

Knut Einar Eriksen og Helge Pharo

Norway and the early cold war:
Conditional atlantic cooperation

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I

By and large the Western European nations joined the North Atlantic Alliance with only the Communist parties opposing membership. Norway was different. Initially the majority of the governing Labor parliamentary party was opposed to Norway joining the alliance, and influential members of the Conservative Party, including the party chairman, were skeptical if not outspokenly opposed.¹

The Norwegian debate over membership had ramifications reaching beyond the boundaries of Norway. As it turned out, both Denmark and Iceland followed the Norwegian lead during 1948-49. The Norwegian Labor government for a period of time also entertained hopes of pulling Sweden into NATO as well. A fair number of senior Swedish military and foreign ministry officials clearly would have preferred to have Sweden join the Atlantic alliance along with Norway.²

Neither the United States nor the Scandinavians at any time considered Finland a possible pact member. The Finnish government in 1948 had signed a mutual assistance treaty with the Soviet Union, providing for consultations in case of a threat evolving from Germany or states aligned with Germany. Thus, with the founding of NATO, the Nordic countries were split three ways. Denmark, Iceland and Norway joined the Atlantic alliance, Sweden remained neutral, though clearly western oriented, and Finland entered into

¹ K.E. Eriksen, *DNA og NATO* (The Norwegian Labor Party and NATO, Oslo, 1972), pp. 19-71; K.-E. Eriksen og H.Ø. Pharo, *Norsk sikkerhetspolitikk som etterkrigshistorisk forskningsfelt* (Postwar Norwegian Security Policies as a Research Field, LOS-notat 92/13, Bergen, 1992), pp. 2-35.

² K. Molin, *Omstridd neutralitet* (Neutrality contested, Angered, 1991); K.E. Eriksen and H.Ø. Pharo, "'De fire sirkene i norske utenrikspolitikk'", (The four circles in Norwegian foreign policy) in C. Due-Nielsen et al., *Danmark, Norden og Nato 1948-1962* (Denmark, the Nordic countries and NATO 1948-1962, Copenhagen 1991) pp. 193-220; K.E. Eriksen, "Norge i det vestlige samarbeidet" (Norway and the west) in T. Bergh and H.Ø. Pharo eds.; *Vekst og velstand* (Growth and prosperity. A political history of Norway 1945-1965, 2.ed., Oslo 1981) pp. 167-281.

an agreement with the Soviet Union, though without accepting a satellite status and while largely maintaining a Western-style domestic political system.

There is no doubt that the Norwegian decision to join pulled Denmark and probably also Iceland along. Furthermore, all the Scandinavians more or less explicitly demanded and gained recognition for special treatment within the alliance. In February 1949 the Norwegian government by a unilateral declaration notified its allies as well as the Russians in February 1949 that Allied troops would only be stationed in Norway under wartime conditions or under the threat of war. The Danes did not explicitly set the same conditions for cooperating in the western defense agreement, but for all practical purposes followed the Norwegian lead. Iceland, of course, did accept a large American air base, but did not set up its own armed forces. As far as the Danes were concerned, they preferred accepting bases on Greenland to handing parts of the island over to the United States, as the Americans had proposed as early as 1946.³

The decision to join NATO is one of the most thoroughly explored issues of postwar Norwegian historiography. The domestic Norwegian processes leading to membership have been analyzed in two monographs published in the early 1970s, Knut Einar Eriksen, *DNA og NATO*, dealing with the decision-making process within the governing Labor party, and Magne Skodvin, *Norden eller NATO?*, detailing the role of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Minister Halvard Lange in particular.⁴ Geir Lundestad in the monograph, *America, Scandinavia and the Cold War 1945-1949*, has analyzed US-Scandinavian relations from 1945 to the formation of NATO, with particular emphasis on Norway⁵. Rolf Tamnes in *The United States and the Cold War in the High North* deals primarily with the membership

³ K.E. Eriksen, "Great Britain and the Problem of Bases in the Nordic Area, 1945-1947", *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 7, 1982, pp. 135-163; N. Amstrup, "Grønland i det amerikansk-danske forhold 1945-48 (Greenland in American-Danish Relations 1945-48) in N. Amstrup and I. Faurby, eds., *Studier i dansk udenrigspolitik tilegnet Erling Bjøl* (Studies in Danish Foreign Policy in Honor of Erling Bjøl, Århus, 1978), pp. 155-98; G. Lundestad, *America, Scandinavia and the Cold War 1945-1949* (Oslo, 1980) pp. 36-84.

⁴ Respectively The Norwegian Labor Party and NATO, Oslo, 1972; and The Nordic Countries and NATO, Oslo, 1971.

