



# SAYING NO TO NUKES

Scandinavian Security Choices in an Age of Proliferation, 1945–1968

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Cover photo: Swedish Prime Minister, Tage Erlander (left), together with Norwegian Prime Minister, Einar Gerhardsen, in Oslo, 1960 (Photo: Finstad / Fjørtoft / Aftenposten / NTB scanpix).

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## Introduction

This paper tells the story of how Norway and Sweden, two relatively similar countries situated in the north of Europe, arrived at the conclusion that they should not develop or host nuclear weapons. The debates over nuclear weapons policy in these two countries in the first two decades after the Second World War were at times intense, and at one point it even led to the resignation of almost the entire Norwegian cabinet. In Sweden, where the government opted not to join NATO and thus did not come under the nuclear umbrella, the debate evolved on slightly different terms than in the neighbouring country to the west. In Norway, the biggest debate was over the stationing of NATO nuclear weapons, while in Sweden, the main debate revolved around the question of whether or not to actually develop their own nuclear weapons.

The two countries are similar in terms of culture, governance, location, size, and wealth. Both states also had the intellectual and material capacity to develop nuclear weapons, and while both chose to refrain from both developing their own nuclear weapons and hosting them, they chose two slightly different approaches to defending their national territory: While Norway opted for a nuclear umbrella, Sweden chose a non-nuclear security strategy.

## Norway: Nuclear Umbrella and Self-Imposed Restraints

In one sense, Norway has never excluded nuclear weapons as part of its security policy: When Norway joined the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 1949 the country also joined a nuclear umbrella.<sup>1</sup> Yet unlike some allies, Norway refrained both from developing its own nuclear weapons (as the UK and France did), and from stockpiling US nuclear weapons on its soil

(as was accepted to by West Germany, Italy, Canada, Netherlands, Belgium, Turkey, and Greece).

During the Second World War, Norway had deepened its historically close relationship with Great Britain, and developed closer ties to the United States. When NATO was created in 1949, then, Norway's geostrategic positioning in the North Atlantic made membership seem both natural and viable. In Norway, the Labour Party came to power in 1935, and with the exception of the war years (1940–45) and one month in 1963, the party held power continuously until 1965.

Norway joined NATO at its establishment, but has consistently limited its involvement in the Organization's affairs. The so-called 'self-imposed restraints' were above all motivated by Norway's geographical proximity to the Soviet Union and by appeasing the NATO-sceptical political Left.<sup>2</sup> The most important of these restraints, adopted already in 1949, was the 'no foreign bases policy', essentially a promise that as long as the country was not attacked or under the threat of being so, Norway would not host foreign powers' military bases. The Soviet Union had a strong stake in this policy, which it often relayed to the Norwegian authorities.<sup>3</sup>

Concerns about the nuclear potency of the Soviet Union increased considerably with the Soviets' launching of the 'Sputnik' satellite in October 1957. The satellite became the symbol of Soviet superiority in the field of long-range (intercontinental) missile technology, and demonstrated that Soviet missiles fired from their own territory could reach the American homeland.<sup>4</sup> This development was a major reason behind the introduction of tactical nuclear weapons in several European NATO states. The proposal to create a US/NATO stockpile in Europe was also seen as a way of curbing the European states' desire to acquire their own nuclear weapons. The offer of

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1 NATO's first strategic concept, 'DC 6/1' from the autumn of 1949, established that the American nuclear umbrella formally protected Norway. See K. Skogrand and R. Tamnes (2001) *Fryktens likevekt: Atombomben, Norge og verden 1945–1970*, Oslo, pp. 101–2.

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2 Norway's NATO-membership – not least its nuclear policy – can be described as a balance between what the historian Rolf Tamnes has called *integration* and *screening*, i.e. modifying its level of integration according to national interests.

3 K.E. Eriksen and H.Ø. Pharo (1997) *Kald krig og internasjonalisering 1949–1965*, in T.B. Jensen et al. (ed.), *Norsk utenrikspolitikk historie*, ed. 5, Oslo, Universitetsforlaget, p. 95.

4 A. Wenger (1997) *Living with Peril – Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Nuclear Weapons*, Boston, Rowman & Littlefield, p. 154.

hosting nuclear weapons was made to Norway too.<sup>5</sup>

The question got a political answer. The Labour Party's Yearly Conference of 1957 adopted a proposal from the floor that nuclear weapons should not be introduced in Norway.<sup>6</sup> This was in line with the 'no foreign bases' policy, but contrary to what Foreign Minister Halvard Lange and Labour Party Secretary Haakon Lie wanted. They were both active proponents of NATO, and professed a hard line against the Soviet Union and communism in all its forms. According to Lie, it was an abomination that Norway would forsake 'modern weapons'.<sup>7</sup>

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Labour Party Prime Minister Einar Gerhardsen is reported to have surprised his peers by declaring that Norway would not introduce, store or build bases for nuclear weapons on Norwegian soil in peacetime.

