
A Historical View on the Nordic “Peace Brand”

Norway and Sweden: Partners and Competitors in Peace

ADA NISSEN

4.1 Introduction

Sweden should make a comeback as international peacemaker! This urgent request to Sweden’s Foreign Minister Margot Wallström came from Peter Wallensteen and Isak Svensson in October 2016. The two scholars were working on the first overall review of Nordic peacemaking since World War II, and their message was clear: Since the rising number of armed conflicts required more peaceful conflict resolution, the Swedish government should increase its engagement and become more like its neighbors in Norway.

In 2016, the Norwegian government spent more than half a billion Norwegian kroner on peace processes with Norway in a third-party role. Sweden on the other hand, once known as the world’s moral superpower, spent less money and was less visible since it prioritized peacemaking under the auspices of the UN and other international institutions. If this did not change, Wallensteen and Svensson argued, Sweden would continue to lag behind in international peacemaking. This was not satisfactory for a country that for decades had prided itself on international solidarity and peace promotion (Dahl 2006; Wallensteen and Svensson 2016b, 2016c).¹

But why was it necessary to bring up Norway in the appeal to the Swedish Foreign Minister? Should it not have been sufficient to appeal to her sense of ethics and/or logic – Sweden should engage more because this would create more peace, and/or Sweden should engage more because Sweden’s security depends on a peaceful and stable world?

¹ See also: Bolling, “Sverige i Norges skugga bland fredens stormakter,” *Dagens Nyheter*, February 25, 2017, www.dn.se/nyheter/varlden/sverige-i-norges-skugga-bland-fredens-stormakter/.

In terms of Aristotle's rhetorical appeals, ethos and logos were apparently considered insufficiently persuasive. Pathos on the other hand, the emotional appeal, would hit a political nerve in Sweden. Therefore, Wallensteen and Svensson alluded to the fact that Scandinavians and other Nordics, be it politicians or the common person, tend to be quite receptive to arguments appealing to their sense of regional competition. This is visible for example in winter sports or in friendly quarrels about which is the most progressive, modern, happy, and healthy country, and which is doing most good for the world.²

Obviously, countries compete all the time, in the global economy, in military power, in sports, and in cultural competitions. What is special about the Scandinavian competition, however, is that it also includes competing in doing good deeds other places of the world. Take for example aid donations. Since the late 1970s, Norway, Sweden, and Denmark have been among the most generous donors to the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC), reflecting an ever-increasing willingness to supply capital and projects to maintain the goal of aid spending as 1 percent of GNP. Since no Scandinavian country wants to be perceived as less generous or less benevolent than its neighbors, matching the others has long been an impetus for foreign policy-makers in all three countries (Pharo 2008: 55, 79).

The point here is to illustrate the distinctive competitive streak that exists in an otherwise cooperative region, often presented as a coordinated political block with shared values, and a common Nordic identity or "brand" based on ideas of exceptionalism (Browning 2007). As pointed out in the introduction to this book, the "Scandinavian Humanitarian Brand" can be defined as a set of narratives that circulate within and outside the Scandinavian countries. An important component of this brand is the exceptional efforts to further peace. Drawing on literature about Nordic exceptionalism and small states in international relations (Mouritzen 1996; Trägårdh 1997, 2002; Riste 2003; Nye 2004; Ingebritsen et al. 2006), as well as Christopher Browning's suggestion that "[b]randing is not just about questions of image but also of identity, status, and recognition in a context where a lack of visibility is seen as inherently problematic" (Browning 2015: 196), this chapter unpacks the peace nation narrative by discussing its historical roots and practical expressions.

² The Local. 2016. "The Nordic Nations Have Gone to War... on Twitter," *The Local*, November 23, 2016, www.thelocal.no/20161123/the-nordic-nations-have-gone-to-war-on-twitter.

The chapter concentrates on Norway and Sweden and goes back in history to explore the roots of their postulated peace traditions and some key features of their mediation efforts during the Cold War. It then moves on to explain Norway's attempt to take ownership of the peace nation narrative in the 1990s and 2000s, and discusses why peacemaking became such an attractive tool for national image building, and why it from time to time caused some friction between two states that both wanted to be *the* peace nation. The chapter uses examples from Norwegian and Swedish peace efforts in Guatemala, the Middle East, and Sri Lanka to illustrate the possibilities and limitations of Nordic mediation. It argues that although the mediation successes have been relatively few, the peace nation narrative is hard to challenge. The main reason for this is that its overarching *telos* is to *be* the good, *spread* the good, and *fulfill* the good.

4.2 Roots of the Scandinavian Peace Nation Narrative

It is sometimes suggested that the political and cultural history, the democratic structure, and social peace in the Scandinavian countries make them natural and particularly well qualified mediators and exporters of peace (Pharo 2005; Leira 2007; Nissen 2015). A reaction to Wallensteen and Svensson's book on Nordic mediation in *Dagens Nyheter*, one of Sweden's biggest dailies, illustrates this notion. "Sweden in the shadow of Norway among the great powers of peace," the paper announced, indicating an undesirable loss of standing, alluding to Sweden's historical identity as "the world's moral superpower."³

But where did this idea that Scandinavian countries naturally belonged to the category "great powers of peace" come from? The answer is manifold. Let us begin with establishing that peacemaking is a variation on a familiar theme, namely the small Scandinavian countries' general post-World War II ambitions to be a moral force in world politics and play significant roles on the global stage (Eriksen and Pharo 1997; Dahl 2006: 151–202; Andersson and Hilson 2009). In some sense, these ambitions sprang from the perception of having a special Nordic identity, which, according to the historian Uffe Østergaard, included qualities like non-European, non-Catholic, anti-Rome, anti-imperialist, non-colonial, and non-exploitative. The Nordic countries shared a sense of being free

³ Bolling, "Sverige i Norges skugga bland fredens stormakter," *Dagens Nyheter*, February 25, 2017, www.dn.se/nyheter/varlden/sverige-i-norges-skugga-bland-fredens-stormakter/.

from Europe's historical burden as conquistador, colonialist, and exploiter of the rest of the world (Østergaard 1997: 25–26, 2002: 151–202).

