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# **Fissionable consensus**

**Scandinavia and the US quest for atomic energy control,  
1946-1950**

**IFS Info**  
*Institutt for forsvarsstudier*

**No. 8 - 1994**

Between 1946 and 1950, the problem of preventing the spread and use of atomic weapons was high on the agenda of the United Nations. At the center of the discussion was the Baruch Plan, put forward in June 1946 by Mr Bernard Baruch, the US representative in the UN Atomic Energy Commission. The plan called for the establishment of an international control agency, with two general tasks: to eliminate the threat of nuclear weapons, and to provide all the signatory states with equal opportunities for taking part in the peaceful utilization of atomic energy.

Since the scientific-technological «secrets» and fissionable materials involved in the non-military use of atomic energy could not be fully separated from those needed to develop an atomic bomb, the basic idea of the Baruch Plan was to place all of these essentials under tight international control. The international control agency would have exclusive ownership to all fissionable raw materials; operate all experimental reactors and nuclear power plants; and perform unrestricted on-site inspection on national territories. Moreover, the Security Council was to be empowered to impose swift economic and military sanctions against any state discovered violating these regulations. No nation should have the right to veto a majority decision to use force. Finally, the plan should be implemented in stages, so that the United States - or any other country possessing nuclear weapons - would not be obliged to dismantle or hand over its stockpile until all other provisions of the control regime had been implemented.

The US plan won the support of an overwhelming majority in both the UN Atomic Energy Commission and the Security Council - thereby becoming «the majority plan». The Soviet Union, however, preferred its own «Gromyko plan», which placed all ownership and operation rights and most control functions in the hands of *national* governments, maintained the veto power, and insisted that all provisions of the treaty should be implemented simultaneously - with the

implication that the United States would lose its stockpile of atomic bombs the moment it signed the treaty.

So far, the historiography of the Baruch Plan has focused on two questions: What were the true motives behind the US proposal? And, secondly, why did the Soviet leaders reject it? The aim of the present article - which will show how Norway, Denmark, and Sweden responded to the US drive for international atomic energy control - is to shed some light on a third, and hitherto largely neglected problem: *Why were so many Western capitalist countries ready to accept the US plan?* Considering its extremely radical provisions, which no doubt would have represented an unprecedented intrusion by a transnational body into the scientific, economic and military policies of sovereign nation states, it may seem surprising that there was not more grumbling or outspoken criticism to be heard from nations wedded to the principles of scientific freedom and economic liberalism - or, for that matter, from the young social democracies, which at that time saw an expansion of the economic control functions of *national* governments as a precondition for economic growth.

The Scandinavian countries represent an interesting case in this context for at least three reasons. First of all, despite their smallness and limited capabilities, they were all in a relatively advanced position in nuclear science and atomic energy research. Thus, the Scandinavian governments could hardly dismiss the problem of atomic energy control as irrelevant to their own countries.

Secondly, Denmark, Norway and Sweden differed so much in their industrial structures and their scientific/technological aspirations that they are unlikely to have shared the same economic interest in the US plan.

Finally, during the period considered here, the three countries chose different solutions to their national security problems - with Denmark and Norway joining NATO and Sweden holding on to

*This article is based on a lecture given by Olav Njølstad 23 September 1994 upon receiving the Dr. Philos degree from the University of Oslo.*

its traditional status of neutrality. Thus, if national security orientation and military functional ties to the United States played any role in determining Western attitudes to the majority plan, Scandinavia seems a promising place to look for the evidence.

## II

The official attitudes of the Scandinavian countries towards the US plan were exposed most clearly by their voting patterns in the UN General Assembly. Prior to 1948, the international debate over the US and Soviet proposals was confined mainly to the UN Atomic Energy Commission, or UNAEC. Norway was to become a member of that body in 1949, but until then, the role of the Scandinavian countries was essentially to applaud the efforts being made by others.

From the fall of 1948, however, the Scandinavian countries were regularly called upon to take a more explicit and binding stand.<sup>1</sup> By then, the negotiations in the UNAEC had reached an impasse. As a result, both superpowers turned to the General Assembly for support. For three subsequent years, the Scandinavian countries took a unified position in the debates in the General Assembly -- always voting with the majority, and always expressing general approval of the majority plan.<sup>2</sup> Thus, even if they did not explicitly commit themselves to the specific provisions of the plan, the overall effect of their voting was to strengthen the international backing of it.

Behind the scenes, however, things looked different. The identical Scandinavian voting patterns were *not* a reflection of identical attitudes to the majority plan. Instead, the unified votes came about *in spite* of considerable differences of opinion - and only after thorough inter-governmental discussions with the specific aim of working out a joint stand. The most important forums for these discussions were the Nordic Foreign Ministry Meetings, which took place each fall in preparation for the annual session of the General Assembly, and the closely related meetings of the Nordic Atomic Advisory Committee - a body of ten Scandinavian experts which had been established to advise the Foreign

Ministers on the technical, economic, and legal aspects of the control problem.