The news from Labour's Party Conference had apparently failed to spread to Norway's allies, so at the NATO summit the same year, Labour Party Prime Minister Einar Gerhardsen is reported to have surprised his peers by declaring that Norway would not introduce, store or build bases for nuclear weapons on Norwegian soil in peacetime. Fearing the destabilizing effect of

proliferation, Gerhardsen went on to urge the Alliance to postpone the decision on introducing nuclear warheads in other European countries as well.<sup>8</sup> In fact, Gerhardsen surprised the Party Office and Ministry of Foreign Affairs too. The statement they had written for him had been much more cautious.<sup>9</sup>

Half a year later, a local branch of the Labour Party's youth organization carried out a well-orchestrated stunt. During the Easter holiday, they collected thousands of signatures against the deployment of nuclear weapons in West Germany. Among the signatories were a majority of Labour Party's parliamentarians, who due to the holiday had been unable to contact the Party Office for advice on the matter. Party Secretary Haakon Lie was furious. The local branch of the youth organization was closed down, a group of people associated with Labour's left wing were thrown out of the party, and all but one of the MPs withdrew their signatures. Nevertheless, the stunt exposed considerable opposition to nuclear weapons among the senior members of the ruling party, bolstering the position of the Prime Minister, who is believed to have secretly supported the stunt.<sup>10</sup>

In April 1961, a majority of the Norwegian Parliament supported the government's decision that nuclear weapons should not be stockpiled on Norwegian territory in peacetime. Nuclear weapons could only be hosted in times of crisis, and it should be up to Parliament to decide what that might constitute.<sup>11</sup> But Norway did not use its veto in NATO against the deployment of nuclear weapons in West Germany. Partly as a result of this, a faction of the Labour Party broke

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5 J. Melissen (1994) 'Nuclearizing NATO, 1957–1959: The "Anglo Saxons", Nuclear Sharing and the Fourth Country Problem', *Review of International Studies* 20 (3), pp. 256–7.

6 O. Riste (2001) *Norway's foreign relations – A history*, Oslo, Universitetsforlaget, p. 215. In fact, the proposal from the floor was made on two occasions. On the first occasion, the proposal was largely ignored. When restated near the close of the following day, however, the proposal was adopted without anyone opposing. Both Lie and Lange refrained from speaking out in solidarity with Prime Minister Gerhardsen – who remained silent. See F. Olstad (1999) *Einar Gerhardsen – en politisk biografi*, Oslo, Universitetsforlaget.

7 F. Olstad (1999) *Einar Gerhardsen – en politisk biografi*, Oslo, Universitetsforlaget, p. 355.

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8 O. Riste (2001) *Norway's foreign relations – A history*, Oslo, Universitetsforlaget, p. 215. The prospect of nuclear weapons being introduced in West Germany was particularly troubling to Gerhardsen. See F. Olstad (1999) *Einar Gerhardsen – en politisk biografi*, Oslo, Universitetsforlaget.

9 H.O. Lahlum (2010) *Haakon Lie – Historien, mytene og mennesket*, Oslo, Cappelen Damm, p. 368.

10 F. Olstad (1999) *Einar Gerhardsen – en politisk biografi*, Oslo, Universitetsforlaget, p. 362.

11 K. Skogrand and R. Tamnes (2001) *Fryktens likevekt: Atombomben, Norge og verden 1945–1970*, Oslo, pp. 149–50.

out to establish the Socialist People's Party. Nevertheless, the Labour Party remained in power.

Norwegian efforts for international arms control and disarmament, in particular to curb nuclear weapons testing, was at its height from the mid 1950s until around 1965. Norway was heavily exposed to radioactive fallout from nuclear weapon tests in the atmosphere.<sup>12</sup> The Soviet tests near Northern Norway were particularly worrying to the Norwegian authorities, but tests performed by the United States and Great Britain were also a concern.<sup>13</sup>

Norway participated actively in discussions on nuclear-weapon-free zones in Europe. From 1957 to 1965, Norway was especially involved in two Polish suggestions: the 'Rapacki' and 'Gomulka' plans. The essence of these plans was to remove or freeze all nuclear weapons in East and West Germany, Czechoslovakia, and Poland. The Norwegian government went further than any other country in the Western Bloc in discussions of the Polish plans (although ending up not accepting them).<sup>14</sup>

The Norwegian authorities also supported the Undén Plan, proposed by the Swedish Foreign Minister Östen Undén in October 1961. The core of this plan – a precursor to the Non-Proliferation Treaty Adopted in 1968 – was that all non-nuclear weapon states should declare that they would not develop, receive or use nuclear weapons.<sup>15</sup> The plan was adopted in the United Nations General Assembly, but was never implemented.

The security situation *vis-à-vis* the Soviet Union provided the main argument both for and

against developing or hosting nuclear weapons in Norway. On the one hand, Norwegian nuclear weapons might deter the Soviet Union from violating Norwegian political sovereignty and territorial integrity. On the other hand, proliferation might destabilize the Nordic region and provoke the Soviet Union into doing something rash.

The fear of the Soviet Union was grounded both in the objective economic and military asymmetry of the two neighbours, and in the old Scandinavian 'Russo-phobia', dating back to the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This phobia was fuelled significantly in 1946, when the Soviet Minister of Foreign affairs Vyacheslav Molotov repeatedly called for a revision of the Treaty of Svalbard, which had codified Norway's sovereignty over a group of islands in the North Atlantic since 1920.<sup>16</sup> A version of the same claim had also been made two years before, when the Red Army was still stationed in Norway's northernmost province after having liberated it from German occupation. The Norwegian authorities could breathe a sigh of relief when the Soviets gave up their demands as more pressing matters developed internationally near the end of the 1940s. Nevertheless, the Soviet Union was clearly seen as a threat to Norwegian security for the whole of the Cold War.

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While Party Secretary Lie and Foreign Minister Lange saw the Soviet danger as an argument for acquiring nuclear weapons, Prime Minister Gerhardsen interpreted the issue the other way around: The somewhat aggressive stance of the Soviets during the Svalbard issue was seen to advise *against* a nuclear security solution going beyond the accession to NATO's nuclear umbrella. It was reasoned that the Soviet Union could

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12 O. Njølstad (1996) *Under en radioaktiv himmel – Norge og atomprøvesprengningene, 1955–63*, Oslo, Forsvarsstudier 3/1996, p. 164.

