

# ‘Our Entire People are Natural Born Friends of Peace’: The Norwegian Foreign Policy of Peace\*

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**Abstract:** *What makes a peace nation? In this article it is argued that the Norwegian foreign policy of peace is rooted in an historical self-understanding of Norway and Norwegians as particularly peaceful, an identity which was first articulated around 1890. Norwegians hold a strong liberal/meliorist belief that the world can become a better place, and that Norway has an important role to play in this process. However, this general belief in peace and a Norwegian peaceful exceptionalism has been expressed in different ways over the last 120 years. Around 1900, the ideal was a passive state and an active people working for peace, while from around 1920 it was accepted that the state needed to take more active part. Where international peace activism was associated in particular with UN peacekeeping during the Cold War, and peace mediation during the 1990’s, increasingly a broader panoply of ‘good’ issues have been tied to an ever expanding notion of peace. The last two decades have also seen increased Norwegian participation in offensive military actions, couched at least partly in terms of peace. That the Norwegian attachment to peace remains strong while still allowing for support to military action suggests both that the Norwegian self-understanding as a peace nation is deeply rooted and that it allows for a self-righteous understanding of ‘peace through war’.*

**KEYWORDS:** Political Culture, Democracy, Discourse, Norway, International Relations

We Norwegians believe ourselves to be a peaceful people, we love peace and work for peace (Hanssen 1901: 40).

Norway is a peace nation (Bondevik 2004).

## Introduction

On April 29<sup>th</sup> 2012 the leading Norwegian newspaper, *Aftenposten*, ran a three-page feature (including the centre spread) with the title ‘Export commodity: Norwegian recipe for peace’. Included on the accompanying world map illustrating ‘Norwegian peace efforts’ were both Afghanistan and Libya, where Norway has contributed with significant offensive military force. Observing from the outside, one could well question whether one was witnessing a blatant exercise in Orwellian newspeak (‘War is Peace’). Engaging with Norwegian foreign policy discourse, one would, however, realise that what might seem like hypocrisy is rooted in a widespread belief in an inherent, liberal Norwegian peace identity.

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\*The quote is from *Dagbladet* 23/4-1896. This article develops further themes that I have discussed in earlier works (Leira 2004, 2005, 2007a, 2007b, 2011). Thanks are due to Laurent Goetschel and David Lanz for very useful and thought-provoking comments to an earlier draft. The usual caveat nevertheless applies.

In 2005, 92% of the respondents in a representative survey agreed (fully or somewhat) with the statement that Norway was 'A rich nation which shares its resources with others through humanitarian activity and peace work'. At the same time, 36% agreed with the statement that Norway was 'A nation which does not do enough for development and peace' (Leira 2007a: 11). The same sentiments are also voiced in the press and by politicians, and by and large the Norwegian people see Norway as a peace nation, with further room for becoming an even more peaceful nation.

The main argument of this article is that peace policy has been a fundamental part of Norwegian foreign policy and that it is largely identity-driven; based on a thoroughgoing liberal belief that Norway can make the world a better place. Norway and Norwegians have engaged in peace promotion first and foremost because it has been deemed to be part of what makes 'us' Norwegian. While peace activism has at times been presented either as a survival strategy in a world of great powers or as a way of increasing status and thus making it possible to realise national interests, these strategies have always been subordinated to an overarching liberal approach to the world. Indeed, there has been an explicit fear that emphasising self-interest might undermine the liberal normative drive at home as well as the reputation for disinterestedness abroad. The explicit liberal identity-dimension makes Norwegian peace policy differ somewhat from the peace policies of the other countries discussed in this special issue, and has perhaps also made it less vulnerable to the post-Cold War turn towards cognitive ideas about peace activism (cf. Goetschel's article in this issue). This is not to say that cognitive ideas are a new phenomenon in Norwegian peace discourse; within the identity-driven framework, Norwegian peace policy has always furthered both normative and cognitive ideas; both transformational ambitions for systemic international change and utilitarian concern with the specific mechanisms supposed to make the world a somewhat better place.

An emphasis on identity necessitates a somewhat detailed historical reading. In the first part of the article, I discuss how a distinct Norwegian conceptualisation of a foreign policy of peace emerged around 1900, and in the second part I provide an overview of how this thoroughgoing liberal approach to foreign policy has continued to temper Norwegian foreign policy ever since. In the third part I engage with Norwegian peace policy after the end of the Cold War. Even though there are important differences between the 1990s, which were dominated by mediation and facilitation and the years after 1999/2001, when Norway has participated actively in military operations abroad, I identify three general trends for the entire period after 1989. Firstly, peace policy continues to be identity-based, even though different interest-based justifications have been introduced and even though there has been a marked increase in the reflexivity of the identity-politics. Secondly, by virtue of being a positively laden foreign policy concept, 'peace' has become ever more all-encompassing, more and more foreign policy has been represented as peace policy. Thirdly, there has been a relatively strong continuity in the means to achieve peace. State activity has been central, and a separate section for peace and reconciliation has been established in the ministry of foreign affairs. Even so, the 'Norwegian model' for peace policy has included a strong connection with NGOs, with the state acting indirectly. Furthermore, the stress on dialogue and open channels of communication, which has been a hallmark of Norwegian diplomacy, has been continued even during the 'Global War On Terror'. In the conclusion I return to some of the similarities and differences between Norway and the other countries under study. Here I suggest that by being constitutive of Norwegian identity, and only secondarily associated with survival or interest-maximisation, and conversely by being tied closely to grass root sentiments and movements (rather than solely

an elite project) Norwegian peace policy might prove more resilient in a rapidly changing world than the peace policies of some of the other states.

