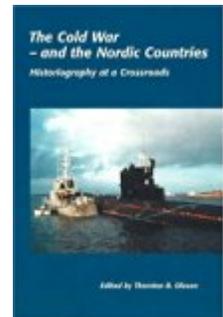


Thorsten B. Olesen, ed.. *The Cold War and the Nordic Countries: Historiography at a Crossroads*. Odense: University Press of Southern Denmark, 2004. 194 pp. DKR 225.00, paper, ISBN 978-87-7838-857-5.



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In 2001 a group of historians from the five Nordic countries (Denmark, Iceland, Finland, Norway and Sweden) decided that it was time to take up John L. Gaddis's challenge and assess what "We Now Know" about the Nordic experience of the Cold War.[1] Their primary aim was to assess the research produced in the decade or so since the fall of the Soviet Union, but they also wished to stimulate a more comparative approach to Cold War history in the Nordic countries. Too often, they felt, historians had been unduly national or even parochial in their concerns. Surely it was now possible to synthesize the results of research on transnational episodes such as the failed negotiations for a defense pact between Denmark, Norway, and Sweden in 1948-1949, or compare Danish and Norwegian alliance policies within NATO, or Swedish and Finnish policies of neutrality and non-alignment?

This book publishes the six papers presented to a roundtable discussion at a conference of Nordic historians at Aarhus in August 2001--one for each country plus a useful introduction by the editor and a concluding overview by Danish histo-

rian Nikolaj Petersen--revised to include research published up to 2003. On the whole they testify more to the vigor of the Nordic community of international historians than they support Petersen's charge of "Nordic parochialism" (pp. 177-178). True, few comparative studies have yet appeared, but the amount and quality of research on Cold War history produced since the fall of Communism suggest that Nordic historiography may indeed be at a crossroads, and that some of the best may still be to come.

The Nordic countries of course share many similarities: of geographical location, socioeconomic structure, political culture and so on. Yet there are important differences between them that have shaped the way in which Cold War research has been conducted in each country and, in turn, the approaches adopted by the authors of the five central chapters.

It is appropriate to begin the discussion with Helge Pharo's chapter on Norway because, as the other authors acknowledge, Norwegian international historians started serious archive-based research in the early 1970s--long before most of

their Nordic colleagues--and have produced a comprehensive and sophisticated Cold War literature that remains the envy of their peers. Pharo attributes Norway's head start to a number of factors: a liberal archive policy; a solid institutional base in universities and research institutes; an enlightened policy of commissioning independent research projects on key areas of Cold War history and, above all, a tradition of strong academic leadership, sustained now for thirty-five years and showing no signs of weakening. Major individual and collective projects completed during the post-Cold War era include a six-volume history of Norwegian foreign policy; a five-volume Norwegian defense history; a pioneering study of the Norwegian intelligence service; and a collection of documents on Soviet-Norwegian relations that stands as a monument to the brief period of archival glasnost in the early 1990s.

Because research started so early, a large measure of consensus exists on some of the main Cold War issues. There is now hardly any controversy over Norway's pivotal decision in favor of the North Atlantic Treaty, and against a Scandinavian defense pact, in 1949. Olav Riste's thesis, stressing the continuity between pre-and post-1949--the conversion of an "implicit" British guarantee into an explicit Western one--commands almost universal acceptance among international historians. The concepts evolved by Norwegian historians to explain Norway's distinctive position--as a member of NATO on the one hand and as a neighbor of the Soviet Union on the other--have proved helpful to historians in the other Nordic countries, especially in Denmark, another NATO partner. Two dichotomies have been particularly influential: deterrence/reassurance and integration/screening. Both describe Norway's combination of alliance membership with a number of self-imposed restrictions, such as the non-stationing of foreign forces on Norwegian soil in peacetime, designed to assure the Soviet Union of its non-aggressive stance.