As suggested by Lars Trägårdh this sense of exceptionalism appears to have given Nordic people the idea that they were on some kind of holy mission to spread the Good Message of social democracy to the world. According to Trägårdh and other scholars, such as the political scientist Hans Mouritzen and the historian Olav Riste, this missionary impulse was rooted in an older Nordic Lutheran Protestant tradition of non-hierarchy and egalitarianism (Mouritzen 1996; Trägårdh 1997, 2002; Riste 2003).

Political scientist Mikko Kuisma has argued that this missionary impulse in turn rested on a peculiar social democratic sense of justice (Kuisma 2007: 16). At the domestic level, this revealed itself as the state's guarantees against unemployment, and provision for sickness insurance and pensions. At the international level, the deep-rooted belief in justice found its expression in the export of human rights, peace, and democracy, values that people considered fundamental in the Nordic social democracies. Especially the Scandinavian states, Norway, Sweden, and Denmark, presented their own well-functioning welfare states as models for others to emulate in the transition from conflict and authoritarian rule to peace and democracy (Wæver 1992; Mouritzen 1995; Andersson 2009; Andersson and Hilson 2009). Since most disagreements in Scandinavia were resolved with negotiations and few battles were fought outside the institutional system, the Scandinavian countries developed "a propensity for a less aggressive and confrontational approach to foreign affairs than most other European states" (Archer 1996: 462). This gave them leeway to act as humanitarian frontrunners and peacemakers.

4.3 Swedish Dominance during the Cold War

Among the Nordics it is first and foremost Norway and Sweden that have cultivated the peace nation narrative. Denmark has focused more on NATO, the EU and traditional aid and so has Iceland, which in addition has a considerably smaller population and economy than the others. Finland did not emerge on the mediator scene before the 1990s, and does not lay claim to a peace nation narrative in the same way as Norway and Sweden. The Finns have mostly mediated under the auspices of the UN, the EU, or OSCE and kept a lower profile than the Norwegians and the Swedes (Wallenstein and Svensson 2016a: 19–20). It was in fact not

until 2008–2010 that the Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs really integrated peacemaking in Finland's national agenda. This makes Finland more of a newcomer than a pioneer in international mediation (Joenniemi 2013: 54–55, 59).

Sweden and Norway, on the other hand, have endeavored to play roles as international bridge builders or peacemakers since the 1950s. During the Cold War, Sweden was the most visible and prominent bridge builder of the two, seeing itself as a representative of a third way between East and West. Swedish representatives mediated among other places in the Suez crisis (1956), the Vietnam War (1965–1968), the conflict in Western Sahara (1976–1977), and in the war between Iran and Iraq (1980–1986). But also Norway facilitated talks in several Cold War conflicts, such as in the Korean War in 1950, in discussions with Poland about détente in the late 1950s, and in the so-called Ohio channel in the Vietnam War between 1967 and 1968. Yet, there was one important difference between the two Scandinavian go-betweens. Sweden was a nonaligned state (at least on paper) whereas Norway was a loyal NATO member that always weighed its viewpoints in light of US politics. Each position had its advantages and disadvantages in regard of peacemaking.

Whereas Sweden could allow itself to raise a clear and loud critical voice, pointing out faults and shortcomings in other states' handling of human rights violations or political repression, Norwegian criticism of the same reprehensible actions was more tempered (Nilsson 1991: 175–180; Tamnes 1997: 361–364). However, this was not always a disadvantage. On several occasions, such as in the talks with Poland, Norway was preferred as third party because of its secure position within NATO, its closer relations with the US, and access to decision makers in Washington (Eriksen and Pharo 1997: 221–227, 245–249).

Still, according to its advocates, many of them Swedish, Sweden was without doubt the real *Sonderweg* and the true peace nation. Supporting this claim was an argument about Sweden's two hundred year old peace tradition, which rested on its long-standing policy of neutrality since the end of the Napoleonic Wars. Sweden's neutrality continued during the First and Second World War, and endured with nonalignment and distance to NATO from 1949 onward (Ottosson 2003: 22–23). During the Cold War the Swedish Social Democrats claimed that only non-aligned countries that were not associated with one of the two hegemonic superpowers could pursue an active and truly moral foreign policy. Although never spelled out, this inevitably implied that the Swedes considered themselves a more moral country than the NATO members

and America friends Denmark and Norway. Often, the Swedish government would oppose US politics that Norway and Denmark accepted or only commented mildly. When a study at the end of the Cold War revealed that Sweden's neutrality actually rested on close and top-secret military cooperation with NATO, there was no strong reaction from Swedish opinion to this disclosure of doublespeak (Dahl 2006: 901–902). Most likely, the identity as nonaligned and independent was so deeply rooted in Swedish culture that it would take a lot more than a study to shake the Swedes' faith in it.