The article takes as its point of departure a discursive view of language as social, political and differential, adhering to an “ontology of linguistic construction” (Hansen 2006). Even so, the different parts of the article engage discourse in slightly different ways. The first and second parts following after this introduction are based primarily on two in-depth studies, one discourse analysis of the Norwegian peace discourse ca 1890-1940 and one genealogy of the emergence of foreign policy in Norway (Leira 2002 and 2011 respectively). Some alternative discourses were discussed in those works, but additional reference has been made here, drawing on studies in particular of military discourse. The third part of the article draws more extensively on the works of other authors, and necessarily provides more of an overview of discourse rather than extensive substantiation of claims.

### **The birth of a peace nation**

Norwegian foreign policy discourse differs from the foreign policy discourse of most other European states in that it is fundamentally liberal. In this section I explore why this is so and how Norwegian foreign policy, by being grounded in a rejection of traditional foreign policy, became a foreign policy of peace.

#### *Thinking about the world*

Until the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there was very little systematic thinking about external matters in Norway. In 1814, a 434-year tight union with Denmark was replaced with a loose personal union with Sweden, where king and foreign matters were the only two items that were common. Thus, there was no indigenous diplomatic service in Norway. Furthermore, there was virtually no nobility (aristocratic privileges were abolished in 1821), the officers were largely absent from the general discourse on foreign affairs,<sup>1</sup> and the energy of intellectuals and politicians was focused on building the new nation. Foreign matters were only discussed intermittently in parliament (the *Storting*), and the prevalent mood of the country was that Norway would be better served by not engaging with the politics of Europe, focusing on trade instead (Kaartvedt 1995, Leira 2011). In short, there were no obvious carriers of a foreign policy discourse in Norway and no sustained interest in discussing political relations with other countries (apart from Sweden).<sup>2</sup>

The European wars between 1848 and 1870; in particular the Crimean War and the wars of German unification, taking place as the press became increasingly professionalised, did bring foreign matters to the fore. However, the period from 1872 to 1884 was largely dominated by a protracted struggle over parliamentary government, where the *Storting*, construed as the true representatives of the Norwegian people, was opposed to the king, his Cabinet and the bureaucracy/ the civil-servant class more generally. The most radical nationalists saw this latter group as something of an alien element, to be assimilated or possibly ejected. In a pattern repeated in a number of countries in Europe, the opposition congealed around a number of liberal issues; political ones like parliamentary government, universal suffrage (first for men, then women as well), secret ballots, trial by jury and local

<sup>1</sup> Although, as we shall see below, a specialised military discourse on war, peace and strategy can be mapped in this period.

<sup>2</sup> In line with general free-trade arguments, trade was typically not considered to be political.

self-government; cultural ones like a separate Norwegian written language, universal schooling and religious tolerance and social ones like protections of workers and establishment of social insurances. The opposition included several different strands of liberal thought, and farmers in the periphery as well as radicals in the cities, but were able to cooperate and establish a liberal party, *Venstre* (literally, the left) and win the struggle over parliamentary government in 1884. The conservatives, defined by being against most of the above issues, formed the party *Høyre* (the right) at the same time. The struggle over parliamentary government was followed rather rapidly by growing tensions within the union, concerning foreign affairs in particular. The key bone of contention from the early 1890s and until the dissolution of the union in 1905 was Norway's desire for separate consuls, and linked to this, especially among the more radical nationalists, was the desire to have a separate minister of foreign affairs.

Engaging with foreign affairs more seriously, implied thinking through what the relations with the world should be like. And this thinking took the form of a confluence between ideas about Norwegian national identity and international ideas about peaceful foreign policy. Domestically, the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century saw the crystallisation of a hegemonic national-liberal conceptualisation of Norwegian identity, based on the ideology of *Venstre*, with an identity closely connected to 'the people'. Combining elements of a civic and an ethnic conceptualisation of the nation, 'the people' were seen not only as the source of political legitimacy, but also the carrier of the cultural essence of the people, their spirit and mission (Sørensen 1998). Politically this identity was juxtaposed against Sweden, and culturally against Denmark, but the identity-construct was also founded on a perceived difference between Norway and 'Europe' more generally (Neumann 2001). Between 1885 and 1890, this national identity focusing on the positive agency of the people was exposed to the liberal international discourse on peace, which also put a heavy emphasis on the agency of the peoples as opposed to the states. The most important direct inspirations were Fredrik Bajer and K. P. Arnoldson, joint Nobel Peace Laureates in 1908, who put the Norwegian liberals in touch with the wider European peace movements, and who toured Norway, agitating for peace (Leira 2007b). In terms of liberal ideas, Norwegians were inspired directly by the international thinking on peace through law and international solidarity, as expressed by among others Molinari, Martens, Deschamps, Gobat and Ducommun, as well as the early thinkers of the peace movement, like Passy, Lemonnier, Pratt and Cremer who were in their turn heavily inspired by the liberal ideas about peace and trade furthered in particular by Cobden and Bright (Leira 2002).<sup>3</sup> With its emphasis on neutrality, free-trade, arbitration and international cooperation and a general liberal (meliorist) belief in gradual progress, the peacefulness of peoples as opposed to states, and the benefits of closer interaction among the peoples of the world, this discourse found an eager reception in Norway.

There was, however, one important difference between how this discourse functioned in other countries and how it functioned in Norway. In the established states of Europe, the liberal position was articulated as opposition against the perceived Realpolitik of the kings and the nobility (Taylor 1957). This was also the case in Sweden, while in Denmark the recent defeat against Germany led to introspection and a general adherence to neutrality as a survival-strategy. In contrast, Norway, lacking any carriers of a foreign policy discourse, had no established domestic Realpolitik-position. When the international ideas

<sup>3</sup> See Ceadel (1996, 2000) for the British peace movement, and Lynch (1999) for a comparison of the British and the American peace movements.

were adapted in Norway, fitting almost seamlessly with the dominant national-liberal discourse, they were adapted as the baseline. Norwegian foreign policy was first articulated as a liberal policy of peace, emphasising the role of the people, neutrality, arbitration and free trade; in short as a reaction against that which was generally seen to be ‘foreign policy’, i.e. the secret conniving, alliances and wars of diplomats and aristocrats.<sup>4</sup>