13 O. Njølstad (1996) *Under en radioaktiv himmel – Norge og atomprøvesprengningene, 1955–63*, Oslo, Forsvarsstudier 3/1996, p. 165.

14 K.E. Eriksen and H.Ø. Pharo (1997) *Kald krig og internasjonalisering 1949- 1965*, in T.B. Jensen et al. (ed.), *Norsk utenrikspolitikk historie*, ed. 5, Oslo, Universitetsforlaget, pp. 246–8; F.G. Lie (2014) *En håndrekning til øst – Norske myndigheters holdninger til og reaksjoner på Rapacki- og Gomulka-planen, 1957–1965*. Master's thesis in history, University of Oslo, pp. 54–6.

15 K. Skogrand and R. Tamnes (2001) *Fryktens likevekt: Atombomben, Norge og verden 1945–1970*, Oslo, p. 164–5.

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16 O. Riste (2001) *Norway's foreign relations – A history*, Oslo, Universitetsforlaget, pp. 186–7.

easily interpret an independent Norwegian nuclear deterrent as a provocation, turning Norway into a target of Soviet aggression.

At a NATO summit meeting in April 1960, State Secretary in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Hans Engen, listed three reasons justifying Norway's decision not to host US nuclear weapons:<sup>17</sup> First, the most important consideration for the Norwegian government had been the so-called Nordic balance.<sup>18</sup> In a Nordic perspective, a Norwegian provocation could reasonably lead to the Soviets tightening the screws around Finland. Elsewhere in the region, the Swedish leadership had urged Norway to stay nuclear free,<sup>19</sup> and the Danes had declined hosting nuclear weapons along with Norway at the Paris NATO summit in 1957. A main reason for Norway's decision to refuse stationing nuclear weapons on its soil, then, was a form of Nordic solidarity.

Second, Norway was the only NATO member state sharing a border with the Soviet Union, implying that Norway had to be particularly careful.<sup>20</sup> As the Svalbard issue had exemplified, the Soviet Union was thought to constitute a clear threat to Norwegian territorial integrity. The Historians Rolf Tamnes and Kjetil Skogrand write that the 'no foreign bases Policy' was a part of 'a unilateral Declaration of Non-Agression on the part of the Norwegian government vis-à-vis

the Soviet government,' and lay Prime Minister Gerhardsen close to heart.<sup>21</sup>

Third, the Norwegian policy makers had to take note of the Norwegian public opinion, which was opposed to hosting allied nuclear weapons. The resistance from the public opinion increased and became more organized in the start of the 1960s.<sup>22</sup>

There was considerable disagreement on the nuclear-weapons issue within the governing Labour Party and the cabinet. Representing a party founded on the ambition of supporting the views of ordinary Norwegian workers, most Labour politicians were opposed to nuclear weapons. However, influential figures in the Labour Party were supportive of the idea of at least holding the door to developing or hosting nuclear weapons open. While Prime Minister Einar Gerhardsen (in office 1945–51, 1955–63, and 1963–65)<sup>23</sup> was opposed to the idea, Foreign Minister Halvard Lange (in office from 1946 to 1965) and Labour's powerful Party Secretary Haakon Lie (in office from 1945 to 1969) were, in line with their general support for American initiatives and leadership, supportive of the idea.<sup>24</sup>

Gerhardsen, however, appears to have seen the US offer (or request) to station nuclear weapons in Norway not only as a bad idea, but almost as an inappropriate interference in Norwegian affairs. After the U2 incident in 1960, when a Norway-bound US spy plane – utterly unknown to the Norwegian authorities – was shot down over the Soviet Union, Gerhardsen supposedly raged that

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17 K. Skogrand and R. Tamnes (2001) *Fryktens likevekt: Atombomben, Norge og verden 1945–1970*, Oslo, p. 140.

18 K. Skogrand and R. Tamnes (2001) *Fryktens likevekt: Atombomben, Norge og verden 1945–1970*, Oslo, p. 141.

19 K. Skogrand and R. Tamnes (2001) *Fryktens likevekt: Atombomben, Norge og verden 1945–1970*, Oslo, p. 141. The authorities of Sweden repeated these demands later; see K.E. Eriksen and H.Ø. Pharo (1997) *Kald krig og internasjonalisering 1949–1965*, in T.B. Jensen et al. (ed.), *Norsk utenrikspolitikk historie*, ed. 5, Oslo, Universitetsforlaget, p. 276. The Nordic leaders recognized that the security of the region required cooperation and a common understanding.

20 Engen forgot about Turkey and the United States (although that doesn't necessarily take the sting out of the argument).

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21 K. Skogrand and R. Tamnes (2001) *Fryktens likevekt: Atombomben, Norge og verden 1945–1970*, Oslo, p. 141.

22 K. Skogrand and R. Tamnes (2001) *Fryktens likevekt: Atombomben, Norge og verden 1945–1970*, Oslo, p. 134. The most famous faction of the Norwegian opposition to nuclear weapons was a group called 'The 13'. The 13 included well-known people from the cultural, academic, and clerical elite of Norway.

23 In the period between 1951 and 1955, Gerhardsen was relieved as Prime Minister by his Labour Party Colleague Oscar Torp. Between 1945 and 1965, the Norwegian Labour Party was in power for all but one month in 1963.