4.4 New Positions in the Early 1990s

What did shake Sweden, at least temporarily, was the global banking crisis and subsequent recession that hit a number of countries in the early 1990s. Whilst the Swedish government focused on rescuing its suffering domestic economy, contemporary observers described the downfall of the Swedish model. In this period, Sweden assumed a less self-assertive international position, turned toward Europe and eventually joined the European Union. Norway, on the other hand, went in a different direction and introduced a formerly unparalleled foreign policy activism, known as the policy of engagement, including energetic promotion of peace, democracy, and human rights in faraway places.

There were several reasons for these political choices. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, Sweden and Norway had lost their major threat in the Northeast. This provided both states with greater room for political maneuver, but for Norway it also had some serious strategic challenges. During the Cold War, the long Norwegian coastline and the border with the Soviet Union made Norway strategically important and an indispensable ally in the eyes of the United States. With the dissolution of the Soviet Union, however, Norwegian territory was no longer as important and the Americans turned their attention to other areas. This made Norwegian foreign policymakers reflect upon Norway's role in international politics and which measures to take to avoid geopolitical marginalization. As suggested by Browning, this was definitely a "context where a lack of visibility [was] seen as inherently problematic" (Browning 2015: 196). To maintain its identity, status, and recognition, Norway needed to find some ways to make itself visible. For a small, democratic state with limited hard power resources, peacemaking was a possible political niche. Since the number of intrastate conflicts increased in the aftermath of the Cold War, and military intervention was an undesirable

option in most cases, small state or NGO mediation became a sought-after response. This opened a window of opportunity for Norway and Norwegian mediators-initiated dialogue processes in Guatemala and the Middle East (Tamnes 1997: 151, 341–349).

Parallel to this, the Norwegians ended up rejecting EU membership in a 1994 referendum. This contributed to a dual feeling of anxiety and optimism about the future, which boosted the engagement policy. Within short, the Norwegian Foreign Ministry took on new assignments in Sudan, Sri Lanka, Cyprus, the Philippines, and Colombia just to mention some places, often engaging high-profile politicians or diplomats in key roles.

4.5 The Norwegian Peace Model

These engagements were grist to Norway's national mill, and soon the formulation of a national narrative about Norway as a peace nation and the introduction of a so-called Norwegian peace model became important elements in Norwegian foreign policy. In the early 1990s, policymakers, diplomats, aid workers, and others involved in foreign policy began to bring up historical circumstances, events, and national icons to justify the country's new role. Among these were the polar hero Fridtjof Nansen who introduced the Nansen passport issued by the League of Nations to stateless refugees, the absence of a colonial past, the awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize, the nonviolent dissolution of the union with Sweden in 1905, and enthusiasm for the UN, just to mention some. In brief, the narrative established that Norway was a nation with a unique tradition for promoting peace and solidarity with other peoples and therefore particularly well qualified to create peace elsewhere. A considerable number of policymakers, diplomats, and others involved in international relations looked upon this somewhat vague but cherished perception of a peace tradition as part of Norway's "family silver" (Nissen 2015: 1–2).

Although it was mostly a post-hoc construction conceptualized in the 1990s, the peace nation narrative was self-reinforcing. The more Norwegians talked about their special tradition, the more important it became and the more plausible it seemed. In the 2000s, the peace nation narrative was so well established that it convincingly provided Norwegians with a character that distinguished them not only from the rest of the world, but also from their Nordic neighbors. A speech given by Foreign Minister Jonas Gahr Støre in 2006, "Norway as Peace Nation – Myth or Reality?" illustrates this. In the speech, Støre underlined that

there were “clear features, in mindset, in Norwegian society, in political life, that [had] led us to play the role as advocate for peace and development.”⁴

Another expression of Norway assuming ownership of the peace nation identity was the introduction of the so-called Norwegian peace model in the 1990s–2000s. This model was a synthetization of Norway’s supposedly unique qualities as a third party, promoted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Its essence was the close cooperation between the Norwegian government, NGOs, and research institutes – implying a seemingly exceptional semi-private, semi-public construction for peace-making. No one really knows who first coined the term Norwegian peace model, but according to aid worker Petter Skauen, who helped facilitate peace talks in Guatemala, the Swedes used the expression very early. What we do know, however, is that the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs was the first to use the concept systematically, and that the reason for this was to conceptualize and internationally promote Norway’s role as peacemaker (Nissen 2015: 8).

Although presented as a unique approach, the model was essentially a reflection of the flexible public–private partnership that characterized society in all the Nordic welfare states. Moreover, the model resembled international mediation trends. After the Cold War, non-state actors like NGOs and research institutes became important players in peace negotiations for most countries engaged as intermediaries (Bartoli 2009). Finally, Norway’s way of setting up assistance to countries in conflict was in fact a marriage of convenience based on practical considerations, not a carefully designed plan or model.

Yet, this postulated model had an important function. It was a very useful tool for promotion of Norway as international peacemaker and helped construct a Norwegian “peace brand” that became significant for Norway’s position in the increasingly crowded field of mediation. This position was in turn vital for the country’s general position, visibility, and status in international politics. Norway was now the small state that demonstrated humanitarian commitment in a unique way and had “developed a voice and presence out of proportions to its modest size and resources” (Nye 2004: 10, 112). The peacemaker role was great for establishing and maintaining relations with central and powerful

⁴ J. G. Støre, “Norge som fredsnaasjon – myte eller virkelighet?,” speech, April 24, 2006, www.regjeringen.no/nb/dep/ud/dep/Utenriksminister_Jonas_Gahr_Store/taler_artikler/2006/Norge-som-fredsnaasjon-myte-eller-virkelighet.html?id=273461.

international actors, especially in Washington, and made it easier for Norway to promote its national interests and values. Peacemaking increased Norway's ability to deliver political messages on a great number of issues from poverty reduction to salmon and gas market directives. When this position was established, it became important to nurture it. Peacemaking was not only a good deed, but also a smart foreign policy.