### *‘The people’ as peacemakers*

In more specific terms, the focus on the people enabled a coherent discursive construction of the naturalness and perpetuation of the Norwegian peace nation: the people were peaceful, and so they elected peace-loving representatives; in turn, these representatives would carry out a peaceful policy and a peaceful policy would allow the people to live in peace and remain peaceful. The identity of the Norwegian people as peaceful was both a cause and an effect of the peaceful policy that would be pursued by a government of foreign policy by the people. More specifically, privileging the people implied celebrating the Storting. The Storting was generally represented as the true agent of the people, organically connected to the nation, while other branches of government – the Swedish king and the bureaucracy in particular – were defined as ‘un-national’. It is thus not surprising that it was the Storting that presented the idea of cooperation between peoples, that this idea was presented as rooted in the people and that it pitted the Norwegian people and Storting against the Swedish king and nobility.

The peaceful people would not only make Norwegian foreign policy better, it would also help change the world, an idea brought out clearly in the works of the leading liberal poet Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson. For Bjørnson, the positive agency of the small peoples, in general and specifically regarding peace, was something of a *leitmotiv*.<sup>5</sup> In his view, the peaceful agency of smaller peoples was a matter of life or death: ‘the small peoples will thus much more rapidly than the large ones remove policy from the hands of kings and diplomats, and control it themselves’ (Bjørnson 1898: 12). The contrast between great and small powers was striking. For the former, the rule was that ‘Egoism is more than a virtue in Great power politics; it is the virtue of virtues’ (Bjørnson [1895] 1913: 298). The implication was that the small peoples had to work for reform or perish. Bjørnson suggested the small peoples could invite all states to a general congress that would establish general arbitration: ‘Here is the salvation of the small states – and through them the conversion of the great to peace’ (Ibid: 302). Although Bjørnson argued in terms of survival, this must be understood in abstract and general terms, as he was eager to denounce any military threats to Norway as reactionary fantasies.

For Bjørnson, the ideal was to eliminate foreign policy as traditionally conceived. Popular – i.e. people’s – control over foreign policy would lead to its being abolished, much as the argument of French and American revolutionaries had been. The current example was Norway, but the point had more general validity as well. Bjørnson (1898:13, 17, 35) also set out the particulars of the Norwegian situation:

<sup>4</sup> This is not to say that Norwegian foreign policy was articulated as “liberal”, rather that it was based on what is recognisable as classical liberal themes.

<sup>5</sup> There are some similarities between this idea and the idea of the peacemaking of the neutrals (*pacigerance*) that Deschamps promoted in 1898. Deschamps, however, saw the states as the agents, whereas Bjørnson and other Scandinavians were more concerned with the peoples.

When Norway wants its own consuls [...] and when it wants its own minister of foreign affairs to lead these consuls, it is not to lead a policy next to the Swedish one, it is to avoid having any policy at all. [...] The goal of the Norwegians is to have a ministry of foreign affairs without a foreign policy [...] that implies a minister of foreign affairs without a foreign policy, a minister of foreign affairs that shall protect us against foreign politics.<sup>6</sup>

Later, Bjørnson specified that it was power politics in particular that he wanted Norway to avoid: 'By our own minister of foreign affairs we mean: no great power politics! Great power politics are controlled by arbitration treaties guarding our absolute neutrality' (Bjørnson 1898: 20), and the minister of foreign affairs should deal with trade, shipping and international agreements: 'when we are not going to have any great power politics, this will actually be [his] only task' (Bjørnson 1898: 20). The intention was to achieve security by standing outside the European system of power politics (Bjørnson 1898: 20–21), and the means to this end were arbitration treaties, international courts and neutrality guaranteed by the great powers: '[our people] wants nothing but arbitration treaties for the protection of neutrality and absolutely no foreign policy' (Bjørnson 1898: 37).

The desire to avoid foreign policy as commonly conceived nevertheless gave rise to the question of how to conceptualise the technical means one was supposed to pursue, and if there was any room for 'foreign policy' after all. Halvdan Koht, a leading peace activist and much later minister of foreign affairs,<sup>7</sup> presented one possibility, a re-conceptualisation of politics:

Culture covers everything in which the human spirit manifests itself, and here politics must be included as well, the internal as well as the external. [...] There is often a lack of culture in the policy among states; here it seems to be profitable to be devious and cunning or to trump one's way forward with raw power and weapons thirsting for blood. But culture in politics, that is simply the peace issue. The friends of peace want to bring the idea of justice into the relations between people and thus subsume politics under culture; the politeness and respect we show one another in personal relations should be present in the relations between the realms as well, that seems to be a worthy labour of progress. [...] The small peoples are the ones who carry the idea of justice forwards. They have no political power to maintain, they quite simply have to be peoples of peace, they need not invest in army and navy, they have no other outlet for their abilities than culture, and culture means justice and peace (Koht 1901a)

By turning politics into a form of culture, and presenting culture in the international setting as the pursuit of justice and peace, Koht helped open a space for thinking about Norwegian external activities as politics or policy – for, in the terms of Palonen (2006), policy was here clearly considered as an activity. Hanssen (1901: 40) agreed, and coupled peace explicitly to foreign policy: 'A sensible foreign policy is, in our opinion, an open and honest and fully realised peace policy'. By inserting the qualifier 'sensible', the old, aristocratic and war-mongering foreign policy could be transformed to a different foreign policy: *a foreign policy of peace*. We see here a difference from Bjørnson's argumentation. The goal was no longer necessarily the revolutionary abolishment of 'foreign policy', but its transformation into something different.

As could be expected, a foreign policy of peace was further specified with an eye to the technical means of achieving peace. Koht, for instance, noted how

<sup>6</sup> Unless noted, all quotes are originally in Norwegian, and translated by the author.

<sup>7</sup> And, in the spirit of full disclosure, the great-grandfather of the author.