24 F. Olstad (1999) *Einar Gerhardsen – en politisk biografi*, Oslo, Universitetsforlaget, pp. 355–60.

Norway was being 'treated as vassals'.<sup>25</sup> Upon receiving the news of Prime Minister Gerhardsen's speech in Paris - where the Prime Minister had clearly gone way beyond what was cleared with the Party and the cabinet, Party Secretary Lie, on his side, was allegedly 'so angry that the walls almost fell down'.<sup>26</sup> To him and Foreign Minister Lange, any opposition to the US and NATO implied fawning over the Soviet Union. The supporters, however, were even more insisting, as the Easter Uprising of 1958 proved.

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the Norwegian Labour Party Prime Minister Einar Gerhardsen knew that his party could potentially break apart if the government went for a more liberal nuclear line.

As his Swedish counterpart, the Norwegian Labour Party Prime Minister Einar Gerhardsen knew that his party could potentially break apart if the government went for a more liberal nuclear line. Indeed, a faction of the Party did in fact break out over the issue of deployment of nuclear weapons to West Germany in 1960. The loss for the Labour Party was not fatal, but another blow could well be. Hosting allied nuclear warheads could even turn strong political forces and the nuclear-sceptic Norwegian public against the membership in NATO more generally.<sup>27</sup> Important voices had preferred a Nordic solution instead of NATO when Norway became a member of the alliance in the spring of 1949.<sup>28</sup>

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25 K.E. Eriksen and H.Ø. Pharo (1997) *Kald krig og internasjonalisering 1949- 1965*, in T.B. Jensen et al. (ed.), *Norsk utenrikspolitikk historie*, ed. 5, Oslo, Universitetsforlaget, p. 214.

26 H.O. Lahlum (2010) *Haakon Lie - Historien, mytene og mennesket*, Oslo, Cappelen Damm, p. 368.

27 K. Skogrand and R. Tamnes (2001) *Fryktens likevekt: Atombomben, Norge og verden 1945-1970*, Oslo, p. 141.

28 Before Norway became part of NATO, the governments of Norway, Sweden and Denmark seriously discussed a Scandinavian alliance. This alternative was never realised, because Norway and Denmark in light of their experiences from the Second World War had different goals and needs compared with Sweden who was one of

Before the accession to NATO, however, Norway seriously considered the prospect of developing its own nuclear weapons. In a newly declassified report from 1946, the first director of the Norwegian Defence Research Establishment (FFI), Gunnar Randers, claims that 'one must either give up the hope of an effective defence, or, in addition to developing other necessary means of defence, aim to acquire nuclear weapons'.<sup>29</sup>

But the supporters of Norwegian nuclear weapons formed a clear minority in the Norwegian political landscape in the 1950s and 60s.<sup>30</sup> They could be found in the Conservative Party, as smaller fractions of the Farmers Party (later known as the Centre Party), and some in the Labour Party. From the point of view of the Prime Minister and the Labour Party, then, saying 'yes' to nuclear weapons ended up being a more risky option than saying 'no': While the former could lead to the breaking apart of the Party (and ultimately loss of power), the latter was politically unproblematic on the domestic political scene (although causing friction inside the Labour Party<sup>31</sup>). Furthermore, and in contrast to Sweden, Norway was already under NATO's nuclear umbrella.

Another important factor in Norway's attitude to nuclear weapons was the engagement

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the militarily strongest states in post war Europe. For example, Norway wanted to procure weapons from the United States, something Sweden did not agree with.

29 Norwegian Defence Research Establishment (FFI), 'Da Norge sjekket muligheten for atomvåpen', 3 October 2013, <http://www.ffi.no/no/Aktuelle-tema/Sider/Da-Norge-sjekket-muligheten-for-atomvapen.aspx> (accessed 28 August 2014). ILPI translation from Norwegian.

30 The Norwegian Armed Forces was really the only branch of the Norwegian authorities where the nuclear supporters ever formed a majority. However, as their Swedish counterparts, their attitude was significantly moderated towards the middle of the 1960s, when NATO's reliance on nuclear weapons was toned down. See K. Skogrand and R. Tamnes (2001) *Fryktens likevekt: Atombomben, Norge og verden 1945-1970*, Oslo, pp.109-10 and 133-4.

31 Due to their sharp differences of opinion and strong personalities, Gerhardsen and Lie allegedly did not speak to each other for long periods of time despite their intimate professional relationship.

in international disarmament. The Norwegian authorities knew that these activities – which sometimes challenged Norway's relationship with its main security sponsor the United States – would have been impossible to sustain if Norway had or hosted nuclear forces. One might also see the Norwegian effort for disarmament as an expression of a broader, Norwegian, self-ascribed identity as a nation of peace; an early part of what the historian Olav Riste has called 'the missionary impulse' in Norway's foreign policy.<sup>32</sup> The missionary impulse can be seen as an offspring of the Norwegian peace tradition with roots back to 1906, and the work of the young scholar and later Norwegian Foreign Minister, Halvdan Koht.<sup>33</sup> Also, since 1901, the Norwegian Nobel Committee had been responsible for the awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize. It is unknown why the Swedish scientist Alfred Nobel chose to give the Norwegians with this task (and not the Swedish Committee which awards the other Nobel Prizes), but it is likely that he and his good friend Bertha von Suttner perceived Norway as having a more peaceful tradition than his own country of origin.<sup>34</sup> According to Riste, the Norwegian missionary impulse and peace tradition has lent Norway significant soft power, and a way for Norway to play a role on the international arena.<sup>35</sup>

Norway could probably afford to keep up with its work for disarmament and arms control because, should the unthinkable occur, the au-

thorities could place its trust in American nuclear weapons. Norway rarely went so far in its disarmament work that the country came into serious conflict with its Western allies.<sup>36</sup>

