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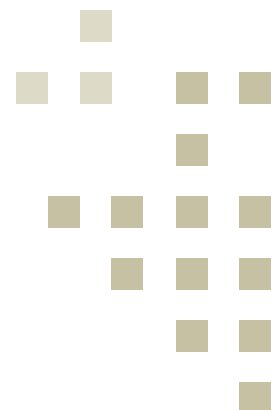
## Norway as an Allied Activist – Prestige and Pennance through Peace

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# Norway as an Allied Activist – Prestige and Pennance through Peace

Henrik Thune and Ståle Ulriksen

**[Summary]** According to a standard view, popular among Norwegian commentators and historians, Norway's foreign relations after World War II are like a pendulum swinging from side to side, between national interests and national values, between the will to secure the state and its territory and the will to represent a global cosmopolitan spirituality. This notion of a Norwegian foreign policy pendulum coincides with the traditional realism-idealism dichotomy within the study of international relations. The formula has become a dominant theoretical ingredient in most current analyses of Norwegian foreign policy, and is a favoured perspective from which politicians celebrate Norway's post-cold war role on the international scene. And that role, at least as far as the self-perception takes it, is that of being an exponent of international «activism» and «engagement».

The first section of this report addresses the question how to approach Norwegian foreign policy analytically. The authors suggest that neither the perspective of the *essentialists* highlighting more or less permanent national interests, nor the geopolitical and systemic focus of the *structuralists* present fully credible explanations. Instead they argue that present Norwegian foreign policy is about the creation, maintenance and enhancement of a role or an identity whose main function is to gain recognition, attention and contact in order to maximize international influence.

In the second part, the authors point at the importance of consensus in Norwegian policy and identify three basic positions in the Norwegian foreign policy discourse. They suggest that pragmatic idealism, a school of thought capable of exploring the analytical approach sketched above, is the dominant factor.

In the third part, the authors focus on some fundamental experiences that have formed the Norwegian image of self in relation to the world. They propose that this heritage represents strong inherent and latent tensions in Norwegian politics.

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## Introduction

According to a standard view, popular among Norwegian commentators and historians, Norway's foreign relations after World War II are like a pendulum swinging from side to side, between national interests and national values, between the will to secure the state and its territory and the will to represent a global cosmopolitan spirituality. This notion of a Norwegian foreign policy pendulum coincides with the traditional realism-idealism dichotomy within the study of international relations. The formula has become a dominant theoretical ingredient in most current analyses of Norwegian foreign policy, and is a favoured perspective from which politicians celebrate Norway's post-cold war role on the international scene. And that role, at least as far as the self-perception takes it, is that of being an exponent of international "activism" and "engagement".<sup>1</sup> As former Foreign Minister Bjørn Tore Godal told the Norwegian parliament in 1996: "The Norwegian society's deep respect for humanitarian values has made the promotion of Human Rights a cornerstone of all our policy. This is of special importance to our work for peace, where it combines idealism and self-interest."<sup>2</sup>

During the Cold War, Norway could distinguish between two international foreign policy arenas. In the arena of narrow security policy and military defence, the realm of east-west conflict and deterrence, Norway kept as low a profile as possible for a member of NATO. Policy was to a large extent defensive, passive and reactive. This was compensated for, however, in the arena of un-securitized foreign policy, development assistance and conflict resolution. In the UN and the adjacent institutional architecture, Norway sought a high profile and proactively sought to project soft power beyond Europe. As the foreign policy arenas were institutionally and thematically separated, priorities and strategies were easily identified as belonging to one arena or the other. The perceived balance between realism and idealism, or between alliance and activism, was easily quantified and analysed.

In the 1990s, these two foreign policy arenas gradually converged. In Somalia, Bosnia and Kosovo, humanitarian values were supported and indeed enforced by military means. NATO, the main institution in Norway's security policy, became involved in crisis handling previously dominated by the UN. Thus, "hard" security moved into "soft" fields, and "hard" means were employed for "soft" goals. This was expressed in NATO's attacks on the Bosnian Serbs in 1995 and the Yugoslav army in 1999. These changes have accelerated after 11 September 2001. Where Norwegian preferences previously could be established independently in fields unrelated to hard security, they now seem to be *dictated* by considerations linked to the broadened concept of security and to relations with the US. Norway's present lack of initiative in the Middle East and its passive role as a member of the United Nations Security Council (2001–2003) resembles the country's Cold War posture in NATO more than its high profile role in the world at large during the same period. The convergence of foreign policy arenas and fields means that Norway's room for foreign policy manoeuvre has been reduced, and that the traditional (low policy) arena of the political left has been

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1 Rolf Tamnes, *Oljealder 1965–1995* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1998).

2 Speech by Bjørn Tore Godal to the Norwegian parliament in 1996.

moved to the core of Norway's foreign policy, reconstituted as the high politics of Norway's strategic national and international interests.

In 1994, when Norway debated membership in the European Union (EU), the country's position as a member of NATO on the outside of the EU was seen by some as a prerequisite for an activist policy in the world at large. With hindsight it does not seem that Norway has utilised this perceived freedom to enhance its role as an activist. Quite the contrary, the non-membership has served to deny Norway access to the only arena in which a new foreign policy balance could have been established.

The remainder of this article is divided into three parts. The first section addresses the question how to approach Norwegian foreign policy analytically. We suggest that neither the perspective of the *essentialists* highlighting more or less permanent national interests, nor the geopolitical and systemic focus of the *structuralists* present fully credible explanations. Instead we argue that present Norwegian foreign policy is about the creation, maintenance and enhancement of a role or an identity whose main function is to gain recognition, attention and contact in order to maximize international influence. In the second part, we point at the importance of consensus in Norwegian policy and identify three basic positions in the Norwegian foreign policy discourse. We suggest that pragmatic idealism, a school of thought capable of exploring the analytical approach sketched above, is the dominant factor. In the third part, we focus on some fundamental experiences that have formed the Norwegian image of self in relation to the world. We propose that this heritage represents strong inherent and latent tensions in Norwegian politics.

### **Concepts of activism: We act – we are!**

If realism versus idealism defines foreign policy, then the dominant tendency of Norway's foreign relations seems to have been of a rather idealistic kind. In just under ten years, Norway has been involved as facilitator or mediator in 14 peace processes, from the Oslo-Process, Colombia, Guatemala, Mali, and Sri Lanka. Requests for assistance to several other conflict areas has been turned down for lack of capacity. Norway is among the very largest contributors to global development assistance as measured by a percentage of GNP and per capita. Its contribution also ranks high in absolute terms. In UN and NATO peace support operations, Norway's contribution of troops measured per capita is, or has been, among the largest in those organisations. During the last few years, Norway has held the chairmanship of the OSCE and membership of the UN Security Council. In the spring of 2001, the "Norwegian" and "Danish" NATO headquarters formed KFOR HQ in Kosovo under a Norwegian general. Finally, in 2002, Norwegian Special Forces under US Command are fighting alongside their American colleagues in a desolate part of Afghanistan.

The question, then, is this: Why this frantic activity? Why does a state with apparently small stakes in distant conflicts (over)stretch its military forces and diplomatic capability to solve them? Why does a country with few historic links, no strategic interests and negligible economic interests donate close to one percent of its GDP to development? And how does this global

role fit into Norway's position as a member of NATO, but still outside the EU?