Pharo shows how recent research has illuminated the policy dilemmas arising from this dual stance. Each move to strengthen the NATO commitment seems to have been followed by counterbalancing measures, not just to reassure the Soviets but also to allay the suspicions of a significant neutralist segment of Norwegian opinion. Interestingly, the dilemmas seem to have become more acute over time. In this as in other chapters, the 1970s emerge as a period of particular difficulty. By then the Northern Flank was more important to the Western allies and Norwegian issues were more integrated with broader NATO ones, while left-wing criticism was more vocal. On the whole, however, the Norwegian balancing act was successful: "Norway reaped the advantages of being part of the alliance while avoiding some of the more unpleasant responsibilities" (p.116).

There is no space to discuss all the issues covered in this informative and densely argued chapter. Pharo does acknowledge, however, that Norway's liberal declassification policy may have been a mixed blessing: that perhaps "the wealth of materials has served to divert attention from efforts to understand and explain" (p. 106); and that there is a need "for mainstream Norwegian historians to take international history more seriously" (p. 135). The task now, he suggests, is to integrate studies of Norway's international position with "the analysis of domestic politics and the changes in Norwegian society more broadly" (p. 135). This is a challenge issued, *mutatis mutandis*, by all of Pharo's fellow contributors.

Poul Villaume's chapter places Denmark thematically close to Norway in that it faced similar alliance dilemmas, but historiographically closer to Sweden and Finland, in that Danish research on Cold War history did not really take off until the 1990s. The reasons include a preoccupation with the Second World War, an effective block on recruitment to university history departments from the mid-1970s to the 1990s, and restrictive archival policies (Nikolaj Petersen's chapter offers

further detail on these handicaps). As in Sweden, official inquiries provided a major stimulus to research. In 1995 the "Thule affair" revealed that in 1957, despite public statements to the contrary, Denmark's prime minister and foreign minister H.C. Hansen had informally agreed to the peacetime storage of American nuclear missiles on U.S. bases in Greenland.

The inquiry commissioned by the Danish government and published by the semi-official Danish Institute of International Affairs (DUPI) in 1997 was the first Cold War study to be based on Danish government archives. Apart from confirming the details of the Thule affair, the inquiry opened up fruitful perspectives on the characteristic balancing act performed by Danish policy makers obliged, like their Norwegian counterparts, to take into account U.S. strategic interests, Soviet suspicions and an often skeptical Danish public opinion. This picture has been broadly confirmed by subsequent research, though interpretations have ranged from those who see Denmark as firmly embedded in the Western camp to those who accuse the Danes of subservience in the face of Soviet intimidation. As in the other Nordic countries, the 1990s saw a wave of journalistic investigation and recrimination directed against supposed villains of the Cold War era: on the one hand, the police and intelligence authorities who conducted surveillance of left-wing activists; on the other the Communists and other left-wingers who apparently had no scruples in accepting Moscow's pay. Research is now less polemical and archive policy has been liberalized (a 20-year rule now operates). Villaume provides a useful summary of what "we now know" in respect of Denmark's Cold War history, together with an agenda for further research. By fortunate coincidence, DUPI has recently (30 June 2005) published a further government-commissioned report on Denmark during the Cold War, 1945-1991. In a welcome gesture of openness, all four volumes of this

scholarly and authoritative report can be downloaded from the internet free of charge.[2]

Iceland, the third Nordic NATO member, is covered in a chapter by Valur Ingimundarson. There are features that resemble Denmark: a late start due to a lack of research and teaching interest in twentieth-century history and a restrictive archive policy. But there is a heritage of greater controversy in that the original decision to place Iceland's defense in the hands of the United States was hotly contested, with opinions polarized on ideological lines (pro-Western versus nationalist/neutralist/left-wing), and demands for the withdrawal of U.S. forces remained on the political agenda throughout the Cold War. Early research reflected this ideological divide, but in the 1990s historians disagreed on more scholarly grounds. While some stressed the need to safeguard Iceland's internal and external security in the face of Soviet expansionism and a strong pro-Moscow Socialist Party, others (notably Ingimundarson himself) focused on the economic dimension of Icelandic foreign policy. Icelandic politicians pragmatically exploited U.S. security requirements to ensure that the United States took account of Iceland's trading interests. As in Norway and Denmark, there has been debate over the alleged stationing of U.S. nuclear weapons in Iceland (no evidence has been found that they were stored in peacetime, but there were plans to bring them to Iceland in time of war), as well as on Eastern bloc funding of Icelandic Communists and Socialists. Future research, Ingimundarson suggests, should move away from high politics to encompass such subjects as the cultural impact of the U.S. military presence.