There is yet much that remains to be set down in international law, and although we don't need to claim honour as a 'pioneering people', we could nonetheless see it as our task to further the development of international law. This is truly the only foreign policy task a small people has (Koht 1902d).

Koht also emphasised the role of small peoples, in general and in expanding the scope of international law and the usage of arbitration treaties: 'In this peace work all states have a job to do, but the calling is strongest for the small peoples' (Koht 1902a). In a comment on the emergent ideas of active peacemaking, he further concluded that such practical projects represented 'the means for the small peoples to fulfil their peace mission' (Koht 1902b). In Koht's arguments we see a naturalising of the role of the small peoples and an interpellation into an active role in transforming the world. Thus, for both Bjørnson and Koht, small states had not only the possibility to change the world, but almost a duty to do so; 'If we Norwegians join ranks and work for the great goal of peace under the banner: Justice for the people and among the peoples! – it will be our honour to have partaken in creating a new age and an era of peace among men' (Koht 1902e: 1–2). Thus, Norwegians wanted to stay out of the game of power politics, but they also had a strong desire to change the rules of the game:

Norway has no desire to partake in the concert of Europe. We desire nothing else than to work in peace on our independent development. We hold no grudges against the Swedes or any other people; we only distrust the Swedish policy. Neither do we have any particular sympathies for any particular country – perhaps only for the freedom-loving countries England and France (Koht 1894: 144).<sup>8</sup>

A special place for Norway was also claimed in the Storting. In 1896 parliamentarians debated whether or not to support the peace movement financially. Most of the 'friends of peace' in the Storting were also 'friends of defence',<sup>9</sup> and were unwilling to support what was seen to be the extreme pacifism of the peace movement. The formal reason for rejection was nevertheless that it was unnecessary to support peace activities among the Norwegian people, as 'our people are completely convinced of the usefulness of the peace and arbitration issues' (Indst. S. No. 171 1896). A parallel argumentation was employed in 1899, when agitation was deemed unnecessary: 'that the peace-oriented work of the Storting is rooted in and supported by the Norwegian people is obvious through the fact that the people have elected representatives that are friends of peace' (Indst. S. No. 200 1898–99). Likewise, *Dagbladet*, the leading liberal newspaper, declared that economic support to the peace movement would be unnecessary, since 'our entire people are natural-born friends of peace' (*Dagbladet*, 23 April 1896). The idea of Norwegians as being particularly peace-loving had, as we have seen, been articulated for only a few years at that point. Nevertheless this naturalisation seemed self-evident.

As the arguments over financial support suggest, there were tensions between absolute and conditional friends of the peace within the peace movement. And, indeed, there were a number of alternative representations of foreign affairs in Norway around 1900; the

<sup>8</sup> Compare *Social-Demokraten* 26/6 1905: 'We should avoid getting mixed up in the great political intrigue-making of the kings and courts. We should only take care of our commercial and mercantile interests. Everything else should be banished.'

<sup>9</sup> Which implied that they were willing to support armaments against Sweden; the majority of Norwegian peace activists were not pacifists, but were willing to take up arms to defend against Sweden (which was seen as the only realistic threat).

foreign policy discourse was not monolithic. Within the peace discourse, absolute pacifists dominated the organised peace movement. Their view of the people was starkly negative, as one of the intellectual leaders put it “We are a people prone to fighting since days of yore; thoughts of war and celebration of war grows among us” (Sørensen 1896: 19). In the general discourse, the absolutist position that the pacifists promoted was nevertheless marginalised. A pacifist position was not popular when war with Sweden over independence seemed a distinct possibility. More generally the pacifists suffered from their pessimistic and individualist view of the Norwegian people. In a setting where Norwegian nationalism celebrated the inherently good Norwegian people and political agitation was largely collectivist, the pacifists had a hard time indeed.

In the broader discourse, peace agitation, as noted, could fit well with a support for armed resistance in case of Swedish aggression. While this was clearly the dominant representation of peace, war and foreign affairs, a more militarist view could also be found in the years leading up to the dissolution of the union in 1905. Militarist writers lamented that the people were not sufficiently imbued with the warrior spirit, and raised the question whether a war with Sweden was “the fire we need to pass through so as to be forged into one people” (Scharffenberg, quoted in Sørensen 2001: 413). Apart from the outliers who wanted to baptise the nation in blood, there were few who argued in the general debate that Norwegian foreign policy should *not* be a peace policy.

In parallel with the general discourse, there was on-going debate about the role of the military and the type of threat Norway faced in military circles from the 1820s onwards (as detailed by Berg 2001 and Ulriksen 2002). However, the imbrication of this discourse in any discourse about “the outside” was weak. Russophobia, borrowed from Sweden but with the particular Norwegian twist of focusing on a possible Northern invasion and the British interest in avoiding such an attack, was for instance established in military circles decades before it became more commonly circulated (Berg 2001: 112-113). The implicit “realism” of much military thought was not incorporated systematically into Norwegian thinking on foreign affairs in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. On the other hand, there was strong imbrication of the defence discourse and other discourses on domestic issues, for instance on parsimony, equality in the union and national identity. Military issues were decidedly discursively framed as *internal* issues. The nationalist and nation-building focus of military discourse was only strengthened around 1905 (Ulriksen 2002).

When trying to lay out a consistent foreign policy, the first minister of foreign affairs, Jørgen Løvland, thus had to juggle the desire to avoid foreign policy altogether with the realisation that pursuing what was intended to dismantle foreign policy constituted a foreign policy in its own right. Thus, what is probably the most quoted speech in the history of Norwegian foreign policy, has a distinct schizophrenic quality:

If one looks at external affairs, it is always said with great force: we do not want a foreign policy. I have used the same expression, and can agree with it, if one finds the right limitation of the expression, that the task must be to help us stay outside the combinations and alliances that could pull us into warlike adventures together with any of the European warrior states. And that is obviously what one desires. But this exact course, to further and maintain neutrality, to keep neutral not only during war, but also in the days of peace, stay neutral in relation to the political combinations among the powers – that is a substantial foreign policy. I am not misinterpreting the expression, and I am largely in agreement with it, but one should remember that it has to imply this, that we should pursue a very powerful foreign policy. Its goal shall be to keep the country outside of the dangerous combinations; but that demands a daily vigilance



and it demands influence. This is the only political foreign policy that we shall have; but this is not the same as not having a foreign policy, on the contrary, it is a continuously living foreign policy. (St.tid 1905–06: 45–46).