The long serving Norwegian Prime Minister, Einar Gerhardsen, belonged to the group that spoke out the loudest against nuclear weapons. Having survived the horrors of the Sachsenhausen concentration camp in Nazi Germany, Gerhardsen had seen humanity at its worst. Gerhardsen feared that Norwegian nuclear weapons would greatly provoke the Soviet Union, and unbalance the Nordic region.<sup>37</sup> Andreas Andersen, Gerhardsen's advisor on matters of foreign policy and security (with a particularly string position from 1955 to 1958), was another important figure. He was a NATO-sceptic who strongly supported nuclear disarmament. Gerhardsen and Andersen both preferred international disarmament and détente, arguing that it would be wiser for the Western Bloc to engage the Soviet Union in informal discussions and talks, rather than threatening it with nuclear weapons.<sup>38</sup>

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32 O. Riste (2001) *Norway's foreign relations – A history*, Oslo, Universitetsforlaget, p. 272.

33 O. Riste (2001) *Norway's foreign relations – A history*, Oslo, Universitetsforlaget, p. 254; H. Koht (1906) *Fredstanken i Noregs-sogo. Noreg i den samfolkelege rettsvoksteren*, Oslo, Det norske samlage.

34 The Norwegian Nobel Committee (2014) 'Hvorfor Norge?', available at: [http://nobelpeaceprize.org/nb\\_NO/about\\_peaceprize/why-norway/](http://nobelpeaceprize.org/nb_NO/about_peaceprize/why-norway/) (accessed 4 July 2014).

35 O. Riste (2003) 'Ideal og egeninteresser: Utviklingen av den norske utenrikspolitiske tradisjonen', in S.G. Holtsmark, H.Ø. Pharo, and R. Tamnes (eds), *Motstrøms. Olav Riste og norsk internasjonal historieskrivning*, Oslo, Cappelen, pp. 53–85. The selection of Norway by Alfred Nobel as the country where the Nobel Peace Prize were to be nominated exemplifies that Norway was seen as a country where peace stood high on the agenda.

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36 Prime Minister Gerhardsens statement in October 1964 that the MLF would indicate a spread of nuclear weapons, even if the Americans saw the arrangement as the opposite, could have led to strong American reactions if the Norwegians had not apologized as they did shortly afterwards. See and H.Ø. Pharo (1997) *Kald krig og internasjonalisering 1949- 1965*, in T.B. Jensen et al. (ed.), *Norsk utenrikspolitikk historie*, ed. 5, Oslo, Universitetsforlaget, pp. 254–5.

37 K.E. Eriksen and H.Ø. Pharo (1997) *Kald krig og internasjonalisering 1949- 1965*, in T.B. Jensen et al. (ed.), *Norsk utenrikspolitikk historie*, ed. 5, Oslo, Universitetsforlaget, p. 271. Lange was Foreign Minister (almost) the whole period 1946–65.

38 J.D. Berlin (2009) 'Ekspedisjonssjef Andreas Andersen – en grå eminense i norsk utenrikspolitikk?' in *Arbeiderhistorie – årbok for Arbeiderbevegelsens arkiv og bibliotek*, p. 61. An example of Gerhardsen and Andersen's attempt to de-escalate the Cold War in the end of the 1950s was their close contact with the embassies of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia in Oslo. This was a back channel, through which Gerhardsen and Andersen gained useful information on developments in the eastern bloc. Gerhardsen and Andersen also used this channel to reassure the Soviets that Norway did not plan to stockpile American nuclear weapons on Norwegian territory. The Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs was not involved in this channel, to the great displeasure of Foreign Minister Halvard Lange.

## Sweden: The Long Path to a Non- Nuclear Security Strategy

In Sweden, the Social Democrats (Norwegian Labour's sister party) held power between 1936 and 1976, completely dominating Swedish politics. Sweden had remained neutral during the Second World War and continued its long-standing policy of neutralism throughout the Cold War. As a consequence, Sweden did not follow its Scandinavian neighbours Norway and Denmark in joining NATO.

Sweden developed a strong interest in nuclear technology after the Second World War. On the civilian side, this interest was to a large part rooted in the common perception that the world's oil resources could be exhausted by 1970. The nuclear solution was seen as a way of securing the future of the Swedish welfare state.<sup>39</sup> On the military side, the growing interest in nuclear weaponry was chiefly motivated by national security concerns – primarily the perceived threat from the Soviet Union: A Soviet invasion of Sweden and Finland would give the Eastern Bloc complete control of the Baltic Sea. Sweden had a considerable industrial know-how, and access to vast amounts of uranium.

Sweden's nuclear-weapons research began shortly after the bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Already in August 1945, the same month as the bombs fell over Japan, the Swedish Social Democrats tasked the newly established National Defence Research Establishment (FOA) with exploring the possibilities for manufacturing Swedish nuclear weapons.<sup>40</sup> The Atomic Committee (Atomkommittén) was es-

tablished the same year, and was given the task of advising the government on all nuclear issues, both civilian and military. The state-owned company AB Atomenergi was established two years later to deal with the industrial aspects of nuclear technology.<sup>41</sup> In 1956, the Swedish Parliament decided to implement a more fleshed out nuclear programme (with heavy water imported from Norway), aimed at the production of uranium-loaded reactors. This programme, under the supervision of AB, was called 'the Swedish line', and gave the government the option to do advanced research on nuclear weapons.<sup>42</sup>

While the supporters of nuclear weapons formed a minority in Norwegian politics, the Swedish political landscape included strong voices in support of the development of nuclear weapons.