In fact, the records of these discussions show that some of the initial national positions were almost the opposite of those officially expressed in the United Nations. For example,

in 1948, Sweden expressed such strong reservations about the majority plan that Denmark and Norway, in order to reach a unified Scandinavian position, were forced to moderate their much more positive stands;

in 1949, Norway contemplated an initiative to end the UN talks and dissolve the UNAEC. It dropped the idea, however, after it had been flatly rejected by Denmark and Sweden;

finally, in 1950, Denmark tried to win support for a joint Nordic move in favor of a radically new approach to the problem of atomic energy control. The proposal stranded on strong Norwegian-Swedish opposition.

Now, what may these different positions and initiatives tell us about the *real* attitudes of the Scandinavian countries?

## III

In accordance with the heuristic principle that, in investigating complicated matters one should always start by solving the least difficult problem, I will begin with the case of Denmark.

Danish policy, my sources indicate, was guided first of all by a strong and unqualified commitment to the goal of nuclear disarmament. As long as the hope of reaching an agreement in the UNAEC had not been totally exhausted, this commitment called for the strongest possible support of the majority plan - in order to maximize the international pressure on Moscow to accept it - combined with a readiness to discuss possible alterations which might make it easier to bring the Soviets along.

Thus, when the Nordic Foreign Ministers met in Stockholm in September 1948 to discuss what position they should take on the majority plan at the forthcoming General Assembly debate, Gustav Rasmussen of Denmark argued that it would be

«unfortunate» if the Nordic countries rejected a proposal which had already won such broad international approval.<sup>3</sup> Apparently, he was less concerned about the technical merits of the proposal than about the negative political impact that a Nordic rejection might have on the prospect of reaching an agreement.

This attitude was confirmed in the discussions that followed the Norwegian drive in 1949 to terminate the UN negotiations. The records show that Denmark took the lead in killing that initiative. When the matter was brought before the Nordic Atomic Advisory Committee in August 1949, the Danish representatives claimed that a termination of the UN negotiations at this point would harm Nordic interests. Rather than be instrumental in discontinuing the talks, they encouraged Norway to use its membership in the UNAEC in a constructive way - to improve the chances for a mutually acceptable agreement. Finally, the Danes made it clear that any recommendation in favor of ending the UN talks would have to be made the «personal responsibility» of the Norwegian and Swedish nuclear scientists.<sup>4</sup> At the Nordic Foreign Ministers Meeting in Copenhagen two weeks later, Rasmussen added to this that Denmark would oppose any move to terminate the negotiations as long as the hope remained for *some* kind of international agreement.<sup>5</sup>

That Rasmussen's position was based on idealistic rather than political concerns can be seen from the fact that he decided to block the Norwegian initiative although he knew that it would have been applauded by US authorities.<sup>6</sup> Thus, the Danes were concerned about the principle at stake, and the symbolic importance of not giving up the quest for a mutually acceptable solution, rather than pleasing Washington.

Ironically, this idealistic concern was soon to be transformed into a *Danish* initiative - which, in turn, was blocked by Norwegian-Swedish «realism». The initiative came about in response to a series of dramatic events in late 1949 and early 1950 which brought the UN talks to a collapse. The Soviet nuclear weapons test in September 1949 prompted a more confrontational US approach to the control problem. While making it clear that it did not contemplate any new arms control initiatives

towards Moscow, the Truman administration responded to this event by launching a program to develop a hydrogen bomb - a firm sign that it would not voluntarily give up its superiority in nuclear weapons. A week earlier the Soviet Union had walked out of the UNAEC to protest Taiwan's continuing presence there at the expense of the People's Republic of China. These developments made the Norwegian representative in the UNAEC report to Oslo that it now seemed «worthless to make any further attempts with respect to atomic energy control unless it can be done as a part of an over-all settlement with the Soviet Union».<sup>7</sup>

This was not how the situation was perceived in Copenhagen, however. Rather than putting the quest for atomic energy control aside pending a solution to the more fundamental issues of the Cold War conflict, the Danes saw a solution of the atomic energy problem as the key to a more comprehensive settlement. The first public expression of this position was made by a private citizen - Professor Niels Bohr, the distinguished nuclear physicist. In an «open letter» to the United Nations in mid-June 1950, Bohr made a call for «an open world» - arguing that, in the nuclear era, world peace could only be preserved by full military and scientific transparency between nations. As a starting point, he asked all governments to commit themselves to an unrestricted international exchange about atomic energy matters. In Bohr's view, such a confidence-building measure would not only pave the way for a permanent solution of the control problem, but also help eliminate the threat of secretly planned aggression and enhance the prospect for peaceful international cooperation in the atomic energy field. A revolution had taken place in the field of nuclear science, Bohr concluded. Now, the time was ripe for a similar revolution in the field of international politics.<sup>8</sup>

Bohr's «Open Letter» was controversial - to put it mildly. It is quite remarkable, therefore, that the Danish government decided to explore the possibility of a joint Scandinavian initiative on the matter. But first the Danes tried to enlist US support.