While not wanting a foreign policy comes close to classical neutrality, as seen in different forms in e.g. Cobden (neutrality as keeping put of the affairs of other countries) and Bajer (neutrality as other countries keeping out of your affairs), the focus on an active people helping to create peace and improve the world, ‘Active Peacemaking’ as the title of an op-ed (Koht 1902d) put it, gives an added dimension to the Norwegian case.

In the very first debate about the organisation of the foreign service of the fully independent state, in the spring of 1906, the tone was much the same. Wollert Konow (H)<sup>10</sup> started the process by presenting a document arguing strongly in favour of prioritising the consular service: ‘for us, just as for the other smaller European countries, politics, in the true meaning of the word, will not be pursued’ (St.dok. nr. 27 1905–06: 5). Here, politics, as commonly understood, was differentiated from what Norway wanted to engage in. In the actual debate, the head of the constitutional committee, which had prepared the issue, stated that ‘we all agree that Norway is not only confined, but that it is also our common desire, to pursue a strictly neutral and completely peaceful policy’ (St.tid 1905–06: 947). A central Conservative representative chimed in: ‘everyone must agree that the only task for our foreign policy is to maintain our continued peace and neutrality’ (St.tid. 1905–06: 972). These two latter quotes pursue the same course as Koht and Hanssen had done outside of the Storting, conceptualising peace policy as foreign policy.<sup>11</sup> Representative Oppen shared Konow’s ambiguity when arguing that ‘the interests of the peace cause and industry should be the first ones to pursue, then the political [interests]’ (St.tid. 1905–06: 973). In this perspective, foreign policy was still tied to diplomacy, aristocracy and great-power shenanigans. In his first intervention in the debate, the new Minister of Foreign Affairs tried to tie the loose ends together:

I have said before that I obviously agree with what all Norwegians feel, but which has found a somewhat misleading term, that our foreign policy should consist of not having a policy. What I have noted in that regard, is that safeguarding the fatherland from being embroiled in conflict and difficulties that could prove fatal, demands carefulness and a never-resting vigilance. This is not to not have a policy (St.tid. 1905–06: 979).

Here and elsewhere, Løvland was seeking to bridge the gap – even though Norway wanted no part of what had traditionally been considered as politics, the very process of guarding oneself against such politics, through waging peace, did constitute a policy in its own right. Thus peace policy was indeed foreign policy.

<sup>10</sup> The (H) signifies that he was elected from the county of Hedmark, and is used to distinguish him from his first cousin by the same name, who was also active in the peace movement and a representative to the Storting from the county of Søndre Bergenshus; Wollert Konow (SB).

<sup>11</sup> It might be possible to discern a slight difference of degree between those desiring simply neutrality and a general peaceful disposition towards the world, and those desiring more a more active peace policy. This duality was reproduced in the late 1930’s, when some leading politicians wanted simply to sit tight, while others desired to utilise all possible Norwegian means to try to reduce conflict in the world. Nevertheless, this difference is probably more visible in hindsight than in was in 1905, and since all involved shared a belief that *the people* should work actively to foster peace, it should not be overstated.

## Maintaining peace policy

After independence, the foreign policy of the Norwegian state largely followed through on the ideological statements of the preceding years, stressing neutrality and free trade, and emphasising international co-operation and the development of international law. An implicit security guarantee from Great Britain implied that neutrality was not perceived as a survival strategy, but rather as a means to avoid getting embroiled in conflicts Norwegians wanted no part of. Individual Norwegians were active in the peace movement before, during and immediately after WW1. For example, Fridtjof Nansen made a name for himself as a great humanitarian (and won a Nobel Peace Prize) for his work for refugees in the early 1920s. Norway also abandoned traditional neutrality to join the League of Nations in 1920 and quickly became one of its most eager members. During the interwar years, the position of *Venstre* was gradually weakened, and the Labour Party (*Arbeiderpartiet*) became the largest political party. However, the social democrats maintained the positive view of the people. Therefore, as in Britain, social democratic foreign policy was largely developed on the basis of the already established liberal principles, with international solidarity as an additional component (Dahl 1969, Leira 2005, cf. Long & Wilson 1995). Several of the leading foreign policy activists of the Labour party also shared a background in different peace movements.

The German invasion in 1940 shattered Norwegian beliefs in the possibility of staying outside of the politics of the great powers. Even so, in the immediate years after the war, Norway attempted to steer a middle course between the Western powers and the USSR, and it was only the increasing Soviet pressure on the smaller powers of Europe in 1948/49 which led to a permanent abandonment of neutrality. In 1949, Norway was one of the original signatories of the North Atlantic Treaty, and during the Cold War, security concerns and alliance would trump peace policy if they were in conflict. Even so, when presenting the foreign policy in parliament in the spring of 1949, the minister of foreign affairs stressed how

the supreme Norwegian interest is peace, and the entire Norwegian foreign policy tradition makes it absolutely clear that we desire nothing else from our participation in international politics than to do our best to ensure that peace, good-will and co-operation is maintained in the relations between states and peoples (quoted in Lange 1952: 89).