Until the early 1950s, discussions about the possible development of nuclear weapons were exempt from public disclosure. The deliberations were limited to select members of the government, the Parliament, the Atomic Committee (Atomkommittén), and the leaderships of FOA and AB.<sup>43</sup> However, the discussion was soon to move into the light, when in 1952, representatives of the Swedish Armed Forces voiced the first of a series of public calls for the development of nuclear weapons. In 1955, nuclear weapons were

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See J.D. Berlin (2009) 'Ekspedisjonssjef Andreas Andersen – en grå eminense i norsk utenrikspolitikk?' in *Arbeiderhistorie – årbok for Arbeiderbevegelsens arkiv og bibliotek*, pp. 59–64.

39 L. Ulfving (2010) 'Varför blev det ingen svensk atombomb?' in Kent Zetterberg (ed.) *Svenska kärnvapen? En antologi uppsatser kring frågan om svenska taktiska kärnvapen under Kalla kriget*, Stockholm, Försvarshögskolan, p. 30.

40 T. Jonter (2010) 'The Swedish Plans to Acquire Nuclear Weapons, 1945–1968: An Analysis of the Technical Preparations', *Science & Global Security* 18, p. 62; L. Van Dassen (1998) 'Sweden and the Making of Nuclear Non-Proliferation: From Indeci-

sion to Assertiveness', *SKI Report 98/16*, Stockholm, Norstedts Tryckeri, p. 9.

41 L. Van Dassen (1998) 'Sweden and the Making of Nuclear Non-Proliferation: From Indecision to Assertiveness', *SKI Report 98/16*, Stockholm, Norstedts Tryckeri, p. 10.

42 T. Jonter (2010) 'The Swedish Plans to Acquire Nuclear Weapons, 1945–1968: An Analysis of the Technical Preparations', *Science & Global Security* 18, p. 71.

43 L. Van Dassen (1998) 'Sweden and the Making of Nuclear Non-Proliferation: From Indecision to Assertiveness', *SKI Report 98/16*, Stockholm, Norstedts Tryckeri, p. 10.

one of the main topics of debate in the Swedish Parliament.<sup>44</sup>

While the supporters of nuclear weapons formed a minority in Norwegian politics, the Swedish political landscape included strong voices in support of the development of nuclear weapons. Elements of the Armed Forces, the National Defence Research Establishment (FOA) and important factions in all major parties supported the idea of a Swedish nuclear deterrent.<sup>45</sup> In Parliament, the views of the Armed Forces were backed up by the Conservative Party, and by important elements in the Liberal Party.

Yet there was strong opposition to nuclear weapons among several political actors and (after the issue got public) in the public opinion. The ruling Social Democrats were clearly torn, and the result of the 1956 Party Congress – the so-called first round on the nuclear weapons issue – was simply to postpone the decision for two years. Within the cabinet, Foreign Minister Östen Undén was a strong opponent of a nuclear security strategy. The Swedish Social Democratic Prime Minister, Tage Erlander, who was probably undecided at that point, feared that the nuclear issue could split his party.<sup>46</sup>

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### The Swedish Social Democratic Prime Minister, Tage Erlander [...] feared that the nuclear issue could split his party.

As Norway, Sweden worked energetically for greater international regulation of nuclear weapons. Undén's efforts to promote international disarmament (including the Undén Plan

of 1961) greatly influenced both the public opinion in Sweden and the Prime Minister Erlander himself.<sup>47</sup> In 1958, the nuclear weapons issue resurfaced for a 'second round'. And again, a final agreement could not be reached. The Social Democrats and the parliamentary opposition agreed to postpone the decision.<sup>48</sup> In the meantime, the resistance to nuclear weapons grew both in the Social Democratic Party, the Swedish Parliament, and in the public.

The third and most difficult round on the nuclear question was played out over the autumn of 1958. Two main factions of the Social Democratic Party were pitted against each other, threatening to tear the Party in two.<sup>49</sup> A review committee including both nuclear sceptics and proponents, led by Prime Minister Erlander and his advisor Olof Palme, was established. An agreement was finally reached in 1959, when Palme proposed that Sweden should refrain from acquiring nuclear weapons 'considering the on-going international negotiations on non-proliferation and disarmament. However, it was also recommended that research on protection against nuclear attacks should continue without continued research on weapons design.'<sup>50</sup> Both the sceptics and the supporters thought this kind of research could further their goals.<sup>51</sup> The final decision not

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44 L. Van Dassen (1998) 'Sweden and the Making of Nuclear Non-Proliferation: From Indecision to Assertiveness', *SKI Report 98/16*, Stockholm, Norstedts Tryckeri, pp. 12–3.

45 Ahlmark 1965: 32–6.

46 O. Ruin (1986) *I välfärdsstatens tjänst – Tage Erlander 1946-1969*, Stockholm, Tidens Förlag, p. 180. For the role of the women's league, see A.G.N. Hoadley (1989) *Atomvapnet som partiproblem – Sveriges socialdemokratiska kvinnförbund och frågan om svenskt atomvapen 1955-1960*, PhD dissertation, University of Stockholm.

47 T. Jonter (2010) 'The Swedish Plans to Acquire Nuclear Weapons, 1945–1968: An Analysis of the Technical Preparations', *Science & Global Security* 18, p. 73.

48 O. Ruin (1986) *I välfärdsstatens tjänst – Tage Erlander 1946-1969*, Stockholm, Tidens Förlag, p. 181.

49 O. Ruin (1986) *I välfärdsstatens tjänst – Tage Erlander 1946-1969*, Stockholm, Tidens Förlag, pp. 182–4.

50 L. Van Dassen (1998) 'Sweden and the Making of Nuclear Non-Proliferation: From Indecision to Assertiveness', *SKI Report 98/16*, Stockholm, Norstedts Tryckeri, p. 15.