⁵ Oslo, 1980.

period, but also analyzes the process leading to membership from both the US and the Norwegian angle.⁶

British policy has been studied in detail in Howard Turner's doctoral dissertation, and also in Knut E. Eriksen and Magne Skodvin, "Storbritannia, NATO og et skandinavisk forbund".⁷ Helge Pharo in "Scandinavia and the Early Cold War", has surveyed the period from 1945 to 1951 in a comparative Scandinavian perspective, but with Norwegian policies providing the main focus.⁸

Two historiographical essays survey the field of postwar Norwegian security and foreign policy studies, Helge Pharo "The Cold War in Norwegian and International Historical Research" from 1985, and Knut E. Eriksen and Helge Pharo, "Norsk sikkerhetspolitikk som etterkrigshistorisk forskningsfelt" from 1992.⁹ It should be mentioned that for the period up to about 1950 Norwegian archives were made available to researchers on a privileged basis from the late 1960s.

For a nation such as Norway, inclined towards non-alignment and with an independent existence of less than 50 years, the decision in favor of joining NATO was not a self-evident one. In fact during 1948-49 several alternative options were considered but in the end found either wanting or unrealistic. Our main concern is to explain why Norway chose NATO, albeit with important reservations. It is well known that the United States and Great Britain wanted Norway as a member of the Atlantic alliance. We shall then also deal with the question of possible Anglo-American pressures on Norway to join the West, while simultaneously briefly outlining the alternative options and why these roads were not taken.

⁶ Oslo, 1991.

⁷ "Britain, the United States, and Scandinavian Security Problems 1945-1949", unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Aberdeen, 1982; *Internasjonal politikk* (Norwegian), 3, 1981.

⁸ In D. Reynolds, ed., *The Origins of the Cold War in Europe* (Yale UP, forthcoming 1994).

⁹ *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 3, 1985; Postwar Norwegian Security Policy as a Research Field, LOS-notat 92/13, Bergen 1992.

III

The six political parties represented in the Storting were inclined towards widely different solutions to Norway's emerging security problem. At the one extreme the leadership of the Communist Party, which at the parliamentary elections in 1945 had gained some 11 per cent of the vote, advocated an alliance, or as a minimum a non-aggression treaty, with the Soviet Union. Even within the party, support for such a choice was less than whole-hearted. Among the voters this option only served to weaken the Communists. From 1948 onwards support of Soviet policies in Eastern Europe, combined with serious internal struggles, led to the decimation of the party and its disappearance as a significant political force in postwar Norway.¹⁰

Non-alignment combined with UN membership had significantly higher support as a viable alternative for Norway. Such a solution harked back to the interwar period when Norway in the 1930s both maintained its membership in the League of Nations and towards the end of the decade returned to a policy of neutrality. This policy option was supported by a significant faction within the Communist Party, which took over power in the party after it split in 1949. The main core of supporters, however, hailed from the Labor Party. Most of them belonged to the neutralist and/or pacifist groups that had constituted a majority of the prewar Labor parliamentary party. In the early postwar years this group was particularly strong among the rank and file of the Labor members of the Storting. As a realistic alternative the UN option did not last beyond the late spring of 1948.¹¹

The reason was that in May 1948 Sweden launched the proposal for a non-aligned Scandinavian Defense League with the aim of preventing a split among the three nations. The Swedes had taken note of Norwegian approaches to Great Britain and the United States, and feared that the Labor Government of Einar Gerhardsen would eventually join a Western alliance.

¹⁰ For a thorough analysis of the internal struggles of the Communist Party, based on Norwegian source materials, see T. Halvorsen, *NKP i krise. Om oppgjøret med det annet sentrum* (NKP in Crisis. On the struggles with the second center, Oslo, 1981); for a supplementary analysis based on recently available materials in Moscow, T. Halvorsen, "Stalinist Purges in the Communist Party of Norway 1948-1949, *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 2, vol 18, 1993.

¹¹ K.E. Eriksen, *DNA og NATO*, pp. 19-97; K. Blidberg, *Just Good Friends. Nordic Social Democracy and Security Policy 1945-1950* (IFS, Oslo 1987).

The Swedish historian Karl Molin in a recent book has argued that the proposal for a Scandinavian Defense League was mainly intended to deflect domestic Swedish pressures for an approach to the West. Our view of the issue is that while the Swedish proposal initially was partly intended as a preventive measure, the Erlander cabinet in the course of the subsequent negotiations came to the conclusion that both in terms of domestic and Scandinavian considerations the Defense League represented a sensible and viable option. As a consequence Sweden was willing to shoulder considerable defense obligations vis-a-vis two virtually defenseless neighbors, take on substantial extra financial burdens, and in reality modify considerably its long held tradition of isolated neutrality.¹²

The postwar Norwegian foreign policy, termed "bridgebuilding", presumed a change of policy for Norway if international tensions were to rise significantly between former World War II allies. As a consequence of the Bevin Plan and the later Czech and Finnish crises during the winter of 1948, the Labor government started reconsidering its postwar foreign policy of bridgebuilding and looking for alternatives. As Soviet pressure on Finland unfolded, rumors were rife that Norway would receive a similar pact proposal from the Russians. During late February and early March of 1948 Defense Minister Jens Christian Hauge and Foreign Minister Halvard M. Lange contacted the British and US embassies in Oslo to inquire whether the Western powers were willing and able to offer military support to Norway in case of a wider war or an isolated attack.¹³

