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Protecting the Northern flank, or keeping the Cold War out of Scandinavia? British planning and the place of Norway and Denmark in a North Atlantic pact, 1947-49

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Abstract

A pragmatic, but focused, pursuit by British policy-makers of an alliance is often regarded as a central element in the genesis of the North Atlantic Treaty. Analysis of the issue of Scandinavian membership shows that British policy was actually not consistent regarding either means or ends. It was subject to internal debate, based upon conflicting assumptions in the Oslo embassy, the Foreign Office and the armed forces. The FO's main concern was to provide Norway and Denmark with a sense of security so that they would take measures against internal subversion, while the military was more concerned to prevent British military resources being overstretched and were prepared to accept Scandinavian neutrality: they wished if possible to keep the Cold War out of Scandinavia. Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin and the FO did not believe this was possible, nor necessarily desirable, but were less than wholehearted about Norway and Denmark joining the pact on their own. Even in early 1949, when Soviet pressure was applied to Norway, Britain was ambivalent about whether Norway should be a founder-member of NATO. Although Britain strongly desired the alliance for long-term gains, they worked hard to ensure the form it took worked to meet their short-term needs.

Keywords:

Anglo-American Relations, Bevin, Chiefs of Staff, Cold War, Collier, Defence, Denmark, Foreign Office, Hankey, Hauge, Lange, NATO, North Atlantic Treaty, Norway, Scandinavia, Sweden, Western Union

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A key stage in the process that culminated in the North Atlantic Treaty and the foundation of NATO was the agreement of United States Secretary of State George Marshall to a British proposal of secret talks on a North Atlantic security arrangement in March 1948.¹ British Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin had gained Marshall's attention by stressing the vulnerability of Norway to Soviet aggression. However, for scholars of British foreign policy or historians of NATO, this pivotal moment has always been placed in the context of British relations with the US or Western Europe: British views of Scandinavian security at the time are rarely subject to any detailed analysis in this historiography.² This paper will show that whatever the significance of the issue as the trigger for the opening of negotiations for the North Atlantic alliance, there were considerable British reservations with regard to incorporating Norway and Denmark in such an alliance. Analysing this issue reveals opportunism and, at times, incoherence, in British policy and highlights the conflicting range of aspirations and imperatives that shaped it at a time when Britain had a crucial impact on the development of the international system.

If for historians of the North Atlantic Treaty, the Scandinavian aspect tends to slip into the background after Bevin's appeal to Marshall, this not the case for historians of Scandinavian foreign relations, who discuss this period extensively. The years 1948-49 saw a dramatic reorientation of the place of the Nordic states in world affairs. Norwegians, Danes and Swedes argued over whether they should be involved with any western bloc, and if so, on what terms. Scholars have debated in detail about the motivations of Sweden, Norway and Denmark as they engaged in talks on a defence pact between May 1948 and January 1949.³ At issue in particular are two related matters: first, whether the alliance Sweden proposed in May 1948, ostensibly a break with a 135-year policy of isolationist neutrality, was sincere, or merely a ruse to prevent Norway and Denmark joining an alliance with Britain and the United States and drawing Scandinavia into the developing Cold War.

¹ Lawrence S. Kaplan, *NATO 1948. The Birth of the Transatlantic Alliance* (Lanham, Md: Rowman and Littlefield, 2007), 55-6.

² The major British narrative of the Treaty negotiations, John Baylis, *The Diplomacy of Pragmatism. Britain and the Formation of NATO, 1942-49* (London: Macmillan, 1993), and the main US one, Kaplan, *NATO 1948*, devote relatively little space to Scandinavian developments.

³ Gerald Aalders, 'The Failure of Scandinavian Defence Union, 1948-1949', *Scandinavian Journal of History* xv (1990), 125-153.

Second, on the Norwegian side, there is much discussion as to whether there was ever a possibility of Norway joining any pact with Sweden that prevented such an alignment to the west. It has been suggested in some quarters that Norway's Foreign Secretary Halvard Lange manipulated Norwegian contacts with the west – especially those in Britain that had been built up during wartime cooperation – to undermine the talks. Other analysts point out that there was a range of opinions in both countries that might have made compromise possible.⁴ Danish scholars have argued that Denmark, feeling particularly exposed to the Soviet threat, saw Sweden as a more likely protector than the more distant US, and played a key role in keeping the talks going.⁵ There is a general consensus that the outcome – Norway and Denmark full members of NATO and Sweden neutral – was a consequence of internal factors, geostrategic position and historical traditions rather than international pressure.⁶

This scholarship has made much use of British sources. Britain is depicted as keenly interested in Scandinavian security. Some scholars see Britain as positioning itself between Scandinavia and the US, both politically and economically, and seeking a 'middle way' in policy terms.⁷ Others argue Britain and the US were determined in 1948-49 to draw Scandinavia – or at the least Norway and Denmark and their Atlantic territories – away from neutrality and into the Cold War.⁸ Much attention given in these studies to a strategy developed in the British Foreign Office (FO) Northern Department, commonly called the Hankey plan, designed to link a Scandinavian defence alliance with the North Atlantic security group, but without involving neutralist Sweden in full-scale commitments. A basic assumption is made that Britain saw the defence of Scandinavia to be a vital interest, and was motivated by fear of a Soviet invasion of the region.⁹

This article will revise these interpretations of British policy. It approaches the issue of Scandinavian involvement in the North Atlantic alliance as an issue in an internal British debate about the nature of the enterprise on which they were embarked. It will demonstrate that assumptions by Scandinavians that they were unequivocally wanted in the Atlantic pact, were not universally true across the British government.¹⁰ It will show that contrary to

⁴ Karl Molin, 'Winning the Peace: Vision and Disappointment in Nordic Security Policy, 1945-49' in Henrik S. Nissen (ed), *Scandinavia During the Second World War* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1983), 361-4; Nikolaj Petersen, 'Danish and Norwegian Alliance Policies 1948-49: A Comparative Analysis', *Cooperation and Conflict*, xiv (1979), 199; Nikolaj Petersen, 'Britain, Scandinavia and the North Atlantic Treaty 1948-49', *Review of International Studies*, viii (1982), 261.

⁵ Eric S. Einhorn, "The Reluctant Ally: Danish Security Policy 1945-49," *Journal of Contemporary History*, x (1975), 493-512.

⁶ Helge Pharo, 'Scandinavia', in David Reynolds (ed.), *The Origins of the Cold War in Europe: International Perspectives* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 194-223.

⁷ Rasmus Mariager. 'Political Ambitions and Economic Realities: Anglo-Danish Relations and the US in the Early Cold War', in Jørgen Sevaldsen, Bo Bjørke and Claus Bjørn (eds), *Britain and Denmark: Political, Economic and Cultural Relations in the 19th and 20th Centuries* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 2002), 537-8.

⁸ Clive Archer, 'Uncertain Trust. The British-Norwegian Defence Relationship', *Forsvarsstudier* ii (1989); Jussi Hanhimäki, *Scandinavia and the United States. An Insecure Friendship* (New York: Twayne, 1997), 10-69.

⁹ Patrick Salmon, 'Great Britain, Scandinavia and the Origins of the Cold War 1945-49', in Gunilla Anderman and Christine Baner (eds), *Proceedings of the Tenth Biennial Conference of the British Association of Scandinavian Studies* (Guildford: University of Surrey, 1995), 130; Magne Skodvin, 'Nordic or North Atlantic Alliance? The Postwar Scandinavian Security Debate', *Forsvarsstudier* iii (1990), 13.

¹⁰ Olav Riste, *Norway's Foreign Relations – A History* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 2001), 197; Olav Riste, 'Was 1949 a Turning Point? Norway and the Western Powers 1947-1950', in Olav Riste (ed), *Western Security: the Formative Years. European and Atlantic Defence 1947-1953* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1985), 137.

the way it tends to be presented in conventional narratives, especially Bevincentric ones, there was no consensus across the government. Probably the most influential figure on British handling of the Scandinavian issue was not Bevin, but a man seldom featuring in any of the accounts of NATO's foundation, Sir Laurence Collier, the British Ambassador at Oslo.

Accounts of the US road to the North Atlantic Treaty highlight the debates within the US government and Congress. The literature on Scandinavia's relationship with the west likewise focuses on internal political differences as well as deep divisions between the Nordic powers. In contrast, analysis of British policy in this period has been more preoccupied with Bevin himself, and his aims regarding Britain's world role, in relation to ideas of a 'third force' based on Western Europe and the colonial empires. Accounts of the British contribution to the creation of NATO say much about the way the British responded to their information about these internal debates elsewhere, and less about any fundamental areas of divergence within the British government.¹¹ Where differences are noted, the implication is that consensus was easily reached, because of commitment to the pragmatic achievement of the overall goal of a formal alliance with the US. Analysis of the Scandinavian issue in British policy debates shows that this conveys a mistaken impression, and overlooks the way British policy was affected by internal disagreements that were not easily resolved. The nexus of debate was between the views most strongly held by Collier on the one hand, and the military Chiefs of Staff (COS) on the other. It shows that short-term imperatives based on financial limitations were key factors in the debate that were not simply set aside in favour of longer-term geopolitical objectives.¹² British policy wound up an uneasy compromise between the two. This puts the Hankey plan in a new perspective, as a compromise not only between different attitudes in the Nordic countries but also as a compromise of internal British viewpoints.

The British dilemma

In 1947, the British government faced serious economic problems as a consequence of the Second World War. Britain had lost almost a quarter of its pre-war wealth. The destruction of productive capacity and the need for reconversion of what was left for peacetime production, the liquidation of overseas assets and the loss of export markets meant a shortage of foreign currency. Overseas debts had risen sevenfold. This put a premium on exports, which necessitated a domestic policy of austerity and continued rationing. This situation was aggravated by the terms of the American loan approved by Congress on 15 July 1946, which required sterling to be freely convertible in mid-1947. World commodity shortages pushed up prices of western hemisphere products. This reduced the real value of the loan and meant that it was effectively exhausted by the end of 1947. Before then, the harsh winter of 1946-47 had precipitated an economic crisis, with fuel shortages cutting production and increasing the dollar gap. There was intense debate within the Cabinet as to whether in this situation Britain could afford to maintain its extensive overseas commitments. These derived not only from its empire (the cost of forces in India and Egypt

¹¹ Alan Bullock, *Ernest Bevin. Foreign Secretary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 840; Baylis, *Diplomacy*, 129-30; Peter Weiler, 'Britain and the First Cold War: Revisionist Beginnings', *Twentieth Century British History*, ix (1998), 131-5; John W. Young, *Britain, France and the Unity of Europe* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1984), 14; John Kent and John W. Young, 'British Policy Overseas: The 'Third Force' and the Origins of NATO – in Search of a New Perspective,' in B. Heuser & R. O'Neill (ed), *Securing Peace in Europe, 1945-62* (London: Macmillan, 1992), 41-6.