51 The rationale for the supporters was that all kinds of research on nuclear weapons could be turned into the research on how to develop them. Some of the sceptics did not want a nuclear research in Sweden at all, and concerned that all kinds of nuclear research would be a step towards the bomb.

to choose the bomb was formally established when Sweden signed the NPT in 1968.

The Nordic balance and ‘the Finland argument’ played an important role also for Sweden.<sup>52</sup> If Sweden had developed its own nuclear deterrent, these weapons would have ruined the concept of a ‘nuclear free’ Nordic area, and challenged not only the Finnish position vis-à-vis its eastern neighbour, but also Norway’s and Denmark’s position in NATO (particularly after 1957, when both Norway and Denmark declined hosting allied nuclear weapons). The goal for Sweden, and for the other Nordic countries, was, after all, to keep the Nordic area outside a future war. Introducing nuclear weapons into the region was not seen as helping in this respect. It is likely that the Swedish leadership saw nuclear weapons as something that would have made an attack on Sweden more attractive in a state of war, and decided against the bomb partly for that reason.<sup>53</sup>

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The goal for Sweden, and for the other Nordic countries, was, after all, to keep the Nordic area outside a future war.

The Swedish authorities’ interest in developing their own nuclear weapons was to a certain degree also diminished by the fact that NATO and its leading member, the United States, reduced the role of nuclear weapons in their military doctrines. The doctrine of ‘massive retaliation’ had come to be seen as having a grave credibility problem, potentially ‘inviting’ low-scale Soviet incursions into the North Atlantic Area. The Kennedy-administration wanted to initiate a conventional build up rather than relying too much on nuclear weapons. This thinking formed the background for the new doctrine, ‘flexible response’, which was formalized by

NATO in 1967, but evident in its policy from the early 60s.<sup>54</sup>

It is also likely that the Swedish position was influenced by communications with the United States, which was strongly against the idea of Swedish nuclear weapons.<sup>55</sup> In the minds of American policy makers, such a development could destabilize the Nordic and Baltic regions. Even though Sweden was never formally a member of NATO, the Swedes may furthermore have felt protected by the United States and its allies. Indeed, in 1960, US president Eisenhower had stated that the United States would come to the aid of Sweden should it be attacked by the Soviet Union.<sup>56</sup>

On the domestic side, the main reason for the Swedish Prime Minister’s hesitancy toward a nuclear security solution was the considerable opposition inside his own party, the Social Democrats. As in Norway, the nuclear issue had the potential to split the governing party in two, leading to a loss of power for the government.

From around 1961, the formerly strong militarily consensus in favour of equipping the Swedish Defence with nuclear weapons started to wither. One of the reasons was disagreement between the different branches of the Armed Forces: Neither the Navy nor the Air Force wanted to bear the cost of the nuclear weapons. The issue was then delegated to a special, secret review board called the Nuclear Device Group. In hindsight, this move made it difficult for the military command to maintain a united front in support of

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52 L. Ulfving (2010) ‘Varför blev det ingen svensk atombomb?’ in Kent Zetterberg (ed.) *Svenska kärnvapen? En antologi uppsatser kring frågan om svenska taktiska kärnvapen under Kalla kriget*, Stockholm, Försvarshögskolan, pp. 39–40.

53 L. Ulfving (2010) ‘Varför blev det ingen svensk atombomb?’ in Kent Zetterberg (ed.) *Svenska kärnvapen? En antologi uppsatser kring frågan om svenska taktiska kärnvapen under Kalla kriget*, Stockholm, Försvarshögskolan, p. 40.

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54 M. Trachtenberg (1999) *A constructed peace: The making of the European settlement, 1945–1963*, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, pp. 278–89.

55 T. Jonter (2010) ‘The Swedish Plans to Acquire Nuclear Weapons, 1945–1968: An Analysis of the Technical Preparations’, *Science & Global Security* 18, p. 78.

56 T. Jonter (2010) ‘The Swedish Plans to Acquire Nuclear Weapons, 1945–1968: An Analysis of the Technical Preparations’, *Science & Global Security* 18, pp. 78–9. In April 1960, the United States National Security Council (NSC) similarly stated that the US ‘[w]ished to assist Sweden in building up a stronger conventional defence capability and thereby integrating Sweden into the NATO framework.’

acquisition.<sup>57</sup> Furthermore, when the Nuclear Device Group came with its conclusions in 1962, its recommendation was actually to drop the development of nuclear weapons. It held it as highly unlikely that nuclear weapons would in fact be used in the event of a war. Rather than developing nuclear weapons, then, the Group recommended a strengthening of Sweden's conventional capabilities in line with 'flexible response'. Leading circles in the Swedish Defence increasingly came to see it as untenable to spend vast amounts of money on a weapon that, in the words of the leader for the Swedish Air Force, Axel Ljungdahl, could only be used at 'the highest level of war'.<sup>58</sup>

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As the Norwegians, Swedish policy makers knew that, to all appearances, Swedish nuclear weapons would have undermined Sweden's soft power in disarmament forums.

Lars van Dassen argues that 'open political structures, with public and political actors who reacted against the nuclear option in spite or because of the insufficient information of what went on in the military and at FOA saved Sweden from proliferation.'<sup>59</sup> Van Dassen also emphasizes that since multilateralism meant so

much to Sweden, and as the country's leaders really thought they could play a role for peace and stability, the arguments against nuclear solutions lay ready for the anti-nuclear forces.<sup>60</sup>

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if the international community could reach progress; Sweden should not stand in its way.

