

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

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

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The Historical Record

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Ironically, events subsequent to Britain's withdrawal from Norway threw the two countries together more closely than before.¹³⁾ The king, government, remnants of the armed forces, merchant marine and national bank of Norway took refuge in the United Kingdom for the rest of the war and played an active part in the fight against Nazi Germany. While these national forces had as their main aim the liberation of Norway, they realised that they had to subsume themselves on most matters to the allied prosecution of the war, even when that caused them difficulties on the home front.¹⁴⁾ Norwegian service units in the United Kingdom came under British operational control and an agreement bet-

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

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

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

8) Take note on alliance
13) Olaf Riste, Londonforsing pp 227-8
15) ————— " 402-5