Of the options theoretically available, joining the emerging Brussels Treaty powers was the least attractive one. In the first place the Norwegian government was not certain it would be allowed in. In his speech to the Commons in late January Foreign Secretary Bevin had carefully omitted the

¹² K.E. Eriksen, *DNA og NATO; Skodvin, Norden eller NATO*; Blidberg, *Just Good Friends*; K. Molin, *Omstridd neutralitet*; K. Wahlbäck, "Sverige og det skandinaviska försvarsförbundet: Sju förklaringsfaktorer" (Sweden and the Scandinavian Defense League: Seven factors of explanation) in C. Due-Nielsen et al., eds. *Danmark, Norden og NATO 1948-1962*, pp. 45-55.

¹³ M. Skodvin, *Norden eller NATO*; O. Riste, "Nordic Union or Western Alliance? Scandinavia at the Crossroads 1948-1949", in E. Di Nolfo, *The Atlantic Pact Forty Years Later* (Berlin and New York, 1991), pp. 129-142; see also O. Riste, "Was 1949 a Turning-Point? Norway and the Western Powers 1947-1950", in O. Riste, ed., *Western Security. The Formative Years* (Oslo, 1985) pp. 128-149.

Scandinavian countries from the circle of possible partners in the process of Western European consolidation. Secondly, the Labor cabinet would be loath to take on any mutual responsibility to engage in the defense of continental states. Partly this was a matter of not being willing to take on military responsibility beyond Norwegian territory; partly, of course, the Labor cabinet for more general political reasons did not want to become too closely entwined with the more conservative and colonial states on the continent.

An Anglo-Scandinavian military alliance, further secured by a US military guarantee, was the preferred alternative. It would provide the best of all worlds; close cooperation between social democrats in Britain and the Scandinavian countries as well as North Atlantic cooperation, a Norwegian goal since the Second World War. There were, however, two snags. In the first place Swedish participation in such a defense league was utterly unlikely. Secondly, Bevin already in March secretly informed Lange that the British goal was a broadly based Atlantic alliance to nail down the Americans to the defense of Western Europe. What he did not tell Lange, was that Britain was not militarily capable of offering Norway a security guarantee.¹⁴

In retrospect we know that by the summer of 1948 only two possible options remained, the North Atlantic and the Scandinavian. The Gerhardsen government ideally would have liked to combine the two without taking on the formal obligations that would be attendant upon membership in the North Atlantic Alliance. What the Norwegians initially required as a minimum would be weapons and munitions on concessionary conditions as well as peacetime military staff talks to prepare for wartime cooperation. This would represent an informal but in reality an explicit Western guarantee of Norwegian independence and territorial integrity. In shorthand these desires could be put in the formula "rights without obligations".¹⁵

The Swedes, of course, did not raise any objections against weapons on concessionary conditions, but they were wholly unwilling to accept staff talks and peacetime preparation for wartime cooperation. Such obligations would formally have spelt the end of their neutrality policies. The Danish

¹⁴ K.E. Eriksen and M. Skodvin, "Storbritannia, NATO og et skandinavisk forbund" (Great Britain, NATO and a Scandinavian Defense League) *Internasjonal politikk* (Norwegian) 3, 1981, pp. 437-511.

¹⁵ M. Skodvin, *Norden eller NATO*; K.E. Eriksen and M. Skodvin, "Storbritannia, NATO og et skandinavisk forbund".

Social Democratic government at the outset of the Scandinavian talks took a position close to the Swedish one, but in effect was willing to go along with any compromise solution that the other two were able to agree on.

Pro-Scandinavian sentiments were running strong in Denmark, particularly among the Social Democrats. This groundswell predisposed Denmark to opt for any Scandinavian pact. Secondly, of course, Danish security depended upon the strength and actions of the Western powers on the continent regardless of what the Danes themselves were able to accomplish. A Scandinavian defense league would add Swedish forces to the defense of "Sjælland" and the Baltic approaches; thus a Scandinavian league clearly would represent a net addition to Danish security.¹⁶

During the summer of 1948 the three Scandinavian states agreed to set up a defense commission to explore the pros and cons of a non-aligned defense league. The ultimate decision on whether to go through with the scheme would of course be left to the respective governments. The commission had completed most of its work by the end of 1948, though its complete report was only available some weeks later. There was agreement that a Scandinavian defense league would improve the security position of the Scandinavian peninsula against a possible attack by the Soviet Union. However, the Norwegian and Danish experts in particular emphasized that western support would be necessary for effective wartime defense, and that such support would have to be prepared in peacetime. This conclusion was not least based upon the bitter experience of the bungled 1940 allied campaign in Norway.¹⁷

Even though the three parties at subsequent cabinet level discussions to some degree managed to close the gap between the Swedish and Norwegian positions, the negotiators in the end failed to reach an agreement. Two main obstacles remained. In the first place it proved impossible to find common ground as to the degree of western alignment. The Swedish refusal to accept