Traditionally, there are two dominant ways of approaching these questions within the Norwegian discourse. On the one hand, there is the idealism – realism dichotomy. This is what we shall call the *essentialist* position. By this we simply mean the notion that policy is determined by, and connected to, a given “national essence”, either in the form of some continuous strategic interests arising out of Norway's geopolitical position and natural resources, or in the form of a set of national values rooted in the history of Norwegian society. From such a (popular) viewpoint, foreign policy is a straightforward rational (and conscious) process aimed at securing given interests or to expressing some authentic moral values and national spirituality. The logic of actual foreign policy-making is simply to mediate between these sets of priorities, to find a point of balance, as it were, according to the shifting international context. Or as historian Olav Riste recently put it in his seminal single-volume survey of Norway's foreign relations: “...to steer a middle course between ‘the two extremes of over-rating the influence of ethics upon international politics or under-estimating it by denying that statesmen and diplomats are moved by anything but considerations of material power’.”<sup>3</sup>

There is yet another common conceptual view of Norwegian foreign relations, inter-connected with the essentialist view, and a part of it. This is a contextual or *structuralist* position. Within this school of thought, Norwegian foreign policy priorities are seen as a function of Norway's position in the state system as such: binding alliances with other states (NATO but not the EU), and Norway as a territorial entity within a particular geopolitical triangle (USA/EU/Russia).<sup>4</sup> Accordingly, ideals and interests are considered to be constant motivations underlying foreign policy, while the actual outcome – the exact position of the pendulum between self-interest and moral values – is decided by changing structural conditions. Again, the voice of Riste is instructive:

As of today Norwegians' fear of a loss of political “self-determination” prevent Norway from joining the EU, while the country's binding commitments remain with NATO. That seems to leave what I have chosen to call the “missionary impulse” as a common ground. There is of course nothing wrong with wishing to play the mediator and peacemaker: it cannot do much harm, and could conceivably in some few cases do some good. But when a small country like Norway assumes a high profile foreign policy, it is important to make sure that there is a proper balance between shadow and substance [...] high profile needs to be reflected also in regard of essential national interests.<sup>5</sup>

Despite the obvious attractiveness of the simplicity of these “essentialist” positions, we shall argue that they have limited validity. The structuralist view is determinist and the idealist-realist dichotomy is reductionist; both

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3 Olav Riste, *Norway's Foreign Relations – A History* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 2001), 273.

4 Neumann and Ulriksen, (1996).

5 Riste (2001).



positions are far too general to grasp any specific mechanisms, or even to make sense of the particular experiences of Norwegian activism in the 1990s. It is fair to say that the actual conduct of Norway's foreign policy in the last decade contradicts the whole notion of the idealism – realism divide. Repeated involvement in peace processes and other areas of activism cannot be interpreted as a function of some internalised factors or constant driving-forces of motivation in terms of given national values or interests. On the contrary, Norway's foreign policy rather has to be understood as a practise formed in response to, and to some extent dictated by, internal and external "audiences". The rationale of the policy is *social*; that is to say, to maximize international recognition and attention from allies as a substitute for a constant and systematic political strategy. The policy is not primarily a reflection of clearly defined interests or moral principles, as the essentialists would argue. Rather, a state that lacks the hard power options and find itself balancing between an established security framework (NATO) and another one in the making (ESDP), seeks to gain international influence by keeping a high profile and doing well according to dominant norms.<sup>6</sup> In this sociological perspective, the present Norwegian "moral" or "idealistic" policies may thus be interpreted as "realpolitik through soft power" or "pragmatic idealism", defined as a national, and mostly implicit, strategy to maximise international influence.

Along these lines of reasoning, the current activist dimension of Norwegian foreign policy is best understood by analogy to Jean-Jacques Rousseau's conception of the *social person*, for whom motivations for actions, and identity, are rooted in a concern with other people's judgements. Or to rewrite a few lines from a commercial – "image becomes everything" and "results are nothing", or, at least, secondary. This attitude is not surprising in the case of Norway: a small country with limited resources, and with a growing fear of being left out of European integration of security, is dependent on converting its role in 'low political' issue-areas through involvement in international peace operations, to 'high political' gains. That is not to say that the individual actors involved on the behalf of Norway in the peace-process in the Middle-East, Colombia, Sri Lanka or elsewhere, are motivated by self-interest. Our claim is another, namely that the systematic priorities of Norway's engagement abroad over the last ten years or so cannot be understood unless one appreciates how an activist-policy functions as a way of converting the comparative advantages as a "soft-power" and as a disinterested peace mediator into attention, recognition and contact, and how the logic of the success of this policy is not actual achievements, but the reaction of the audience – the international as well as the domestic.

An example: Norway withdrew its infantry battalion from UNIFIL in Lebanon in 1998 in order to maintain and reinforce its presence in the Nordic-Polish brigade in SFOR. The first ever NATO operation out of area, and the first large-scale Nordic military co-operation for more than a century, was obviously more important than an UN operation that had been going on

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6 Henrik Thune and Torgier Larsen, "Utenrikspolitik uten software. En teori om om-dømme, populisme og andre politiske trekkrefter i små staters utenrikspolitik", i Geir Dale, *Grenser for alt. Kritiske perspektiver på norsk utenrikspolitik* (Oslo: Spartacus, 2000).

for twenty years. In 1999, however, the forces in Bosnia were withdrawn in order to facilitate the deployment of a combat group to Kosovo. Again, compared to the high profile operations in Kosovo, Bosnia had become a boring backwater. The important thing is what you are seen to be doing, not what you actually achieve.<sup>7</sup> The policy is simply the message, and the degree of attention decides the success of the policy.

This may seem as a rather trivial point. But the political implications are far from trivial. To be sure, the main dilemmas confronting Norwegian foreign policy decision-makers in the 1990s, did not (primarily) rise out of the balancing of national economic and strategic interests against moral principles and ideals, along the line of the realism-idealism approach. The dilemmas were to a large extent related to striking the right balance in order to satisfy two different political audiences: on the one hand, the (positive) recognition by close allies (in particular the United States) and the need to maintain a neutral position to continue the role as a disinterested mediator in various peace processes; on the other hand, the securing of domestic political support by way of satisfying the dominant Norwegian national self-perception.

Two issues in particular have manifested this tension. The first was the decision by the Norwegian Labour government to re-start commercial whaling against the scientific advice of the International Whaling Commission (IWC). The policy challenged Norway's international image and was to some extent viewed as politically damaging. However, the policy was strongly supported by the domestic constituency and generally considered to be a natural expression of Norway as a society with historical rights and deep-rooted knowledge of the oceans and the environment. The second issue was related to the Oslo-process and the second intifada in the Middle East. In an attempt to maintain its role as a disinterested mediator between the two parties in the Middle East and not to challenge the British and American position, the Norwegian government decided to abstain from voting on two different resolutions at the UN Security Council in 2001. The decision fuelled massive public protest, with its explicit references to the domestic audience's self-perception as a righteous and morally enlightened people.

### **Discourses of activism**

In a bird's eye view, Norwegian foreign policy is characterised by a high degree of consensus. In addition to the disputes mentioned above, the exception to this rule – a contentious breakdown of the general consensus – usually only occurs when there is a potential withering of Norway's legal sovereignty through binding security alliances, regimes or institutionalised co-operation. As far as the post-Second World War period is concerned, this has only happened three times: one time from 1949 and onwards in relation to NATO membership, and twice concerning relations with Europe (EEC in 1973 and the EU 1994). The three debates on membership in NATO, the EEC and the EU were social earthquakes with lasting effects on the Norwegian political geology. As such they represent another presumed divide in

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7 Thune and Larsen (2000).

the Norwegian foreign policy discourse, namely the conflict between “nationalism and internationalism”<sup>8</sup> or “isolationism” and “atlanticism”.<sup>9</sup>

The *essentialist* perspective, introduced above, normally takes the outcome of these major political debates as its starting point. If one were to follow a structural perspective, for instance, the latent conflict (between a “national” and an “internationalist” position) surfaces as one tries to change not only the rules of the game but the game itself by suggesting deep changes in Norway’s relations to other states or to international organisations like NATO or the EU. To the extent that this implies changes in basic institutional structure, the result is that foreign policy consensus or compromises break down and latent conflicts surface with volcanic strength, dwarfing all other political debates until some sort of conclusion is found.

