, because of lack of resources devoted to the Central Region, there is nothing worth reinforcing.

However, this is not the end of the argument, which is over priorities rather than «either/or» choices. The discussion is about how much to devote to the Northern Region and seas, not whether any resources should be expended there. Even those who foresee a short Central Front war, accept the necessity of a balanced provision in the north and at sea by NATO. David Greenwood makes the following points:

- some capacity should be devoted to the protection of shipping tasks as an insurance against a long war

- the «balance of naval and maritime air power in the North during peacetime, and the regular exercise of capabilities, *does* diminish the likelihood of a shooting-war in Europe itself» – it forecloses what the Soviets might regard as «easy options» in the North
- control of the north-east part of the NATO Command area, especially the routes to the Continent of Europe, would give the West «escalation dominance», that could persuade the Soviets not to move from a conventional to nuclear war.¹¹⁹⁾

Furthermore, while too much Western attention to the Northern Region might be a distraction from the main battlefront, a judicious investment there – especially if it primed the local powers' pumps – could help drain Soviet resources from the Continent of Europe to protect their strategic resources in the north.

Finally, although the Northern Region can be seen as a Front of the maritime North Atlantic area or as an important pillar on the shores of the Arctic Ocean, its greatest military importance is in relation to the Central Front. This is not only because of its importance in the internal reinforcement of the European theatre but also because of the role of the Baltic Approaches and Jutland for the outcome of a European war.¹²⁰⁾ Southern Norway becomes of relevance as «the northern hinge of the Baltic Straits»¹²¹⁾ as well as a window on the North Sea. However, it should be noted that even within the Northern Region there is a dilemma for the United Kingdom (and Norway) in their commitment of forces. How many should be devoted to North Norway and how many to the Baltic? The answer would depend on the particular scenario but it should be remembered that the Baltic Approaches – especially their air vulnerability – are of immediate interest to Denmark, Norway, West Germany and the United Kingdom (not to mention the US and other NATO allies fighting in the area) while North Norway's importance is not always so obvious to non-Norwegians.

Even given the domination of the Central Region, NATO has to devote sizeable resources to the Northern Region and its surrounding seas, partly because of their own value and partly because of their connection with the potential main battlefield.

What is the probable Western response in the area? The NATO aim would be to retain control at least of the main airfields in Norway (or, in the last resort, to deny them to the Soviets) and to command the Norwegian and North Seas, with the option of entering the Barents Sea at a

later stage. The Soviet view of the interrelationship between sea control, air superiority and control of adjacent shores has been mentioned (above p.32). The West also sees the necessary link between control of Norway and control of the seas off Norway. In the words of the then First Sea Lord:

« . . . the defence of Norway and control of the Norwegian sea are inseparable.»¹²²⁾

Jonathan Alford placed the connection in the form of a syllogism:

«Who controls the Norwegian Sea depends on who controls the North Norwegian airfields; who controls those airfields depends on who gets there first; and who gets there first depends on who controls the Norwegian Sea.»¹²³⁾

From an American viewpoint the reinforcements to Norway

*« . . . all have to go by ship, to Norway, after the conflict breaks out. If we allow the Norwegian Sea to be controlled by the Soviet Union, Norway is untenable . . .
In order to put forces into that area, we have to provide air support for them.»¹²⁴⁾*

Although the above speaker, Navy Secretary John Lehman, drew the conclusion that carrier-based aircraft, not their land-based equivalents, would be needed to protect US forces crossing the Atlantic, the retention of North Norwegian airfields would clearly be a welcome advantage for reinforcements being shuttled from Britain to Norway and would be able to provide some extra air cover, for example, for NATO's Striking Fleet if it operated off the Norwegian coast at an early stage, before much of its American element arrived. To help retain these airfields, the Allies would have to rely partly on the Norwegian Adapted Hawk (NOAH) system and partly on air defence provided by the Norwegian Air Force, enhanced by elements of the USAF and RAF. To fight a battle over the airfields of North Norway, British and US aircraft would have to be sure of the airfields in Central and South Norway and of carrier-based aircraft off the Norwegian coast.