The international developments on arms control and non-proliferation impacted heavily on the Swedish domestic politics. Almost everyone in Sweden, except the FOA and certain people in the military, had the attitude that if the international community could reach progress; Sweden should not stand in its way.<sup>61</sup> There was also an understanding that as long as nuclear weapons did not become common in the armies of other small and medium sized states, Sweden should refrain from developing such weapons. As the Norwegians, Swedish policy makers knew that, to all appearances, Swedish nuclear weapons would have undermined Sweden's soft power in disarmament forums.

It is difficult to explain Sweden's 'nuclear no' without pointing to Tage Erlander, Prime Minister of Sweden between 1946 and 1969. As the Social Democratic Party's political opposition in the Swedish Parliament was clearly more nuclear friendly, Erlander's talent for holding his party together—and in power—ended up being crucial for the Swedish 'nuclear no'. With the help of his advisor, Olof Palme, Erlander was able to offer both sides something they could accept. Influenced by his Foreign Minister, Östen Udén, Erlander went from being a cautious nuclear supporter in the late 40s and early 50s, to becoming a clear nuclear sceptic in the end of the 1950s. Udén's skills as an orator and tough stance against nuclear weapons contributed greatly to

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57 T. Jonter (2010) 'The Swedish Plans to Acquire Nuclear Weapons, 1945–1968: An Analysis of the Technical Preparations', *Science & Global Security* 18, p. 75. See L. Ulfving (2010) 'Varför blev det ingen svensk atombomb?' in Kent Zetterberg (ed.) *Svenska kärnvapen? En antologi uppsatser kring frågan om svenska taktiska kärnvapen under Kalla kriget*, Stockholm, Försvarshögskolan, p. 34 for more on the fact that the Swedish Air Force changed its attitude towards nuclear weapons around 1960.

58 L. Ulfving (2010) 'Varför blev det ingen svensk atombomb?' in Kent Zetterberg (ed.) *Svenska kärnvapen? En antologi uppsatser kring frågan om svenska taktiska kärnvapen under Kalla kriget*, Stockholm, Försvarshögskolan, p. 44.

59 L. Van Dassen (1998) 'Sweden and the Making of Nuclear Non-Proliferation: From Indecision to Assertiveness', *SKI Report 98/16*, Stockholm, Norstedts Tryckeri, p. 29.

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60 L. Van Dassen (1998) 'Sweden and the Making of Nuclear Non-Proliferation: From Indecision to Assertiveness', *SKI Report 98/16*, Stockholm, Norstedts Tryckeri, p. 29.

61 L. Van Dassen (1998) 'Sweden and the Making of Nuclear Non-Proliferation: From Indecision to Assertiveness', *SKI Report 98/16*, Stockholm, Norstedts Tryckeri, p. Iv.

changing the minds of the influential figures in the Party and cabinet.<sup>62</sup>

A last person who had a particular impact on the Swedish opinion was Inga Thorsson, the leader of the women's league of the Swedish Labour Party. A convincing radio appeal from Thorsson in January 1957 intensified the nuclear debate in Sweden, and engaged a wide group of politicians, writers, artists and journalist in support of the anti-nuclear cause.<sup>63</sup> Undén and Thorsson were instrumental in pushing the opponents to nuclear weapons from a minority to a majority.<sup>64</sup>

## Conclusion

Norway and Sweden eventually chose different nuclear security policies. Norway chose to be part of the NATO nuclear umbrella, but decided against hosting US nuclear weapons on its territory. Sweden, on its side, chose to forgo a nuclear weapons altogether.

In both countries, opposing forces in the ruling parties and public opinion, made it very difficult for the government to choose nuclear security options—or in the Norwegian case to deepen its complicity in NATO's nuclear policy—while keeping their parties united. In both countries, the development of nuclear weapons could have lead to the ruling parties of both countries to loose a considerable fraction of nuclear-sceptic members and voters, which in the next stage could have led to the break-up of their governments and the loss of power. This, in turn, would probably have led to the formation of new, right-leaning governments more supportive of nuclear weapons. Prime Minister Gerhardsen in Norway as his peer Erlander in Sweden, were very well aware of this.

In light of the changed strategic thinking among the leading Western powers, combined with the international détente from 1963, it would not

have been sensible for either Norway or Sweden to push for their own nuclear weapons. Instead they did the opposite and worked for disarmament and arms control, expressing their satisfaction with NATO's strategic change. The Scandinavian countries' positive view of flexible response, combined with their desire for détente played an important role in their decisions against acquiring nuclear weapons during the 1960s. Another important factor in both countries was the consideration of the other Nordic neighbours, the so-called Nordic balance.

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The Scandinavian countries' positive view of flexible response, combined with their desire for détente played an important role in their decisions against acquiring nuclear weapons during the 1960s.

Today, the Nordic is one of the most peaceful and prosperous regions of the world. The territorial integrity and political sovereignty of the countries has not been called into question since 1945. With the benefit of hindsight, the policy choices of both Norway and Sweden in the early Cold War could probably be said to have been sensible.

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62 A.G.N. Hoadley (1989) *Atomvapnet som partiproblem- Sveriges socialdemokratiska kvinnförbund och frågan om svenskt atomvapen 1955-1960*, PhD dissertation, University of Stockholm, p. 3.

63 L. Van Dassen (1998) 'Sweden and the Making of Nuclear Non-Proliferation: From Indecision to Assertiveness', *SKI Report 98/16*, Stockholm, Norstedts Tryckeri, pp. 13–4.

64 Y. Möller (1986) *Östen Undén – En biografi*, Stockholm, Norstedts, p. 463.

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