4.6 Why So Little Cooperation?

As Norway was embracing its new international role, Swedish peace efforts continued at the civil servant level without political profiles involved, usually under the auspices of the EU or the UN. Whereas Norway increasingly emphasized the importance of access to Washington, the Swedes stuck to their historical narrative about neutrality and independence to explain why their contribution to world peace also had a special and important character. Imaginably, Norway and Sweden's slightly different positions in international politics could create a fertile ground for cooperation in peacemaking. The two countries had qualities and contacts that could complement each other. Sweden was more independent whilst Norway had better access to NATO and the powerful US. Yet, cooperation did not dominate Scandinavian peacemaking. In the long list of efforts led by Nordic mediators between 1946 and 2015, there are in fact remarkably few joint projects. On some occasions, Norwegian and Swedish mediators have cooperated, but for the most they have been protective and pursued their mediation missions separately (Wallensteen and Svensson 2016a: 19–20).

Part of the reason for this lies in the general dynamics of peace processes. Few disputing parties want more than one mediator to intervene since too many cooks may spoil the broth. Still, this does not explain everything. It might in fact seem as if Norway's and Sweden's adoption of very similar peacemaker identities has made cooperation somewhat complicated for them. Although they are able to pull together, each country's recurring need to promote its "unique" peacemaker identity has made it imperative to distinguish oneself from the seemingly identical neighbor. Since neither Sweden nor Norway wants to be left "in the shadow among the great powers of peace," to use the words of *Dagens Nyheter*, they both seek to stand out in an international comparison.

Many of the Swedish and Norwegian actors involved in mediation would probably not agree that distinction or prestige-seeking is a central component to Scandinavian peacemaking. “We seek effect, not glory,” Norway’s former Foreign Minister Espen Barth Eide maintained when he explained the fundamental approach of many Nordic peacemakers (Wallenstein and Svensson 2016a: 197). While it is hard to dispute that seeking effect in the form of a more peaceful situation has lied at the heart of Norwegian and Swedish motivation to engage in peacemaking, competition and “glory” in the form of status-seeking cannot that easily be excluded as additional motivating factors, at least not at the state level (de Carvalho and Neumann 2015). A historical glimpse of Norway and Sweden’s peacemaking efforts in Guatemala, the Middle East, and Sri Lanka illustrates this clearly.

4.7 Obscure Competition in Guatemala

Let us first turn to Guatemala. In 1989, two Norwegians more or less spontaneously started Norway’s first mediation initiative after the Cold War. Secretary General of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), Gunnar Stålsett, and the aid worker Petter Skauen, from the Norwegian Church Aid (NCA), convinced the Guatemalan government and the Marxist inspired guerrilla URNG to start a direct dialogue. At this point, several countries in Central America had been plagued by internal conflicts where left-wing insurgency movements fought against US-backed right-wing regimes. Stålsett and Skauen’s initiative quickly received support from the Norwegian government, with the ambitious aim of ending a more than thirty-year-long civil war. As the initiative gained momentum and the dialogue progressed, Norwegian media and politicians began to present it as exceptionally brave and typical Norwegian. It was never mentioned that the initiative to a large degree built upon forgoing Swedish peace efforts in Central America (Nissen 2015: 60–63).

In the early 1980s, Sweden had engaged extensively in Latin American liberation struggles and search for peaceful solutions. Social democratic Prime Minister Olof Palme and Secretary General of Sweden’s Foreign Ministry Pierre Schori dreamt of establishing a “Pax Centroamericana” and pushed for peace through a high-level regional dialogue forum known as the Contadora group (Nilsson 1991). This dream was never fulfilled, largely because the powerful US did not share the Swedish enthusiasm for dialogue with left-wing

movements. Yet, the initiative had planted some seeds that became fruitful a few years later when the Costa Rican President Oscar Arias decided to revive the group to promote peace in Guatemala, Nicaragua, and El Salvador (Azpuru 1999: 104).

This pre-history of Swedish engagement actually made Sweden the preferred candidate for a mediator role in Guatemala. As it happened, the Lutheran World Federation, which had established a conflict resolution fund, asked the Swedish government to host the initial meeting before it asked the Norwegian. The Swedes were positive, but backed down because a security guard at the Swedish embassy in Guatemala was suddenly killed for unknown reasons. Instead of taking the role as official host, Sweden decided to continue as a less directly involved supporter. This led the LWF to Norway where the Ministry of Foreign Affairs accepted the role as host immediately.

Norway was much more inexperienced in Central America than Sweden and had very few financial, political, or cultural ties to the region. One important exception was the Labor politician Thorvald Stoltenberg's assignment as the Socialist International's special representative to Nicaragua between 1983 and 1987. Yet, this was a personal-professional rather than an official Norwegian connection and Norwegian policy toward Central America remained less activist and outspoken than that of Sweden. Interestingly, Sweden's important groundwork for the Guatemala peace process, and the fact that Sweden was the preferred candidate for a first meeting were passed over in silence in Norway. Instead, the Norwegian mediators explained that Sweden probably did not get the third-party role because the Swedes had been "inattentive in class and failed to realize the potential of the peace process" (Egeland cited in Nissen 2015: 72).