¹² Cf Nikolaj Petersen, 'Bargaining Power Among Potential Allies: Negotiating the North Atlantic Treaty 1948-49', *Review of International Studies* xii (1986), 200; Jan Melissen and Bert Zeeman, 'Britain and Western Europe, 1945-51: Opportunities Lost?', *International Affairs*, lxiii (1987), 83.

produced debts of £335 million), but also from its duties as one of the victorious powers, such as the administration of occupation zones in Germany and Austria. In 1947, the cost of the occupation of Britain's zone in Germany approached £130 million. Bevin believed that Britain should do so, and moreover argued that he needed credible military strength to back up his foreign policy, especially with growing discord with the USSR in many areas. Conversely, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Hugh Dalton, argued that Britain's economic recovery took precedence, and sought to cut occupation costs and overseas defence activities as much as possible. A start was made with the cuts to aid to Greece and Turkey in February 1947, which resulted in the US announcement of the Truman Doctrine. In April, Bevin warned Marshall that the burden of British commitments was 'proving almost more than we can bear.'¹³

Britain's defence dilemma was therefore to find a way of maintaining the credibility of British power, as well as the actual ability to act where British interests required it, within the limited means available as a result of the financial crisis – a crisis which worsened through the course of 1947 and which US aid provided through the Marshall Plan would only resolve in the longer-term. The task of the British military leaders – the three Chiefs of Staff – was to develop a plausible imperial and national defence strategy within these budgetary constraints. They found it a virtually impossible task, but under repeated pressure from Prime Minister Clement Attlee, Dalton and Minister of Defence A. V. Alexander, they developed a strategic concept based on a pared-down view of Britain's vital interests. These were defined in mid-1947 as consisting of three pillars: defence of the United Kingdom itself, defence of sea communications to the empire and the United States, and defence of the Middle East.¹⁴

The defence of the United Kingdom against an attack by the USSR (the only potential enemy considered) required some defence in depth on the continent of Europe. However, partly as a result of the financial constraints, but partly too as a result of the lessons they drew from the Battle of Britain, the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force chiefs, Admiral John Cunningham and Air Marshal Arthur Tedder, succeeded in getting the COS committee, against misgivings by Army chief Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery, to agree that Britain could defend itself, so long as none of its strength had been sacrificed in the defence of Western Europe. There would be 'no more Dunkirks'.¹⁵

Even with this proviso, it was recognised that the only plausible solution to Britain's defence dilemma, if withdrawal from its global role was not to be considered an option, was to get the US to commit itself to fulfil some of the military duties that the British did not wish (or could not afford) to undertake, such as the despatch of large-scale reinforcements to Europe in the event of war. This became a prime aim of British policy from the start of 1947 onwards, and dovetailed with developing concerns on the part of Bevin with regard to the security of Western Europe in the second half of 1947.

The perceived threat to Western Europe came from the actions of the USSR, which were considered increasingly menacing. While direct military action by the USSR could not be entirely ruled out, it was believed that it was following more indirect, though no less threatening, methods. The Soviet Government had rejected participation in Marshall Aid,

¹³ Bevin to Dalton 24 April 1947 FO800/514; Sean Greenwood, *Britain and the Cold War 1945-91* (London: Macmillan, 2000), 32, 42, 46, 53-4; David Kynaston, *Austerity Britain* (London: Bloomsbury, 2007), 133-6.

¹⁴ DO(47)44 *Future Defence Policy* 22 May 1947 CAB[inet papers, United Kingdom National Archives (hereafter TNA), Kew] 21/1800; Anthony Gorst, 'Facing Facts? The Labour Government and Defence Policy 1945-1950' in Nick Tiratsoo (ed), *The Attlee Years* (London: Pinter, 1991), 194-7.

¹⁵ DO(47)68 15 September 1947 CAB131/4; Elisabeth Barker, *The British Between the Superpowers* (London: Macmillan, 1983), 98-102.

and had prevented the states in Eastern Europe that it controlled from doing so. Soviet policy was interpreted in Washington and London to be one of obstruction: of both European economic recovery and of the political settlement of issues outstanding from the Second World War, initially with regard to Germany. Soviet negotiators appeared to be deliberately procrastinating, and both Bevin and Marshall concluded before the London Council of Foreign Ministers meeting in November 1947 that if this continued then there was no point in maintaining the appearance of cooperation and consultation. The Soviets, they thought, were stalling in the hopes of European economic collapse, which would enable domestic communist parties to seize power. Marshall therefore brought the London meeting to a premature close on 17 December, when it became clear that Soviet Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Molotov had not come with the intention of reaching agreement on any of the outstanding issues. This was to be the last of the regular scheduled meetings of the Council.

The foundation of Cominform in September and a wave of communist-inspired industrial action in Western Europe convinced Bevin and Marshall that the Soviet aim was to undermine European economic recovery by subversion. Devastated, and socially and politically dislocated by the experiences of the war, European states were seen to be vulnerable to such tactics, and in need of an increased sense of security to give them the confidence to achieve economic recovery and to resist the propaganda of their own communists. The Western Europeans looked to Britain to provide reassurance, and this only intensified Britain's own dilemma, as its defence strategy of 'no continental commitment' was not conducive to raising their spirits. Once again, a US commitment to participation in the defence of Western Europe appeared to provide the answer. These issues were the driving force for British initiatives following the collapse of the Council of Foreign Ministers in December 1947, which led eventually to the formation of NATO.¹⁶

At the start of January 1948, Bevin set out to his Cabinet colleagues a vision of a 'spiritual federation of the west,' or 'Western Union.'¹⁷ He followed this up with a speech to the House of Commons on 22 January. While the specifics of the proposal were unclear, the demonstration of initiative and leadership appealed to western Europeans, and their responses quickly built up a momentum that culminated in the conclusion of the Brussels Treaty on 17 March 1948, signed by Britain, France, Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg. The treaty promised mutual cooperation and commitment to each other's defence. The USSR was not specifically named as the ostensible threat, though unlike the Anglo-French Dunkirk treaty of a year earlier, Germany was not defined as the potential enemy either.¹⁸ The treaty thus marked a vital stage in the movement away from alignments based on the Second World War. On 25 February 1948 communists in Czechoslovakia had engineered a coup, removing all pro-western elements from the Prague government. This had shaken the French in particular, and made them ready to take bolder steps, as well as giving the opportunity for the increased political marginalisation of their own communists. The sense of insecurity in Western Europe that Bevin and Marshall had noted the previous

¹⁶ Don Cook, *Forging the Alliance. NATO 1945 to 1950* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1989), 106-9.

¹⁷ CP(48)7 *Review of Soviet Policy* 5 Jan. 1948, CP(48)8 *Future Foreign Publicity Policy* 4 Jan. 1948, CP(48)6 *The First Aim of British Policy* 4 Jan. 1948 CAB129/23; Bullock, *Bevin*, 519-20; Cook, *Forging*, 117.

¹⁸ The Treaty was closer in format to the 1947 Rio Treaty than it was to the Dunkirk Treaty, involving as it did mutual assistance against any aggression. The Rio model had been suggested by State Department official John D. Hickerson, though this may not have been decisive: with the Czechoslovak coup a focus on potential German aggression seemed quite beside the point, and none of the parties was prepared to be so directly provocative as to specifically mention the Soviet Union in this regard, quite apart from the domestic difficulties it would have provoked among centre-left opinion, Cook, *Forging*, 122.

year, however, was naturally increased by the events in Czechoslovakia, a state which had seemed to straddle east and west. This accentuated the tendency of the continental European members of the Brussels pact to wish to address issues of defence immediately.

Bevin had always understood that what the newspapers called the 'Bevin Plan' had a defence dimension, but had sought from the moment that he unveiled his somewhat inchoate plan to Cabinet to cover this angle by getting a guarantee from the Americans that they would underwrite the defence of Western Europe.¹⁹ The Americans had resisted his attempts to get a firm public commitment, partly for domestic reasons, and partly because they saw the Bevin plan as a step towards the integration of Western Europe, which they regarded as the long-term solution to its economic and political problems. They wished to avoid any American participation that might harm this movement. Bevin, however, always considered a security guarantee from the US to be vital, both to provide Europeans with a sense of security, but also in order to prevent Britain from being drawn to commit its own scarce defence resources to a continental strategy.²⁰ This became urgent for Britain because even before the Brussels Treaty was concluded, the Europeans had raised the issue of defence. The COS, however, had recently reaffirmed that they would not send any forces to defend Western Europe should it be attacked.²¹ The quest for an American commitment to do so became imperative as a consequence.

The communist seizure of power in Prague prompted Bevin to put the issue to the Americans again. On 25 and 26 February, immediately after the coup, he painted the situation in dramatic terms to United States Ambassador Lewis Douglas, saying that the next six to eight weeks would be crucial to the west.²² He stressed to Douglas that it was vital to have discussions on defence issues, involving France, Britain and the Benelux countries, and that they take place in Washington. Bevin received no direct response.²³ On 3 March he presented to Cabinet an alarmist paper outlining the dangers of the Soviet attempt to spread Communism.²⁴ He remained convinced that the key to all the inter-connected problems of European economic recovery, security against communist subversion such as had been deployed in Czechoslovakia and Britain's own defence dilemma, was a US security commitment in a form more substantial than a presidential declaration. The problem facing the British was how to move the Americans to enter into such a commitment. The lack of response to Bevin's pleas to Douglas showed that even the Czech coup, which had been a profound shock both sides of the Atlantic, was not sufficient to do this. A much less dramatic development, however, proved to be the trigger the British were looking for.

Lange's appeal to the West

Late on March 8 1948, Halvard Lange informed Collier and the US ambassador, Ulrich Bay, that he had heard rumours from three sources that the Soviet Government was about to put pressure on Norway to agree a non-aggression pact. Lange said his government intended to refuse, but wished to know what support it could expect if Stalin responded in a hostile

¹⁹ FO to Inverchapel 13 Jan., Inverchapel to Bevin 19 Jan. 1948 F[oreign]O[ffice General Correspondence, TNA] 371/73045/Z273, Z480.