Clearly, anti-submarine warfare will be vital for the Allied presence off the coast of Norway and, following what has been said above, onshore in Norway. ASW activity is wide-ranging and can be conducted from the air (and space), the surface or beneath the sea; detection devices can be passive or active; and anti-submarine weapons will be mainly mines and torpedoes.¹²⁵⁾ It is preferable that ASW operations are undertaken early on in a war thereby «sanitizing» the seas across which reinforcements and supplies will have to travel. There has been a good deal of discussion about US ASW operations against Soviet strategic submarines.¹²⁶⁾ Suffice it to say here, that in the early stages of a conflict it is more likely that precious ASW resources would be used to clear vital sea areas of the enemy's attack submarines. In evidence to the US Senate Committee on Armed Services, Secretary of the Navy John Lehman said in 1984 that, concerning the Norwegian Sea:

«We have to send submarines up there. It has to be premised on land-based air, substantial use of P-3's and Nimrods operating out of Iceland and the UK. Our submarines have to go and nullify the Soviet submarine force before we can send any surface ships, certainly before we send the Marines up there in amphibious craft. And, once we have secured that, we have to be able to use carriers in the area to provide air support to the forces there.»¹²⁷⁾

And again:

«. . . If we allow the Norwegian Sea to be controlled by the Soviet Union, Norway is untenable.»¹²⁸⁾

If the Norwegian coast is controlled by the Soviet Union, however, the Norwegian Sea may not be untenable but the cost of holding it would surely increase. The forces that could be available to keep the important areas of Norway in Western hands until the Norwegian Sea is made safe for naval reinforcement are the Norwegian armed forces, the UK/Netherlands amphibious force, the AMF and air elements of the MAB. These forces would in themselves make easier one of the main tasks of the West Europeans in the area, ASW, with the Norwegians involved in coastal work and the British concentrating their resources in the EASTLANT and Channel commands (see above p.25-27). These forces would have to «hold the fort» in the northern waters before the US carriers arrived, which could be weeks after the initiation of conflict. The arrival of these carriers would in any case be dependent on the

area having been made comparatively safe, as made clear by John Lehman. Making the area safe, according to the former Secretary of the US Navy, would allow the Marines to be sent in by amphibious craft and would be dependent on an effective anti-submarine campaign in the waters off Norway.¹²⁹⁾ The United Kingdom would play an important part in this campaign (and that of mine counter-measures) not just for the sake of the US Marines and US Navy's carriers but also for the protection of its own seaborne resources and because of the necessity of not ceding the bulk of the Norwegian Sea to the Soviets, thereby placing in jeopardy the whole of Norway.

A final point should be made about the **Battle of Norway's importance for Britain**. If it were lost in any substantial way, the air defence of the United Kingdom could be placed at risk, especially if the Soviets had access to the south-west coast of Norway. This would draw British resources away from the Central Region and they could suffer serious detrition. This has led some commentators to suggest that, even in peacetime, UK Air Defence should link up with that of South Norway on a closer basis than already practised, with the air defence of that part of Norway being integrated into the British structure.¹³⁰⁾ This could be all that more important if and when Canadian F18 aircraft are no longer available for the air defence of Norway.

So far, the area in question has been examined in the context of a conflict. It should not be forgotten that this region has security importance in the period leading to a conflict and in peacetime. In the words of the 1975 Defence White Paper:

«If the balance of maritime power were to shift so far in favour of the Warsaw Pact that it had an evident ability . . . to isolate Europe by sea, the effect on Allied confidence and cohesion would be profound.»¹³¹⁾

In North Norway, as at sea, Western provision for defence and reinforcement weakens the attraction of certain opportunities for the Soviets, thereby – it can be supposed – affecting their willingness to undertake those particular missions. The calculus of deterrence is affected not merely by the size of opposing forces but also by the likelihood of their deployment. Exercises, peacetime manoeuvres, prestocking arrangements and COB agreements are demonstrations of that determination. This having been said, the countries involved still have to have the necessary resources as well as the will-power.