¹⁶ N. Petersen, "Optionsproblematikken i dansk sikkerhedspolitik", Danish Security Policy and the Question of Options) in N. Amstrup and I. Faurby eds., *Studier i dansk udenrigspolitik tilegnet Erling Bjøl*, pp. 199-235; N. Petersen, "Atlantpagten eller Norden?" (The Atlantic Pact or a Scandinavian Defense League?) in C. Due-Nielsen et al., eds., *Danmark, Norden og NATO 1948-1962*, pp. 17-42; *ibid.*, K.E. Eriksen and H.Ø. Pharø, "De fire sirklene i norsk utenrikspolitik", pp. 193-220.

¹⁷ M. Skodvin, *Norden eller NATO*; M. Skodvin, *Nordic or North Atlantic Alliance*.

any formal ties proved to be unacceptable to Norway. Secondly, the United States in January 1949 again made it clear that a non-aligned Scandinavian Defense League would not receive preferential treatment with regard to weapons deliveries. The requirements of the North Atlantic Pact members would be taken care of first.¹⁸

III

Along with the Norwegian cabinet the British Foreign Office by the fall of 1948 realized that attempts to pull Sweden into formal NATO membership would prove futile. As an alternative the head of the Northern Department of the Foreign Office, Sir Robin Hankey, approached the Norwegians with a very tentative proposal for solving the Scandinavian security problem, later known as the Hankey Plan. The British discussed the plan in some detail with the Norwegians, in October 1948 and then returned to the matter among themselves in January 1949. Only in the first instance was the plan the subject of serious discussion. The Americans were informed of the British proposal, but neither participated in the discussions nor reached any conclusions as regards its substance.

The essence of the plan was the concept of interlocking pacts. Norway and Denmark were to participate both in the North Atlantic Pact and a Scandinavian Defence League, while Sweden was to be a member only of the latter. In case of war the two Western Scandinavians would shoulder the same obligations as the other NATO nations, while Sweden would take on more limited commitments. Sweden would contribute to closing the Baltic approaches, supply intelligence information to NATO, and commit Swedish foreign trade and the economy more generally to the Western cause. Formally the NATO guarantee was only to apply to Danish and Norwegian territory; in reality, of course, this kind of cooperation could only function if Sweden was also placed under the Western umbrella.¹⁹

¹⁸ M. Skodvin, *Norden eller NATO*; M. Skodvin, *Nordic or North Atlantic Alliance*; K.E. Eriksen and M. Skodvin, "Storbritannia, NATO og et nordisk forbund".

¹⁹ K.E.Eriksen and M. Skodvin, "Storbritannia, NATO og et skandinavisk forbund"; H. Turner, "Britain, the United States and Scandinavian Security Problems 1945-1949".

As far as the British Foreign Office was concerned, Norway and Denmark primarily represented security liabilities. They still suffered from wartime destruction and their military preparedness left much to be desired. Norway's importance lay above all in its important strategic position, in the traditionally close ties to Britain, and to a degree in its large merchant marine. Norwegian ships, however, were mainly to be found in waters controlled by the Western powers, and as in 1940 could easily be taken over by the West. Sweden, on the other hand, was both militarily and economically a force to be reckoned with in Europe. In view of French colonial commitments, within Europe Sweden after Britain was probably the strongest military power outside the iron curtain.

For such a plan to be presented to the Swedes it would first of all have to be accepted by Norway. In Norway it was never widely discussed. It was never discussed in cabinet meetings, nor in the Foreign Relations committee of the Storting, where both NATO membership and the Scandinavian Defence League were discussed. Only the Prime, Foreign and Defense Ministers were privy to the plan, and they rejected it out of hand.

It was least important that to give Sweden preferential treatment in this way was unacceptable for domestic political reasons. Opposition to North Atlantic alignment was running strong in the Labor party, particularly so among the members of the Storting. They would regard the proposal for interlocking pacts as an argument for Norway seeking the same solution as Sweden was being offered. To the cabinet inner circle, however, it was more important that such a proposal primarily would represent a waste of time and effort. The three of them were for good reasons convinced that the Swedes would never accept such modifications of their neutrality policy. In effect, the Hankey plan would only complicate the ongoing Scandinavian discussions. Subsequent historical research, including our own current work not yet published, find overwhelming support for that conclusion. So far no evidence has been found to suggest there would have been any Swedish support for the Hankey plan.²⁰

²⁰ C. Due-Nielsen et al., eds., *Danmark, Norden og NATO 1948-62*, discussion after K. Wahlbäck's paper, pp.56-57; M. Skodvin, *Nordic or North Atlantic Alliance?*; K.E. Eriksen and M. Skodvin, "Storbritannia, NATO og et skandinavisk forbund"; 489-92, 496-97; the conclusion regarding the extent of the discussion on the Norwegian side is based on our reading of the verbatim minutes of the Storting Foreign Affairs committee and the papers of the Prime Minister's office; access to both have been given on a privileged basis for our