The process in Guatemala provided an opportunity for Norway to demonstrate the capability of small states on the global scene and to receive positive international attention. Because of this, it became important for Norway to demonstrate its skills as third party. Combined with the fact that Norway was an inexperienced mediator, this urge to demonstrate skills led the Norwegian mediators to prepare for a final ceremony in Oslo way too early into the process. Tempted by the prospect of rapid success and seduced by the Guatemalan president Jorge Serrano Elias' launch of a "quick plan for peace" the Norwegians ignored objections from the URNG guerrilla that the president was moving too fast, and decided to push for the signing of an agreement in Oslo. Thorvald Stoltenberg, who had now become Foreign Minister

(1990–1993), remarked enthusiastically: “We should definitely support this [the quick plan] because of our interest in bringing the negotiations to a happy solution – in Oslo!”⁵

However, not everyone favored the idea of a happy solution in Oslo. Other players were also interested in the diplomatic limelight that the hosting of a final ceremony would inevitably shine. Facilitator Petter Skauen noted that the Swedes had in fact offered money to the Guatemalan Reconciliation Commission “virtually to buy the ceremony.” This worried the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs who urgently set out to convince the Guatemalans that Norway was the best place for a final ceremony, not Sweden. Although the quick peace plan eventually was called off because the talks stalled as human rights violations increased, the Norwegian eagerness to rush the negotiations despite warnings demonstrates that rapid success and positive international attention were important to Norway (Nissen 2015: 70–71).

Another example of the status and recognition-seeking aspect of peacemaking occurred only a few months after the incident with “the happy solution in Oslo.” While waiting for the official Norwegian-led talks to resume, the Swedish government organized a meeting with key actors in Stockholm to discuss the human rights situation in Guatemala. The problem was that the meeting was a side initiative and not communicated clearly to the Norwegians. This caused great irritation. Not only did the Swedes neglect to inform about their plans, the Norwegians also perceived the initiative as intruding and potentially threatening to their own position. The reason for this was that the Guatemalan government accused Norway of favoring the guerrilla since both Norway and the guerrilla were more concerned with human rights issues than the government. Sweden’s human rights meeting was troublesome because it could give the impression that the international community, and thereby Norway, sympathized with the guerrilla. Since this would make Norway unacceptable as third party, the Norwegians risked losing their role as go-between. Again, Norway needed to demonstrate ownership to the process (Nissen 2015: 70–71). When the official talks resumed in 1992, Foreign Minister Stoltenberg instructed his staff: “[W]e must not wait so long that the [first] meeting is organised somewhere else!”⁶

⁵ Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs 25. 4/54, 12, memo, April 30, 1991.

⁶ Handwritten remark on memo. MFA 25. 4/94, 14, memo, September 9, 1992; MFA 25. 4/54, 14, memo, August 13, 1992.

A third example of how important it was for Norway to remain a central actor in the Guatemala process took place in 1993. Several countries were forming an official support group for the process, and Norway feared being excluded because the Guatemalan government found the Norwegians biased toward the guerrilla. To secure Norway a place in the group, the Norwegian ambassador to Mexico therefore suggested a discrete trade-off. Norway would donate 100,000 dollars to the Guatemalan Reconciliation Commission in exchange for inclusion in the group. This was a remarkable suggestion, considering the negative Norwegian reactions to Sweden's attempt to "buy the ceremony" in 1991 (Nissen 2015: 74–75).

In sum, these examples illustrate how attractive a third-party role in a peace process could be for Norway and Sweden and how far they would sometimes go to maintain or create such a role for themselves. Although the general, outward impression of the Scandinavian peace efforts in Guatemala was one of harmony, Norway's need to demonstrate ownership to the third-party role and Sweden's attempt to engage more actively through an uncommunicated side initiative depict a relationship with elements of both cooperation and competition. A successful third-party role in an international peace process provided such great opportunities for increased status and recognition, and a strengthened national image or brand, that Sweden and Norway both found them very attractive. Still, Norway's drive and desire to stand out seems to have been stronger than Sweden's.

4.8 A Rare Incident of Cooperation and Norwegian Sensation in the Middle East

Norway and Sweden's appetite for third-party roles became apparent also in the Middle East. Since the establishment of Israel in 1948, a number of other international actors had tried to contribute to dialogue between Israel and the Palestinians. Several Swedish actors were among the ones who mediated between the two parties, including personalities such as Count Folke Bernadotte, UN Secretary General Dag Hammarskjöld, and UN Special Envoy, Gunnar Jarring. Whereas the Swedish government by the early 1970s had established connections with both Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), Norway continued to support and talk only with Israel until the late 1970s when also Norwegians opened up for dialogue with the PLO (Waage 2000b: 189–211).

Like in Central America, the Scandinavian states' mediation experience in the Middle East started as a Swedish-initiated dialogue, which Norway later built upon. The Swedish breakthrough came in 1988, when Foreign Minister Sten Andersson (1985–1991) managed to persuade the chairman of the PLO Yasser Arafat to publicly reject terrorism and proclaim Israel's right to exist. This led the United States – an essential player in the Middle East – to recognize the PLO as a legitimate representative of the Palestinians and start a dialogue with the organization. For this work, Andersson and his Swedish team received great international recognition (Waage 2000a: 62–63).

However, this time Sweden had not put the initiative across alone. Norway had helped secure vital American support through its close relationship with the United States, by convincing US Secretary of State, George Shultz, to back the Swedes. This incident is in fact a rare example of how Norway and Sweden could use their different positions to pull together as a peacemaker team. Since Sweden had a more ambivalent relationship to Israel due to the assassination of the Swedish UN mediator, Count Folke Bernadotte, in 1948, an action probably ordered by the Israeli politician, Yitzhak Shamir, and because Israel did not like Sweden's pro-PLO policy under Prime Minister Olof Palme, Norway provided what seemed to be a more balanced position than Sweden. This led Sweden and Norway to cooperate, but also here, the desire to position oneself through playing an active role came to the fore.