If it seemed that deterrence were failing and a Soviet *coup de main* were expected, say, in the Northern Region, the European element in NATO's forces would provide the front-line of an early response. They would also be able to take action that in itself would be reassuring to an ally such as Norway, without provoking pre-emption from the Soviet Union. It might be preferable to display Western resolve in the Norwegian Sea in a crisis by placing British elements of the Striking Fleet or STANAVFORLANT there rather than calling in an American carrier battle group. An early US presence could force the Soviet Union to decide whether to respond in kind, thereby escalating the situation, or back away with the subsequent loss of face, whereas British vessels could be interpreted by all sides as European ships deployed in the waters of a European ally. Likewise the UK/Netherlands amphibious force could embark from the United Kingdom and remain offshore from Norway as an indication of an Allied willingness to commit troops to the area without actually landing them on Norwegian soil.

Both in peacetime and in a crisis Norway has another important function for the defence of the United Kingdom, and for that of NATO generally. It has intelligence-gathering, communications and early-warning duties that are of relevance not just for the Norwegians. It provides early warning of Soviet aircraft approaching the British Isles and is an anchor-point for the Sound Surveillance System (SOSUS) in the North Norwegian Sea, which is used for monitoring Soviet submarines exiting from the Kola Peninsula.¹³²⁾ It is part of the NATO Air Defence Ground Environment (NADGE), an essential part of NATO's means of tracking Soviet air activity.¹³³⁾ Norway also houses a number of intelligence installations whose work is no doubt of interest to the United Kingdom¹³⁴⁾ and the country has a series of military navigation and communication stations.¹³⁵⁾

The above account demonstrates that, in a European war, control of Norway and its adjacent seas will have a significant role to play in the defence of the Central Region, the reinforcement of Allied forces and the containment of Soviet maritime power. (It could also affect detri- tion of the USSR's sea-based nuclear deterrent.) All these roles make it necessary for the United Kingdom to commit a large share of its mili- tary resources to the defence of this region, not in preparedness for conflict there but to persuade the Soviet Union that any aggression will not bear fruit and that diplomatic considerations in the area should not be made on the basis of a predominance of Soviet power on the Kola

Peninsula. Furthermore, the area increasingly appears to be part of the front-edge of the United Kingdom's defence.

Can Britain provide the resources for these defence roles and responsibilities? It has been mentioned that within the Northern Region generally there is a dilemma for Britain concerning the division of resources between Norway and the Baltic (see above p.34). The forces outlined on p.30 may not end up defending Norway at all. Those most likely to reach Norway are the troops of the UK/Netherlands amphibious force but their form of transport for the next decade has yet to be decided. Otherwise the British forces most likely to be involved in the defence of Norway are the naval contributions the United Kingdom makes to STANAVFORLANT and MARCONFORLANT. Their importance in the defence of NATO, and especially of Norway and the United Kingdom, has already been stressed. But will Britain continue to devote the resources to allow a strong contribution to these forces in the Norwegian Sea? The history of the Royal Navy has demonstrated the decline in the size of the surface fleet, albeit now more concentrated in Northern Waters and with greater submarine assistance than in the 1970s.