By the end of January 1949 it was clear to most participants that the Scandinavian discussions had failed, even though when Foreign Minister Lange in February travelled to Washington D.C. to investigate the modalities for Norwegian participation in the North Atlantic Pact, he was also to present the arguments in favor of a Scandinavian Defence League. However, this final effort must be seen mainly as a measure designed for domestic Norwegian consumption. The Labor party leadership needed to persuade its own rank and file in particular, that every conceivable effort had been made. At the same time preparations were being intensified to gain the fullest possible support for membership in the Atlantic alliance at the upcoming biannual Labor convention. The last failed effort during this process was the Danish proposal in early February for a Swedish-Danish alliance. The Swedes promptly turned it down. From their point of view Denmark represented no more than a military liability.²¹

Even though Great Britain and France in particular were willing to accept and possibly preferred a Scandinavian Defense League linked to the West, official policy in the United States and Canada remained opposed or at least strongly skeptical of such a solution in Northwestern Europe. The French, of course, preferred a pact with a continental and Mediterranean focus, and feared that the strength of the West would be diluted by the alliance taking on obligations in the north as well. Furthermore the French preferred fewer competitors for the limited supply of weapons and munitions. As for the Russians any Scandinavian Defence League would be seen as linked to the West, regardless of whether this was formally the case. This Russian position made it considerably more difficult for the opposition in Norway and Denmark to argue for an independent Scandinavian option.

work on the history of Norway's foreign relations 1950-65.

²¹ K.E. Eriksen and M. Skodvin, ""Storbritannia, NATO og et skandinavisk forbund"; K.E. Eriksen and H.Ø. Pharo, "De fire sirklene i norsk utenrikspolitikk 1949-1961".

IV

Most historians who have dealt with the issues of the Scandinavian Defense League and the Atlantic Pact largely agree that domestic preferences, historical experience and geostrategic positions far outweigh international pressures in explaining the different choices made by the three nations.²² First of all their wartime experiences differed fundamentally. Sweden remained successfully neutral, and in the postwar years the concept of neutrality enjoyed overwhelming popular support and served as the guiding star for Swedish policy-makers. Denmark and Norway on the other hand were quickly conquered by Germany and remained occupied for the duration of the war. Thus neutrality in these two countries was seen to embody the complete failure of the foreign and defense policies of the interwar period.

In the case of Norway the London government-in-exile became an active partner in the grand alliance, and cooperated both closely and in many ways successfully with the two western great powers. Thus important leaders of the postwar Labor party had enjoyed a learning experience that eroded traditional Norwegian skepticism of both alliances and great powers. As opposed to Labor in Sweden the foreign policy elite of the Norwegian Labor Party tended to emphasize both great power leadership and responsibility in international affairs, and a considerable community of interests between small powers and large.²³

Their geostrategic positions also tended to pull the three states in different directions. Norway was above all a North Atlantic state in terms of security interests, and in the case of conflict between the two emerging blocs, Norwegian territory would be the most vulnerable and the least easily defended. Sweden, of course, was also western oriented in terms of trade and economic interests, but its security policies were more geared to cater to its Baltic position. When declining to join the Atlantic Alliance the Swedes also had Finland in mind. Swedish membership in NATO was likely to provoke the Soviets to take over Finland. That was in itself undesirable,

²² K. Blidberg, *Just Good Friends*; G. Lundestad, *America, Scandinavia and the Cold War 1945-49*, pp. 352-358; K.E. Eriksen and H.Ø. Pharo, "Norsk sikkerhetspolitikk som etterkrigshistorisk forskningsfelt", pp. 22-31.

²³ M. Skodvin, *Norden eller NATO*; O. Riste, "Nordic Union or Western Alliance?"; this conclusion is strengthened by our own current research on the history of Norwegian policy, 1950-65.

and would at the same time bring the Soviets right up to the Swedish border, thus reducing the warning time in case of an attack. The security and integrity of Denmark depended upon the balance of power on the continent. As long as the Western allies controlled their part of Germany the Danes were protected; if the west was forced to retreat there was little Denmark could do to fend for itself. The Danes considered a Scandinavian Defense League as an additional security guarantee; for Norway it represented an insufficient one.

Wide differentials in terms of military power and economic strength may also contribute to explaining the positions taken during the Scandinavian defense negotiations. As a proud and relatively strong middle power Sweden was wholly unwilling to be subjected to American or British military leadership. Compared to the Norwegians the Swedish leadership was far less concerned with possible American and British disapproval of their policies. The government in Stockholm was certainly far less worried than the Oslo one that the Scandinavians might not be able to acquire weapons from the west on concessionary conditions.

