

# E Pluribus Unum: Political Unification and Political Realism

## Chapter 5: The Liminal Union of Sweden and Norway\*

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First draft: 20 April 2005

This draft: 22 August 2005

Word count: 7,900

\* Thanks to Joshua Baron, Abigail Becker, Robert Jervis, Jack Snyder, Kenneth Waltz, and especially Reidar Maliks, the personification of Swedish-Norwegian union. They do not share in remaining error.

## Chapter 5: The Liminal Union of Sweden and Norway

*Abstract: Sweden and Norway's alliance from 1814 to 1905 is another misleading case of political union. The two countries aligned after the Napoleonic Wars and improperly called their alliance a union. There was legal ambiguity and some federal authority, but in the main supreme power remained at the state level. To sum, my argument accounts for Norway-Sweden's lack of union, and running my argument in reverse has purchase on explaining the quasi-union's demise.*

Now that the most powerful princes in Europe together make it a point of honour by their superior physical resources to compel fulfillment of the treaty for the withdrawal of Norway – you, my gracious lord, must also from your side weigh up Norway's strength in relation to that colossal power. That it is irresistible, especially when England gives way, is incontestable.... Try therefore to negotiate for this loyal people the best conditions that can now (perhaps never again) be secured as a federated state with Sweden. Then nobody will ever have benefited Norway so much as you.

– Christian Colbjørnsen<sup>1</sup>

What sort of union might be formed if countries came together after a cataclysmic great power war, stayed together during a period of long peace, and shared similar language, cultures, laws, and religion? The union between Norway and Sweden is such an instance. Following an increasingly familiar pattern, I first elaborate a brief history of

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<sup>1</sup> Letter to the King of Norway, May 19<sup>th</sup>, 1814, quoted in Derry 1957, 135.

this unification, then analyze how well my argument explains it, and finally discuss how rival perspectives fare comparatively.

## I. A Concise History of Sweden and Norway's Unification and Dissolution

Ninety years is a long time to maintain an experiment. The experiment with union between Sweden and Norway lasted longer than Soviet communism and German fascism combined, but all led to failure and fragmentation. This section traces the development of a union whose beginnings in 1814 aspired to Pan-Scandinavianism and whose end in 1905 reaffirmed traditional nation-states.

### A. Post-Vikings to Pre-Napoleon

Let us start by leaving aside the marauding and pillaging of Viking and medieval Scandinavia.<sup>2</sup> We begin in Denmark, at the end of the fourteenth century. Through the Kalmar union and subsequent advances, Denmark established supremacy over Norway, turning it into a Danish province. The interests of the two polities were, while not diametrically opposed, far from identical. When Danish rule grew oppressive, Norwegians would protest and occasionally form ill-starred rebellions.<sup>3</sup> It would be historically inaccurate to say the Norwegian nation existed in this period, but the tension

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<sup>2</sup> Interested parties may learn more on such issues in Stomberg 1970, chaps. 1-7; Scott 1988, chaps. 1-4; Keilhan 1944; Oakley 1966, chaps. 1-4; Derry 1957, chap. 2, 68; Gjerset 1969, 1: chaps. 1-74; 1969: 2, chaps. 1-15; Anonymous 2000a; Anonymous 2000b; Hume 1983: 1-2; Miller 1990. A note on sources: information on Sweden and Norway's union in English is evidently not a high scholarly priority. One indication of this is the paucity of publications in history and political science journals over the last hundred years. Several searches in JSTOR's archives divulged a single match on the subject, and the article was four pages long and contained little analysis.

between Danish interests and Norwegian interests laid the groundwork for later growth in Norwegian nationalism.