The overlap with the idealist-realist divide of the *essentialist* perspective is at best only partial. The advocates of Norwegian membership in the EU, for instance, would be seen as “internationalists” in spite of the fact that they argued from a realist position that specific and concrete Norwegian interests would be better served within the EU. Hardly anyone advocates for membership in the European Union from an idealist point of view. Correspondingly, most of the opponents of EU membership would in this perspective be termed “nationalists” or “isolationists”. A large portion of the opponents, however, most notably the Socialist Left, would argue against membership in the European Union from an idealist perspective. The image of the EU as a “Fortress Europe” blocking out the ex-communist Second World and the ex-colonial Third World was a central theme in the debates of 1973 and 1994. Perhaps surprisingly, the idealists condemning the EU from a global perspective successfully established alliances with groups representing subsidised and protected economic fields like agriculture. The latter groups were basically both nationalist and isolationist.

The security dimension of the last debate on EU membership illustrates the fluidity, the strange alliances and surprising positions of these heated debates. The proponents of EU membership included the dominant parties in Norway, the Labour Party and the Conservatives. During the late 1980s Norway was offered full membership in the West European Union. But neither Labour nor the Conservatives grabbed that opportunity, preferring to wait for a debate on membership in the EC/EU. As long as Norway was not a member of the WEU, “the security card” could become important as a mobilising factor in the EU debate. Ironically, the opponents of EU membership, including the Socialist Left Party, which grew out of the Labour party as an anti-NATO faction, embraced NATO almost completely in 1994 and argued that security was taken care of by NATO, and that an autonomous WEU might do damage to NATO.

In what we term the *sociological* perspective, these major debates occur if and when it would seem that foreign policy decisions may threaten what are perceived as central elements of national identity and international recognition. The agricultural groups opposing membership in the EU were marginal in economic terms. They were, nonetheless, able to mobilise and utilise

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8 Lundestad (1985).

9 Olav Riste, *Isolasjonisme og stormaktsgarantier* (Oslo, Institutt for Forsvarsstudier, 1991).

central elements of Norwegian national myths and national identity in their argumentation.<sup>10</sup> One should note that, as a member of the European Economic Area (EEA) and other institutional instruments, Norway is almost completely integrated in the economic dimensions of the EU as well as the judiciary and military dimensions.<sup>11</sup> In other words, opposition is based primarily on emotional factors, on symbolic issues strongly tied to national identity. Thus, foreign policy consensus breaks down when external actions threaten internal self-perception.

The resulting foreign policy practice, within the sociological perspective, is somewhat schizophrenic. On the one hand, Norway participates in European processes to the extent possible in a practical and pragmatic fashion in order to maximise external influence. As regards symbolic policies, on the other hand, Norway simulates independence in order to secure internal consensus.

Apart from the few great political battles, there has been relatively little, if any, public debate on the general priorities and framework of Norway's foreign policy.<sup>12</sup> Norwegian debate on foreign policy and involvement in international military operations are marked by something like a legalist fetishism in a way that implies consensus as long as policy is consistent with traditional interpretations of international law. Even potentially controversial issues such as NATO's "strategic concept" from April 1999, or Norway's participation in *Operation Allied Force* against Serbia the same year, only led to public debate of a legalistic dimension.<sup>13</sup>

It may not be surprising, then, that one will seek in vain for serious attempts at constructing a systematic and intellectually informed foreign policy strategy at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA).<sup>14</sup> The last time anything close to a principled and synthetic analysis of policy priorities was published by the Ministry was the report submitted to the Parliament (Stortinget) in 1989, under the title *Development trends in the international society and their effects on Norwegian foreign policy*. However, the report, often referred to as "the bible" of Norway's foreign relations, was not only surprisingly unclear in its priorities, but also (typically it seems) constructed to satisfy all the different interest-groups, various political outlooks, and the departments within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Defence (MOD).<sup>15</sup> Despite great ambitions – the chapter on the aims of Norwegian foreign policy announce nothing less than a re-definition of Norway's national interests – the conclusion took the form of a rehearsal of a general and under-problematised concept of "national interest": "to promote Norway's interests in its foreign relations, including both our particular interests and the interests we share with other countries." This was followed

10 Iver B. Neumann, *Norge, en Kritikk* (Oslo: Pax forlag, 2001).

11 The problem, of course, is that Norway is not allowed to take part in the final rounds of the decision-making process in the EU. Norway can play along as long as it respects the rules, but is not allowed to participate in the frequent time-outs where rules are changed.

12 See Lodgaard (2001).

13 Knut Nustad and Henrik Thune, "Norwegian Participation in International Operations: Legal Provisions and Political Paradigms", in Ku and Jacobsen, eds., *The Use of Force and Democratic Accountability* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

14 See for instance Iver B. Neumann, *Norges handlingsrom og behovet for en overgripende sikkerhetspolitisk strategi*, Det sikkerhetspolitiske bibliotek nr 3, Den norske atlanterhavskomité, (2002).

15 Riste (2001).

up by a long list of various national, global and international goals and interests, but without any guide as to how to prioritise different aims and to translate priorities into actual measures.<sup>16</sup> What “national interest” is supposed to mean in a post-Cold War world was also left unexplored. The term was simply used as a catch-all-device, open for any interpretation, and, therefore, a flexible way of securing consensus while leaving the real policy planning to the day-to-day dynamics.

Nonetheless, it is not fair to deduce that lack of clearly defined policy strategies is the same as no policy strategies. The political practice of the last decade has indeed been marked by a clear profile. This policy profile, however, cannot be found in any strategy documents. Nor is it clear to what extent the politicians themselves have been aware of its existence. For the policy it is not a result of systematic thinking, but the sum of actual practice. And the practice has an inherent logic – something that makes it consistent over time, something that makes it possible to talk about a particular Norwegian foreign policy model in the 1990s. We shall shortly return to the historical evolution of this practice, defined as “pragmatic idealism” below, and ask how it should be understood as a political project, and how it has come about. But first: What are the current disagreements and tensions within the Norwegian foreign policy discourse? What are the positions?

In a country where consensus is the prime ethos of foreign policy making and priorities, the debate is hard to detect. It is a hidden debate, a hidden discourse between opponents that do not recognise each other as opponents, but where everyone claims the voice of consensus. The current Norwegian foreign policy discourse can be divided into three different *ideal*-positions, “the traditionalists”, “the pragmatic idealists” and “the do-good-ers”:

**The traditionalists** represent the back to basics approach, where “basic” means fundamental territorial security and economical interests. In calling for a return to a practice that never ruled alone, the traditionalists attempt to refute their old antagonists, the equally traditional proponents of international activism for peace. The traditionalists have presented a rather harsh critique of the Norwegian activism of the 1990s, by presenting it as ignorant of national economic interests, and Norway’s relations to and role in Europe and in the Nordic-Baltic region.

**The pragmatic idealists** represent the Norwegian model of the 1990s, the core of what we introduced as the Rousseauian and social dimension of Norwegian foreign policy: that is to say, a willingness to utilise Norway’s status as a small disinterested state to play a central role as peace mediator and for the promotion of human rights as a way of converting the comparative advantages of “soft-power” into attention, recognition, and contact with large international actors such as the EU, the UN, and, most importantly, the United States. Characteristics that are interpreted as weakness in a hard power perspective are turned to strength in this soft power design. The dominant representatives of this position are all critical of the traditional approach

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16 Recently there has been a (slight) renewed interest for more systematic discussions of policy priorities. Former state secretary (deputy minister) at the MFA, Espen Barth Eide, for instance, inaugurated two initiatives, one strategy document on Norway’s relations with US, and a similar one about EU-Norway.

for being too focused on territorial security, and sceptical to a non-consequentialistic (*do-good-ist*) approach of the political left.

**Do-good-ism** represents a cosmopolitan and deontological critique of the traditionalists as well as the pragmatic idealists. The traditionalists are viewed as amoral and self-centred, while the pragmatic idealists are criticised for misusing activism and development assistance for the sake of increasing Norway's own utility, and moving the humanitarian focus away from the pivotal development issues to conflicts and crises where Norway can play a central role. Do-good-ism is a Kantian cosmopolitan position merged with a long lasting national missionary spirit rooted in the legacy of Norwegian national icons such as the explorer and diplomat Fritjof Nansen and the writer Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson. The aim is an ethical purification of the activism policy, de-linking it from strategic interests and challenging the preoccupation with the importance of maintaining close relations to the US.