The intellectual outlook of leaders as well as the climate of popular opinion also differed significantly between Norway, Denmark and Sweden. Danish Prime Minister Hans Hedtoft in particular was an outspoken supporter of closer Scandinavian cooperation, a "Skandinavist" or "Nordist". Popular support for Scandinavian or Nordic cooperation was much stronger in both Sweden and Denmark than in Norway throughout the interwar period as well as during the first postwar decades. Norwegians, political elites as well as public opinion, Labor and bourgeois, tended to view such cooperation with considerable skepticism. The historical heritage of having been a very junior partner in unions with both Denmark and Sweden, the continued Swedish dominance in Scandinavia after the dissolution of the last union in 1905, and the pro-German neutrality policies of Sweden in the early part of the war, troubled Norwegians well into the 1950s and 1960s. In the early postwar years explicitly anti-Swedish sentiments were on occasion strongly pronounced.²⁴

²⁴ K.E. Eriksen, *DNA og NATO*; we deal with this issue quite extensively in our forthcoming work.

Swedish Prime Minister Tage Erlander in his memoirs in fact mused that the ensuing division among the Scandinavian countries may have been the best solution:

*Norway with its ever-present chip on the shoulder with regards to Sweden, which at times forces the Norwegian government into the strangest of actions, and recurring outbursts of independence rhetoric in the Norwegian press - is that a proper partner for careful Sweden.*²⁵

V

In spite of all the factors predisposing Norway to choose the Atlantic Alliance the decision was by no means easy. While the historical heritage in many ways was divisive, the Scandinavians held many things in common as regards language, history and similar political institutions and development. An analogous point of view may be applied with regard to Norway's relationship with the Soviet Union. On the one hand membership in the Alliance was desirable as a means of protection against the assumed threat from the eastern neighbor. On the other hand the Norwegian government worried that membership might turn out to be unduly provocative. In the same way we must note that while there was certainly widespread sympathy and admiration for the British, and to a lesser extent for the Americans, the occupation experience as well as the national uncertainties that were strongly pronounced in the new Norwegian state, made it desirable to keep the potential western protectors at a certain distance. This was also important for domestic political reasons. While the Communists declined in strength after the coup in Czechoslovakia, skepticism of the West remained strong on Labor's left.²⁶

These contradictory tendencies made for a pronounced ambivalence in alliance policies. Once having secured its position in the West by joining the Atlantic Pact, Norway set about limiting its commitments. In significant respects Norway achieved an exceptional membership status. On the one hand Norway managed to nail Britain and the United States to the defense of Western Europe's northern flank; on the other hand the Gerhardsen and Torp governments managed to avoid military arrangements that could be

²⁵ *Tage Erlander 1940-1949* (Oslo, 1973), s. 293.

²⁶ K.E. Eriksen, *DNA og NATO*.

considered unduly provocative by the Soviet Union, a policy of screening and commitment as historian Rolf Tamnes has dubbed it. The most important limitations imposed by the Norwegians are represented by the bases declaration and limitations upon allied military activities in North Norway, and a minimal presence of American military advisers in Norway.²⁷

Even before signing the Pact in Washington in April 1949, the Norwegian government issued what has become known as the bases declaration. In essence it stated that Norway would not accept the presence of foreign forces unless engaged in war or was considered threatened by war. Initially the bases declaration caused no difficulties with the Americans and the British. In 1949 they had neither the desire for bases, nor the military capability to defend them. If a demand for bases had been presented at this time, the Labor government would not have applied for membership. No responsible politician in Norway would have accepted bases at the time.

After the outbreak of the Korean War both the Norwegian military and allied powers, represented by the American and British military in particular, applied considerable pressure to have the declaration changed, particularly with the goal of setting up NATO air bases. The majority of Norwegian politicians nevertheless held fast. Neither were they subsequently willing to have nuclear weapons stationed on Norwegian territory. By 1960 the Labor foreign policy elite was even considering rejecting NATO's nuclear first strike option in case of a massive Soviet conventional attack, thus trying to keep Norway out of the first phase of a war in Europe. As Foreign Minister

²⁷ R. Tamnes, *The United States and the Cold War in the High North*; K.E. Eriksen and H.Ø. Pharo, *Norsk utenrikspolitikks historie 1950-65*, forthcoming 1996, Scandinavian University Press; Einar Gerhardsen in the first 20 years of the postwar era headed four cabinets, an immediate postwar coalition cabinet in the summer and fall of 1945, a majority Labor cabinet from 1945 to 1951, a majority Labor cabinet from 1955 to 1961, which continued as minority government with support from the Socialist People's party until the fall of 1963, then after a two-week non-Labor interregum was back in power from September 1963 till October 1965, when the non-Labor parties gained a majority in the Storting. From the middle of 1951 till January 1955 Oscar Torp headed a Labor cabinet. The two-week non-Labor cabinet in 1963 was headed by the Conservative John Lyng with the Christian People's Party Erling Wikborg as Foreign Minister. Trygve Lie served as Foreign Minister until February 1946 in Gerhardsen's two first cabinets, then Halvard Lange served until 1965 with the exception of the two weeks in 1963.