Government ministers have pointed to the qualitative improvements being undertaken in the Royal Navy. The Type 22 frigates – with accompanying submarines and helicopters – provide modern ASW cover. When the Type 23s start replacing the Leander-class and auxiliary oil replenishment (AOR) ships come into service and with operational improvements already made, the Royal Navy will have a substantial increase in capability.¹³⁶⁾

However, the Soviet Union has expanded the size of its Northern Fleet, is currently «narrowing the technological lead long held by the West» in submarines and the Soviet navy has shown «an improvement in combat efficiency and readiness, and fuller integration of naval forces into combined arms operations.»¹³⁷⁾ Furthermore, there is not yet conclusive evidence that the Royal Navy will be rejuvenated in the early 1990s. So far, one Type 23 was ordered in 1984-5, three in 1986-7 and three in 1988-9, with the last batch perhaps being accepted into the fleet from 1992. Only two AORs appear to be funded by the government which wants six but as of yet does not seem to have plans to pay for the others.¹³⁸⁾ It will depend on the ordering policy in the next couple of years whether the Royal Navy will be able to sustain the figures of «about fifty» destroyers and frigates.

There is also the question of whether the «about fifty» figure has

much meaning when a lesser number is operational. The House of Commons Defence Committee reckoned that there were 32 fully operational frigates and destroyers available on 10 June 1988.¹³⁹⁾ Furthermore, there is no indication that the British government has plans to increase the tempo of ship replacement in the near future: both the expenditure on sea equipment and the navy general purpose combat forces expenditure are set to fall, in pounds sterling terms, in 1988-9.¹⁴⁰⁾

This trimming back of British naval resources has caused the ability of the Royal Navy to undertake its wartime tasks to be challenged. These tasks in the Eastern Atlantic and Channel are:

- the interception and containment of Soviet forces in the Norwegian Sea
- direct defence of reinforcement, resupply and economic shipping
- ASW defence of NATO's Striking Fleet Atlantic
- protection and deployment of the UK/Netherlands amphibious forces to NATO's Northern Flank.¹⁴¹⁾

The Defence Committee noted that

«forward defence is now seen as the primary wartime role for the surface fleet. The number of ships available make it likely that other roles, such as the defence of convoys, or patrol and protection of the seas around the United Kingdom, including the Eastern Atlantic, will have a lower priority.»

Furthermore, it is contended that this strategy of forward defence «has very important merit of coincidence with the long established commitment to provide reinforcement for North Norway» and that «it has been cogently argued that forward defence also protects the British Isles, in particular from Soviet forces based in the Kola Peninsula.»¹⁴²⁾

Some reservations about the strategy are voiced: in a period of tension, Royal Navy ships so deployed could only monitor transiting Soviet submarines and, at such a time, «forward deployment could appear provocative.» The Committee also thought it far from guaranteed that a Soviet threat in the Atlantic would be identified as early as necessary or that ships would be in the right place to deal with it.¹⁴³⁾ Members questioned the consistency of the Ministry of Defence's evidence on convoy protection and concluded that «the principal provision

for the defence of economic shipping is reliance on the strategy of forward defence.»¹⁴⁴⁾ The Committee doubted whether this was an adequate method of protecting «high value» shipping and whether there would be sufficient resources to carry out such protection satisfactorily and deploy significant forces forward into the Norwegian Sea.¹⁴⁵⁾ The conclusion was that if

«the number of destroyers and frigates fall much below its present level, the Royal Navy will not be capable of meeting all the peacetime tasks . . . and we doubt whether it would be of an adequate strength for the wartime roles assigned to it by NATO.»¹⁴⁶⁾

A more pessimistic view would be that the United Kingdom presently has insufficient naval forces to undertake its four main tasks in wartime, especially if the bulk of the Striking Fleet (the American contribution) had to come from the east coast of the United States, maybe taking some five days to reach the GIUK gap.¹⁴⁷⁾ In such a case, the Royal Navy might consider it wise to use its resources mainly in the more defensive role of protection of shipping and to be cautious about both the share of surface fleet committed to the Norwegian Sea and how far forward the ships would venture. What is decided is contingent on the scenario but clearly the options open to the Royal Navy depend to a great extent on the size of their active surface fleet and number of submarines. That the surface fleet has decreased and the submarine fleet has shown only a marginal increase must be of concern to the decision-makers in Norway. Indeed, if it is accepted that the defence of the Norwegian Sea is of vital importance for the protection of the British Isles, it should be a major concern for British decision-makers.