### **The historical perimeters of foreign policy**

The expression of these faceless debaters (or ideal positions) may be found in an analysis of the few open and heated foreign policy disputes mentioned above. Yet the positions are not simply reactions to Norway's role in the 1990s, but are linked to formative experiences and historical representations of the past, and in particular long lasting national discourse on the meaning of "national independence". History, or rather the experiences that have been lifted to the forefront by interpretations of history, has provided some axioms that still influence and indeed dominate Norwegian thinking on foreign policy.<sup>17</sup> These axioms, in essence, mark the limits of normal foreign policy debate – a line that cannot be crossed without provoking strong reactions and a breakdown of consensus. Below we have pointed out three such axioms and discussed how a balance between them was found during the Cold War.

#### **Distrust of Great Powers**

In 1814 Norway declared its independence after 400 years of union with Denmark. Although Copenhagen was the undisputed centre of Denmark-Norway, Norway, as a separate Kingdom, had its own laws and its own army. After a brief war Norway was forced by the victorious Great Powers to enter a personal union with Sweden, which, having lost Finland to Russia in 1809, entered the alliance against France on the premise that it would gain Norway as compensation. The experience of having been a pawn in this game left a permanent scepticism towards Great Powers, alliances and international politics in general.

#### **Hostility to "unions"**

The break-up of Denmark-Norway was directly due to its alliance with Napoleon's France after the British attack on Copenhagen in 1807. However, by 1814 Norwegian nationalism had been growing for decades, and

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<sup>17</sup> Neumann (2001).

many Norwegians blamed Denmark for the war with England, upon which Norwegian trade depended. Denmark was also blamed for the territorial, political and economic decline of Norway since what now came to be considered a medieval golden age.<sup>18</sup> The union with Sweden did not imply comprehensive integration. It was basically an alliance with a common King and a common foreign policy. Norway had its constitution, its parliament (the *Storting*), a separate government, and armed forces independent from the Swedish. Nevertheless, the Norwegians came to view all external commitments with suspicion. Almost from the start, parts of the Norwegian elite sought to reduce the country's obligations in this alliance.<sup>19</sup>

From the 1840s to 1864 political Scandinavianism, expressed through a Pan-Scandinavian Movement, grew strong in Sweden and Denmark. In Norway, Scandinavianism found little fertile ground in a population which was developing a national identity that to a large extent was built on antagonism towards Swedes and Danes. The nationalist movement found Norwegian culture in its "pure form" with the farmers of isolated inland communities, and in proximity to a harsh nature, not in the more cosmopolitan urban upper and middle classes. In 1884 the Norwegian national movement, embodied in the liberal party, brought the country to the edge of civil war but eventually succeeded in disabling the King and his conservative supporters in the public services by establishing parliamentary democracy. In 1905 the Union was peacefully dissolved, though large forces were mobilised at both sides. In the years from 1895 to 1905 a huge mobilisation of national values whipped up hostility against the Swedes.

History was rewritten. Since then the very term *Union* has been understood as foreign repression.<sup>20</sup> Here lies the root of the Norwegian scepticism towards the EEC and the EU. The outcome of the conflicts of 1814, 1884 and 1905 are seen as national victories against external threats embodied in unions. The term "union" symbolises dependence – the opposite of the independence that was created by breaking out of the subsequent unions with Denmark and Sweden. Since the roots of the national identity are portrayed as egalitarian, based on rural culture and physical duress in a harsh natural environment, the Norwegian traditional self-perception is somehow alien to political projects that may be portrayed as elitist, urban and as having a "disneyfied" view of nature.

#### *The need for alliances and the dangers of isolationism*

From 1807 to 1814 Norway was isolated by a British naval blockade that resulted in hunger and economic stagnation. One of the lessons drawn from this experience was the recognition that the first and foremost Norwegian strategic goal should be to avoid war with England.<sup>21</sup> The maxim, avoid conflict with the primary Sea Power, has been at the core of Norwegian strategic thinking ever since.

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18 Wergeland (1816).

19 Ulriksen, *Den norske forsvarstradisjonen. Folkeforsvar eller militaermakt?* (Oslo: Pax forlag, 2002).

20 Neumann (2001).

21 Ludvig Mariboe, "Nogle ord om almindelig Voernepligt, og et Forslag til, paa den mindst bekostelige og mindst byrdefulle maade at underholde et Land- og Søveoem i Norge", Trykt hos Jacob Lehman, Christiania.

As history was re-interpreted and re-written around 1905, Norwegian military history was reduced to a series of border wars against the Swedes. Participation in alliances and military operations outside Norway was, when mentioned at all, seen as a burden imposed by Denmark or Sweden. The development of military contributions to an embryonic international community within a Scandinavian framework during the nineteenth century were ignored and quickly forgotten.<sup>22</sup> Since then, with the possible exception of a brief period after 1940, Norwegian defence policy has been understood as territorial defence.<sup>23</sup> This is another central element in Norwegian thinking on foreign policy: military force is a tool of last resort for territorial defence, not an instrument for marginal foreign policy gains.

From 1905 on, Norwegian foreign policy sought to isolate the country from the rivalries of the European powers. However, as the First World War broke out, Norwegian policy increasingly favoured the Entente. To avoid war with Great Britain was still considered the most important strategic maxim, and Norway became something like “The Neutral Ally”.<sup>24</sup> The country had tolerated the loss of 900 ships and 2000 sailors in German submarine attacks. Norway did not, as did the US, declare war on Germany when its rights as a neutral were violated.

Norway became a member of the League of Nations in 1920. Although a majority of 100 to 20 in the *Storting* voted for membership, there was no great enthusiasm for the project.<sup>25</sup> Membership was seen as an unavoidable break with neutrality. If Norway chose to stand outside, one could expect the crucial relationship with Great Britain to deteriorate. However, neutrality was still the ideal. During the 1920s and 1930s, Norwegians were among the strongest critics of the so-called military paragraphs of the Covenant of the League of Nations. Although the Norwegians were willing to let the international court in Hague rule in the conflict over Eastern Greenland,<sup>26</sup> they were very much against contributing troops to defend other states against aggressors.

The German invasion of Norway on 9 April 1940, and the humiliating defeats in the following campaign still haunts all Norwegian thinking on defence. “Never again the ninth of April” is at least as important in Norway as “Remember the Alamo” was to Americans in the nineteenth century. The Norwegian King and government did not capitulate but followed the retreating allied forces to fight on from the UK. There, the armed forces were re-

22 The period between 1840 and 1870 was dominated by a series of Great Power wars, but there was also a trend towards the development of a European international community built on laws and norms. As part of this development Norwegian naval vessels took part in operations against the pirate states of North Africa alongside ships from most other European maritime states. This period also saw Swedish and Norwegian troops deployed between Danish forces and German nationalists in Slesvig in one of the first international peacekeeping operations.

23 Ulriksen (2002).

24 Olav Riste, *The Neutral Ally. Norway's Relations with Belligerent Powers in the First World War* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1965).

25 Nils Ørvik, “Sikkerhetspolitikken 1920–1939 – fra forhistorien til 9.april 1940”, Bind I “Solidaritet eller nøytralitet?”, Bind II “Vern eller vakt” (Oslo: Tanum forlag, 1960/1961).

26 After the war the Norwegians launched their “cold water imperialism” and claimed a collection of frozen lands in the Arctic and Antarctica. A bid to take over or to take back, depending on one’s view of history, Eastern Greenland strained relations with Denmark in the early 1930s. The dispute was solved by a ruling of the International Court in the Hague, and Norway accepted defeat.



built in close co-operation with the British and financed by the huge Norwegian merchant fleet. The war was another fundamental experience, a classic external shock in the sense that it brought about deep changes in policy.