If Pharo's chapter on Norway is the most magisterial, Mikko Majander's chapter on Finland is the most exciting. Thanks to its release in 1991 from its "special relationship" with the Soviet Union, Finland represents the biggest leap in post-Cold War historiography. Until the 1980s a culture of official secrecy still prevailed and practically

nothing had been written on the post-1948 period. From the late 1980s a new era of "Finnish glasnost" saw the opening of both private and official archives (in 2000 a 25-year rule was established), while Finnish historians were also quick to exploit the archival opportunities emerging in Russia and other countries of the former Eastern bloc. They have started to answer some of the most important questions arising from Finland's relationship with the Soviet Union, as well as those surrounding the roles of Finland's uniquely influential post-war presidents, J.K. Paasikivi (1946-1956) and, above all, Urho Kekkonen (1956-1981).

One of the most controversial periods was immediately after the war, when it seemed likely that Finland would become just another satellite of the Soviet Union: particular mystery surrounded the rumors of a Communist coup in the spring of 1948. Why was Finland not Sovietised? Finnish historians have established that the fact that Finnish institutions remained intact, combined with Communist miscalculations and Soviet pragmatism, meant that there was no serious threat of a coup. On the other hand it was not until 1950, with the reliable Kekkonen as prime minister for the first time, that an "arrangement" acceptable to both sides was established. The subsequent twists and turns of the Finnish-Soviet relationship were characterized as "Finlandisation" by many Western critics: this was Soviet influence the "soft" way, with the Finns willingly subordinating themselves to, or even anticipating, Soviet demands. Majander notes the paradox that, having denied the phenomenon during the Cold War era, the Finns themselves revived Finlandization as a way of stigmatizing all those who had official or unofficial contacts with the Soviet Union and its representatives. The debate is now becoming less polemical and more scholarly, but controversy continues to surround "the enigma of Urho Kekkonen" (p. 53). The more extreme claims--that Kekkonen was effectively a Soviet agent--can now be safely dismissed: "he was a great Finnish patri-

ot but with burning political ambitions" (p. 54). This led Kekkonen to use his special relationship with the Soviet Union to pursue his own goals in Finnish politics, and he "began to regard himself as the sole savior of Finland, the only person who could possibly manage Finland's way through Cold War international relations" (p. 54).

As in the other Nordic countries, the 1970s are revealed as "new years of danger" (p. 58). Even as Finland performed valuable services for the international community, including the USSR, for example by hosting the 1975 Helsinki Conference, the Soviet military embarked on new initiatives to draw Finland into closer cooperation. This appears to have been connected with the growing influence of the military in the Brezhnev regime following the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. Majander devotes more attention to trade than the other contributors--not surprisingly in view of the economic and political importance of Finland's trade with the Soviet Union and the Eastern bloc. Historians have shown how stable exports to the Eastern bloc enabled Finnish firms like Nokia to take risks in penetrating Western markets. Majander also spends more time than most of the others (apart from Villaume) in discussing biographies and memoirs: not just those of political heavyweights like Paasikivi and Kekkonen, but also those of Soviet operatives such as Viktor Vladimirov, who evidently enjoyed cordial relations with his Finnish counterparts.

Majander concludes with some interesting suggestions about the wider lessons to be learned from the Finnish experience. Finland, he says, "was not only 'between East and West', as the trite metaphor claims, but in many respects it was a part of both West and East, in that order" (p. 71). It provides an example of the "power of the weak": of how small "clients" of the superpowers were able to extract favors from their "patrons." If Finland could not join the process of European integration out of consideration for its Soviet neighbor, "the Soviet Union became 'responsible' for

compensating the losses that the decision caused for the Finnish economy" (p. 71). It also offers insights into the Kremlin's wider international objectives and the often contradictory combination of Realpolitik and ideology in Soviet foreign policy.