²⁰ Martin H. Folly, 'Breaking the Vicious Circle: Britain, the United States and the Genesis of the North Atlantic Treaty', *Diplomatic History* xii (1988), 62-5.

²¹ COS(48)18th mtg 4 Feb. 1948 DEFE[Defence Papers, TNA]4/10, COS(48)59(O) 18 March DEFE 5/10; Barker, *British Between*, 131-2, Martin H. Folly, 'The British Military and the Making of the North Atlantic Treaty', in Joseph Smith (ed), *The Origins of NATO* (Exeter: Exeter University Press, 1990), 55.

²² Bevin conversation with Douglas 26 Feb. 1948 FO371/73067/Z2642.

²³ Douglas to Lovett 26 Feb. 1948 *Foreign Relations of the United States 1948: III* [hereafter *FRUS1948: III*], 32-33.

²⁴ CP(48)72 *The Threat to Western Civilisation* 3 March 1948 CAB129/25.

fashion to this rebuff.²⁵ The conventional narrative of the history of the foundation of NATO traces a direct line of causation from this point to the signature of the North Atlantic Treaty on April 4 1949.²⁶

One of the notable aspects of the 8 March ‘crisis’ is that no panic is evident in either London or Washington. This has tended to be obscured by the language Bevin used to try and get action from Marshall: his phrase ‘imminent threat to Norway’ is often quoted: some narratives of NATO’s foundation even suggest that a Soviet invasion of Norway was expected.²⁷ Yet the FO papers show no expectation of any Soviet movement against Norway. From the start the indefinite nature of what Lange had said to Collier was evident, and the rumours were quickly seen to be without foundation. The main issue was how to answer Lange, rather than deal with the Soviets. Moreover, the State Department appeared even less concerned: the British ambassador, Lord Inverchapel, reported from Washington that they did not initially seem to think Lange needed any answer at all.²⁸

However, Bevin saw an opportunity to make progress on the larger issue of US commitment to European security, and asked Marshall for immediate talks on a security pact for the North Atlantic. His quest for an American security guarantee predated both Lange’s demarche and the Czech coup. It had been intended more as a precondition for movement to Western Union than as a consequence of it. The ‘North Atlantic’ angle was a new one, but otherwise in his plea to Marshall he was repeating earlier attempts to get the Americans to commit themselves to the defence of Western Europe.²⁹

Collier’s report also prompted an assessment of the place of Scandinavia in what was already being called the ‘cold war’. The significance of Lange’s queries was that they needed to be answered in such a way that Norwegian morale, and readiness to risk a hostile Soviet reaction, were not affected by the discouraging truth that neither power had plans to defend Norway. Similar unofficial requests made earlier by Defence Minister Jens Christian Hauge to service attachés had received only evasive answers: addressing them officially through ambassadors made it harder to pretend the questions had not been asked, especially with the hint of imminent Soviet demands added into the mix.³⁰ It was thus not Soviet pressure that was the impetus for action – there was no Soviet pressure – but concern that Norway should not lose its nerve. Thus it was that, although the reaction with regard to an external threat to Norway was indeed calm, other British documents – letters from Attlee to Commonwealth leaders and FO briefing for Bevin’s forthcoming discussions in Paris with

²⁵ Bay to Marshall 8 Mar., 9 Mar. 1948 Record Group 59, US National Archives, 857.20/3-848, /3-948; Collier to FO 104 8 Mar. 1948 FO371/71504/N2710 (despatched 10.23 pm). Lange went much further with Collier than with Bay, in specifically requesting what help Britain would provide if Norway was attacked as a result of refusing a Soviet demand for a non-aggression pact.

²⁶ This is the account given on NATO’s own website, <http://www.nato.int/archives/1st5years/chapters/1.htm>, citing Lord Ismay, *NATO, The First Five Years* (Paris: NATO, 1955); Cook, *Forging*, 125; Riste, ‘Was 1949 a Turning Point?’, 139.

²⁷ Richard Best, *Cooperation With Like-Minded Peoples* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1986), 163; Rolf Tamnes, ‘The Strategic Importance of the High North During the Cold War’, in Gustav Schmidt (ed), *A History of NATO: The First Fifty Years* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001) vol. 3, 258; Geir Lundestad, *America, Scandinavia and the Cold War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), 178-81; Patrick Salmon, ‘Great Britain and Northern Europe from the Second World War to the Cold War’, in Robert Bohn and Jurgen Elvert (eds), *Kriegsende im Norden. Vom Hießen zum Kalten Krieg* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1995), 201.

²⁸ Inverchapel to FO 10 March 1948 FO371/71504/N2912.

²⁹ FO to Inverchapel 10 March 1948 FO371/71458/N3001; Inverchapel memo 11 March, Marshall to Truman and to Inverchapel 12 March 1948 *FRUS1948*: III, 46-9.

³⁰ Collier to FO 15 Jan. 1948 FO371/71449/N637; Bay to Marshall 19 Feb. 1948 *FRUS1948*: III, 24ff; Collier despatch 8 March 1948 FO371/71450/N2775; Riste, ‘Was 1949 a Turning Point?’, 139.

the Scandinavian foreign ministers – took a serious view of the situation.³¹

Scandinavia in post-war British defence planning

British planning after the end of the Second World War assumed that Norway was important for Britain's own defence, for an enemy controlling Norway's coastline could interdict Britain's access to the Atlantic sea-lanes. Denmark was also seen as important because of its position at the entrance to the Baltic, its possession of Greenland, and close connections to Iceland. These latter territories were recognised to be of vital interest to the US as outliers of western hemisphere defence and as 'stepping stones' both in the provision of aid to Britain and in launching a strategic air offensive against the USSR. Sweden played a much less significant role in these direct strategic terms, but its position and policy were seen to be the keystone of the whole area. The problem was that while Norway and Denmark were regarded as strategically important, they were seen to be very weak. Moreover, with the tight fiscal constraints, the necessity for prioritisation meant that little, if any, force could be spared to help them. Thus, while Norwegian defence planning was based on an assumption that Britain would defend Norway, British planners had no intention of doing so.³² Closer contingency planning seemed vital (a lesson drawn from the experience of 1940), but would be counter-productive if it revealed this unpalatable fact to the Norwegians.³³

There was a way round this dilemma. Sweden was regarded as considerably stronger, and if the three states could collaborate, they would feel stronger and the very act of coordination might well deter the Soviets. Back in early 1947, this matter had been debated extensively in Whitehall and with the ambassadors at Oslo (Collier), Stockholm (Sir Bertrand Jerram) and Copenhagen (Alec Randall). Over the next two years, the British government contained within it a wide spectrum of opinions on this vital question. It would be misleading to imply, therefore, that Britain unambiguously and consistently sought to pull Norway and Denmark away from a Scandinavian pact and into NATO.³⁴ Collier stood at one extreme, and occupied an influential position in Oslo throughout this period. At the other end were the COS, whose approach to Scandinavian coordination and neutrality was based on radically different premises. The FO Northern Department and other interested departments, the other ambassadors, and Bevin himself, moved between the two positions. This produced a policy kept fluid by the conflicting imperatives of the British defence position right through to March 1949.

Sir Laurence Collier was highly experienced in the matter of British relations with Scandinavia, having been head of the Northern Department for ten years before being appointed ambassador to the Norwegian government-in-exile in 1941. He had a record of voicing his views vigorously, even when they went against office wisdom.³⁵ He had written on 19 December 1946 that it was better for British interests if Norway and Denmark did not get engaged in defence coordination with Sweden, for if they did so, they would catch the infection of appeasement, 'Sweden's usual policy towards her strongest neighbour.' It

³¹ Commonwealth Relations Office to UK High Commissions 9 March 1948, Attlee to Mackenzie King 10 March 1948 [Prime Minister Private Office Papers, TNA] PREM8/788; FO brief 11 March 1948 FO371/71451/N3336; Bevin meeting with Naval Staff 12 March 1948 FO371/71447/N3309.

³² Olav Riste, 'NATO, the Northern Flank, and the Neutrals' in Schmidt, *History of NATO* vol. 3, 243.

³³ COS(48)18th mtg 4 Feb. 1948 DEFE4/10, Stapleton to Sargent 28 Feb. 1948 FO371/71447/N2471, COS(48)42nd mtg 19 March 1948 DEFE4/11. The Danes expected no help, which made them particularly anxious to form a defence arrangement with Sweden.

³⁴ Cf Petersen, 'Britain, Scandinavia', 259.

³⁵ Donald Lammers, 'Fascism, Communism and the Foreign Office, 1937-39', *Journal of Contemporary History*, vi (1971), 68, 76-7.

would be better, Collier argued, for the two countries to integrate their defences with those of Britain.³⁶ This was to remain Collier's firm view, and is the key to understanding his interpretation of Norwegian policy to Whitehall. Collier's counterparts in Copenhagen and Stockholm disagreed. Randall favoured a Scandinavian defence pact, and Jerram, though more ambivalent on that, felt that Britain should encourage secret Scandinavian defence contacts. Norway's 'sturdy courage' might stiffen the Swedes.³⁷

FO officials agreed it might be best to encourage the three to strengthen their defences by working together. Suspecting that Collier harboured anti-Swedish prejudices that distorted his judgement, they doubted whether Sweden would appease the USSR to the same degree that it did Germany: Russia was its traditional enemy.³⁸

From the military point of view in 1947, a Scandinavian defence bloc seemed to serve British strategic interests – and from this the COS were not to waver over the next two years. The Joint Planning Staff (JPS) view was that unfortunately the Scandinavians would be reluctant to form such a bloc, through fear of Soviet responses, unless given guarantees of military assistance from the western powers.³⁹ Similarly, Randall warned that any pressure from Britain to develop a defence bloc would produce a demand to know what Britain and the US would do to assist it in the event of a Soviet reaction.⁴⁰ British lack of resources, and US resistance to making commitments of this sort, meant it was best to prevent such questions being asked, for the discouraging answers would make the situation worse.

Clandestine contacts developed between individual Scandinavian officers, but without official government sanction.⁴¹ The Danes were most enthusiastic for Scandinavian cooperation, believing that Denmark would be an early target if the USSR embarked on aggression in Europe.⁴² Norway shared much of this feeling of vulnerability, but antipathy to Sweden, and the experience of the Second World War, inclined them to prefer defence cooperation with the west, if Britain and the United States were prepared to offer the necessary guarantees. Neither, at the end of 1947 was yet prepared to do so, despite their recognition of Norway's strategic significance.