On 20 June 1950, the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs instructed its Ambassador in Washington to inform the US Secretary of State Dean Acheson that an instant and unqualified US

commitment to the principles advocated by Professor Bohr would dramatically improve the prospect of an agreement on atomic energy control, and might also have a decisive impact on political developments in countries like India, Yugoslavia and China.<sup>9</sup>

The outbreak of the Korean War five days later ruined the opportunity for a meeting with Acheson. Instead, the Ambassador met with George Kennan, who assured him that, while unable to make any official commitments, the US government would give Professor Bohr's proposals its most serious consideration.<sup>10</sup> On the basis of this «polite» response, the Danish government turned its attention towards Oslo and Stockholm in order to explore the possibility of a joint Scandinavian initiative. Prime Minister Hedtoft discussed the matter with his colleagues Erlander of Sweden and Gerhardsen of Norway, and asked for a special meeting to be arranged with Professor Bohr, Foreign Ministers Rasmussen, Lange, and Undén, and himself to examine the problem.<sup>11</sup> Also the Nordic Atomic Advisory Committee placed the issue on its agenda.

These discussions resulted in nothing, however - for reasons I will return to in a moment. Here, suffice it to say that the unsuccessful Danish initiative of 1950 was spurred by the same commitment to the goal of nuclear disarmament that had made Denmark the most eager supporter of the majority plan in 1948, and the strongest opponent of the Norwegian initiative to end the UN negotiations in 1949.

Many factors may help to explain the idealistic character of the Danish approach. First of all, it may have been part of a more general pattern: in a recent study, Tor Egil Førland shows that a devotion to high principles can be seen in other areas of Danish Cold War foreign policy as well.<sup>12</sup> However, there are strong indications that the Danish initiative should be seen mainly as a reflection of the limited scope and ambitions of the Danish atomic energy program.

That program was characterized by being strictly confined to the area of nuclear physics - with professor Niels Bohr's institute in Copenhagen as the dynamic center. Now, since a

major goal of the majority plan was to strengthen the international basis of this kind of scientific and theoretical work, the Danes did not have to fear any negative consequences of the plan. This fact, together with the total absence of any national economic and military interests in the practical application of atomic energy, gave the Danish authorities the privilege of approaching the question of international control from a disinterested and idealistic angle.<sup>13</sup>

## IV

Sweden, in contrast, was never a disinterested party in these matters. Indeed, in 1948 Swedish officials cited national interests as the major reason for their inability to commit Sweden more strongly to the US plan. According to Foreign Minister Østen Undén, the Swedish Atomic Energy Commission and the Swedish defense establishment were skeptical about the technical feasibility of the plan. If the proposed control measures were inadequate, they argued, the implementation of the plan could undermine, rather than enhance, Swedish security. They also warned Undén that the proposed control system would make it necessary for Sweden to disclose its own industrial and military secrets. At the time, the Swedish atomic energy program contained both a civilian and a military arm - the first concentrating on the problems of uranium enrichment and reactor technology, the latter on plutonium chemistry and possible nuclear weapons' designs. It is easy to understand, therefore, why Undén proposed to his Nordic colleagues that they should not commit themselves to the specific provisions of the plan before its technical, economic and legal consequences for the Scandinavian countries had been thoroughly analyzed - a suggestion which led to the establishment of the Nordic Atomic Advisory Committee.<sup>14</sup>

Before I proceed to explain the negative Swedish response to the Norwegian and Danish initiatives of 1949 and 1950, I shall make some comments about Norway. The Norwegian and Swedish positions were both very similar and very

different. In this particular case, therefore, a «look to Norway» may also make it easier to see what characterized the policies of Sweden.

At first glance, the similarities between Norway and Sweden were more striking than the differences. After the Second World War, both countries had launched ambitious R&D programs to investigate possible industrial and military applications of atomic energy. Moreover, both programs were characterized by close cooperation between the civilian and military research establishments.