When Norway entered the United Nations in 1945, the reluctance and doubt that had characterised the attitude towards the League of Nations were gone. Norway willingly accepted and prepared to undertake the military commitments inherent in the UN. This embrace of the UN reflected a recognition that small states could not leave the responsibility for grand politics to Great Powers. Simultaneously, a *de facto* alliance with the UK was continued after the war. The only standing Norwegian brigade was deployed as a part of the British Army on the Rhine to occupy Germany. During the five years in exile, Norwegian politicians and officers developed strong links to their British and American counterparts. Although Norway entered negotiations with Sweden and Denmark over a Nordic alliance in the late 1940s, the Norwegians were not at all prepared to sever those links.<sup>27</sup> Norway became one of the founding members of NATO in 1949.

Norwegian policy in NATO was characterised by all the historical experiences sketched above. The need for alliances, above all with the dominant Sea Powers, was recognized. There was the scepticism towards unions and integration with other states, and there was a continued scepticism towards Great Powers, including allied ones. All these considerations had to be balanced. Regional alliances had to be balanced with global commitments. The need for credible military arrangements had to be balanced with fear of integration with strong allies. The year 1949 seems to be a turning point in Norwegian alliance policy. The change may, however, be seen as a matter of degree, not of substance.

### **The balancing act: realism and idealism**

In official terms, Norway from 1949 to 1989 relied on a mixed strategy of deterrence and restraint towards the Soviet Union. The deterrence component was based upon membership in NATO, and a guarantee of British and American reinforcements in times of crisis and war. NATO provided Norway with what former Defence and Foreign minister Johan Jørgen Holst termed “borrowed power” in its relationship with the USSR.<sup>28</sup> The restraint component in this policy was defined in a set of unilateral measures meant to minimise provocation of the USSR. The most important was the “basing policy” (basepolitikken) that allowed no foreign troops to be permanently stationed in Norway. Allied forces were not allowed to exercise in Finland, the county bordering the USSR. In addition, nuclear weapons and “offensive” systems like the F-111 heavy attack aircraft were not allowed exercises in Norway. The membership in NATO, as with the present membership in the EEA, was thus a minimalist solution.

As the deterrence-restraint strategy was so elegantly formulated after the actual decisions of restraints were taken, one might however ask if the real

<sup>27</sup> Magne Skodvin, *Norden eller NATO* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1971).

<sup>28</sup> Johan Jørgen Holst, *Norges sikkerhetspolitiske situasjon* (Atlantehavskomiteens skriftserie nr 121, 1988).

reason for the minimalist solution was in fact the above mentioned deeply felt convictions in Norwegian foreign policy thinking.<sup>29</sup>

In NATO's first decade, almost all Norway's standing forces were dedicated to the defence of northern Germany, Denmark and the Baltic approaches. However, in 1953 the Norwegian brigade in Germany was moved to Northern Norway and in the 1960s all forces were tasked with the defence of Norwegian territory. Thus, after a brief interlude as a net contributor to the most exposed areas of the alliance, the Norwegians returned to focus on territorial defence. From then on the alliance came to be viewed more as a mechanism for providing military assistance to Norway, and less as a commitment demanding Norwegian contributions. In a sense the Norwegians had shaped their image of NATO to make it fit into their image of their own place in the world.

From the 1950s on, in a spiral of threats and counter threats, the military bases on the Kola Peninsula developed into the single most important area for the Soviet strategic forces. The Norwegian response was a defence build-up partly financed by American aid, which came to an end in the 1970s. As the Soviet expansion continued, Norway had few means of her own to balance this military capability. The result was an agreement in which the US pre-stored equipment for a US Marine brigade in Central Norway. The location of the US equipment to Central rather than to Northern Norway was a part of the non-provocation policy towards the USSR. This policy was designed to put a restraint on the allied superpower so as not to provoke the hostile one. Low military tension was a clear objective. Simultaneously, Norwegian strategists very actively supported the idea that NATO should earmark military reinforcements trained and equipped for combat in arctic environments. The Anglo-French campaign in Norway in 1940 had demonstrated the disastrous consequences of deploying unprepared troops in harsh climate and difficult terrain.

It was recognised that only the US could provide substantial reinforcements in times of war, but for political reasons great efforts were made to place as many "flags in the line" as possible. Norway favoured a multilateral relationship with the USA to a bilateral one.<sup>30</sup> In the latter Norway would have a small say. Nevertheless Norwegian dependence on American reinforcements increased in the late 1970s and the 1980s. As the Americans implemented the so-called "maritime strategy" in the 1980s, what previously had been termed the northern flank became known as the northern *front*.

### **Activism as penance**

Modern Norway has a history of avoiding formal and long-term commitments to international co-operation. Since before the end of the Norwegian-Swedish Union in 1905, Norway has always been hesitant to enter into such arrangements, the Norwegians have always preferred some kind of association rather than full membership, a high degree of legal and cultural autonomy rather than binding collective commitments.

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<sup>29</sup> Lundestad (1985).

<sup>30</sup> Johan Jørgen Holst, *The New Europe: A view from the North* (Atlantehavskomiteens skriftserie nr 143. IISS, 1993; London: The Military Balance 1992–1993).

- Norway was very hesitant to enter the League of Nations. After it did, the Norwegians spent most of their energy on a crusade to abolish the military paragraph saying that an attack on one member should be met by all. The Norwegians thus sought to weaken the organisation.<sup>31</sup>
- As a member of NATO, Norway expected help if attacked, but did not allow foreign troops to be stationed on its soil in order to facilitate that assistance. As NATO changed during the 1990s, Norway dragged its feet and was remarkably slow in restructuring its defence to the new realities. To many Norwegians, it was a shock to discover that membership in NATO involved Norwegian commitments abroad as well as allied contributions to the defence of Norway.
- Norway blocked the development of the economic dimensions of Nordic co-operation in the 1950s. Twice the population has rejected membership in the European Union and its forerunners.
- Norway is the world's second largest exporter of oil. Although Norway depends on the work of OPEC for the regulation of oil prices, it is not a member of that organisation. Even if Norway has co-operated with OPEC from time to time, the strategy is basically that of the free rider.
- Agricultural policy is highly protectionist. Norway does not allow food exports worth mentioning from third world countries to enter its markets.
- Norwegian immigration policy is very strict and has been so for decades. Compared to Sweden, Norway allows remarkably few refugees and asylum seekers to stay in the country.
- Norwegians consumes by far the most energy per capita in the world. Although this can in part be attributed to a large metallurgic industry, it is not easily reconciled with the country's environmentalist image. Moreover, Norway has been reluctant to offer concessions on the release of greenhouse gases because of the needs of its most important industry, off-shore fossil energy production.

Seen from abroad, some traits of Norwegian politics and policies are clearly not very sympathetic. If not for the massive engagements in peace promotion and development assistance, the Norwegian state and nation would have a serious image problem. In a sense, the heavy emphasis on such foreign policy activism can be seen as a balancing the isolationist traits sketched above, a kind of penance.

Membership in and increasing dependence upon NATO did not prevent Norway from taking activist stands contrary to allies. Norway provided humanitarian assistance to the communist movements in Angola, Mozambique and Cape Verde from 1969, as these organisations fought the Portuguese.<sup>32</sup> NATO never supported or sympathised with Portugal's colonial policy. Nevertheless, the fact that Norway supported the enemies of an ally illustrates the limits of internal control in NATO.

Norway, along with Denmark and following the lead of Sweden, was instrumental in the suspension of Greece, another NATO ally and a close

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<sup>31</sup> Ørvik (1962).

<sup>32</sup> Gunnar M. Sørbo, "Norsk bistandspolitikk", in Torbjørn L. Knutsen, Gunnar M. Sørbo and Svein Gjerdraker, *Norges utenrikspolitikk* (Oslo: Christina Michelsens institutt / Cappelen akademisk forlag, 1997).

trading partner, from the Council of Europe after the military coup in 1967. Norway did not follow Sweden all the way, but maintaining diplomatic relations with Greece and not raising the case in NATO. Nevertheless, the policy was radical compared to that of other West European NATO members.<sup>33</sup> Norway also joined, although somewhat reluctantly, Sweden, Denmark, the Netherlands and France in taking the Turkish military regime to the European Human Rights Commission in 1982.