In 1940 Britain was taken by surprise by the invasion of Norway and the troops sent there to bolster Norwegian resistance were untrained for the terrain and weather they were to find and ill-equipped for the campaign. In the end, the defence of Norway was sacrificed to the demands of the war on the European continent. For Britain and Norway in 1988, whatever issues remain to be solved between the two countries, the misunderstandings, the anger and the disappointment of 1940 are a world away. The doubt remains, however, whether the balance between Britain's continental commitments and those to the Northern region and the maritime areas truly reflects the growth of Soviet power in the north and the importance to Britain of Norway and the Norwegian Sea as a front line of defence.

Conclusions

How then does the British defence effort fit in to Norway's security policy?

Traditionally the two countries have been close on questions of international security. After the Second World War, Britain was willing to take advantage of the new climate in Europe first to tie Norwegian defence procurement to Britain, then to contribute to the NATO command structure in Norway and, later on, to provide daily cooperation on C³ and air control and a regular contribution for Norway's reinforcement calculus. The latter has been seen as being particularly important as it has given meaning to Norway's own defence effort and has acted as an incentive for other Allied states to contribute. Furthermore, it has provided an important complement to the Superpower presence of the United States.

An evaluation of the British element in Norwegian security should appreciate that Norway's security policy has had *three important aspects* since the Second World War: resistance, reinforcement and reassurance. The elements are intertwined. The Norwegian defence effort is aimed at holding off (but, realistically, not defeating) any aggressor until outside reinforcement arrives. Whether allies feel it worth reinforcing Norway will depend to an important extent on the resistance shown by that country. However, arrangements for reinforcements and their nature should not appear to threaten Norway's Soviet neighbour (especially its strategic assets) in such a way that the Soviets might be persuaded to increase substantially the protective element in the Kola Peninsula to the discomfort of the Nordic states, or that the Soviet Union might wish to place greater emphasis on pre-emptive moves in a time of crisis. Norway, therefore, prefers COB-agreements, pre-stocking, host-nation support and regular, controlled exercises in conventional defence to permanent bases, forward deployment of troops and the stockpiling of nuclear or chemical weapons on its soil. These choices are made to facilitate the reinforcement of Norway, to reassure elements of Norwegian opinion that membership of NATO does not

mean foreign bases or nuclearisation, and also to assure the Soviet Union that Norway will not be used as a launching-pad for aggression against the Kola Peninsula or Leningrad.

The United Kingdom has made and makes a contribution to the three elements of Norwegian security.

Britain's association with the purely national element of Norwegian defence – the **resistance** element – was at its height during and just after the Second World War when the United Kingdom was the prime source of armaments and training for Norway. Since the early 1950s, this position has been taken over by the United States and the British now play the junior role. Whether there are unfulfilled Norwegian needs that Britain may assuage is doubtful. It is possible that a joint procurement effort involving Britain – such as the NATO frigate – might offer armament and defence opportunities to Norway that otherwise would not exist. It also may be the case that specialist British forces might help in the training of their Norwegian counterparts more than at present. The British contribution has developed in the area of early warning and surveillance but this has been in the form of a more cooperative effort between the United Kingdom and Norway in the monitoring and patrolling of the airspace over the seas that join them. An extension of Air Defence UK to cover South Norway could work to the benefit of the United Kingdom by providing suitable forward defence, and could help directly in the protection of a presently underguarded part of Norwegian airspace. It is at least worth consideration by a working group of the two countries.