Despite these similarities, Norwegian authorities did *not* share the Swedish concern that their national efforts might be adversely affected by the majority plan. In the fall of 1948, Norwegian Foreign Minister Lange could therefore inform his Nordic colleagues that the prevailing view among Norwegian experts was that the US-sponsored plan took care of *all* relevant Norwegian interests in the atomic energy field.<sup>15</sup>

Why did Norway and Sweden reach such different conclusions? Part of the answer has to do with the different structures and directions of their non-military atomic energy programs. The Norwegian waterfalls, which provided Norway with an abundant potential for hydro-electric power production, made the economic rationale for a vigorous atomic energy program much weaker in Norway than in Sweden.<sup>16</sup> In addition, the costs of processing the scarce national sources of natural uranium would be relatively higher in Norway's case - and might even turn out to be impossible without foreign assistance. In the view of Professor Gunnar Randers, the director of the Norwegian Atomic Energy Institute, the best solution to this problem would be to use the valuable stocks of Norwegian heavy water as a means to purchase uranium from abroad - from the United States, if possible; otherwise from the United Kingdom, Belgium, France, or Sweden.

The Swedes, who had no similar treat to offer, put more emphasis on self-sufficiency. This fundamental difference between the «blue-yellow line» of Sweden and the internationally oriented strategy of Norway explains why the Swedish evaluation of the economic implications of the

majority plan was so preoccupied with risks and losses, whereas Norwegian experts focused on opportunities and gains.<sup>17</sup>

Equally important, there was a striking contrast in how the two countries evaluated the military implications of the plan. As we have seen, the Swedish defense establishment feared that the proposed control measures would not be effective enough to provide a credible guarantee against violations of the agreement. The implicit danger was that Sweden could be forced to surrender its own program for research into nuclear weapons, while the Soviet Union secretly continued its programs, thereby gaining an unacceptable military advantage.

The professional Norwegian assessment was radically different. The experts at the Norwegian Defense Research Establishment (FFI) felt that the technical aspects of the proposed control system was a factor of «minor importance» as far as the Norwegian position on the majority plan was concerned. This conclusion rested on the argument that Norway *under any circumstances* would have to assume a nuclear attack against its territory in case of war. This was so, not so much because the proposed control measures might be inadequate - the possibility which the Swedes were so concerned about - but because the measures *came too late*. As the original FFI report put it, Norwegian defense experts did not «quite share the official American view that Russia has not made much headway in this field». Instead, the FFI experts found it reasonable to assume that the Soviets had already built nuclear reactors, and that they were coming close to experiments with explosives.<sup>18</sup>

This pessimistic - but very accurate - estimate of the status of the Soviet program helps to explain why Norwegian military planners in 1948 had so few qualms about the majority plan: their worst-case scenario would remain essentially the same, regardless of whatever international arrangements were made to control the spread of nuclear weapons. In a similar fashion, they concluded that Norway's own military capabilities would remain unaffected by the plan, since Norway under no circumstances could be expected to develop

nuclear weapons within the current long-term planning period of 10 years.<sup>19</sup>

As a preliminary conclusion, therefore, we may say that the different Norwegian and Swedish attitudes to the majority plan were a result of different estimates about its economic and military implications. Sweden's qualified support reflected fears that the plan might give too little in terms of security and demand too much in terms of economic-industrial potential. Norway's much stronger commitment reflected the feeling that the plan was irrelevant to Norway's national security problem, but potentially helpful to its non-military atomic energy efforts.

## V

The only problem with this conclusion is that it does not seem to square with what happened afterwards. Considering its strong initial support of the majority plan, why would Norway - as it did in 1949 - prefer to cancel the UN talks and dissolve the UNAEC? And why would Sweden, the most reluctant supporter of the plan, oppose that move? Would it not have been more compatible with the initial attitudes of both countries if their roles in 1949 had been reversed?

As we shall now see, the apparent incompatibility between their 1948 and 1949 positions disappears as soon as we bring a third causal factor into the analysis: NATO. Even if the United States at first made it a virtue not to discuss the problem of atomic energy control in NATO, the events of 1949 strongly suggest that the different national security orientations of Norway and Sweden had a crucial impact on their attitudes to the UN negotiations and the majority plan.

In the case of Norway, its membership in NATO had the effect of redirecting its search for uranium and technological assistance away from Western Europe and towards the United States. By the spring of 1949, it had become increasingly clear that none of the most likely West European candidates was able or willing to solve Norway's uranium problem - at least not in the short term.<sup>20</sup>

As shown in a previous study by Astrid Forland, these developments made the Norwegian

authorities decide to make a second attempt with the Americans. After a series of high-level consultations in Washington in May 1949, Professor Randers concluded that, due to the extremely tight export regulations of the US atomic energy law, Norway could not expect any special American assistance as long as the UN talks went on. If the negotiations collapsed, however, the US Congress might change the law in such a way that would benefit Norwegian interests.<sup>21</sup> Rander's optimism in this regard had been fed by countless allusions from US officials during his talks in Washington. For example, Mr Gordon Arneson, the leading expert on atomic energy matters in the US State Department, told Randers that Norway was «on top» of his list of potential receivers of US assistance - a privilege he explicitly linked to Norway's membership in NATO. He saw no similar place in the sun for Sweden, however. On the contrary, Arneson pointed out that the Swedes, who he felt were «asking for a free ride», were on the *very bottom* of that list.<sup>22</sup>