For four hundred years, Norway suffered famines, expropriation of its wealth into Copenhagen's coffers, and armies traversing its territory. Many of those armies were Swedish, swarming into Norway at irregular intervals during centuries of border warfare. The 1644 Hannibal War, hostilities following the 1658 Treaty of Roskilde, the 1676 Gyldenløve War, 1709-1720 Great Northern War, 1788 skirmishing, and the 1792 conflict that almost escalated to war are all illustrations of routine threats and incursions.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, while prohibitions against Catholic and Jewish immigration are partly responsible, modern Norway's anomalously high homogeneity is probably due to this history of political conflict. Union with Denmark was a mixed bag, but there were enough negative experiences to sour Norway on cooperating intensively with Sweden or Denmark.

## B. The Napoleonic Wars and the Unification of Norway with Sweden

As Napoleon battled his way through Europe, the Scandinavian countries did their best to stay clear, but their policy of armed neutrality did not fare well. To telescope many details, Denmark-Norway signed a treaty with France and Russia in 1807, and consequently English ships ravaged Denmark and defeated nearly the entirety of its naval

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<sup>3</sup> On the Kalmar Union, see Boyesen 1886, 469-470; Oakley 1966, chap. 5; Stomberg 1970, chaps. 7-8. On failed Norwegian uprisings against Denmark, see Boyesen 1886, 481-482; Derry 1957, chap. 4.

<sup>4</sup> On border strife between Norway and Sweden, see Scott 1988, 312; Stagg 1956, 122-123, 126-129, 140-141, 160; Stomberg 1970, 585; Boyesen 1886, 496, 502-504; Gjerset 1969, 2: chap. 32.

fleet and merchant vessels.<sup>5</sup> It was bad enough that Denmark had dragged Norway into a hopeless war, brought starvation and blockade, and deprived Norway of its commerce, yet it was insanity for Denmark to declare war on Sweden in 1808, on the principle that Sweden opposed Russia and France. For once Denmark cavalierly initiated war, Norway was left alone to face the Swedish onslaught. One Norwegian recorded in his memoirs:

This war prepared the way for the separation of Denmark and Norway, and some Norwegians began, though vaguely, to think of the advisability of a union [with Sweden], the very possibility of which had hitherto wounded their innermost feelings.<sup>6</sup>

Seventeen thousand poorly equipped and trained Norwegians repulsed 15,400 Swedes (three-fourths of Sweden's fighting force was on its eastern front), inflicting heavy defeats in the battles of Toverud, Trangen, and Prestebakke. Norway did not continue on the offensive, perhaps because it was not well enough organized, perhaps because it was balancing with Sweden against the Russian threat.

The Russian threat prompted talk of Pan-Scandinavianism and a union of the three kingdoms: Denmark, Norway, and Sweden. Bickering and infighting pushed the proposal into dormancy, as well as Danish impotence. The English controlled the sea-lanes, and effectively severed the Danes from the other two kingdoms. Norway had demonstrated the ability to defend itself against Sweden, and Denmark had to delegate

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<sup>5</sup> For the details of Scandinavian alignment in the time of Napoleon, see Scott 1988, 293; Stomberg 1970, 598-600. On the damage Danish policy caused to Norway, including famine and the notorious eating of "bark bread", see Gjerset 1969, 2: 388-390; Stagg 1956, 161-166.

<sup>6</sup> Quoted in Derry 1957, 127. On the defense of Norway, see Boyesen 1886, 512; Scott 1988, 294; Gjerset 1969, 2: 393-395; Stagg 1956, 166.

authority to a power it could little govern. Denmark and Norway drifted apart while Norway and Sweden began drifting toward England.<sup>7</sup>

Meanwhile Russia pressed its advantage on Sweden's eastern front. In 1809, Sweden lost one-third of its territory to Russia, including the painful loss of Finland. Panic ensued in Sweden; a German statesman noted, "Sweden lies in her death-throes and she should be permitted to die in peace".<sup>8</sup> Radical circumstances demanded radical actions; Sweden deposed its king, invited a French field marshal of Napoleon's (Bernadotte, who later changed his name to King Karl Johan or Charles John) to assume the throne and lead the Swedes, wrote a constitution that endured into the 1970s, and joined the alliance of England and Russia to defeat France in 1812. In return for this allegiance, Russia and England agreed that Sweden would compensate for its loss of Finland by linking with Norway, thereby securing its western border, raising the odds of future English support, and ensuring that no single state would control the entry to the Baltic Sea.