The Norwegians believed they could do more than just assist Sweden, and were looking for a way to reach what they believed was their full diplomatic potential. Parallel to Sten Andersson's initiative, Norway's Foreign Minister, Thorvald Stoltenberg, explored the possibility of Norwegian facilitation of direct talks between Israel and the PLO. Although the Israeli government was lukewarm, since the Israelis saw the Swedish initiative as the preferred alternative, the Norwegians did not leave the idea. Motivated by the fact that Yasser Arafat two times had raised the idea of Norway as go-between because of its good relations with Israel and the United States, Stoltenberg continued to look for opportunities. When the Swedish initiative after a while broke down due to lack of trust between the two parties, Sweden left its active mediator role in the Middle East and the scene was open for new attempts. Although Norway's parallel activity never competed directly with the Swedish initiative because of their different relations to PLO and Israel, it still exposes how eager both states were to take initiatives, often at the same time. It was almost as if Sweden and Norway overbid

each other in an international peace auction (Waage 2000a: 62–63, 2004: 1–46; Aggestam 2012: 74).

Eventually, Norway took the big mediation prize in the Middle East. After the Swedes left, the peace process scraped through some rounds of American-led negotiations in Washington without much success. While this went on, a new clandestine Norwegian initiative took form. Terje Rød-Larsen, a Norwegian sociologist and researcher who accompanied his diplomat wife to Cairo, established a secret back channel for dialogue between the Israeli government and the PLO. After a year of complicated, secret negotiations in Norway, the (in)famous Oslo agreement was surprisingly presented to the world. Few could believe that little Norway had managed to succeed with mediation in the Middle East, especially the Americans who had been running a parallel and official peace process in Washington all along. Also to the Norwegians involved, the situation was dreamlike. “It felt completely surreal,” State Secretary in the MFA, Jan Egeland, explained. At the same time, Egeland was convinced that the Norwegian peace efforts in the Middle East and Guatemala verified that Norway had a special role to play and had demonstrated this “more clearly than any other small nation, ever, [I think,] in the history of the world, during the last four to five years” (Egeland cited in Waage 2012: 106).

What seemed to be a giant Norwegian mediation success seduced diplomats, politicians, aid workers, and journalists. Newspapers were overflowing with compliments and recognition of the Norwegian-brokered agreement. According to the Norwegian newspaper *VG*, requests about assistance from the Norwegian peace team were “pouring in from all over the world.”⁷ Also international actors were impressed and Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres even claimed that the role of Norway “simply represent[ed] the character of its people.”⁸

The Oslo agreement and its aftermath marked a shift in Norway’s understanding and promotion of itself as a peace nation with special skills to resolve conflicts in other countries. From this point on, the narrative of the peace nation accelerated and Norway became known to the public as “humanitarian superpower.” Yet, when the Norwegian daily *Dagens Næringsliv* asked Foreign Minister Bjørn Tore Godal (1994–1997) whether Norway planned to adopt a form of activism

⁷ T. Johansen, S. Talsnes, & H. Henden (1993). “Verden venter på Holst,” *VG*, September 29, 1993. *Author’s translation from Norwegian.*

⁸ NRK. “Den gode viljen 2:5.” Broadcasted, January 15, 2013.

similar to Sweden's during the last decades of the Cold War, Godal disproved.⁹ In reality, however, Norway was actively looking for third-party roles to play, and ended up as mediator in countries like Sudan, the Philippines, East Timor, Cyprus, Haiti, and Sri Lanka.

4.9 The Limits of Norwegian Mediation: A Tragic Outcome in Sri Lanka

On the face of it, Norway's post-Cold War activity indeed resembled Sweden's activity during the Cold War. Moreover, since Norway had decided to remain outside the European Union, the Norwegians were for the first time since 1945 on some occasions perceived as more independent than the Swedes. This became particularly apparent after the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the United States in 2001, when the EU decided to designate a number of groups as terrorist organizations. Since EU members were prevented from talking to terrorists by legal constraints, Norway became one of few players who could act as intermediary in conflicts where one party was considered terrorist. This dynamic played out in Sri Lanka where Norway mediated between the Sri Lankan government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) from 2000 to 2009.

To support the Norwegian mediation efforts, the EU members Sweden, Denmark, and Finland participated in an international monitoring mechanism, which they funded and staffed together with Norway and Iceland. But when the EU designated the LTTE as a terrorist organization in 2006 after pressure from the Americans, Sweden, Denmark, and Finland were forced to withdraw. Since Norway had not succeeded in securing comprehensive support from vital, powerful players such as the United States and India, this left Norway as a lonely and vulnerable facilitator in a country on the brink of war. Together with a series of local and regional developments, this made Norway's mediation mission impossible and allowed the process to slide into a full-scale war. Norway's efforts in Sri Lanka demonstrated that the peace nation was no great peacemaker without support. Still, when Norwegian mediators were asked if it would have been better to admit one's shortcomings and pull out instead of contributing to an illusion of an ongoing peace process under the cover of which a war could gradually unfold, their

⁹ "Superdepartementet," *Dagens Næringsliv*, July 8, 1995.

unison response was no. Pulling out would be the opposite of doing what was ethically right, the opposite of doing good. And doing good was after all the whole point of being in Sri Lanka (Nissen 2018: 239–245).