Lange commented to the Swedish ambassador, on this vital issue Norwegian and Swedish security policies had in fact converged.²⁸

In a conversation with British Defense Minister Lord Alexander, Norwegian Defense Minister Jens Christian Hauge in the spring of 1949 characterized North Norway as a buffer zone between the Soviet Union and the Atlantic Alliance. He emphasized that he wanted no allied military activity in this area. In subsequent years this policy was somewhat modified, but in January 1951 the cabinet announced that no NATO maneuvers nor allied ships nor aircraft were allowed on Norwegian territory or within Norwegian territorial waters east of the twenty-fourth meridian, making for a distance of 350 km to the Soviet border. The number of allied units visiting Norway at any one time was also regulated, as was the need for prior clearance for all flights over Norwegian territory.²⁹

Also allied military advisers and technicians were kept at a minimum, and replaced by Norwegians wherever and whenever possible. The Northern command at Kolsås near Oslo was certainly considered both necessary and desirable when it was established in 1951. Still Norwegian governments worked hard to keep it under domestic political control and to increase the proportion of Norwegian staff officers. During the latter part of the 1950s a few leading politicians and military even wanted to transform it into an exclusive Dano-Norwegian command. This idea was rejected by the Foreign and Defense Ministers, who argued that such a solution would put most of Denmark under the Central command. Thus the Danes, still strongly skeptical of the southern neighbor, would be unlikely to accept a change that would put the greater part of Denmark into a future German-dominated zone.

Finally it should be noted that during the first months of the alliance, Defense Minister Hauge, one of the most avid proponents of Norwegian NATO membership, argued against the possible development towards an integrated military alliance with a joint command structure. When the proposal was launched in the aftermath of the Korean War, however, the international environment had changed to such a degree that the Government

²⁸ K.E. Eriksen and H.Ø. Pharo, *Norsk utenrikspolitikks historie 1950-65*, forthcoming 1996.

²⁹ See M. Berdal, "Norway in United States Naval Strategy, 1954-1960: Bilateral Strategic Planning in a Multilateral Alliance" (Unpublished doctoral dissertation, St. Anthony's College, Oxford, 1992), p.34; see also J.J. Holst, "Norwegian Security Policy", *Cooperation and Conflict*, II, 1966, pp. 70-71.

found it necessary and even desirable to accept it. Commitment then took precedence over screening, even in the face of considerable bourgeois-nationalist opposition.³⁰

VI

Given this profound reluctance to accept all the implications of NATO membership, we may legitimately ask why the Labor government chose to join the alliance in the first place. As a consequence of increasing East-West tension and the heavy-handed Soviet approach to Finland in February and March 1948 the Norwegian government by the spring felt a need for a Western guarantee for the nation's security and territorial integrity. The deeply held Norwegian fear during this period can only be fully understood if we keep in mind the fact that the German attack in April 1940 and the end of the occupation period were still fresh in the minds of policy-makers and the public in general. To remind them of those recent trials in the life of the new state, the report of the Commission to investigate the events of 1940 was being completed during this same period. No Norwegian government would easily contemplate being held responsible for another calamity of such proportions.

Furthermore, while all three Scandinavian nations until 1940 had pursued a policy of neutrality, the Norwegian one also entailed what has been dubbed a reserve position. The pursuit of neutrality was based on the assumption that none of the major powers had any interest in acquiring Norwegian territory. Secondly, and this is the crux of the matter, if any hostile nation were to have designs on Norway, the British navy would prevent the aggressor from succeeding. Britain would in fact in its own interest come to the aid of Norway. This, briefly put, is the theory of the implicit or automatic British guarantee, which historian Olav Riste has developed in several works. April 1940 demonstrated that the implicit guarantee did not function as intended by Norwegian foreign policy-makers.

³⁰ K.E. Eriksen and H.Ø. Pharo, *Norsk utenrikspolitikks historie 1950-65*, forthcoming 1996.

The lesson was drawn that wartime support would not function adequately without peacetime preparation.³¹

This lesson was temporarily applied during the war, when the London government was a prime mover for a postwar North Atlantic alliance. As the United States, however, preferred a universal security organization, the United Nations, to the formation of regional alliances, Norway towards the end of the war opted for a policy dubbed bridgebuilding. By keeping a low profile and promoting big power cooperation Norway hoped to maintain its security and territorial integrity without formal ties to the Western powers. Bridgebuilding was in the first place built on the hope that the great powers could maintain a minimum of good will between themselves. If international relations were to take a decisive turn for the worse, however, Norway would in its turn approach the west for a formal guarantee, thus reverting to the Atlantic policy of the war years.