There were two potential dangers inherent in this situation in British minds at the start of 1948. One was the possibility stressed by Collier that Sweden would lead Scandinavia into neutrality, rendering any prior planning impossible. A second was the internal political position in the three countries. These considerations were evident in British actions after 8 March. They were not contingent on there being any substance to the rumours of imminent Soviet demands. More important was that the Norwegians might believe them true. They had to be reassured – and Lange's specific questions about military assistance determined what kind of form that reassurance needed to take. The Norwegian government also, it was believed, needed to be prompted not to lose sight of the main danger: they must not become obsessed with unlikely Soviet military moves, when the real

³⁶ Collier despatch 19 Dec. 1946 FO371/65961/N127. During the Second World War, Collier argued that Norway was so important to Britain that it should always be prepared to fight in Norway's defence, Patrick Salmon, *Scandinavia and the Great Powers 1890-1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 345.

³⁷ Randall despatch 4 Feb., Jerram to Hankey 15 Feb. 1947 FO371/65961/N127, N2405.

³⁸ Warr minute 11 Jan., Creswell minute 13 Jan., Warner minute 17 April 1947 FO371/65961/N127, N3398.

³⁹ JP(47)56(F) 4 June 1947 *Scandinavian Defence – Strategic Considerations*, despatch to Randall 5 Aug. 1947 FO371/65961/N6750; COS(47)72nd meeting 9 June 1947 DEFE4/4.

⁴⁰ Randall to Hankey 25 July 1947 FO371/65961/N8976.

⁴¹ Jerram to Hankey 31 Oct. and 5 Nov., Talbot minute 26 Nov. 1947 FO371/65961/N12910, N13454; Jukka Nevakiki, 'Scandinavian Talks on Military Cooperation in 1946-1947: A Prelude to the Decisions of 1948-1949', *Cooperation and Conflict*, xix (1984), 172-4.

⁴² Randall to Hankey 18 Dec. 1947 FO371/65961/N14705.

danger, as the communist actions in Czechoslovakia seemed to show, was internal. Covert intelligence reports from Norway suggested that communist activity in factories, organization for sabotage and caches of weapons formerly belonging to the resistance, were far greater than the authorities seemed to realise, even though Prime Minister Einar Gerhardsen had made a fierce speech on 29 February in the wake of the Czech coup calling attention to a domestic communist threat.⁴³ The speech apparently failed to satisfy Bevin, for he continued to emphasise this issue, minuting ‘my information is that... the Communist movement in Scandinavia is better organised than we realise.’ When he met Lange in Paris on 15 March, he moved on from assuring him that Britain and the US were soon to meet to discuss Atlantic security, to deliver a homily about the need to clamp down on subversives. Indeed, Bevin declared Britain itself was implementing a discreet witch-hunt and he urged Lange to ensure his government did the same. Of course, this was a way of diverting Lange away from awkward questions about what would be done to aid Norwegian defence. But this was a genuine concern of Bevin’s, and one on which he felt, from his own trade union experience, uniquely qualified to give advice.⁴⁴

The British soon discounted the rumours, but pressed the Americans for discussions on the organisation of not only North Atlantic, but also West European, and Mediterranean security. This clearly had little to do with the need to act quickly to save Norway from Soviet assault. The threat to Norway in British eyes came internally, not externally.⁴⁵ The further danger was that Lange’s questions could expose British intention not to act to defend Norway. Marshall’s positive response to Bevin’s plea led to top secret Anglo-American-Canadian talks in the Pentagon at the end of March. They resulted in a paper recommending the formation of a North Atlantic security group – but the American delegates insisted this remain absolutely secret and that the paper should be regarded merely as a State Department working paper. As it happened, considerable debate on the issue was to follow within the US administration. The absence of a public agreement meant there was nothing from the Pentagon talks that could serve the purpose of boosting Norwegian confidence, when Lange had been led to expect something helpful from the consultations. Norway had long been interested in defence coordination with Britain, and Lange was trailing the idea of a ‘Northern Defence Union’ involving Britain, in March and April 1948. He received no encouragement from Britain on this either.⁴⁶ Instead, the Norwegian government became drawn into discussions on inter-Scandinavian coordination.⁴⁷

The absence of a real US movement towards the early conclusion of an Atlantic pact meant that the British for their part were drawn to consider how to ensure that the Scandinavians worked together to improve their own sense of security, while not adopting Sweden’s isolationist neutrality.⁴⁸ The US Ambassador to Sweden, Freeman Matthews,

⁴³ Kenney (embassy press-reader) minute 5 March 1948 FO337/117.

⁴⁴ Note of Bevin views 8 March, Etherington-Smith minute 14 March 1948, Bevin minute, FO to Collier 15 March 1948 FO371/71450/N2839, N3134, N3184; Bevin conversations with Lange, Rasmussen and Undén 15-16 March 1948 FO800/460.

⁴⁵ Henderson despatch 17 March 1948, Hankey minute 24 March 1948 FO371/71504/N3452, N3979.

⁴⁶ Collier despatch 27 April 1948 FO337/118; Olav Riste, ‘The Reluctant European: Norway’s Attitude to Military Integration, 1948-1950’, in Norbert Wiggershaus and Ronald G. Foerster (eds), *The Western Security Community 1948-50. Common Problems and Conflicting National Interests During the Foundation Phase of the North Atlantic Alliance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 186-8; Einhorn, ‘Reluctant Ally’, 502; Salmon, ‘Great Britain and Northern Europe’, 202; Riste, ‘Was 1949 a Turning Point?’, 132, 139.

⁴⁷ JP(48)27 12 March 1948, COS(48)37th mtg 15 March 1948 DEFE4/11; Alexander to Hauge 7 April 1948: the British answers are calculated in their vagueness FO371/71445/N4194; Grethe Vaernø, ‘Norway and the Atlantic Alliance, 1948-1949’, *NATO Review*, xxix (June 1981), 20; Riste, *Norway’s Foreign Relations*, 200.

⁴⁸ Bateman minutes 9 and 17 April 1948 FO371/71451/N4021.

was, like Collier in Oslo, a fierce critic of Swedish neutrality, and he urged the State Department to put pressure on Sweden to come over fully into the western camp.⁴⁹ The US counsellor in Stockholm, Hugh Smith Cumming, told startled Swedish businessmen that in the event of a war Swedish factories would be bombed out of existence to deny them to the Soviets.⁵⁰ The British did not like to apply such direct pressure, preferring to influence Scandinavian policy by what Robin Hankey, the head of the FO Northern Department, called ‘crafty diplomacy’, but which, in the following nine months was actually over-complicated and predominantly reactive.⁵¹ It was, moreover, hamstrung by American inaction. Despite the events in Czechoslovakia and Lange’s anxious pleas, there was little public sign of urgency coming from Washington regarding the organization of North Atlantic security. Although Bevin’s agitated predictions in March had proved unfounded, the British were not happy with such leisurely progress. The problem was not the prospect of further action by the USSR, but by Sweden.⁵²

Exploration of the option of a Scandinavian regional solution

The matter was immediate because of what Hankey called a ‘new and more aggressive formulation of Swedish neutrality.’⁵³ Swedish Foreign Minister Östen Undén was concerned that Norway was moving towards too definite an alignment with the western powers. Across the region there was considerable attachment to the idea of Scandinavianism. The Swedish government capitalised on these feelings, knowing that politicians in the other two countries would find it inadvisable to be appearing to stand in the way of increasing inter-Scandinavian cooperation. Gerhardsen was inclined to respond positively, and Lange himself saw some merits in Scandinavian defence cooperation.⁵⁴ At the meeting of Scandinavian prime ministers in Stockholm on 9-10 May, Undén gained agreement from Gerhardsen and Hans Hedtoft, Prime Minister of Denmark, to a memorandum affirming that a Scandinavian Defence Union should be considered. It would keep outside any other grouping and avoid involvement in a war between great powers.⁵⁵ The Swedish proposal was disturbing to those Norwegians who looked for more explicit military planning with Britain. These included Lange, Hauge and the influential Haakon Lie, secretary of the Norwegian Labour party.⁵⁶ They had close links in Whitehall – Hauge had worked with the Special Operations Executive during the war – and had been encouraged by Collier. The Norwegian defence establishment regarded the Swedes with animosity, with bitter memories of Swedish cooperation with Germany during the occupation of Norway from 1940 to 1945. Lange and Hauge threatened to resign when Gerhardsen returned to Oslo, and he accordingly withdrew Norwegian agreement to the Stockholm memorandum on 14 May. The Swedish initiative, however, had attracted many

⁴⁹ Matthews to State Department 21 April and 5 May 1948 *FRUS1948:III* 97-98, 112-14.

⁵⁰ Henderson (Stockholm) despatch 21 April 1948 FO371/71724/N534; Aalders, ‘Failure’, 139.

⁵¹ Cf Archer, ‘Uncertain Trust’, 14-16, Petersen, ‘Britain, Scandinavia’, 259. It has been argued that Labour ministers were more accommodating of Swedish neutrality because of their affinity for Swedish social democrats and their close relations with leading members of the Swedish government, Juhana Aunesluoma, ‘“Our Staunchest Friends and Allies in Europe”’: Britain’s Special Relationship with Scandinavia, 1945-1953’ in Michael Hopkins, Michael Kandiah and Gillian Staerck (eds), *Cold War Britain, 1945-1964. New Perspectives* (London: Palgrave, 2003), 68-9, 72-3.

⁵² Two Hankey minutes 8 May 1948 FO371/71452/N6194, N5347.

⁵³ FO to Collier 12 May 1948, Randall to FO 15 May 1948 FO371/71445/ N5346, N5703; Etherington-Smith minute 19 May 1948 FO371/71452/N5713.

⁵⁴ Petersen, ‘Alliance Policies’, 197-8; Einhorn, ‘Reluctant Ally’, 502-5.

⁵⁵ Petersen, ‘Alliance Policies’, 197; Farquhar despatch 13 May 1948 FO371/71724/N5801.

⁵⁶ Lie was seen as an able anti-communist propagandist, and was fed material by the British, Kenney to Information Policy Department 26 May 1948. FO1110/27/PR396.