The Norwegian critique of the American war in Vietnam never reached the same level as that coming from Sweden. Nevertheless, the Norwegian government granted humanitarian aid to Vietnam in 1972 while the war was still being fought.<sup>34</sup> The aid was terminated in 1979 as a reaction to Vietnamese policy towards the refugees who were fleeing in boats, many of whom were picked up by Norwegian merchant vessels and settled in Norway.

In 1979, Vietnam invaded Cambodia and drove Pol Pot's regime out of the country. By then the Khmer Rouge had committed genocide on its own people. More than one million Cambodians, or some 20% of the population, are assumed to have died as a direct consequence of the regime led by Pol Pot. In other words, Vietnam conducted what has been labelled "humanitarian intervention" under other political circumstances. Yet the US, supported by China, pushed through a UN resolution that condemned the Vietnamese intervention. Norway supported this resolution, an act that has been described as "amoral".<sup>35</sup> This is often explained as a combination of Norwegian worries about the principle of non-intervention and, especially, as an action directly linked to the Cold War. One should note, however, that another example from the early 1980s contradicts the latter explanation, namely the Nicaraguan case.

From the early 1980s, the American policy towards Nicaragua was aimed at destabilisation of the Sandinista regime. The USA financed and trained the Contras, mined harbours and tried to isolate the country politically and economically. Simultaneously, Norway granted Nicaragua development aid.<sup>36</sup> Indeed, Norway made Nicaragua one of its most important partners in Latin America while the US regarded the same state as hostile. One should note that this was in a period characterised by high military tension between NATO and the Warsaw Pact in general, but particularly in the high north as the US launched its so-called maritime strategy.

The contrast between Norway's acceptance of USA leadership in the Cambodian case and the direct and overt Norwegian opposition to US policy and strategy in Nicaragua is striking. However, a large fraction of the Norwegian left strongly supported the revolutionary movements in Central America, making the *Sandinistas* into something like a romanticised emancipating icon. Large number of Norwegian volunteers went to Nicaragua to participate in the (re)building of the country. The Socialist, Marxist and

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33 Gjerdåker (1967).

34 Olav Stokke, "Hovedlinjer i bistandspolitikken: Mål, strategier og prinsipper", in Tore Linné Eriksen, *Den vanskelige bistanden: Noen trekk ved norsk utviklingshjelps historie* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1987).

35 Gjerdåker (1987).

36 Svein Gjerdåker, "Norsk menneskerettspolitik", in Torbjørn L. Knutsen, Gunnar M. Sørbo and Svein Gjerdåker, *Norges utenrikspolitikk* (Oslo: Christina Michelsens institutt/Cappelen akademisk forlag, 1997).

Maoist love affair with Vietnam, on the other hand, had ended years before Vietnam intervened in Cambodia. In Asia the revolutionary ideals were China and Cambodia. Pol Pot's policy was described by one Norwegian radical as "a promising project". Thus, in the Cambodian case, the sympathy of the Norwegian left was with the movement guilty of genocide.

During the Cold War it would seem that membership in the alliance did not at all prevent Norwegian activism in the third world. On the contrary, NATO was to some extent an arena for such activism. NATO membership was an asset in the work to support democracy in Turkey, Greece and Portugal. In general, however, foreign policy activism and security policy were conducted by two separate bureaucracies in two separate arenas. The branches of the MFA dealing with security and development, respectively, did not coordinate their policies. In fact, the members of the different branches hardly met. This sharp division meant that national consensus could be maintained as both "realist" and "idealist" interests and needs were accommodated.

As the Cold War ended, the balancing act on the tightrope ended as well. The point of the new juggling act was to keep as many balls in the air as possible.

### **The juggling act: Pragmatic Idealism**

The changes in the international climate and landscape after the Cold War and the appearance of pragmatic idealism broke down the division lines between the still separate arenas. The changes of the early 1990s broadened the area of political manoeuvre for the pragmatic idealists. Goodwill and prestige won in one arena were seen as currency that could be used in the other. Moreover, a high national profile in external arenas could be exploited in an internal arena divided over the EU-issue, and provide the basis for a new consensus as the EU-debate culminated in the referendum of 1994.

The image-building policy of the pragmatic idealists required coordination and concentration of national foreign policy resources in fields and regions high on the international agenda. Diplomatic, military, economic and humanitarian resources were to be co-ordinated in support of a common goal. The combined effort was to be concentrated in geographical areas of particular interest to the international community.

In the first half of the 1990s, Norway concentrated its efforts in two such areas, Israel-Palestine and Bosnia. Both areas were high on the agenda and both had long standing links to Norway. Large parts of the Norwegian political environment had strong links to Israel, and since the Second World War relations between Norway and Yugoslavia had been very good. Thus good results in these areas would matter at home. Similarly, both areas were headaches for the US and other important allies. Norwegian efforts and perhaps success would be appreciated and result in goodwill to be transformed to influence in other arenas.

Moreover, one should note that very small direct security and economic interests were at stake in these areas. In other words, the potential gains in terms of prestige were high and the risk, in economic and security terms, was low.

### **The assets**

The pragmatic idealists could draw upon a number of assets in their policy.

Norway spends close to one percent of its GDP on development aid and relief. In the 1990s substantial funds were shifted from long-term, but low profile, development assistance to short-term, high profile relief operations. In addition, development cooperation with several states was terminated and funds moved to other regions as priorities shifted. These economic resources gave Norwegian diplomacy important formal positions in donor groups. Such positions were platforms that could be used strategically.

The Norwegian state finances the lion's share of the budget of several large non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working both practically and theoretically in long-term development and disaster relief. These organisations could of course be used on the ground in the prioritised areas of operation. Indeed, they could be used in coordination with military forces. The Norwegian armed forces and NGOs managed, in spite of strong prejudices on both sides, to plan for and carry out operational co-operation at a point where such co-ordination was in the concept stage in most other western states.

The Norwegian foreign policy environment is a small one, and in several instances leading non-political bureaucrats in the MFA for one government have served as junior ministers in other governments. This secures a high degree of continuity both at the bureaucratic and political level and allows for lessons learned in one theatre of diplomatic operations to be transferred to another rather quickly. Thorvald Stoltenberg was Minister of Foreign Affairs for the Labour Party, and already involved in the Israel-Palestine peace process, when the UN's Boutros Boutros-Ghali asked him to replace Cyrus Vance as Special Representative of the Secretary General in the former Yugoslavia in 1993. Stoltenberg brought with him several Norwegians, several with experience from the Oslo peace process, who found key positions in international work on Bosnia. One weakness of this small and well-versed community, as will be elaborated upon below, was their failure to win the hearts and minds of the Norwegian security and defence community for international efforts.

Participation in international peace support operations has been one of the strongest pillars of Norwegian foreign policy activism. During the Cold War, such operations were normally carried out under the auspices of the UN. To some extent those operations were located and carried out outside the framework of the Cold War. The largest troop contributors to these operations were small aligned and non-aligned states. Along with the other Scandinavian states, Norway was among the top contributors in absolute numbers and far above most others as measured in soldiers per capita.

During the Cold War there were distinct borders between defence policy, security policy and foreign policy in general. Defence policy was about the territorial defence of Norway. Security policy focused on the internal life of NATO and the relationship to the Soviet Union. However, UN peacekeeping activities were neither part of defence policy, nor security policy. UN peacekeeping belonged to general foreign policy. The bills were paid by the MFA. Neither the MOD or the defence establishment itself was particularly interested. If participation in peacekeeping operations did not damage an officer's

career, it certainly did not improve his or her prospects. The military units deployed to such operations were raised ad hoc on a volunteer basis, deployed for six months and dissolved when they returned. Cold War peace support operations (PSOs) were typically peacekeeping missions in which a lightly armed force was placed between two clearly defined antagonists who had welcomed the presence of UN troops.