Norway in fact in the immediate aftermath of World War II placed itself more firmly under the British defense umbrella than had been the case in the interwar period. Above all, several of the ties of wartime military cooperation were maintained into the postwar period. The Norwegian military trained and were taught in Britain, and all three services were largely furnished with British weapons and other equipment. As agreed during the war, from 1947 onwards the better part of the Norwegian conscript army was placed in Germany under British command as part of the British occupational forces. This semi-alliance certainly made it less difficult for Norway than for Denmark and Sweden to join in a formal military alliance where Britain in the northern area would be the major partner, though we find elements of a semi-alliance also in Denmark's relationship with Britain. This Norwegian choice for the West - as was realized by the British and the Americans at the time - was also the all-important factor for Iceland and Denmark. Without Norwegian membership in the alliance neither of them would have joined NATO.³²

³¹ In addition to the works previously cited, see in particular, "Functional ties - A Semi-Alliance", in O. Riste ed., *Defence Studies* (Oslo, 1991); and "Isolationism and Great Power Protection. The Historical Determinants of Norwegian Foreign Policy", in J.J. Holst, ed., *Norwegian Foreign Policy for the 1980s* (Oxford/Oslo, 1985).

³² K.E. Eriksen and H.Ø. Pharo, *Norsk utenrikspolitikks historie 1950-1965*, forthcoming 1996; see also O. Riste, "Was 1949 a Turning-Point"; and also in O. Riste, *Western Security*, R. Tamnes, "Norway's Struggle for the Northern

There was never any strong pressure through diplomatic or military channels from either the United States or Great Britain for Norway to join the Atlantic Alliance. Both Foreign Minister Bevin and Secretaries of State Marshall and Acheson made it clear to the Norwegians that the choice was their own to make. Yet they did point out that they disliked a non-aligned defense league on the Swedish model. The American and British policy-makers were certainly influenced by the perceived need to prevent the Soviet Union from gaining control of any part of Norwegian territory. Their preference was for a policy of denial, however implemented. The Americans indeed made it clear that the Pact members would be given priority with regards to the supply of weapons and equipment, while simultaneously emphasizing that these were certainly inadequate relative to European needs.³³

For the small Norwegian state, faced with a heavy reconstruction burden after the ravages of the war, the latter was a significant argument in favor of joining the West. Pact membership was furthermore considered a means of maintaining the store of good will that Norway had banked with the west as a result of its wartime policies. These intangibles were by many seen as equally important.

Domestic political considerations in fact played a very important role for those having to decide on Norway's security alignment. The bourgeois parties overwhelmingly preferred close economic and political ties with the western powers. It is likely that a majority of the Labor parliamentary party would have preferred a Scandinavian league under Swedish leadership, and Prime Minister Gerhardsen for some time shared that view. When in the end he opted for NATO membership, domestic political considerations of both a national and a party nature were decisive. Labor on the one hand might split along the middle, and the non-Labor opposition might wreck

Flank"; and M. Skodvin, *Norden eller NATO*.

³³ M. Skodvin, *Norden eller NATO*; for a somewhat diverging view, G. Lundestad, "USA, skandinavisk forsvarsforbund og Halvard Lange: En revurdering" (The United States, a Scandinavian Defense League and Halvard Lange: A Reevaluation) *Internasjonal politikk* (Norwegian), 1, 1977, 139-173; for a wrapping up of the discussion, *ibid.* 1977, K.E. Eriksen, "NATO, Norden og den utro tjener Halvard Lange" (NATO, the Nordic countries and the unfaithful servant Halvard Lange), *ibid.*, 2, 1977, pp. 261-302, and final comment in *ibid.*, 4/1977, pp. 747-752; on the American-British denial strategy, see M. Berdal, "Norway in United States Strategy", p. 35.

completely the national foreign policy consensus. In the end the Labor opposition was the least obstacle to national cohesion. He felt that there had to be strong national consensus over the foreign policy of a small nation.³⁴

In sum, domestic needs in a very general sense, the need for the greatest possible national political cohesion and the preferences of the western great powers would be best served by Norwegian membership in the Atlantic alliance. Neither should we discount the importance of Norway's little brother or union complex with regard to Sweden. Yet the scales tipped only lightly in that direction, thus the subsequent search for screening measures.

American interests, as defined by the Truman administration, were certainly also well served by the Norwegian decision in favor of an alignment with the west. Norway's participation in the Pact would strengthen both its democratic and Atlantic character. Even if Norway in some ways represented a military liability for the United States and Britain, at the same time the country made significant military contributions. With the establishment of a Scandinavian Defense League the peninsula as well as Denmark would have become a potentially dangerous grey zone between East and West. As a founding member Norway instead served as a magnet pulling Denmark and Iceland into the alliance as well. Thus the alliance gained a member bordering the Soviet Union that could provide facilities in peacetime and bases in wartime. At the same time Greenland and Iceland provided the very desirable "stepping stones" between North America and Europe.³⁵ The dynamic of events and needs during 1948-49 pulled as well as pushed Norway towards the emerging alliance.

³⁴ K.E. Eriksen, *DNA og NATO*.

³⁵ For a thorough and illuminating analysis on the differing US points of view of Norway and the evolution of the US position, including the issue of "stepping stones", see G. Lundestad, *America, Scandinavia and the Cold War, 1945-1949*, pp. chapter 8, pp. 235-289.