Norwegian socialists, deeply distrustful of the United States, and appealed to a wide cross-section of the public that was attached to the ideals of Scandinavianism. The Danes were anxious to forge Scandinavian cooperation, fearful that immediate help in the event of a war could only come from Sweden, not from the west, and in September, Hedtoft succeeded in getting agreement to set up a Scandinavian Defence Committee to study the issues.⁵⁷

The Swedish perspective was explained on 20 May by Ambassador Erik Boheman to Sir Orme Sargent, the permanent under-secretary at the FO. Boheman said that if the Soviets thought their enemies would not make use of Scandinavia as a base, they would leave it alone. The western powers could not do anything for Scandinavia if it came to the point of war, but Scandinavia could organise its own defence and offer serious resistance to the Soviets.⁵⁸ The Swedish belief that they had a policy that was acceptable to both east and west was derided in the FO as unrealistic, and it was felt, as Harold Farquhar, the new ambassador in Stockholm, remarked, 'a cold douche for their complacency is ... sadly required.'⁵⁹ However, the FO still rejected putting any pressure on Sweden, and continued to believe the key to progress could only come from Washington. Instead of pressing Sweden, the situation was used once more to urge action from the Americans. Bevin warned Marshall on 1 June, 'we must ... keep in mind the danger that a 'neutral' Scandinavian system will develop if the question of mutual support as between Western Europe and the United States is left in the doldrums.'⁶⁰

Progress on the idea of a North Atlantic pact had indeed stalled while the Pentagon paper was further debated within the State Department. Behind the scenes, advocates of an alliance set out to convince key congressional figures. Most important was leading Republican senator Arthur Vandenberg, who was chairman of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations. In an election year, support from both parties was necessary if such a big departure from American tradition was to be achieved. However, until this process produced results, Collier reported that the absence of a statement of what support they could expect was making it hard for Lange and Hauge to hold Norway's position, let alone prevent Denmark's inclination to Scandinavianism setting up a momentum in public opinion that would draw them both towards the Swedish solution.⁶¹ Marshall acknowledged the situation, but rather lamely stated that since the US role was 'not yet crystallized,' it was difficult for the US to influence the Scandinavians. Matthews' heavy-handed attempts to dissuade the Swedes from neutrality by threatening the withholding of supplies, were stopped. The Americans thus at this point effectively had no Scandinavian policy.⁶² This left the British to attempt to finesse the matter as best they could in the absence of the only condition they thought would make a decisive difference.

The 'Hankey Plan'

To deal with this situation, Robin Hankey fleshed out an idea that had been current in his department for a while. The plan involved Norwegian and Danish membership of a North

⁵⁷ Petersen, 'Alliance Policies', 197-9; FO to Collier 16 May 1948 FO371/71445/N5676.

⁵⁸ Sargent conversation with Boheman 20 May, FO to Randall 27 May 1948 FO371/71724/N6148.

⁵⁹ Farquhar despatch 27 May 1948 FO371/71724/N6319. Patrick Salmon suggests Sargent's remarks had such an effect on Undén: if so, the effect soon wore off, Salmon, 'Britain and Northern Europe,' 202.

⁶⁰ Jebb minute 28 May 1948, FO to Balfour 1 June 1948 FO371/73070/Z4394, Z4467. Bevin to Marshall 1 June 1948 *FRUS1948*: III 136-8.

⁶¹ Collier to FO 2 June, Randall to FO 3 and 15 June 1948 FO371/71445/N6478, N6792, N7020.

⁶² Marshall memo to Truman on Swedish neutrality 3 June, Marshall to Matthews 10 June 1948 *FRUS1948*: III 134-5; Bevin minute 19 June, Bevin conversation with Boheman 18 June 1948 FO371/71725/N7091, N7108; 4th Washington meeting 8 July 1948 FO800/453; Jebb memo on Washington talks July 1948 FO371/73074/Z6140.

Atlantic pact, simultaneous with their membership of a defence union with Sweden. The three Scandinavian countries would be bound by pledges of mutual assistance in time of attack, joint planning and standardisation of arms, but Sweden would only be required to take action if Norway or Denmark were themselves attacked, remaining neutral if they went to war as a result of their obligations to other North Atlantic pact members. It was necessary to recognise, Hankey told Frances Willis of the US embassy, that the attachment of the Scandinavian powers to any Western Union or Atlantic Union would have to be allowed to shade off gradually as one got further eastwards.⁶³ This idea of graded membership of the alliance had some appeal, for otherwise those outside the bloc might be regarded by the Soviets as of no interest to the western powers. Under a scheme such as this a hard division of Europe would be avoided. It would be useful in accommodating states like Greece, Turkey, Austria, and maybe Finland and Yugoslavia as well – advocates of this approach, who included, in a slightly different form, George Kennan in the State Department, hoped that by not formalising the blocs too rigidly, some states that were within the Soviet orbit might be drawn away from it in time, notably Finland.⁶⁴

This approach, Hankey hoped, would be less likely to provoke the Soviets to tighten up their control of the intermediate areas, such as Finland, than would a direct alliance of Sweden with the Atlantic pact. It would give Norway and Denmark all they would really need from Sweden. It would assuage Sweden's fears that the Soviets would push for bases in western Finland, were it to align with the US, while at the same time preventing a Swedish lapse into full isolation.⁶⁵ The plan was drawn up in order to be able to influence the Scandinavian discussions in the direction the British preferred, though the FO never came to a decision as to the opportune moment to put it forward. It became the subject of rumour and of unofficial debate with the State Department and the Norwegians.⁶⁶ It also, however, came to serve a different purpose within the British government's own debate, offering a compromise between the diplomats and the military, as we will see.

In the United States, the discussions with Vandenberg had borne fruit. The senator sponsored Senate Resolution 239, affirming support for US membership of a regional security pact in accordance with article 51 of the United Nations Charter. The resolution was approved by the Senate on 11 July, a process undoubtedly aided by the Soviet closure of western access to Berlin on 24 June, precipitating a crisis that lasted until May 1949. The Vandenberg Resolution freed the hands of the administration to enter negotiations, and these began in Washington, involving the ambassadors of Canada and the five Brussels treaty powers, together with Robert Lovett, under-secretary of state. Initial progress was slow, as the Americans did not in any way regard themselves as bound by the Pentagon paper, and the North Atlantic concept was a new one to all the Europeans, except the British. France and Belgium disliked it on the grounds that it threatened to draw resources to the flanks. They feared that Norway, Iceland and Greenland might prove of more interest to the US than the defence of the Rhine.⁶⁷ Real progress was made only when a smaller working group was set up, helped by the crisis atmosphere and sense of urgency engendered by the continuing Soviet blockade of Berlin. After meeting throughout August, an updated

⁶³ Hankey to Farquhar 9 Aug. 1948 FO371/71725/N8874.

⁶⁴ Alan K. Henrikson, 'The Creation of the North Atlantic Alliance, 1948-1952', *Naval War College Review* xxxii (May-June 1980), 20; Vaernø, 'Norway', 19.

⁶⁵ Hankey minute 23 July 1948 on telegram from Scott (Helsinki) FO371/71725/N8293; Hankey paper 6 Aug. 1948 FO371/71458/N8874.

⁶⁶ Meeting of ambassadors and Bateman minute 22 Oct., Hankey to Randall 22 Nov., Hickerson to Hoyer Millar 15 Nov. 1948 FO371/71454/N11864, N11090, N12412, N12618; Collier despatch 20 Oct. 1948 FO337/119; Petersen, 'Britain, Scandinavia', 261; Petersen, 'Alliance Policies', 207.

⁶⁷ Foreign Ministers meeting 20 July 1948 PREM8/1431.

proposal for a North Atlantic pact was produced at the start of September for governments to consider.⁶⁸

The FO lectured its European allies that Norway and Denmark were of cardinal importance, for a war might begin there, as it had before. They should therefore be included in the pact.⁶⁹ However, this was not a unanimous view in the British government. Rather than following the FO's lead, the COS now reiterated their different perspective on the issue. Although the defence aspects of the North Atlantic pact idea were in essence long-term, short-term military issues could not be kept out of the reckoning, for if the prime aim of a boost to confidence and sense of security was to be achieved, the Europeans needed their present anxieties about their strategic weakness assuaged.⁷⁰ As we have seen, the very act of beginning the process of cooperation had brought forth such questions: although the British (and Americans) regarded them as untimely, the fact they had been posed meant the issue was hard to ignore. Moreover, the crisis over Berlin, which carried the real possibility that war would break out over the Anglo-American efforts to break the Soviet blockade of the city by air, meant that these immediate issues loomed large in British military minds as well. On 28 July, Montgomery reaffirmed that it was out of the question that Britain would give any land assistance to Norway in event of war.⁷¹

'A Necessary Adjunct'

However, for all the sense of crisis engendered by the confrontation over Berlin, the period from September 1948 to January 1949 saw little decisive movement towards completion of the North Atlantic Treaty. The working group had worked well, and produced a draft of a treaty, in which two levels of membership were proposed, on 9 September. Norway, Iceland, Denmark and Sweden were seen to be appropriate members, though it was unclear whether their membership should be full or limited. There then followed a long pause. Berlin tended to focus attention on immediate issues: plans for the future seemed less germane when it seemed possible that, in the words of the COS, they would have to 'fight with what we've got.'⁷² The Brussels Treaty powers considered the draft treaty in a leisurely fashion, and only in December produced instructions and a revised draft for their ambassadors to put forward in Washington. In the United States, the general election meant no progress was possible until November. After President Harry Truman won his surprise re-election (and the Democrats regained control of the Senate), the State Department was eager to move forward, but it was only on 24 December that the working group reported an updated version of the treaty.

This slow – or non-existent - progress meant that the Scandinavian discussions continued without outside pressure to reach a speedy conclusion. Indeed, even when the State Department voiced a readiness to address the issue of Scandinavian membership, the British held them back, preferring to see whether the talks could indeed produce a compromise conclusion akin to the Hankey scenario. Scandinavian scholars have debated the degree to which Norwegian participation in these talks was whole-hearted, or whether they persisted simply to give the impression to their public opinion that they had tried, while behind the scenes Lange worked to ensure the talks failed. British policy is portrayed as allowing the talks to 'blow themselves out', in Nicholas Henderson's words, while ensuring

⁶⁸ Nicholas Henderson, *The Birth of NATO* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1982), 56-64.

⁶⁹ FO to Franks 13 Aug. 1948 FO371/73074/N6278; Hankey to Hollis 2 Sept. 1948 FO371/71458/N8874.