For 20 years, from 1978 to 1998, Norwegian troops formed one of the largest contributors to the UN interim force in Lebanon (UNIFIL). Such tasks could be carried out with battalions raised ad hoc from the pool of former conscripts. The men and women in these units had been trained in different units of the Army, the Air Force and the Navy. They were given a mere two to three weeks of training and sent off to Lebanon. Upon arrival each battalion was a more or less random collection of uniformed civilians, not a cohesive military unit. The lack of training, cohesion and equipment limited the possible tasks to observation and patrolling; combat beyond squad level skirmishes was out of the question. As will be seen, these facts do not seem to have been understood by the foreign policy elite.

In spite of such failures and frequent setbacks on the ground, the juggling act of the pragmatic idealists was a success in the early 1990s. Internally, the broken consensus from the debate on membership in the EU was quickly repaired. Externally, Norway managed to gain important positions and presumably international influence in the OSCE, the UN Security Council, and in the Middle East and other peace processes.

However, starting in 1995, several strains was beginning to show as the roles of NATO and UN converged and as the Norwegian armed forces suffered from overstretch.

### **Defence policy and activism**

The Nordic Peacekeeping tradition ran into troubles in the 1990s. Somalia, Croatia and Bosnia lacked the clearly defined lines of conflict that characterised Lebanon and Cyprus. The developing modes of operation also provided the Nordics with challenges. Peacekeeping gave way for peace enforcement and passive observation changed to active engagement. The increased risk and more demanding tasks led to a re-assessment of what kind of forces was needed for modern PSOs.

The Norwegian Cold War defence structure was a militia-like system with very small standing land forces, while Air and Sea forces were held at a higher level of readiness. Upon mobilisation, the total defence forces would grow to more than 300.000 personnel, or some 7–8% of the population. The system provided large numbers of men with some military training but very few high quality units. The ability to recruit relatively large numbers of men for short term and simple peacekeeping missions and sustain such commitments for decades was a spin off of this Total Defence system. As the Cold War ended and the series of internal wars and international interventions of the 1990s started, peace support operations rapidly became part of an adjusted and internationally oriented security policy. However, the changes in security policy were not followed by qualitative changes in defence policy.

As pointed out above, Norwegian policymakers sought to isolate the low-tension Northern theatre from the high-tension theatre of Central Europe throughout most of the Cold War. The success of this policy backfired as the Cold War ended. The Norwegian military establishment was clearly among the conservatives in NATO following the end of the Cold War. They were the last proponents of big Article Five exercises and of a continued readiness towards Russia. A fact sheet from the Ministry of Defence in 1995 stated this very bluntly:

One of the major tasks facing Norway will be to encourage our Allies to maintain exercises at a level that is sufficient to ensure a credible defence preparedness. The Government will take steps to make it attractive for Allied forces to conduct exercises in Norway in the future as well. There is still a need for Allied exercises in Norway, in order to practice joint operations under Norway's unique climatic conditions.<sup>37</sup>

As late as in 1996, the Chief of Defence maintained that the Partnership for Peace could serve as an alternative to enlargement of NATO. The Norwegian representative in NATO's Military Committee spoke forcefully against enlargement on the grounds that such moves would dilute the Alliance's ability to take decisions,<sup>38</sup> an initiative that was not embraced in the political establishment. In February 1996, the Chief of Defence said that in the future Norwegian security interests would perhaps be closer to those of neutral Finland than those of the NATO-partner Denmark.<sup>39</sup>

Norwegian defence policy and military decision-makers did not accept that the end of the Cold War, the collapse of the Warsaw Pact and the break up of the Soviet Union signalled a new strategic environment and that this demanded a fundamental change in the Norwegian defence structure.<sup>40</sup> The defence review of 1992 and the cutbacks in the structure of the armed forces which followed were in essence a quantitative adjustment of structure to budget.<sup>41</sup> It was not, as in most other West European NATO members, a qualitative change that increased the capability for sustained and increased participation in international PSOs. The army, for instance, planned to mobilise about 40 manoeuvre battalions in war. Only one of these would be a more or less standing force composed of soldiers and officers who had actually volunteered for PSO-missions. The traditionalists that dominated defence policy still focused on conscription, now more as a nation-building tool than a mechanism for recruitment, and on territorial defence.

Constant exposure of troops to danger in areas such as Somalia, Bosnia and Kosovo throughout the 1990s demonstrated the weakness of the system, and as one would expect, the actual operational needs overshadowed long

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37 "Adaption of Norway's Self-Imposed Restraints", *Fact Sheet* no. 2/95, October 1995, The Royal Ministry of Defence.

38 Per Nordrum, "Forsvarssjefen: Partnerskap alternativ til utvidelse av NATO" in *Aftenposten* (07.02.1996).

39 Per Nordrum, "Forsvarssjefen: Partnerskap alternativ til utvidelse av NATO" in *Aftenposten* (07.02.1996).

40 Ulriksen (2002).

41 Iver B. Neumann and Ståle Ulriksen, "Norsk sikkerhets – og forsvarspolitik", in Torbjørn L. Knutsen, Gunnar M. Sørbo and Svein Gjerdårker, *Norges utenrikspolitikk*, 2 (Oslo: Christina Michelsens institutt / Cappelen akademisk forlag, 1997).



term planning. Consequently, resources had to be allocated to improve the quality and quantity of units available for PSOs. Thus the quality and robustness of the deployed Norwegian units increased dramatically during the last years in Bosnia and in Kosovo. However, as these changes were introduced ad hoc and the basic structure of the Total Defence system was maintained, the lack of balance between budget and structure did not improve. On the contrary, the lack of deep changes resulted in a budgetary collapse by 1999–2000.<sup>42</sup>

### **Military overstretch**

In 1998, Norway withdrew its contribution from UNIFIL after 20 years. The official reason was the embarrassing fact that the Norwegian State was not able to raise and sustain one battalion of infantry in both Lebanon and Bosnia. Bosnia was given priority.<sup>43</sup> The commander of UNIFIL saw the decision as an example of a rich state running away from its global responsibility to focus on matters closer to home.<sup>44</sup> The resulting image of Norway was not very flattering.

The withdrawal was the outcome of a tug-of-war between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on one hand and the MOD and the Armed forces on the other. The MFA wanted a large Norwegian presence in the area in order to support its diplomatic missions. Besides UNIFIL, Norway was among the major contributors to the civil police mission to Hebron, and as a large contributor, led the group of donors to Palestine. In addition, several Norwegian NGOs were operating in the area. There is little doubt that the mission in Lebanon would have been terminated in an earlier stage if not for the Norwegian involvement in the peace process.

The Armed Forces and the MOD had wanted to terminate the contribution to UNIFIL for years. They saw UNIFIL as a burden that limited Norwegian contributions elsewhere, both at home and in the former Yugoslavia. By 1998 their argument weighed more heavily because the strain of two simultaneous battalion-sized deployments was real, and even more so because the problem could be presented as a choice between indirect “idealistic” interests in the Middle East and UN, and more direct strategic interests in NATO. Bosnia, where NATO was running the operation, had become a second point where a concentrated Norwegian multifunctional effort had been put into action, with a large military, diplomatic and NGO presence.

The two traditional arenas for Norwegian foreign policy merged for the first time in Bosnia. There, Norway had a small logistical battalion from 1993. As NATO took over from the UN in Bosnia in late 1995, it became imperative to enlarge the Norwegian contribution. Norway had lost influence in NATO since 1989 and needed to be seen as an important ally. As NATO

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42 One consequence was that the procurement of some 30 advanced fighter aircraft, planned for a decade, had to be terminated and the planned fighter strength of the Airforce reduced by 40%.

43 Se f.eks. *Pressemelding fra Forsvarsdepartementet* 18.juni 1998 “Norge held fram i UNIFIL, men på redusert nivå”, og *Pressemelding nr 127/1998* “Siste nordmenn hjem fra Sør-Libanon”, *Forsvarets pressesenter* (26.11.1998).