There is an obvious moral driving force here, and an implicit acknowledgement that Norway has a mission; making the world a better and more peaceful place. While NATO membership was obviously considered to be vitally important in its own right, it also had the added benefit of covering Norway's back, allowing Norwegians to get on with the business they really wanted to pursue: saving the world.<sup>12</sup> The implicit goal was to pursue peace where it did not conflict with security, and to increase the sphere for peace in general. Throughout the Cold War, Norwegian governments tried to balance NATO membership with efforts at dialogue with the Communist powers and self-imposed restrictions on Norwegian NATO-membership (e.g. accepting no nuclear weapons and having no permanent US bases on Norwegian soil).

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<sup>12</sup> There were no obvious *Realpolitik* reasons for pursuing a peace policy, but within the Norwegian government, engagement in peace and development were seen to have the additional benefit of keeping the idealists happy, and thus defusing domestic disagreements over foreign policy.

Norway was also a very strong supporter of the UN from the outset, and had a strong presence in UN peacekeeping operations from the very start of such operations. Such participation was understood in terms of peace and internationalism, rather than defence, as evidenced by the attitude within the Norwegian armed forces that UN operations were at best a career dead end and at worst a waste of resources (Græger & Leira 2005). The general concern with international solidarity in the form of development aid was also closely tied to ideas of peace; peace through development.

Even though we do find a number of examples of normative ideas in the Norwegian peace discourse during these decades, there was also a strong commitment to constitutive ideas and the pursuit of small steps slowly making the world a better place. WW2 and the Cold War had led to reduced immediate ambitions for Norwegian peace policy, but the belief in a Norwegian mission and the overarching goal persisted. Fittingly in this respect, during the latter years of the Cold War, to the liberal and the social-democratic elements of the peace discourse were added a Christian-democratic element, drawing on long-standing missionary practices and international ecumenical work.

The Cold War nevertheless also ensured that thinking influenced by realist insights gained a stronger footing in Norway. Since 1905, Norway had its own, small, corps of diplomats. These diplomats had tended towards Realpolitik even before the war, and were strengthened in this conviction after 1945 (Neumann & Leira 2005). Likewise, the military discourse, even though still strongly nationalist, necessarily also achieved a greater influence on general discourse. Finally, the emergence of more systematic studies of international history and international politics also brought more realist perspectives to bear on Norwegian foreign policy.

Although security-issues were high on the agenda throughout the Cold War, the adherence to peace and co-operation was never lost. When the former Labour minister of foreign affairs, Knut Frydenlund, presented his ideas about foreign policy in 1982, he finished with a wish that Norwegian foreign policy might: 'be led by the visions, or perhaps naive ideas, that are so prevalent in the Norwegian people, of a world where right trumps might and where all shall have a joint responsibility for one another' (Frydenlund 1982: 213). It was in line with the broader Norwegian commitments when another book by Frydenlund (1987), posthumously published, was called *A Better Organised World*. And Labour was not alone in conceiving of the world in liberal terms. Frydenlund's successor, the Conservative Svern Stray, in his own tour of the Norwegian foreign policy horizon, stressed how 'the problems of the world must be solved through co-operation and community' (Stray 1985: 25). The Conservative party was less eager on peace policy than the parties of the centre and the left, but a common liberal background ensured that positive engagement for a better world persisted as a foundational trait of Norwegian foreign policy. Relating to the realist world of power politics was a pragmatic necessity, but this adjustment generally took place within an overarching liberal approach to foreign policy. This is not to say that a continuous and unchanging peace tradition can be found from 1905 to 1989. Changes in the character, degree and intensity of international interaction and institutionalisation influenced the direction of Norwegian foreign policy as such, as well as peace initiatives. There were important changes both in the content of 'peace' and the relative place of 'peace' in Norwegian foreign policy over these decades, but the basic liberal outlook persisted, and there was a self-consciousness of Norway so to speak having a tradition for having a peace tradition. Repeated references to Bjørnson and Nansen served to underscore this continuity.

### **After the cold war – peace in all directions!**

As the Cold War was winding down, new avenues opened up for Norwegian peace engagement.<sup>13</sup> The intellectual starting point was Jan Egeland's (1988) thesis that small states had comparative advantages with regard to making the world a better place. Egeland made the point for human rights, but it was soon expanded to cover peace activism in general, with the establishment of a so-called 'Norwegian Model'. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has argued repeatedly, and this has been echoed by Norwegian media, that the lack of an imperial past and great power ambition, coupled with a long-standing peace tradition, close connections between the state and humanitarian NGOs, readily available funds and broad domestic political consensus made Norway a particularly suitable country for pursuing mediation and offering good offices.

#### *A peace nation with a peace mission*

A representation of Norway as a peace-nation of the first rank on this basis emerged rapidly after the revelation of Norway's contribution to the Middle East peace process in 1993. With explicit reference to the earlier peace activism, it was argued that peace policy in and of itself could be a foreign policy, and that Norway had a unique opportunity to help the world become more peaceful. Key to this representation was a continued belief in peace as something which came more or less naturally to Norwegians. Prime Minister Bondevik (from the Christian Peoples' Party) e.g. stressed time and again how Norway had to be a peace nation, or, alternatively, realising its dream of becoming a peace nation: 'The work for peace has been one of the bedrocks that Norway has built upon for centuries. [...] Norway shall be a peace nation [...] we must, as far as a small nation manages, strive to build a culture of peace among nations' (Bondevik 2003).

Jonas Gahr Støre, who was minister of foreign affairs 2005-2012, has been more careful to downplay Norwegian exceptionalism, but still maintains that Norway has 'nothing but a crystal clear obligation to be a peace nation' (Støre 2006). In a book titled *Making a difference* (Støre 2008: 13, 24) he pushes the logic further:

In our times, Norway is a political and economic surplus nation. We have the strength to carry our part of the responsibility for creating a better world. [...] We must visibly show that we take at least our part of the responsibility; that we are going above and beyond what the rest of the world could normally expect. We have the resources to make a difference; we have a political and economic surplus that obligates.