Most likely, these allusions were part of a deliberate US strategy to impede, rather than help, the Norwegian reactor program.<sup>23</sup> Happily ignorant of this possibility, however, Randers concluded that it would be better for Norway if the negotiations in the UNAEC were brought to an end. Thus, in June 1949 he advised the Foreign Ministry in Oslo to consider whether Norway should put forward an official proposal to terminate the UN talks.<sup>24</sup>

It is less known that Randers and Lange thereafter made a coordinated effort to enlist Scandinavian support for such an initiative.<sup>25</sup> Thus, when the experts of the Nordic Atomic Advisory Committee met in Stockholm at the end of August 1949, Randers presented the same arguments as those just referred to - with one notable difference: rather than point out how *Norwegian* national interests would be best served by ending the negotiations, he now stressed that the prospect of increased US technical assistance was of the «utmost importance» to *all* Nordic countries<sup>26</sup> - quite the opposite of what he had been told in Washington. Two weeks later, at the Nordic Foreign Ministers Meeting, Lange confirmed that

Norway might vote in favor of dissolving the UNAEC.<sup>27</sup>

As mentioned, Denmark would hear nothing of a Nordic initiative of this sort. The Swedish attitude was more ambivalent. On the one hand, it is clear that the Swedish nuclear scientists were inclined to agree with Randers.<sup>28</sup>

On the other hand, that position was overruled by Foreign Minister Undén, who informed his Nordic colleagues that he personally sympathized with the official French position that it would be better to put off the talks than to dissolve the Commission. Halvard Lange countered that the French view most likely reflected the influential role of the French Communist Party, but this argument had no visible impact on Undén. Realizing that the Swedes could not be brought along, Lange caved in, saying that in the present situation he could see «plenty of reasons» for simply voting in favor of continuing the UN talks on the basis of the majority plan.<sup>29</sup>

Why did Undén oppose the Norwegian proposal? As hard evidence is lacking, speculations must suffice. The most compelling one, I think, is that the Swedish authorities found the proposed initiative too risky. It was politically risky because Sweden could end up as part of a highly exposed minority together with Norway, the USA, Britain, and a few other NATO countries. Finally, it was economically and militarily risky for the very same reason that made it so attractive to the Norwegian side: the prospect of US help.

It would be more than strange if those in charge of the Swedish atomic energy establishment were affected by any illusions on this point. They had already tried very hard to obtain US help - with no results.<sup>30</sup> At one point, the US Secretary of State George Marshall even informed Undén that Sweden could not expect any favorable action on pending applications until it was willing to disclose the exact nature and purpose of its atomic energy program. In reality, as Marshall told the US Ambassador in Stockholm on a strictly confidential basis, no US assistance could be expected, even if the information asked for was put on the table. The reason was simple: the USA did not *want* to assist the Swedish effort. As Marshall put it: The «safest

place for Swedish uranium is in the ground.»<sup>31</sup>

If Undén and his advisers had only the slightest suspicion that this was how the Americans regarded the Swedish program, that would go a long way to explain their reluctance in 1949 to help close the UN talks.

## VI

What is left for us to explain is why Norway and Sweden, despite their different relationships to the United States and different stakes in the UNAEC talks, were brought so quickly together again by their common oppositon to the «Bohr plan».

In Oslo, the immediate reaction to Bohr's letter was that it contained «little of interest»,<sup>32</sup> and that there was a «bad climate» for initiatives of this kind.<sup>33</sup> When Lange met with the Professor in August 1950, he made a similar point, arguing that in view of the difficult situation in Korea, he strongly doubted the wisdom of raising an issue of this sort with the United States.<sup>34</sup>

Back in Oslo, Lange took steps to ensure that the Norwegian members of the Nordic Atomic Advisory Committee prepared for a discussion of Bohr's proposal at the next Committee meeting.<sup>35</sup> When the Committee met in Copenhagen at the end of August, the Norwegian representatives worked efficiently, together with their Swedish colleagues, to block any joint Scandinavian diplomatic initiative on the matter. The Norwegian-Swedish arguments were practically identical, and fell into two categories. *First*, the delegates claimed that, from a strictly technical point of view, nothing had happened during the last year which might call for a different attitude to the problem of international atomic energy control: the US proposal was still workable, and the Soviet plan remained equally inadequate. *Secondly*, when one of the Danish members suggested that there might be compelling *political* reasons for a new approach, the Swedish-Norwegian delegates took the position that the Committee should refrain from making political recommendations. They thereafter proposed a political recommendation of their own: namely, to advise the Nordic governments to take no further action on the matter - a proposal which



the Danish representatives somewhat grudgingly accepted.<sup>36</sup> Eventually, the Scandinavian governments followed that advice.