44 Nicholas Blanford, “UNIFIL threatened by overstretched peacekeepers”, in *Jane's Defence Weekly* (24.02.1999).

moved into areas formerly the exclusive domain of the UN, the pragmatic idealists' external room for political manoeuvre shrank.

Norway was asked in 1999 to participate in NATO's operations on the ground in Kosovo. There were no forces available and the legal structure of the Total Defence system did not allow use of any of the almost 40 battalions the Army could have mobilised in war. The effect was that the independent company under SFOR headquarters and the infantry battalion integrated in the Nordic-Polish brigade in Bosnia were withdrawn.<sup>45</sup> The partners in the latter unit did not approve. In the international defence press, Norway was used as an example of a state with too many commitments and too few resources.<sup>46</sup> Although NATO threatened to use force against Yugoslavia over Kosovo in the autumn of 1998, and although the actual war started in March 1999, the Norwegian combat group was not able to enter Kosovo until September of that year. The bulk of the Norwegian forces arrived three months after their allies.<sup>47</sup>

By 1999 Norway was hardly contributing to UN Peace Support operations at all – all available forces were engaged in NATO operations. The image of Norway as an independent actor on the global scene could not be sustained.

These cases illustrate the lack of co-ordination between activist policies and the defence structure. Moreover, they demonstrate a fundamental lack of understanding of military issues in a foreign policy elite far more comfortable wielding the pen than the sword. By 1998 the debate on the defence structure and international operations had been going on for years. Nevertheless, in March 1999 it was obvious that even the main players in the political foreign policy environment were unfamiliar with basic military problems and actually believed that the Armed Forces had the capability to act quickly.<sup>48</sup> The pragmatic idealists had not done their military homework. They had not engaged themselves in the debate on defence. Dramatic changes in the defence structure to increase capability for operations far from home could have threatened consensus, both in security and defence policy and on the moral-activist front.

### Activism and opinion backfire

As activism institutionalised a specific Norwegian role in the Middle East, the nature of that role threatened the foreign policy consensus as well. The Norwegian role in the Israel-Palestine peace process was based on long-standing contacts between large parts of the Norwegian political environment and Israel.<sup>49</sup> Traditionally most Norwegians, including most political parties, had strong sympathies for Israel. From the late 1970s and early 1980s, however, Norwegian public opinion slowly turned towards the Palestinians. One reason for this was probably the Norwegian military presence

45 See Pressemelding nr 96/1999, "Telemark kompani trekkes tilbake" *Forsvarets pressemønter* (06.06.1999).

46 Ian Kemp, "Peacekeeping at stretch" in *Jane's Defence Weekly* (28.07.1999).

47 However, a small number of Norwegian Special Forces had joined the British SAS and were among the first to enter Kosovo.

48 This fact was demonstrated in several TV-interviews with leading politicians, and at a conference arranged at the Red Cross the (1999).

49 Waage (2000).

in Lebanon. Some 1000 Norwegian troops joined UNIFIL in 1978. The deployment lasted until 1998 with two contingents every year. Although Norwegian troops fought some skirmishes with the PLO and other anti-Israeli groups, and although most of the troops were friendly to Israel when they left home, most of the tens of thousands of soldiers returning from Lebanon had developed antipathies towards Israel. It is a fact that most Norwegian losses in combat or hostile actions since the end of the Second World War have been soldiers killed or wounded by the Israeli Defence Forces or its puppets in South Lebanon.

The Israel-Palestine conflict probably gets more coverage in the Norwegian media than any other foreign crisis. Presently, in 2002, most Norwegians are disgusted by the Israeli handling of relations to the Palestinians. Support for Israel is at an all-time low. Norwegian policy in the Israel-Palestine conflict does not reflect this. Thus the role of the arbitrator blocks a policy in line with popular opinion (see the section on “Concepts of Activism” above). The coveted seat in the Security Council, then, became an internal problem rather than an external source of influence.

### **Conclusion: Alliances and activism**

Membership in NATO does not at any point seem to have directly blocked foreign policy activism. Alliance membership seems to have been an asset as well, albeit not a decisive one, in Norwegian efforts in Israel-Palestine. Norway’s close relationship to the US did not help when the Norwegians tried to build contacts between the PLO and the Americans in 1987. The Americans turned the offer down.<sup>50</sup> The Swedes, however, managed to prepare the ground for a dialogue between the PLO and the US in 1988.<sup>51</sup> Palestinian leader Yassir Arafat emphasised in 1989 that Norway could play an important role because of close ties to Israel, the USA and the EU. For Israel, however, it seems to have been important that Norway was not a member of the EU.<sup>52</sup>

Before August 1995, the importance of alliance membership for Norway’s role in the diplomatic efforts in Bosnia is unclear. As Stoltenberg and Lord David Owen, on behalf the UN, desperately tried to mediate between the warring parties in Bosnia, the Americans very consciously undermined the arms embargo. Moreover, they utilised their leading position in NATO to do it. There is little doubt that the mere fact that the US established itself as an independent actor in Bosnia complicated the process and weakened the position of the UN and the West Europeans. The internal strains in NATO were huge at the time. One can only speculate whether any other constellation of actors would have managed to produce a different result. It does not seem likely, however, that any neutral actor would have been capable of restraining US actions. In none of these theatres did membership in NATO block a heavy Norwegian involvement.

Yet, as shown above, the fact that NATO moved into the UNs traditional area of operations strained and stretched Norwegian resources to such a

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50 Waage (2000), 98.

51 Waage (2000).

52 Waage (2000).

degree that autonomous, co-ordinated and concerted multifunctional and multifaceted foreign policy operations could not be sustained. Moreover, as membership in the European Union was rejected and the UN became side-tracked in the mid-1990s, NATO became relatively more important as a foreign policy arena.

The strategies of the pragmatic idealists were to a large extent designed to improve Norway's prestige and influence abroad by concentrating and co-ordinating already existing resources allocated to foreign policy. That is, the strategies were not meant to change the direction of Norwegian security and defence policy or involve the full range of Norwegian military resources. After Kosovo, NATO's new strategy, the Defence Capabilities Initiative and the attacks of 11 September 2001, however, such changes seem to be unavoidable.

Events in Kosovo and later exposed the naked emperor. The pragmatic idealists found that the traditionalists' firm grip on domestic defence and military policy resulted in a lack of deployable military capability which blocked their own efforts abroad. However, after Kosovo, the pragmatic idealists, in their struggle against the traditionalists, could point to developments in NATO and demand changes.

The traditionalists have found no point around which to rally. Their perspective on the development of the armed forces still assumes that operations abroad drain resources from territorial defence at home. They still see NATO mainly as a source of reinforcements in existential conflicts. In a sense, the Norwegian traditionalists dominating defence debates to this date have not managed to come to terms with the new NATO. Their ideal defence structure is seen in Brussels as obsolete and a complete waste of money. Thus they are probably fighting a losing battle.

The demise of the traditionalists, the former supporters of NATO, is matched by the bewilderment of their long-time opponents. In 1998–99, the do-good-ists, the former opponents of NATO, found themselves in support of, even lobbying for, NATO intervention in Kosovo. With the fanaticism of the convert, the former pacifists demanded and expected prompt and efficient military action in the name of humanitarian values.

However, developments inside NATO do not favour the pragmatic idealists either. The operations in Bosnia and Kosovo were NATO, not UN. While Norway had been one of the largest contributors to UN operations in 1990, the country was hardly contributing at all to such operations in 2000. Thus one may ask if the commitment to NATO should be viewed as a channel for activism or a duty towards the alliance blocking an individual and independent activist role. Clearly Norway does not have the resources to conduct semi-independent multifunctional activist operations within a UN framework in addition to comprehensive NATO operations, as well as prepare for similar operations within the EU.

In NATO Norway's chances of sustaining a high military profile are rather slim, at least until a deep qualitative change is implemented in the military structure. If so, a new strategy completely based on civilian resources will have to be drafted. The alternative is probably the anonymous life of a private NATO member.

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