Along the way to defeating Napoleon, a Swedish army menaced Denmark and requested the right to rule Norway. In a weakened state, Denmark turned Norway over to Sweden in the Treaty of Kiel, January 14<sup>th</sup>, 1814. On January 15<sup>th</sup>, the King of Sweden wrote his son, "Norway is united with Sweden, and forms a separate and independent kingdom." To another he wrote, "Norway is to be taken possession of, not as a province,

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<sup>7</sup> See Stagg 1956, 164; Gjerset 1969, 2: 392-396.

<sup>8</sup> Quoted in Stomberg 1970, 612. On the Swedish reaction to defeat, see Oakley 1966, 165; Scott 1988, 296-307; Stomberg 1970, 607-615, 627-628.

but only to be united with Sweden in such a way as to form with it a single kingdom.”<sup>9</sup>  
From the very beginning, there were incompatible intentions for union and independence.

Back in Norway, there was uniform, albeit ambivalent, rejection of the Treaty of Kiel. No one solicited Norway’s opinion on unifying with Sweden, and if they had, the answer would have inclined toward the negative.<sup>10</sup> Finns and Swedes had a longstanding common enemy, while Sweden and Norway had engaged in longstanding border warfare. Although elites realized that Norway was defensively not considerable, they wanted more autonomy than they had possessed under Denmark and the people were even more eager for independence.

The great and good met at Eidsvold, a city north of Christiania (modern Oslo), to write a constitution. They drafted eleven propositions and approved ten – the eleventh was a proposal for uniform military compulsory service – and on May 17<sup>th</sup>, the document officially became the Norwegian constitution. Claims were made concerning the originality of this constitution, echoing its American uncle; British politician Samuel Laing, remarked, “There is not probably in the history of mankind another instance of a free constitution, not erected amidst ruins and revolutions, not cemented with blood, but taken from the closet of the philosopher, and quietly reared and set to work, and found to be suitable without alteration to all ends of good government.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Karl Johan quoted in Gjerset 1969, 2: 416. On the treaty between Russia, England, and Sweden, see Boyesen 1886, 514; Scott 1988, 308. On English interest in no single power controlling the entry to the Baltic Sea, see Hobsbawm 1996a, 101; on the importance of the Baltic trade to British hegemony, see Blainey 1968, 3-33. On the Treaty of Kiel, see Gjerset 1969, 2: 415-416; Oakley 1966, 167; Stomberg 1970, 630.

<sup>10</sup> On the division between Norwegian proponents of union vs. independence and the propaganda laid for union, see Stagg 1956, 178-182; Derry 1957, 130-131; Scott 1988, 316; Stomberg 1970, 610; Boyesen 1886, 518; Gjerset 1969, 2: 398-400, 425-428.

<sup>11</sup> Quoted in Gjerset, 2: 428. On the balance of forces across this period, see Gjerset 1969, 2: 434-440; Scott 1988, 312-313; Stomberg 1970, 616, 631.

Predictably Sweden, and to a lesser extent the great powers, gave Norwegian nationalism a chilly reception. Sweden and Norway negotiated to a standoff, and Norway braced for an assault, which shortly arrived. The Swedish king warned the Norwegians that their resistance was “contrary to their own interests as well as to the true and unchangeable principles of political science.”<sup>12</sup> This failed to mollify the Norwegians. While the balance of forces was not lopsided (20,000 Norwegians vs. 16,000 battle-hardened Swedes), Sweden had twice the population of Norway, Russia promised 30,000 reinforcements, England pledged military stores, and the naval balance was horrifically unequal. On the other side of the ledger, Norway had the defender’s advantages, low population density, rugged, tenable terrain, and faced a fragile coalition.