In retrospect, it is easy to see why Norway opposed the Bohr plan: at the best, it would serve to revive and prolong the UN talks which Norway now preferred to terminate; at the worst, it would build international support in favor of a less satisfactory control regime. Under any circumstances, the fact that Norway had supported it could only undermine the prospect for a special US-Norwegian nuclear relationship in the future. As Randers put it, it would be «dangerous» for the Nordic countries to make any initiative of this sort without explicit backing from the Western powers.<sup>37</sup>

Sweden, too, must have seen the Danish initiative as an all-lose, no-win option. For one thing, Swedish authorities may have feared that an abortive attempt to revive the UN negotiations could boost the process towards the establishment of two separate control and cooperation regimes, centered around the Soviet Union and the United States - a development which could very easily have left neutral countries like Sweden out in the cold. Equally important, steps were now taken to speed up Sweden's secret nuclear weapons research program.<sup>38</sup> Bohr's call for transparency and openness ran contrary to the nature and direction of this effort.

Finally, Sweden's freedom of action may have been restricted by its silent collaboration with the United States in the very sensitive field of nuclear export control. In August 1948, the US government took steps to establish a top secret export control system with the aim of denying the Soviet Union and other Communist countries access to raw materials and technologies useful for the development of nuclear weapons. Preceding the similar initiatives on CoCom, and deliberately separated from them to allow possible non-CoCom members to take part, the first invitations to join this club of secret guardians of the US nuclear monopoly went to six West European nations: Switzerland, Sweden, Belgium, the Netherlands, Italy, and Norway - all possessors of raw materials or technologies deemed relevant to atomic energy

production. As a result of these inquiries, Norway agreed to stop all exports of heavy water to the Communist world, whereas Sweden confirmed an earlier secret agreement with the US government not to make its uranium compounds or reprocessing technologies available to the Soviet Union.<sup>39</sup>

For Norway, which later decided to join both NATO and CoCom, the participation in this secret export control regime is unlikely to have made much difference to its positions on international atomic energy control. Sweden, however, may well have found that its involvement in this effort made it more difficult to criticize US positions and proposals. The Danish authorities, in contrast, had no similar functional ties to Washington to concern them. Because of Denmark's total lack of fissionable resources and potentially useful technologies, the United States did not bother to request Danish support until the spring of 1950 - apparently without success.<sup>40</sup>

## VII

Returning to the opening question of why the Western capitalist countries were so supportive of the US-sponsored majority plan, the findings presented in this article seem to justify two broad conclusions:

The first, and most trivial one, is that they supported it for very different kinds of reasons. To the extent that the Scandinavian attitudes were representative of a more general pattern, the Western unity behind the majority plan was made up of at least three different kinds of supporters: the *idealists*, like the Danes, who combined economic and military disinterest with a strong commitment to the goals of nuclear disarmament; the *positive realists*, like the Norwegians, who had little faith in the plan in terms of national security, but found it economically attractive; and the *negative realists*, like the Swedes, who feared that the plan might have negative economic and military consequences for themselves, but decided to support it on a general basis in the absence of any better alternative - or, perhaps, because they realized that it would never be implemented anyhow.

The second conclusion is that the Western unity behind the US plan may also have been less solid

than it appeared at the time. As shown by the Swedish reservations in 1948 and the abortive Norwegian and Danish initiatives of 1949 and 1950, the United States could not take an endless and unqualified Western support for granted. For instance, Western unity might be challenged by impatient idealist countries like Denmark which were ready to consider alternative approaches to the control problem if this could enhance the chance for Soviet approval. Positive realist countries like Norway might become so frustrated by the absence of US assistance that they would prefer to bury the majority plan and opt for a privileged nuclear relationship with the United States. Finally, there was always the risk that the Swedes and other negative realists might withdraw

their general support the moment they were asked to embrace the specific provisions of the proposed control regime.

What kept this fissionable consensus together was, of course, the lack of realistic alternatives, and the perceived political and military necessity of maintaining a unified block against the Soviet Union. This conclusion, in turn, raises an interesting question: What would have happened to the Western unity if Moscow had suddenly accepted the majority plan? Since there are no wrong or right answers to a contra-factual question, let me conclude by suggesting that a Soviet acceptance of the majority plan would indeed have represented a more serious threat to Western unity, than the threat actually posed by the Soviet decision to reject it.

# NOTES

<sup>1</sup> For an early example of US activities in this regard, see UD, 30.5/17-II, MemCon, Anker to Lange, 6 August 1948; Letter, Minister of Foreign Affairs to Ministry of Defense, 7 August 1948.