Making a difference is thus not simply an option, it is an obligation, and part of what makes Norwegians Norwegian. It is self-evidently true in Norwegian discourse that the world can become a better place, that Norway can play a key role in this process and that playing such a role is not optional, but a moral obligation (cf. Leira 2007a). A major exploration of power and democracy in Norway likewise noted that 'The picture of Norway as a moral and humanitarian superpower has become a new national symbol, in line with other symbols which shape Norwegian identity' (NOU 2003/19: 51). To quote historian Rolf Tamnes' (1997: 339) pithy, and somewhat ironic, summation: 'Norway saves the world, thus Norway exists'.

<sup>13</sup> The peace discourse of the period from 1993 to 2008 is covered well by Skånland (2010).

However, peace activism has also been seen as something which benefitted Norway, by increasing the status of the country and ensuring access to decision-makers which might otherwise not have been interested in Norway; peace as a niche-product allowing Norway to accrue political capital. In a period when geopolitical development made Norway less central than it had been during the Cold War, peace activism was one issue which might allow Norway to remain relevant (Thune & Larsen 2000). This became even more important after the Norwegian electorate rejected EU membership in a referendum in 1994. The emphasis on political capital must necessarily be seen as part of a broader strategy of widening the appeal of the peace project, and anchoring it more deeply through reference to self-interest. Access to foreign decision-makers was also part of what made most of the Conservative party gradually accept peace activism; when they entered government in 2001, they discovered that pursuing peace was what made Norwegians interesting abroad.<sup>14</sup> On the other hand, there has also been domestic criticism of this interest-based reasoning, as when minister of foreign affairs Støre (2006) argued that ‘We ought not to, we will not, use our peace engagement to sell Norwegian salmon’, and a fear that focusing on interests could undermine credibility abroad and support at home. An alternative focus on interests can also be found, when it is stressed how it is in Norwegian enlightened self-interest to make the world a more peaceful place, as this will ensure peace for Norway, as well as reducing illicit flows (e.g. of narcotics, weapons and people). Approaching the subject matter theoretically, rather than politically, Iver B. Neumann (2011), drawing implicitly on the English School, has recently argued that Norwegian peace diplomacy can be understood as a systems-maintaining practice. For small and medium-sized states, he argues, systems maintenance follows from a rationality of government valuing global social change, and is also related to enlightened self-interest and reputational gains.

Although most Norwegians seem to share a view of peace policy as positive and of Norway as a peace nation, the last decade has witnessed more criticism of this self-image. Criticism has come from (at least) five quarters, two directed against peace mediation and the broader engagement policies as such, arguing that Norway should do less, two directed at the application of peace policies, arguing that Norway should do better, and one directed at the implied self-understanding, arguing that Norway should think differently.<sup>15</sup> The first of these criticisms comes from what is easily recognisable as a realist position among some journalists, academics and politicians – the engagement policy draws resources from what Norway should *really* be focusing on (Toje 2010). The second, and related, criticism stresses how the effects of Norwegian engagements have been negligible, that mediation in general is futile and that wars (at least civil wars) should be allowed to play themselves out to their conclusion. This is a typical academic position (Østerud 2006). The third set of criticisms, again chiefly academic, might well agree that Norwegian peace mediation and the engagement policy have not been as successful as they should have been, without rejecting the overall project as such. Norwegian engagement in several peace processes has for example been criticised (see Waage 2004 for the Middle East and Sørbo et al 2011 for Sri Lanka). Furthermore, Tvedt (2003) has made a profound critique of the Norwegian policies towards the developing world as driven by deontological ethics (or ethics of conviction) rather than consequentialist ethics, and argued that the entire policy-field is tainted

<sup>14</sup> It should be added that a concern with human rights has also helped turn the parties of the Norwegian political right in the direction of the broader peace engagement.

<sup>15</sup> This section draws partly on ideas put forward by Skånland (2010) and Berg Harpviken & Skjelsbæk (2010). The trends described in these articles have persisted since, in even more accentuated form.

by corporatism and elite circulation. Even so, these academics would argue that Norway should do better, rather than giving up the entire peace-project. This is even more obvious for the fourth set of criticisms, voiced by NGOs and concerned media and individuals arguing that Norway has not fulfilled its role as a peace nation. Typically, this criticism is directed against Norwegian participation in wars abroad, and against Norwegian arms export, (Lie & Mikalsen 2012). Harpviken and Skjelsbæk (2010) make a parallel point more generally, stressing the need for a more explicitly ethically grounded peace policy, and rejecting the notion that interests and ideals can be merged in the pursuit of peace. Finally, a number of researchers have questioned the Norwegian self-image as a peace nation. Some, drawing on above-mentioned criticisms, have decried it as 'false', while a more systematic approach has been to view the self-image as a construction, denaturalising it while not necessarily rejecting it (Neumann 2004, Leira 2004, 2005, Skånland 2010).

### *From war and development to peace*

When peace was established as a central concept in Norwegian discourse around 1900, the general international conception of peace was negative in the sense of absence of war. The concept itself has changed in many ways during the last century (Kende 1989), as exemplified by the changing criteria for awarding the Nobel peace prize (Bulloch 2008).<sup>16</sup> This development can be observed in Norwegian discourse as well, with an ever-increasing number of issues being subsumed under the positive heading of 'peace'. This has been particularly obvious in the gradually more overlapping fields of development and security, and seems clearly related to the expansion of the concept of security in the decades after the end of the Cold War, and following parallel logics (Buzan, Wæver & de Wilde 1998). Security and development in the global south increasingly became seen as interrelated; development leading to peace and peace leading to development, and it was argued that Norway could further development more effectively and efficiently by working for peace, than through traditional development aid (Skånland 2010). On the other hand, explicit reference to 'peace' has become less frequent over the last decade, with the entire panoply of good causes now being referred to as 'engagement policy'.