⁷⁰ COS(48)136th mtg 24 Sept., 137th mtg 25 Sept. 1948 DEFE4/16.

⁷¹ COS(48)106th mtg 28 July 1948 DEFE4/15.

⁷² COS(48)97th mtg 12 July 1948 DEFE4/14, and see also Defence Committee paper DO(48)55 19 Aug. 1948 CAB131/6.

the State Department did not impede this process by crudely applied pressure that might prove counter-productive by seeming to be outside interference.⁷³ A detailed look at the British record, however, shows that during this three month hiatus period, the British view of the place of Norway and Denmark in a North Atlantic pact was the subject of considerable internal debate. With their minds focused by the Berlin crisis and the inadequacy of Britain's armed forces if it came to war, the British military reiterated their support for a Scandinavian defence pact, and threw the FO's assumptions into doubt. As a consequence, they watched the Scandinavian talks with some hopes that a suitable solution might emerge close to the lines of Hankey's scenario, and did not simply await their collapse with equanimity.

On 8 September the COS considered a report *Short Term Strategic Aims in Europe at the Outbreak of War*, which recognised that the territorial integrity of Scandinavia was important to the air defence of Great Britain and to allied shipping, but concluded its defence was not as important as that of France and Benelux. The best that could be hoped for was that Scandinavia stay neutral and be prepared to defend itself if attacked.⁷⁴ On 10 September the vice-chiefs (VCOS) endorsed Hankey's plan, but emphasised that the COS would not contemplate giving any armed assistance to the Scandinavians. There was also some risk that Norway and Denmark would look to Britain for equipment they ought to get from Sweden.⁷⁵

Military misgivings about the possible undertakings that would have to be made to Norway and Denmark if they were in an Atlantic pact while Sweden was not, became more evident over the next four months. A War Office note on the working group's draft Atlantic Pact proposal reiterated that Britain should not be committed to war in defence of countries whose loss would not put it in mortal danger, nor disperse its forces to areas that were not vital. Scandinavia was not in that category, though Iceland was. Britain should proceed by bluffing and secret diplomacy, not public pacts. Norway and Denmark were unlikely in any event to join any pact that did not offer direct military assistance.⁷⁶

British policy-makers needed to resolve these conflicting aims and assumptions. Hankey summarised the dilemma: either Norway, abetted by Britain, bring Sweden to agree to a Scandinavian pact associated with the Atlantic pact, or Norway, in order to have any security, would require armed assistance from the west on a scale impossible to provide. 'There seems no doubt', he told Sargent, 'a Scandinavian Pact is a necessary adjunct to association of Norway and Denmark with the Atlantic Pact.'⁷⁷ Following a conference with the three British ambassadors on 22 October, Hankey despairingly noted that Britain could not avoid telling the Scandinavians what would be offered them if they joined the Atlantic pact – that is, giving the direct, frank answer to the question Lange posed on 8 March, which had consistently been avoided until then. But if this information did not make them feel secure, as it probably would not, they would remain neutral and appease the Soviets.⁷⁸

The JPS and COS remained sure that Scandinavia was indefensible without a regional defence pact, though also holding that Swedish self-confidence was misplaced and

⁷³ Henderson, *Birth of NATO*, 66-7; Salmon, 'Britain and Northern Europe', 202.

⁷⁴ COS(48)200(O) 8 Sept. 1948 DEFE 5/12.

⁷⁵ COS(48)126th mtg 10 Sept. 1948 DEFE4/16; Waterfield to Hankey 15 Sept. 1948 FO3671/71458/N10092.

⁷⁶ War Office note on DO(48)64 'Atlantic Pact' 28 Sept. 1948 DEFE11/19. The 'vital areas' included Eire, Spain and Portugal but not Italy or Norway. At COS(48)139th mtg 29 Sept. 1948, it was conceded that political reasons might make it necessary to include some countries to the east of this 'stop-line' DEFE4/16; Price to Alexander 4 Oct. 1948 DEFE11/19.

⁷⁷ Hankey minute 26 Oct., Hankey brief for Sargent discussion with Rasmussen 26 Oct. 1948 FO371/71454/N11376, N11516.

⁷⁸ Hankey to Waterfield 2 Nov., Hankey to Randall 22 Nov. 1948 FO371/71454/N11864, N12412.

that the pact would need some outside help.⁷⁹ They felt the Norwegians needed to be aware of the importance of defence cooperation with Sweden. Entry on their own into a North Atlantic pact would expose to them the inability of Britain to come directly to their aid in the event of war, and also reveal the main American interests in the region, which were their mid-Atlantic territories, over-fly rights to attack the USSR and denial of resources to the enemy. Alliance with Sweden would cover the issue of the defence of the mainland, thereby rendering these uncomfortable facts secondary, so that they would not impede the development of a Norwegian sense of security – and therefore firmness against internal subversion.

The COS continued to seek alternatives to Norway and Denmark being members of the Atlantic pact without Sweden. They asserted that a Scandinavian pact was of great strategic importance.⁸⁰ The JPS concluded that a communist-dominated Scandinavia would not place the British Commonwealth in mortal danger. But certain strategic facilities made the region important in a war with the USSR, and these at least would need to be denied to the enemy. However, viewed from a military point of view, the FO's gloomy view of the potential of a neutral Scandinavian pact was misplaced. The JPS argued that if the three countries followed a co-ordinated defence policy, they could be a valuable strategic asset, for it would give them the ability to defend themselves. By contrast, the security offered to them by a North Atlantic pact was principally its deterrent influence on the Soviets. The British military saw Norway and Denmark as such a liability that they were in favour of it even if Sweden insisted it was to be neutral and unconnected to the North Atlantic arrangement. As far as the COS were concerned, it was best 'to keep the cold war out of Scandinavia.'⁸¹

In response to this, Hankey argued that Scandinavian neutrality would not be respected by either side in a life-and-death struggle since it was on the bomber route to the USSR. The Soviets would only be deterred by strength.⁸² The COS stuck to their guns, however, noting on 3 January 1949 that it would not be wise to include Norway and Denmark in the North Atlantic pact without Sweden. Scandinavian defence should be treated as a whole. It is often claimed that the British fallback position should the Hankey plan fail was Norwegian and Danish membership of the Atlantic Pact, but as far as the COS were concerned the preferred alternative was a Scandinavian Defence Union.⁸³ They were probably strengthened in this view by the knowledge (from leaks) that the Swedish General Staff was opposed to its government's policy of neutrality.⁸⁴

Talks resume in Washington – and end in Scandinavia.

The Washington talks resumed in January 1949. Once again, the small working group functioned effectively and made good progress in gaining a consensus on the outstanding issues. However, the US secretary of state, Dean Acheson, found when he reviewed the state of negotiations, that much preparatory work needed to be done with congressmen. The consensus informally reached in the working group could not, therefore be regarded as settled at least until it was clear that it would be accepted in the Senate. In a sense,

⁷⁹ COS(48)128 19 Oct. 1948 quoting JP(48)31 DEFE5/8.

⁸⁰ COS(48)169th mtg 24 Nov. 1948 DEFE4/18. The VCOS complained about the high price some small countries put on their membership COS(48)167th mtg 23 Nov. 1948 DEFE4/18.

⁸¹ JP(48)119 'Allied Strategic Facilities in Scandinavia' 9 Dec., COS(48)181st mtg 17 Dec., COS(48)183rd mtg 20 Dec. 1948 DEFE4/18.

⁸² Hankey to Price 30 Dec. 1948 COS(48)232 DEFE5/9; COS(49)3rd mtg 7 Jan. 1949 DEFE4/19.

⁸³ COS(49)1st mtg 3 Jan. 1949 DEFE4/19, cf Petersen, 'Britain, Scandinavia', 259, Salmon, *Scandinavia*, 369.

⁸⁴ Salmon, 'Britain and Northern Europe', 206.

therefore, at the end of January 1949, when Acheson began concerted work on this, the negotiations became more fluid. At the same time, the inter-state negotiations moved up to the ambassadorial level where they tended to be more contentious. The states involved attempted, on what would be last opportunity, to press their particular concerns, such as the French determination to secure the inclusion of the Algerian *departments* in the area covered by the Treaty.⁸⁵ Despite the time it had taken since the process had begun in the wake of Lange's comments to Bay and Collier in March 1948, and the continuing crisis over Berlin, much still needed to be thrashed out and agreed by European governments and American senators, as opposed to their representatives in the supportive and congenial atmosphere of the working group. Fundamental questions, such as who should be members of the pact, and when and on what basis they should join, took another six weeks to resolve.⁸⁶ The British ambassador at Washington, Oliver Franks, who had a close working relationship with Acheson and was most sensitive to what senators would and would not accept, played a key role in mediating these issues, but back in Whitehall, while there was an acceptance of the need for pragmatic compromises, because of their enthusiasm for a North Atlantic pact, the continuing imperatives of their defence dilemma meant these were not just issues to be overlooked in the interest of concluding some form of pact. The same considerations as before continued to play a role in producing a continuing uncertainty regarding Scandinavian membership. Laurence Collier played a key role in determining the outcome of the internal British debate in favour of Norwegian membership.

The issue of Scandinavian participation came to a head when Sweden produced a definite proposal of a Scandinavian alliance at a meeting in Karlstad on 6 January, which Norway provisionally accepted.⁸⁷ Undén was convinced that Scandinavia could keep out of a European conflict if their bloc was both neutral and strong – though in fact the Soviets assumed any Scandinavian bloc would be pro-western.⁸⁸ He feared that Soviet action in Finland would be provoked were allied bases to be allowed on Scandinavian territory. He refused therefore to entertain a compromise by which a neutrality provision would only include the mainland, excluding the island territories, such as the Faeroes and Greenland. Although the Swedish General Staff themselves had misgivings, these attitudes had considerable support in Denmark. The Danes were conscious of their vulnerability, whether an attack was launched in Scandinavia or in Central Europe. Denmark and Sweden, Foreign Minister Gustav Rasmussen told Randall, were concerned that the west would do nothing if they were overrun, and that membership of the Atlantic pact would provoke the Soviets. A Swedish guarantee and supply of armaments was valued greatly.⁸⁹ In the FO it was commented that the Danes had 'wobbled off the fence on the Swedish side.'⁹⁰

Even after all these months, however, British policy in response was deeply ambiguous. Hankey complained to Gunnar Hägglöff, the new Swedish ambassador, that it was only the Swedes who thought that a Scandinavian bloc and association with the west were mutually exclusive – he was clearly still hopeful of a 'grading off eastwards' solution.⁹¹ If only the pact was itself not neutral, that would serve Britain's needs, Hankey

⁸⁵ Michael Hopkins, *Oliver Franks and the Truman Administration. Anglo-American Relations 1948-1952* (London: Frank Cass, 2003), 108-13; Cook, *Forging*, 208-19.