<sup>2</sup> In 1948, they embraced a French resolution which put the blame for the current stalemate on the Soviet Union, expressed general support of the principles previously adopted in the majority plan, and instructed the UNAEC to investigate whether there could be some way to obtain universal acceptance of those principles. In 1949, Denmark, Norway, and Sweden likewise supported a French-Canadian resolution which once again approved the general principles of the majority plan, but now placed the work of the UNAEC in abeyance pending firm signs of Soviet accommodation. Meanwhile, exploratory talks were to be conducted by the six sponsoring members of the UNAEC - the USA, the USSR, the UK, France, China, and Canada - to clarify the exact difference between the principles of the two rival plans. In 1950, the Scandinavian countries responded to the final breakdown of the UN talks following the first Soviet nuclear weapons test and the US decision to develop a hydrogen bomb by supporting a resolution which formally dissolved the UNAEC and placed the problem of atomic energy control on the agenda of the UN Disarmament Commission - with the implication that nuclear arms disarmament was no longer to be addressed separately from other arms control issues. Although only the last of these decisions was in accordance with the first-choice preferences of the United States, all of them had been informally accepted by Washington prior to the final roll call. UD, 30.5/17-III, report NorDel UNGA to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 21 October 1948.

<sup>3</sup> UD, 30.5/17-III, Minutes from the Meeting of the Nordic Ministers of Foreign Affairs, 8-9 September 1948.

<sup>4</sup> UD 26.1/10-I, Minutes of the second meeting of the Nordic Atomic Advisory Committee, Stockholm 25-27 August 1949.

<sup>5</sup> UD 30.5/17A, Minutes of the Nordic Ministers of Foreign Affairs Meeting, Copenhagen, 12-13 September 1949.

<sup>6</sup> Given Rasmussen's detailed account of the US position at the Copenhagen meeting, he cannot have failed to realize this. UD 30.5/17-VI, Minutes of the Nordic Ministers of Foreign Affairs Meeting, 12-13 September 1949.

<sup>7</sup> UD 26.6/4-I, NorDel (Sunde) to UD, no. 152, 20

February 1950.

<sup>8</sup> Niels Bohr, «Åbent Brev til De Forenede Nasjoner», 9 June 1950. København: J.H.Schultz Forlag.

<sup>9</sup> UD 26.6/4-I, Memorandum (Dons), 22 August 1950, w/att confidential memorandum from the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs on its actions in favor of Professor Bohr's «Open Letter».

<sup>10</sup> UD 26.6/4-I, Memorandum (Dons), 22 August 1950, w/att confidential memorandum from the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs on its actions in favor of Professor Bohr's «Open Letter».

<sup>11</sup> UD 26.1/10-I, Letter, Danish Embassy in Oslo (Smith) to UD (Skylstad), 12 August 1950.

<sup>12</sup> See, for instance, Førland, «Foreign Policy Profiles of the Scandinavian Countries: Making Use of CoCom», *Journal of Scandinavian History*, 1994, Vol. 19, No. 2, pp. 165-184.

<sup>13</sup> For evidence of the limited scope of the Danish program and the failure of Danish authorities to take any interest in possible practical applications of atomic energy, see the exchanges between Randers and his Danish colleagues at the meeting of the Nordic Atomic Advisory Committee, 30-31 August 1950. UD 26.1/10-I.

<sup>14</sup> UD 30.5/17A, Minutes of the Nordic Ministers of Foreign Affairs Meeting, Copenhagen, 12-13 September 1949.

<sup>15</sup> UD, 30.5/17-III, Minutes from the Meeting of the Nordic Ministers of Foreign Affairs, 8-9 September 1948. While Lange did not elaborate any further, it is clear that he had been informed by the Ministry of Defense that the prevailing judgement among Norwegian experts was that the US proposal covered Norwegian interests «to the extent possible in case of any international agreement». UD, 30.5/17-III, Memo, Ministry of Defense to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2 September 1948.

<sup>16</sup> For a thorough discussion of these matters, see UD 26.1/10-I, Report by the Norwegian Atomic Advisory Committee to UD, «Oversikt over flertallsplanen om kontroll med atomenergi og dens rettslige, tekniske og økonomiske konsekvenser for Norge», 24 April 1950.

<sup>17</sup> Also Forland points out this difference, «På leiting etter uran: Institutt for Atomenergi og internasjonalt samarbeid 1945-51», *Forsvarsstudier*, 3/1987, p. 19.

<sup>18</sup> UD, 30.5/17-III, Memo, Ministry of Defense to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2 September 1948.

<sup>19</sup> UD, 30.5/17-III, Memo, Ministry of Defense to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2 September 1948. Beyond that period, the FFI remarked in its report, «it would not be reasonable to make plans» about matters of this sort.