The chapter on Sweden by Ulf Bjereld and Ann-Marie Ekengren is the only disappointment in this volume. Unlike the other authors, they do not focus on post-Cold War historiography but instead offer what the editor tactfully calls "a more general Cold War research outline" (p. 13). They identify some important questions--how neutral Sweden actually was; the significance of the "active foreign policy" pursued by Olof Palme in the late 1960s and early 1970s--but many other important topics remain undiscussed or touched on only briefly. The chapter gives little sense of how the knowledge base has widened, or interpretations have changed, over time. Thus Adler-Karlsson's 1970 study of Western economic warfare against the Soviet Union is cited without any suggestion that Adler-Karlsson was a pioneer, or that we might "now know" more than we did then. Bjereld is so self-effacing that he does not take the opportunity to explain the origins, activities and outcomes of the major research project, "Sweden during the Cold War" (SUKK) that he himself heads. True, he refers briefly to some of the books produced by the project, but without indicating their origin, while other important contributions (like Magnus Petersson's study of Swedish-Norwegian security relations) merely rate an entry in the bibliography.[3]

Above all, the chapter fails to convey the intensity of the debate on Sweden's ambiguous Cold War role. Was Sweden really neutral or a cryptically of the West? The seminal 1994 report of the Neutrality Policy Commission is mentioned but with little sense of context. For a better idea of what has been going on, the reader might be advised to turn to some of the essays in Kurt Almqvist and Kay Glans, eds, *The Swedish Success*

Story, especially the lively contribution by Wilhelm Agrell.[4] Another major omission is the controversy over the alleged presence of Soviet submarines in Swedish waters: the "Whiskey on the Rocks" affair that aroused widespread international attention in the early 1980s. This is particularly ironic in view of the illustration on the book's cover, which depicts a Soviet submarine grounded outside the Swedish naval base of Karlskrona in 1981. In an otherwise extensive bibliography, Milton Leitenberg's *Soviet Submarine Operation in Swedish Waters: 1980-1986* makes no appearance.[5] Nor is there any reference to the official inquiry headed by Ambassador Rolf Ek  us in 2002 (after the Aarhus conference but two years before the book was published). The reader is thus given no insight into the important issues raised by the inquiry: not only its conclusions (which were studiously impartial about the nationality of the supposed submarines) but also the qualitative difference between this inquiry and that of the Neutrality Commission eight years earlier (one conducted by a retired ambassador, the other by a team that included a number of distinguished professional historians).[6]

Nikolai Petersen concludes the volume by summarizing what "we now know" and setting out an agenda for future research. Like the other authors, he sees the way forward in a move away from "high politics" and towards more study of the Cold War on the ground. This means taking ideology seriously and looking at the role of political parties and trade unions, as well as the cultural aspects: for example, the pervasive influence of American culture versus the far more stilted efforts to promote friendship and cooperation with the Soviet Union. There is still more work to be done on bilateral relations with such countries as Great Britain and the Federal Republic of Germany. Finally, as the organizers of the Aarhus symposium proposed, there remains much scope for comparative research on the similarities and differences in the ways in which the five Nordic countries experienced the Cold War on the North-

ern Flank. Of course Cold War research has moved on since the book was published, and in that sense it is already out of date. But that is exactly how it should be. As an interim report, and as a comprehensive bibliographical guide, it remains invaluable.

Notes

[1]. John Lewis Gaddis, *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

[2]. <http://www.diis.dk/sw13004.asp> (in Danish).

[3]. For those who are interested, there is a useful description (in Swedish) of the SUKK project and the 14 volumes so far published, on the publisher's website, <http://www.santerus.com/sida.asp?sida=2>.

[4]. Stockholm: Axel and Margaret Axson Johnson Foundation, 2004.

[5]. Washington: CSIS, Washington Papers, 1987.

[6]. Fortunately there is excellent coverage of this debate on the Parallel History Project website, http://www.isn.ethz.ch/php/research/AreaStudies/area_studies.htm#1.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at <https://networks.h-net.org/h-german>

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