For Norway more than for Sweden, the experiences from Guatemala and the Middle East became significant for development of the national identity as peace nation after the Cold War. Norway's decision to mediate alone in Sri Lanka is a good example of how the role as international peacemaker sometimes involved an element of hubris that led to miscalculation of own capacity. The fact that the peace process ended in a full-scale civil war in 2009 was by no means Norway's fault, but Norway definitely overestimated its ability to change conflict patterns and convince important states like India and the United States to support the process wholeheartedly. Observably, seeking status, prestige and doing good deeds could sometimes have severe negative implications.

4.10 Conclusion

Both Norway and Sweden cling to variations of the peace nation narrative or "peace brand," which at its core holds the fundamental assumption that Norway and Sweden are more peaceful and thereby better at understanding and creating peace than most other states. The reasons for this are several. First, if we turn to Browning's suggestion that branding is about identity, status, and recognition in a context where a lack of visibility is seen as inherently problematic, it is obvious that Norway and Sweden's smallness and geographical position in the outskirts of Europe constitutes a potential lack of visibility. Since lack of visibility is inherently problematic for any state with ambitions to influence global affairs, the selection of peacemaking as a special contribution to the world is rational. It helps Norway and Sweden to become visible and recognizable, and to achieve a certain status in international politics.

Second, the role as international go-between seems to fulfill some values that most Scandinavians appear to reckon as universal. No Scandinavian country wants to be inferior to its neighbors in terms of communal solidarity or promotion of peace, democracy, and human rights. In some sense, the peacemaker ambitions are also related to the perception of having a special identity, which includes a sense of being free from Europe's historical burden as colonialists and exploiter of the

rest of the world. Third, because the dominant notion of peacemaking in Norway and Sweden is to see it as a virtue in itself, the actual success rate does not matter that much. Besides, success in peacemaking depends on the yardstick you measure by.

The cases in this chapter are three examples. In Guatemala, the government and the guerrilla did reach a comprehensive agreement in 1996. However, it was reached with assistance from the UN, not Norway, and large parts have not been implemented. The signing of Oslo accord in the Middle East was ground-breaking since it was the first time Israelis and Palestinians signed an agreement after direct talks, but in wider perspective Swedish and Norwegian efforts in the Middle East have not made peace between Israelis and Palestinians. The Oslo accord is controversial because it is an intentional agreement that does not deal with substantial issues. In Sri Lanka, Norway helped the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE come together, discuss substantial matters, and sign a ceasefire agreement in 2002, but the parties never signed any final agreement because the peace process ended in full-scale war. The fact that there are few clear Scandinavian mediation successes is not because Norway and Sweden are bad mediators, but rather because peacemaking is a difficult and risky business. In principle, Norway and Sweden are just as good or bad at mediation as other similar mediators with limited international status and power. Sweden and Norway have definitely gained some mediation experience, but this does not necessarily make them better mediators or more genuine peace nations than others.

This implies that Norway and Sweden cling to the narrative of the peace nation because it is a powerful narrative in itself. It fulfils certain auto- and xeno-stereotypes of Scandinavia as a historically anti-imperialist, non-colonial, and nonexploitative region. Since the peace nation narrative's overarching *telos* is to *be* the good, *spread* the good, and *fulfill* the good, it distinguishes the Swedes and the Norwegians from the various "bad guys" in international politics. However, because the peace nation identities that Norway and Sweden have created for themselves are so similar, the need for distinction is pressing. Therefore, the peacemaking activity also has a certain competitive streak, which at first glance seems illogical given the two states' long tradition for cooperation on a broad range of foreign and security policy matters. However, this competitive streak seems to be one of the components that keeps the peace nation narrative or "peace brand" alive. This was visible in Isak Svensson and Peter Wallensteen's call to the Swedish foreign minister.

Because neither Sweden nor Norway wants to be perceived as less visible or less generous than the neighbor, this contributes to push them to be proactive, donate money, and engage extensively in international peacemaking. When this engagement is grounded in postulated peace traditions, which in turn are justified by continued practical peace promotion, the peace nation narrative or “peace brand” acquires a circular robustness that makes it sticky in times of change.

References

- Aggestam, K. (2012). The Psychology of Peacemaking. In M. Fixdal, ed., *Ways Out of War*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 71–90.
- Andersson, J. (2009). Nordic Nostalgia and Nordic Light: The Swedish Model as Utopia 1930–2007. *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 34(3), 229–245.
- Andersson, J. & Hilson, M. (2009). Images of Sweden and the Nordic Countries. *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 34(3), 219–228.
- Archer, C. (1996). The Nordic Area as a “Zone of Peace.” *Journal of Peace Research*, 33(4), 451–467.
- Azpuru, D. (1999). Peace and Democratization in Guatemala. In C. J. Arnsperg, ed., *Comparative Peace Processes in Latin America*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, pp. 97–126.
- Bartoli, A. (2009). NGOs and Conflict Resolution. In J. Bercovitch, V. Kremenyuk, & I. W. Zartman, eds., *The SAGE Handbook of Conflict Resolution*. London: Sage Publications, pp. 392–412.
- Browning, C. S. (2007). Branding Nordicity: Models, Identity and the Decline of Exceptionalism. *Cooperation and Conflict*, 42(1), 27–51.
- (2015). Nation Branding, National Self-esteem and the Constitution of Subjectivity in Late Modernity. *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 11(2), 195–214.
- de Carvalho, B. & Neumann, I. B., eds. (2015). *Small State Status Seeking: Norway’s Quest for International Standing*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Dahl, A. S. (2006). Once a Moral Superpower, Always a Moral Superpower. *International Journal*, 61(4), 895–908.
- Eriksen, K. E. & Pharo, H. Ø. (1997). *Kald krig og internasjonalisering 1949–1965. Norsk utenrikspolitisk historie*. Vol. 5, Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.
- Ingebritsen, C., Neumann, I. B., Gstöhl, S., & Beyer, J. (2006). *Small States in International Relations*. Seattle: University of Washington Press.
- Joenniemi, P. (2013). Finland: A Non-traditional Peacemaker. *Canadian Foreign Policy Journal*, 19(1), 53–59.
- Kuisma, M. (2007). Social Democratic Internationalism and the Welfare State After the “Golden Age.” *Cooperation and Conflict*, 42(1), 9–26.
- Leira, H., ed. (2007). *Norske selvbilder og norsk utenrikspolitikk. Report*. Oslo: Norwegian Institute of International Affairs.