⁸⁶ See in particular French Ambassador Georges Bonnet's attempts to bargain Norwegian membership for Italian membership, 13 Washington meeting 25 February 1949 FO800/455.

⁸⁷ Einhorn, 'Reluctant Ally', 503-5.

⁸⁸ Sven G. Holtmark, 'Enemy Springboard or Benevolent Buffer? Soviet Attitudes to Nordic Cooperation, 1920-1955', *Forsvarsstudier*, vi (1992), 73-6.

⁸⁹ Randall to FO 11 Jan. and 13 Jan. 1949 FO371/77391/N391, N443.

⁹⁰ Bateman minute 13 Jan. 1949 FO371/77391/N546.

⁹¹ Hankey conversation with Hägglöff 12 Jan. 1949 FO371/77392/N545.

noted, as they did not need much from Norway and Denmark, and without Sweden they were a considerable liability. He therefore proposed a second plan, in which Norway and Denmark would not actually be in the North Atlantic pact, but would make arrangements with the US and Britain regarding the Faeroes and Greenland. In return for joint planning, all three states would receive supplies. The potential drawback was that under Swedish leadership they might be drawn into semi-isolation and drift into a 'passive and weak-kneed policy' towards the Soviet Union.⁹²

Collier's interpretation of the Karlstad meeting was that Denmark hoped for such an arrangement, and believed that Washington could be persuaded to alter the US policy to provide no arms to nations that did not have reciprocal arrangements with them. Norway went along with this to satisfy its own isolationists. Scandinavian public opinion, Collier reported, was impressed by the Swedish offer. This was all in line with Collier's oft-repeated warnings that Sweden would draw Norway away from the west if it could.⁹³ To Collier, as he had been arguing since December 1946, the central fact to build on was a Norwegian willingness to join the western powers: that, he said, was the only firm foundation. As before, Collier disregarded military misgivings that Norway on its own would be a liability. If Britain 'held on to the substance rather than the shadow' then the Danes might be drawn back away from the Swedes, and Sweden perhaps would come to realise the disadvantages of isolation. Hankey appreciated Collier's viewpoint but still preferred a system of interlocking arrangements, if possible, though he conceded that Iceland would follow Norway and Denmark and it was very important to have Iceland in the Atlantic pact.⁹⁴

Hankey therefore outlined his plan once again, revised a little to embrace the new realities in Scandinavia. If adopted, it would have set a sturdy precedent for the relationship of NATO to the states on its periphery, and created a zone of gradation between the eastern and western blocs. On 17 January, he recommended that Norway and Denmark indeed be included in the Atlantic Pact, with the proposed Swedish guarantee to them only becoming operative if they themselves were attacked. He saw two possible alternatives to this. One was that Norway and Denmark should be in the Atlantic pact, with no connection to a neutralist Sweden. Second, there was the option that emerged from Karlstad: a Scandinavian pact, with Norway and Denmark unable to join the Atlantic pact, but making certain arrangements with Britain and the US.⁹⁵ Gladwyn Jebb, one of the keenest of the FO officials for an Atlantic pact, agreed that it would be rash to ignore Sweden, for it was not possible to give Norway and Denmark what they needed to secure their own defence. He recommended the Karlstad option. Sargent, who had said little in this debate, although he was the senior official in the FO, now intervened and ruled that this option was not to be pursued. He preferred Norway and Denmark's membership in the Atlantic pact, with Sweden isolated.⁹⁶ However, Foreign Office minister Hector McNeil was briefed that the aim was to get Norwegian and Danish membership of the Atlantic pact by inducing the Swedes to drop the requirement that they would have to be neutral in order to be in a Scandinavian pact, so the link with Sweden was still a goal, and seemed a possibility, given the views of the Swedish General Staff. Bevin, however, ruled that this all needed careful

⁹² Hankey minute 13 Jan. 1949 FO371/77391/N390.

⁹³ Collier to FO 14 Jan. 1949 FO371/77391/N459.

⁹⁴ Collier to FO 17 Jan., Hankey minute 20 Jan. 1949 FO371/77392/N551.

⁹⁵ Hankey minute 17 Jan. 1949 FO371/77392/N687.

⁹⁶ Jebb minute 17 Jan., Hankey note 19 Jan. 1949 FO371/77394/N1278.

consideration before taking it any further, with the practicalities of arms supplies much in his mind.⁹⁷

While the diplomatists dithered, the COS held to their line. They continued to favour a separate neutral bloc if it was not possible to include all three in the Atlantic pact. Their previous endorsement of the Hankey plan was, they said, given on the assumption that it would be possible to associate Sweden with the Atlantic pact. For them, the primary aim was that all three should stand together, so Collier's enthusiasm for separating Norway from Sweden was entirely misplaced. If they acted together, they would form 'quite a formidable military combination.' Underlying these assertions, however, was the view of the COS that these three countries, while important, were not *absolutely vital* to Britain's survival, and that therefore any commitment which would involve the use of already inadequate British resources could not be justified on military grounds. They did add that it would be 'embarrassing' if the neutral bloc extended to cover the Faeroes and Iceland.⁹⁸

British ambiguity was on the verge of being resolved in favour of this weighty and decisive pronouncement. Hankey drafted instructions to Franks, saying that Norway and Denmark without Sweden would be a strategic liability: the forces required to defend them, without help from Sweden, would not be available for many years. Rather than try to draw Norway and Denmark into the Atlantic pact, driving Sweden into isolation, Britain should build on the Karlstad proposal, focusing on trying to move Sweden from its insistence that Norway and Denmark cut themselves off from the west.⁹⁹

Collier intervenes again

Collier, however, was as firm in his views as the COS. Before the message to Franks could be sent, he weighed in again. Collier was determined to achieve Norwegian membership of the western alliance, and not only was he prepared to accept Norwegian separation from Sweden, he positively welcomed it. He condemned the Hankey plan, claiming (correctly) that Norwegian opinion would not accept any Scandinavian pact that involved Norway in obligations not shared by Sweden, for under the plan Norway would have to help the western powers, while Sweden would not. Collier felt that Hauge suspected the plan was a result of British belief that Norway was a liability. If Norway stayed out, Collier warned, it would fall into the Swedish orbit, Lange might have to resign, and 'our name would be mud.'¹⁰⁰

Collier's trump card was his claim that the Norwegians were determined to enter the Atlantic pact without an arrangement with Sweden. Weight of opinion shifted from the COS view to that of Collier. The instructions to Franks were dropped and instead Hankey was told to draft a Cabinet paper, favouring the entry of Norway and Denmark into the Atlantic pact over Scandinavian neutrality. Swedish 'obstinacy' was blamed for the imminent breakdown of the Scandinavian defence talks. Collier argued that a Norwegian decision in favour of the Atlantic pact would be confused by further mention of interlocking pacts, so it was decided not to approach them at all with regard to the need for help from Sweden. Hankey returned to the argument that Sweden might lead them into appeasement, and, rather illogically, speculated that Sweden might feel isolated when Norway and Denmark

⁹⁷ Brief for McNeil 19 Jan. 1949, Bevin note FO371/77392/N687.

⁹⁸ COS(49)10th mtg 19 Jan. 1949 DEFE4/19.

⁹⁹ Draft telegram to Franks 21 Jan., Bevin and Alexander comments 22 Jan. 1949 FO371/77400/N1280.

¹⁰⁰ Collier to Hankey 21 Jan., Hankey minute 22 Jan. 1949 FO371/77392/N684. Hankey asked Collier to refrain from calling it the 'Hankey plan'; clearly this caused him embarrassment with his superiors.

joined the Atlantic pact, and seek to make defence arrangements anyway.¹⁰¹ British reservations remained, however, for Hankey's immediate superior, Charles Bateman, amended the paper to indicate that it was hoped Norway and Denmark would come in when the 'opportunity arrives,' since it was clear that if an approach was made to them now, they would immediately ask for a statement of what would be given to them, and a reply would be extremely disappointing. British policy was still performing a frenzied dance around this issue.¹⁰²

British policy was not yet settled, however. On 27 January all three service chiefs reaffirmed strongly that they favoured Scandinavian neutrality. The only condition was that Iceland would not be included.¹⁰³ They averred that if the Scandinavians united to deny the region to an enemy, they stood a reasonable chance of success, given help in peacetime and provided the Soviets were also fighting on the Rhine. It was conceded that even with a neutral Scandinavian pact, Britain and the US would have to provide supplies, and would want to use Greenland and the Faeroes, which would give the Soviets a *casus belli* against the Scandinavians. However, in purely military terms, the judgement of the JPS, endorsed by the COS, was that a neutral pact was preferable to having Norway and Denmark in the Atlantic arrangement, unconnected to Sweden: the latter would mean that Britain would have to give them arms 'at the expense of our main strategic aims' – and in any case, successful Scandinavian defence, as earlier studies had established, depended on all three states cooperating. They disliked the option of bringing Norway and Denmark into the Atlantic pact as a first step, in the hopes that Sweden would feel isolated and follow.¹⁰⁴

Response to further Soviet intervention

It was ostensibly an ill-judged Soviet action that moved this issue to resolution. On 29 January the USSR sent a note to the Norwegian government, pressuring it not to join an Atlantic pact. Far from deterring the Norwegians, this enabled Lange to seize the initiative in a manner reminiscent of March 1948.¹⁰⁵ He indicated that an invitation to the Washington talks would be well-received. However, this was actually as much a consequence of the final breakdown of the Scandinavian talks as it was of Soviet pressure – two abortive meetings in Copenhagen (22-24 January) and Oslo (29-30 January) failed to remove Norwegian misgivings that the link to the west allowed in the Karlstad formula was too narrow. It offered no certainty that the west would help Scandinavian defence, and the Swedish assumption (and Danish hope) that US arms supplies would still be available to a neutral bloc went against what Lange believed was American policy. Lange had already indicated to the Norwegian public on 27 January that the North Atlantic pact option was being considered: that is, before the issue of the Soviet note.¹⁰⁶ Lange then made a high-profile visit to Washington: though while there all he did was ask Acheson whether the Americans preferred Norway in an Atlantic or in a Scandinavian arrangement – and if the latter, what the position would be regarding the supply of munitions. All this achieved was to reopen the issue, as Acheson then sought the views of the other negotiating powers.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰¹ Hankey brief for Bevin 24 Jan. 1949 FO371/77393/N1150; draft Cabinet paper 'Scandinavia and the Atlantic Pact' 26 Jan. 1949 FO371/77394/N1151.