In line with the idea of global Norwegian enlightened self-interest in pursuing peace, it was also argued that working for peace increased Norwegian security: 'Our policy of peace is becoming part of our security policy. This is both the most important justification and a sufficient justification for our peace policy' (Støre 2006). Relating peace to security was obviously also related to Norwegian participation in military operations abroad. Here it should be recalled that Norwegian participation in peacekeeping-operations had traditionally been seen within the framework of the peace discourse, rather than the defence discourse. The Norwegian defence discourse lacked terms for discussing the use of military force outside of Norway, and Norwegian international military operations have thus largely been inscribed in the internationalist terms of the peace discourse (Græger & Leira 2005). Even the rapid reaction force of the Norwegian army, seen as the elite of the regular armed forces, conceived of itself as part of the Norwegian peace tradition: 'Norway has a good reputation as a peace nation, from the establishment of the UN and NATO, Nansen-aid and the Nobel prize. Telemark Bataljon is a part of this tradition' (Telemark bataljon 2005). And, as noted in the introduction, military operations in

<sup>16</sup> Since the Nobel peace prize is awarded by a Norwegian committee, it could be argued that the changing criteria are a direct reflection of changing Norwegian conceptions of peace.

Afghanistan and Libya have been conceptualised at least to some extent as part of Norwegian peace policy. The operations were framed as in line with international solidarity with the populations of the countries in question, and with an emphasis on civilian reconstruction and the Norwegian military as seasoned peacebuilders (Græger 2005, 2007). Nevertheless, there has also been a thoroughgoing re-evaluation of the possible uses and usefulness of armed forces, as Norwegian engagements abroad have shifted from UN peacekeeping to NATO or US-led interventions (Haaland 2007, 2010). The continued participation in military operations abroad has certainly put the internal self-image of the peace nation under some stress, but the overall framework seems less shaken than one could have expected. One possible explanation is that Norwegian public opinion on foreign affairs, seems to accept the principles of R2P; sometimes it might be right and necessary to intervene in other countries to ensure the greater good. And although Norwegian exceptionalism has traditionally tilted towards missionary activities, there is in principle nothing keeping it away from crusading.

### *Change and continuity in means*

The focus on ‘the people’ has implied that Norwegian peace efforts have never been restricted to the state – civil society was engaged in international co-operation and peace activism well before the state got engaged. When Norway got engaged in mediation and peace facilitation, NGO participation became explicitly part of ‘the Norwegian model’. Most Norwegian efforts in this direction have sprung from previous NGO-contacts leading to more formalised engagement, as with the Church Aid in Guatemala and Norwegian People’s Aid in Sudan.. The same pattern has also been obvious in other varieties of peace policy; during the campaign to ban land mines, where Norway was one of the central countries, NGOs worked in close tandem with the state.<sup>17</sup> However, as Norwegian peace policy has always been conceptualised as partly independent of the state, a changing role for the state does not imply a weakening of the peace profile as such.<sup>18</sup> The decision to institutionalise peace policy in a separate section in the ministry of foreign affairs illustrates this well. On the one hand, the establishment of a separate section served to tie the state closer to peace activism, while on the other hand, a number of the pioneers of peace activism from the 1990s have argued that institutionalisation reduces the flexibility which was a hallmark of the early successes.

Norwegian peace policy has also differed from a number of other countries in the years after 2001, in the insistence on dialogue. Based on a long-standing commitment to keeping channels for communication open and a consensus-based domestic political culture, Norway has maintained contacts with actors which have been blacklisted (or, more correctly, put on lists of terrorist organizations) by other governments. For example, Norway maintained contacts with the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka, enabling facilitation in the peace process (which eventually failed), and was one of the first governments to normalise relations with the Palestine coalition government, which Hamas participated in, in 2007. The ability to maintain open channels has obviously been made possible by Norway not being a member of the EU, and thus not having to adhere to the EU terrorist lists.

<sup>17</sup> It should be added that most of the relevant NGOs are heavily state-funded.

<sup>18</sup> And it should be stressed that what we are observing is changing ways of governing, not a reduction in state governing as such (cf. Neumann & Sending 2011).

## Conclusion

For 120 years, Norwegians have had a tradition for having a peace tradition, seeing themselves as historically (and possibly also biologically) more peaceful than other peoples, and embracing a mission, a duty or an obligation to try to spread peace to the world. In the perspective of this special issue, Norwegians were among the first ‘natural-born peacemakers’. This self-image has proved almost immune to empirics – practices which clash with it are either deemed irrelevant, seen as an opportunity to realise our peacefulness in an even more perfect way or allowed to modify the idea of what makes peace.

This is not to say that the content of the identity has been static. Until around 1920, the goal was to have a passive state but an active people, connecting with other peoples and building an ever tighter and better organised world society. After 1920, the state became more important, and the interwar years were generally years of high Norwegian involvement in international cooperation and high Norwegian hopes for perpetual peace. The Second World War and the ensuing Cold War tempered these hopes, and Norwegian attention was turned towards organisation-building and peacekeeping. The end of the cold war allowed for renewed enthusiasm, and the last two decades have witnessed a very strong Norwegian engagement in a wide number of peace-related issues, but at the same time also continuous Norwegian participation in sharp military operations.

By being based on a liberal conception of the world and being tied so closely to identity, Norwegian peace policy seems unlikely to subside in the immediate future, even though the specific content of such a policy might change relatively rapidly. What matters in an identity perspective is not what sort of policy Norway pursues, but that it can be presented as peace policy, as steps towards making the world a better place. In this, Norwegian peace policy differs somewhat from the peace policies of other small countries. On other counts, there are important similarities, not least in the acknowledgement that peace activism can increase status and lead to a better ability to achieve other foreign policy interests. But even here, Norway differs from smaller countries which are part of the EU – lacking the direct connection with important world leaders; Norway has both a bigger need and a bigger opportunity to pursue status-enhancing peace policies than EU member states.

Interest-maximisation and status-seeking must nevertheless be considered secondary effects, Norway seems likely to persist in the pursuit of a peace policy not because it gives us what we want, but because it confirms us as being who we are.

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