<sup>20</sup> For Randers' assessments at the time, see FD H-

arkiv 1946-52, Eske 23, Mappe H-187/1 «Institutt for atomenergi, Randers to the Minister of Defense (Hauge), 27 February 1945; and Randers to the Minister of Defense (Hauge), «IFA's Årsberetning 1949», 14 March 1949.

<sup>21</sup> Forland, «På leiting etter uran: Institutt for Atomenergi og internasjonalt samarbeid 1945-1951», *Forsvarsstudier*, 3/1987, pp. 8-9.

<sup>22</sup> UD 38.1/9-II Randers to Lange w/att, 1 July 1949.

<sup>23</sup> Apparently, the USA was never seriously considering supporting the Norwegian program or treating Norwegian applications more favorably than those from other Western countries (possibly excepting France). For documentation of the extremely critical attitude, especially among US military leaders, to the Norwegian program, see FRUS, 1948, Col. I, pp. 746, 786-793; FRUS, 1950, Vol. I, p. 558.

<sup>24</sup> Forland, «På leiting etter uran: Institutt for Atomenergi og internasjonalt samarbeid 1945-1951», *Forsvarsstudier*, 2/1987, pp. 8-9. For primary sources, see UD 38.1.9-II, Randers to Lange w/att, 1 July 1949; and UD 30.5.17-V, Secret report, NorDelUN (Sunde) to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, no. 568, 7 June 1949.

<sup>25</sup> For an early outline of this strategy, see UD 30.5/17-VI, Randers to UD, 11 July 1949.

<sup>26</sup> UD 26.1/10-I, Minutes of the second meeting of the Nordic Atomic Advisory Committee, Stockholm 25-27 August 1949.

<sup>27</sup> UD 30.5/17A, Minutes of the Nordic Ministers of Foreign Affairs Meeting, Copenhagen, 12-13 September 1949.

<sup>28</sup> One of the Danish representatives (Cohn) later reported that both his Norwegian and Swedish colleagues «came close to recommend that the work of the UN Atomic Energy Commission should be brought to an end». UD 30.5/17A, Minutes of the Nordic Ministers of Foreign Affairs Meeting, Copenhagen, 12-13 September 1949.

<sup>29</sup> UD 30.5/17A, Minutes of the Nordic Ministers of Foreign Affairs Meeting, Copenhagen, 12-13 September 1949.

<sup>30</sup> In Washington, the word went around that the volume of Swedish applications for equipment useful in the field of atomic energy were exceeded only by those of Canada. Telegram, US State Dep (Marshall) to US Embassy in Sweden, 30 August 1948, *FRUS*, 1948, Vol. I, p. 748.

<sup>31</sup> Telegram, US State Dep (Marshall) to US Embassy in Sweden, 30 August 1948, *FRUS*, 1948, Vol. I, pp. 748-749.

<sup>32</sup> See Dons' handwritten comment on UD 26.6/4-I,

NorEm Copenhagen (Sommerfelt) to UD, 14 June 1950.

<sup>33</sup> UD 26.6/4-I, Notat (Dons), 22 August 1950.

<sup>34</sup> UD 26.1/10-I, Notat (Lange), 23 August 1950.

<sup>35</sup> UD 26.1/10-I, Letter, UD (Skylstad) to Bahr, Randers, and Gjelsvik, 21 August 1950.

<sup>36</sup> UD 26.1/10-I, Minutes of the Meeting of the Nordic Atomic Advisory Committee in Copenhagen 30-31 August 1950. See also, Telegram, Danish Foreign Ministry to «gesantskabet i Reykjavik», 30 August 1950.

<sup>37</sup> UD 26.1/10-I, Minutes of the Meeting of the Nordic Atomic Advisory Committee in Copenhagen 30-31 August 1950.

<sup>38</sup> Agrell, p. 159.

<sup>39</sup> Airgram, the US Secretary of State to Certain Diplomatic Missions Abroad, 16 August 1948, *FRUS*, 1948, Vol. I, pp. 739-744; Memorandum, Chairman of the US AEC (Lilienthal) to the Chairman of the Joint Congressional Committee on Atomic Energy (McMahon), 18 February 1949, w/ enclosure, *FRUS*, 1949, Vol. I, pp. 430-434; Memorandum, the Secretary of State (Acheson) to the Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs (Perkins), 13 October 1949, *FRUS*, 1949, Vol. I, pp. 565-568. For more details about the Norwegian response, see UD 38.1/9-II, Notat (Anker), 7 September 1948; Notat (Lange), 16 September 1948; Letter, UD to FD, 16 September 1948; Notat (Ording?), 14 March 1949.

<sup>40</sup> Summary Log of Atomic Energy Work in the Office of the US Under Secretary of State, May-September 1950, *FRUS*, 1950, Vol. I, p. 586.