¹⁰² Bateman minute 26 Jan. 1949 FO371/77394/N1151.

¹⁰³ COS(49)13th mtg 7 Jan. 1949 DEFE4/19.

¹⁰⁴ COS(49)40 'Scandinavian Defence and the Atlantic Pact' 28 Jan. 1949 DEFE5/13.

¹⁰⁵ Kaplan, *NATO 1948*, 207-9; FO to Franks 31 Jan. 1949 DEFE11/19.

¹⁰⁶ Petersen, 'Alliance Policies', 206-7; Riste, *Norway's Foreign Relations*, 202.

¹⁰⁷ Franks to FO 8 Feb. 1949 FO371/77394/N1308. Lange raised the possibility, even after the defence talks had stalled, of a Scandinavian pact that did not preclude agreements with the Atlantic powers over the overseas dependent territories, and this attracted much interest in the ambassadors group when Acheson raised

The FO did not believe the Soviets would follow their note with hostilities, but concluded that Denmark and Norway would be less vulnerable to such pressure if they joined the talks. Franks therefore supported their membership of the pact in the ambassadorial meeting on 8 February.¹⁰⁸ Characteristically, a further reaction to the Soviet note was concern that Norway should keep an eye on its own communists.¹⁰⁹ The COS acknowledged that the Soviet pressure changed matters: they were prepared to accept that the Scandinavian question was now ‘part of the cold war.’ Tedder reiterated, even at this juncture, their preference for a neutral Scandinavian pact, but he conceded that the military balance between the options was narrow and political considerations might now tip the balance the other way.¹¹⁰

However, the issue of whether Norway should be included in the talks and whether it and other prospective members from outside Western Union should be founder-members remained contentious issues in the final stage of the negotiation of the North Atlantic Treaty in Washington in February and March 1949. British attitudes performed another flip. On 14 February, when Lange passed through London on his way home from Washington, Bevin tried earnestly to persuade him not to press for immediate participation in the talks or indeed membership of the pact.¹¹¹ Apart from the long-standing obsession that British plans not to fight in Norway must not be known to the Norwegians, the fear now was that the small powers would raise issues that would delay matters, thereby exercising influence out of proportion to their strength and status. The role the British had in mind for them was as shelterers under the Anglo-American security umbrella, which they should accept in whatever terms were offered. This is evident explicitly with reference to Italy, when the British a number of times expressed the view that the Italians would ‘bedevil the discussions’ by raising unwelcome issues and setting conditions for their membership.¹¹² They were less negative about the Norwegians, but the underlying concern was the same. Moreover, having the smaller powers accede after the treaty was signed would mean that the initial defence discussions under the treaty would take place without them. This would meet a crucial British requirement: to avoid the pact drawing Britain into extra defence commitments. It would also keep the nature of the short-term strategy devised in the context of the Berlin crisis from the smaller powers – that is, that some of them would be sacrificed in strategic retreats.¹¹³

Lange was not prepared to go along with this British proposal, and may well have been encouraged by Collier, who, blithely regardless of fluctuating views in Whitehall, continued to press for Norway’s early inclusion in the talks themselves.¹¹⁴ A direct request by the Norwegian ambassador at Washington, Wilhelm Morgenstjerne, to join the discussions, despite Bevin’s proposal to Lange, made it impossible to refuse. On 25 February, Acheson proposed to the ambassadors that Norway be invited, in response to

it, prompting enquiries back to the Permanent Commission of the Brussels Treaty, 12th Washington meeting 8 February 1949 FO800/455.

¹⁰⁸ FO to Franks 1 Feb. 1949 FO371/77397/N1015; Brief for Bevin 3 Feb. 1949 FO371/77394/N1472; 12th Washington meeting 8 February 1949 FO800/455.

¹⁰⁹ Bateman minute 31 Jan. 1949 FO371/77397/N1083.

¹¹⁰ JP(49)14 *Norway and the North Atlantic Pact*, COS(49)21st mtg 9 Feb. 1949 DEFE4/19.

¹¹¹ Bevin and Jebb conversation with Lange 14 Feb. 1949 FO371/77398/N1656.

¹¹² Martin H. Folly, ‘Britain and the Issue of Italian membership of NATO, 1948-49’, *Review of International Studies*, xiii (1987), 188-90.

¹¹³ FO to Franks 5 March 1949 FO371/79230/Z1959; COS(49)38th mtg 7 March 1949 DEFE4/20.

¹¹⁴ Collier to FO 25 Feb. 1949 FO371/77399/N1930; Lange returned from Washington convinced that a Scandinavian pact separate from a western group could not count on political or military support, Riste, ‘Was 1949 a Turning Point?’, 133.

Morgenstjerne's application. The FO changed its mind and agreed that a Norwegian representative should join the final talks, though pressing that he not be allowed to raise any new points that might delay matters.¹¹⁵

France did not feel the same obligation to consider Norwegian sensitivities, and was concerned to maintain its own centrality in the geographic coverage of the pact.¹¹⁶ After a disputatious ambassadors meeting on 1 March in Washington accepted that Norway should join the talks, on 3 March the Permanent Commission of the Brussels Pact, prompted by France, said it preferred Norway should sign the treaty later, alongside other small powers, so that they could have no influence on the text.¹¹⁷ The FO reversed itself again and supported this, and Jebb explicitly acknowledged to Norwegian Ambassador Per Preben Prebensen on 4 March that this was to avoid small powers raising questions that would delay proceedings – that is, trying to have any input into the treaty they were going to be asked to sign.¹¹⁸

Congressional sensitivities took precedence, however, and it was finally decided that all proposed members be invited to sign at the same time as the principals, although only Norway would have attended any of the talks. Bevin remarked to the Cabinet that Sweden might well have been drawn in as well, if proceedings could have been 'more leisurely', but he still preferred to put no pressure on Sweden to alter its stance, which had defaulted back to isolation.¹¹⁹ The COS the day before had reiterated their preference for the Scandinavian defence bloc that Sweden had failed to achieve – illustrating once more that the impetus for the North Atlantic pact was political, not military.¹²⁰

Conclusion

It is evident that the formation of British policy was a matter of considerable debate, and that British concepts of western defence were a complex matter, shaped by Britain's global defence dilemmas. By analysing British policy on the issue of Scandinavia during the genesis of the North Atlantic Treaty, this paper sheds fresh light on what has been described as 'the diplomacy of pragmatism' conducted by Bevin and other British policy-makers as they worked to create a workable post-war alliance to serve a multiplicity of British interests. While Britain was a major driving force behind the formulation of the treaty, it was not on the basis of a single vision of what was wanted or consensus on a 'middle way': there was much internal debate and inconsistency as political considerations came into conflict with military imperatives. British stances regarding a range of significant issues cannot be understood if British policy is simply presented as a unitary whole. Bureaucratic compromises between officials and planners made British input into the negotiations that shaped the North Atlantic treaty more inconsistent and contradictory than is usually acknowledged. Moreover, British pragmatism at times defaulted into indecision, leaving it prone to hijacking by a person of unambiguous views, such as Laurence Collier in Oslo.

It would be wrong to assume, therefore, that British policy can be explained by a simple formula. Rather than energetically and single-mindedly seeking a North Atlantic pact that included Norway and Denmark – indeed was conceived in order to include them –

¹¹⁵ Etherington-Smith minute 28 Feb. 1949 FO371/77399/N1930; 13th Washington meeting 25 Feb. 1949 FO800/455; Jebb conversation with Italian ambassador 28 Feb. 1949 FO371/79229/Z1851.

¹¹⁶ Franks to FO 25 Feb. 1949 FO371/77399/N1931.

¹¹⁷ 14th Washington meeting 1 March 1949 FO800/455; FO to Franks 3 March 1949 FO371/79230/Z1960.

¹¹⁸ Jebb conversation with Prebensen 4 March, FO to Collier 4 March 1949 FO371/77399/N2232, N2182.

¹¹⁹ Cabinet meeting CM(49)19th 8 March 1949 CAB125/15; Etherington-Smith note 8 March 1949 FO371/77399/N1985.

¹²⁰ COS(49)38th mtg 7 March 1949 DEFE4/20.

and draw the Cold War demarcation line between east and west through the middle of the Scandinavian peninsula, multiple British policy imperatives drew them to prefer a graded system, in which Norway and Denmark were linked to the western system, but were actually defended by arrangements with Sweden that would leave them half in and half out of the western bloc. A Soviet attack on the region was not believed to be likely: the threat, especially after the events in Czechoslovakia, was seen more to be Soviet subversion using domestic communists. Such a half-and-half arrangement would, it was hoped give the Scandinavians a better sense of security, and ability therefore to counter such a threat, than exposure to the fact that the British did not, contrary to what most assumed, see the region as so vital that it had to commit forces to its defence. Although the idea of graded membership lost favour during the Washington discussions, analysing the Scandinavian issue shows that the British continued to be attached to the concept up to the end of February 1949, and indeed, the acceptance of Norwegian reservations about the placing of NATO bases in Norway, meant that a degree of limited membership was actually established – though it went nowhere near as far as the British had thought might be preferable, if the consequence was a definite Swedish connection to the Scandinavian members of NATO.¹²¹ Although Britain strongly desired the alliance for long-term purposes, they tried where possible to shape it to meet their short-term needs. They could not achieve this aim in this instance, because it simply did not fit the realities of the situation, in terms of US congressional opinion, Swedish attitudes, relations between the Nordic states, and Soviet policies. The result was that NATO, while it achieved the prime goal of US involvement in the defence of Western Europe left other aspects of Britain's defence dilemma unresolved.

¹²¹ Aunesluoma, 'Staunchest Friends', 68. Bevin had misgivings about the consequences of the North Atlantic pact butting right up against the Soviet bloc, minuting in February 1949, 'It is clear now, I think, that we shall get a reaction by Russia if there is any Pact with a country which touches their frontier'. This was the case, of course, for Norway, which had a common frontier with the USSR itself, Bevin minute Feb 1949 (undated) FO371/77403/N1387.