- Mouritzen, H. (1995). The Nordic Model as a Foreign Policy Instrument: Its Rise and Fall. *Journal of Peace Research*, 32(1), 9–21.
- (1996). Denmark. In H. Mouritzen, O. Wæver, & H. Wiberg, eds., *European Integration and National Adaptations: A Theoretical Inquiry*. New York: Nove Science Publishers, pp. 65–99.
- Nilsson, A. S. (1991). Swedish Social Democracy in Central America: The Politics of Small State Solidarity. *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs*, 33(3), 169–200.
- Nissen, A. (2015). The Peace Architects: Norwegian Peace Diplomacy since 1989. PhD Dissertation. Department of Archaeology, Conservation and History, Faculty of Humanities, University of Oslo.
- (2018). Troublesome Peace Making: How American Views on Terrorism Affected Norwegian Mediation in Sri Lanka, 2000–2009. *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, 29(3), 522–542.
- Nye, J. S. (2004). *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*. New York: Public Affairs.
- Østergaard, U. (1997). The Geopolitics of Nordic Identity: From Composite States to Nation States. In Ø. Sørensen & B. Stråth, eds., *The Cultural Construction of Norden*. Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, pp. 25–71.
- (2002). Nordic Identity between “Norden” and Europe. In L. Beltrán, J. Maestro, & L. Salo-Lee, eds., *European Peripheries in Interaction. The Nordic Countries and the Iberian Peninsula*. Madrid: Universidad de Alcalá: Servicio de Publicaciones, pp. 151–202.
- Ottosson, S. (2003). *Svensk självbild under kalla kriget. En studie av stats- och utrikesministrarnas bild av Sverige 1950–1989*. Stockholm: Utrikespolitiska Institutet.
- Pharo, H. Ø. (2005). Den norske fredstradisjonen – et forskningsprosjekt. *Historisk tidsskrift*, 83(2), 239–255.
- (2008). Reluctance, Enthusiasm and Indulgence: The Expansion of Bilateral Norwegian Aid. In H. Ø. Pharo & M. Pohle Fraser, eds., *The Aid Rush: Aid Regimes in Northern Europe during the Cold War*. Oslo: Unipub, pp. 53–89.
- Riste, O. (2003). Ideal og egeninteresser: Utviklinga av den norske utanrikspolitiske tradisjonen. In S. Holtsmark, H. Pharo, & R. Tamnes, eds., *Motstrøms. Olav Riste og norsk internasjonal historieskriving*. Oslo: Cappelen akademisk, pp. 53–85.
- Tamnes, R. (1997). *Oljealder 1965–1995: Norsk utenrikspolitikk historie*. Vol. 6, Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.
- Trägårdh, L. (1997). Statist Individualism: On the Culturality of the Nordic Welfare State. In Ø. Sørensen & B. Stråth, eds., *The Cultural Construction of Norden*. Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, pp. 253–285.
- (2002). Sweden and the EU: Welfare State Nationalism and the Spectre of “Europe.” In L. Hansen & O. Wæver, eds., *European Integration and*

- National Identity: The Challenge of the Nordic States*. London: Routledge, pp. 130–181.
- Waage, H. H. (2000a). *Norwegians? Who Needs Norwegians? Explaining the Oslo Back Channel: Norway's Political Past in the Middle East*. Evaluation Report 9/2000. Oslo: Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
- (2000b). How Norway Became One of Israel's Best Friends. *Journal of Peace Research*, 37(2), 189–211.
- Waage, H. H. (2004). Peacemaking Is a Risky Business: Norway's Role in the Peace Process in the Middle East 1993–1996. Oslo: PRIO Report 1/2004.
- (2012). Proactive Peace Diplomacy: Jan Egeland. In M. Fixdal, ed., *Ways Out of War: Peacemakers in the Middle East and Balkans*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 91–118.
- Wallenstein, P. & Svensson, I. (2016a). *Fredens diplomater. Nordisk medling från Bernadotte til Ahtisaari*. Stockholm: Santérus Förlag.
- (2016b) (October 20). *Internationell medling kräver mer resurser*. *Svenska Dagbladet*. www.svd.se/internationell-medling-kraver-mer-resurser.
- (2016c) (October 21). *Sverige bör satsa på medling i väpnade konflikter*. *Utrikesmagasinet*. Hentet fra, www.utrikesmagasinet.se/analyser/2016/oktober/sverige-bor-satsa-pa-att-medla-i-konflikter/.
- Wæver, O. (1992). Nordic Nostalgia: Northern Europe after the Cold War. *International Affairs*, 68(1), 77–102.