One of the greatest British contributions to Norway's defence is that of **reinforcement**. Once more, this is an area in which the United States has become dominant. That said, Britain still makes a separate and important contribution to the reinforcement of Norway. It is separate from the US forces (though in AMF is part of a joint Alliance effort) and thus can be used before an American presence. It can provide a non-Superpower and low-level commitment that demonstrates Alliance solidarity with Norway without being unnecessarily provocative. The British amphibious force could position itself in – or off – Norway even before hostilities, thereby providing a «pre-enforcement» force.

The extent and level of the British reinforcement effort – though modest in comparison with that of the United States – is significant. In its full array it covers ground forces trained in the Norwegian environment, a wide range of air support and a «blue water» and coastal naval

element. The United Kingdom is also an important building-block in the AFNORTH command structure, providing the Commander-in-Chief among others, and is a regular participant in Norway's programme of exercises.

Over the years the British reinforcement commitment to Norway has been varied and not always certain. What has developed over the last ten years has not only been a greater Norwegian need for the sort of reinforcement that Britain can provide but also a clearer British interest in such provision.

Is there a need for a reconsideration of the British contribution to the reinforcement of Norway? In principle, no. This essay makes it clear that such a British effort is an investment in the defence of the British Isles and in NATO solidarity. In practice, some readjustment may be needed. At the end of the 1980s, there has been a certain amount of flux in the Allied effort in the Northern Region. The Canadians have ended their major commitment to the area; the British have taken an «exercise rest» with regard to the Royal Marines in Norway in 1988; Britain is also in the process of considering replacements for its amphibious shipping and UK defence is more generally going through a period of cuts; the US Navy's eyes are on the Gulf; the West Germans are showing an increased interest in the areas to their north; the Norwegian defence effort has been criticised as inadequate by the former Chief of Defence. In short, a number of NATO members are taking national decisions that affect the defence of Norway as well as that of the Alliance.

Of course, there are processes within NATO for the examination of such decisions and their wider consequences, but all too often it is difficult to reverse the cancellation of programmes or to stop the building of a new weapons' system. The result is often a lack of coordination. To stretch a point, one could see the ending of the UKMF commitment to Jutland leading to concerned Norwegians providing troops for the area; Norway asking for extra outside resources to replace the Canadians who have gone to West Germany; the West Germans providing extra troop ships and aircraft for the defence of Norway and asking the British not to denude their commitment to BAOR . . . Mobility in the defence of Western Europe is desirable but it could perhaps be more purposeful.

Alliance members involved in the Northern Region should consider the overall picture in the area before taking vital national decisions, and a more conscious effort at mutual bargaining should be made. Could it

be that a continued British amphibious commitment to the region would be helped by a Norwegian and, maybe, Dutch contribution to the replacement for *Fearless* and *Intrepid* in which case, would the Royal Marines then become dedicated to the reinforcement of Norway? Should the United Kingdom be cutting its naval strength in EASTLANT and retaining a full commitment to BAOR while West Germany is expanding its blue-water presence? Should the consolidation of Canadian troops in Europe at Lahr, West Germany, be matched by a West German contribution of troops and aircraft to the reinforcement of Norway? Might not greater mobility training of Norwegian troops and flexibility in service hours be an appropriate match for a continued Allied presence?

Britain has also contributed to the **reassurance** element in Norwegian security policy. While this policy is a national and self-enforced one, its success has to a certain extent depended on the restraint and understanding of allies. Britain has not questioned Norway's «base and ban» policies and has respected constraints on exercises. In adhering to Norway's ban on nuclear weapons in their country, Britain has been assisted by the understanding of the host country. For example, the visits of British ships to Norwegian ports is on the basis that the British respect Norwegian ban policy and the Norwegians accept the British policy of neither confirming nor denying whether their ships are nuclear-armed. Furthermore, the British commitment of ships and the Royal Marines to the early defence of Norway and its adjacent waters allows Norway to ask for early allied reinforcement without immediately involving the United States. This could help prevent unnecessary escalation in a crisis. A continuation of Britain's ability to contribute to Norwegian security in such a fashion should be regarded as bolstering the reassurance as well as the reinforcement element in Norway's defence.

Britain and Norway are facing a host of *uncertainties* in their security policies: the squeeze on resources for defence; the prospect of a new political leadership in the United States; the developments in Soviet policy; the possibility of further arms control, disarmament and confidence-building agreements between the two superpowers and between NATO and the Warsaw Treaty Organisation; the demands of new technology. Each of these elements could affect the countries' security policies and the defence relationship between the two states. Some developments may bring out conflicting interests: for example, Norwegian leaders have made it clear that they would not like to see an increase in sea-launched cruise missiles (SLCMs) after the INF Treaty whe-

reas the British government may well support a greater emphasis on SLCMs.

There are also areas of potential policy cooperation. One is in the response to the Soviets' new *Nordpolitik*. On 1 October 1987, Mr Gorbachev made a speech in Murmansk, in which he referred to a variety of security and resource issues in the Arctic and sub-Arctic region. This speech is one of a number of initiatives made by Mr Gorbachev on arms control, disarmament and regional issues. It reiterated some familiar themes, such as Soviet support for a Nordic Nuclear-Free Zone, and brought in relatively new proposals in the security field, such as confidence-building measures in the seas off Norway. Mr Gorbachev also had some ideas concerning resources, scientific study and environmental protection. During his January 1988 visit to Scandinavia, Mr Ryzhkov, the Soviet Prime Minister, fleshed out some of these proposals but what he offered on the jurisdictional dispute in the Barents Sea was met with a distinct Norwegian lack of enthusiasm.¹⁴⁸⁾

The Soviet Union seems anxious to establish a number of international agreements (bilateral and multilateral) that would safeguard its security position in Northern Europe, remove what it regards as threatening forces and also help develop its resources there. Properly negotiated agreements could help to lower tension in the region and thereby could contribute to Norway's policy of reassurance, but, if Norway is left in a weak bargaining position with the Soviets, the result could be closer to appeasement than reassurance. It is necessary for Norway's allies that have interests in the northern region of Europe to become involved in negotiations resulting from Mr Gorbachev's Murmansk Initiative and to give positive support to Norway. The following points could be considered by the British

- British involvement in the conferences and negotiations about resource, environmental and scientific issues is necessary. The United Kingdom has an interest in Soviet openness on the subject and in making sure that Norway is not alone in responding positively to this part of the Murmansk Initiative.
- Norway should be supported by Britain in its jurisdictional disputes with the Soviet Union.
- British research and resource interests in Svalbard might be re-awakened.

- Any confidence-building measures or restrictions at sea should be examined with a sceptical eye. They should not limit the Allies' freedom of manoeuvre in the high seas off Norway, nor should the maritime reinforcement effort be placed in a less favourable position than now.
- Prior NATO agreement should be sought on the acceptability of measures in the Northern Region.
- A close watch by both countries of the Soviet presence in Northern Waters to see whether new more defensive patterns are emerging.

Once the security framework for Northern Europe becomes clearer, the NATO partners with interests in the region should be able to consider what commitments in terms of troops, air strength, seapower and infrastructure will be needed for the 1990s. Two important contributors to the alliance presence there will be Norway and Britain. Until now, Norway, often of necessity, has placed trust in Britain to help with its defence. Occasionally, the Norwegians have not been sure about their traditional ally and Britain's response has sometimes been uncertain. The decades of collaboration and a realization of common interests should ensure that these two countries' efforts into the next decade and the next century complement each other.

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**The British-Norwegian Defence
Relationship**

Clive Archer

**INSTITUTT FOR
FORSVARSTUDIER**

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The British-Norwegian Defence Relationship

The United Kingdom and Norway have had close links since Norwegian independence. This study examines their defence relationship especially since the Second World War. In particular, their cooperation within NATO during the 1980s is charted and the British contribution to Norwegian defence evaluated. Suggestions are made concerning areas of future mutual interest.

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