Early fighting favored the Swedes but the Swedes did not want to harm the reservoir of goodwill they might have with their potential partners, nor did they trust the support of their great power backers, and so pressed for a negotiated settlement.<sup>13</sup> Austria, Prussia, and England all made evident that Sweden would merge with Norway and would receive material aid to effect that end, provided Sweden was mindful of Norway’s domestic politics. Sweden reiterated its terms to Norway. Seeing the writing on the wall, Norway agreed to unify with Sweden on the condition that the constitution of Eidsvold be recognized, which Sweden was under duress to do anyway. The constitution was duly recognized on the condition that all matters relating to union would be done jointly. The head of the union, the King of Sweden, calmed unifying fears by stating on August 30<sup>th</sup>, 1814, “the kingdom of Norway, without being regarded as a conquered

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<sup>12</sup> Gjerset 1969, 2: 438.

<sup>13</sup> On the circumstances favoring a negotiated settlement, see Oakley 1966, 168; Scott 1988, 312. On great power reactions to Scandinavian affairs, see Gjerset 1969, 2: 422, 433-434; Stagg 1956, 182-183; Boyesen 1886, 522-523.

country, in the future shall be in an independent state united with Sweden; and its present constitution shall be properly protected, after the changes necessitated by the union of the two countries shall have been made.”<sup>14</sup> Terms of the Treaty of Moss were brought into effect on November fourth.

The crucial component of the Treaty of Moss was its incompatible commitments to Norwegian independence and political union. The ambiguity between independence and union was never resolved and ultimately brought down what little union there was. The Norwegian parliament believed it retained supreme authority – which the historical record later validated – but even at the time, it was clear that troops could not be summoned from Norway without the Norwegian parliament’s approval. Following the Treaty of Moss, Norway foreshadowed that real political union was not in the cards; its first actions were preparations for continued military conflict with Sweden.

### C. 1815-1886, State of the Union: Rotting

From the outset, the terms of the agreement were strenuously contested, though the Swedish parliament agreed on complete formal equality between the kingdoms in 1815. Legal authorities were repeatedly consulted and reached no consensus. Sweden believed that in time it would achieve the prerogatives and supremacy not clearly attained initially. Norway was equally determined to deny those prerogatives and supremacy, believing its trump was inscribed in the constitution.<sup>15</sup> In the background, nationalist doctrines had been contagiously contracted from Germany and were gradually gathering

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<sup>14</sup> Karl Johan quoted in Gjerset 1969, 2: 442. On Karl Johan’s constitutionally ambivalent position, see Derry 1957, 138. On the Norwegian parliament’s perceptions and preparations for a resumption of hostilities, see Gjerset 1969, 2: 442, 444; Scott 1988, 313.

momentum in Norway. The first and most constant avenue along which Norway struggled with Sweden was over veto power. The king could veto measures passed by the Norwegian parliament (Norway's legislative body is called the *Storting* and Sweden's the *Riksdag* or *Rigsdag*, but both are parliaments by another name so for simplicity's sake I call them as such), but the king's veto could be overridden if the measure was passed three times.

The first such test of supreme power occurred in 1821. In 1815, 1818, and 1821, the Norwegian parliament passed a bill noxious to the king, and on the third time declared it law. The king was manifestly irritated and upset. He issued a circular, vehemently denouncing the ingratitude and perfidy of Norway.<sup>16</sup> That summer Sweden's armed forces held maneuvers near Christiania and there were indications that a coup was brewing. The coup failed to materialize and the maneuvers ended in parades and balls. The king shortly thereafter sought wider powers, such as the right to dissolve the Norwegian parliament, remove government officials (except judges), order new elections, and create a new hereditary nobility. In 1827-1830, the king challenged the Norwegian parliament over their celebration of May 17<sup>th</sup> as a national holiday, as opposed to the more union-centric November 4<sup>th</sup>. In both efforts, the king lost.

During this period, Sweden-Norway enjoyed very little international conflict. The chief cause of concern, Russia, made little waves. There were some muffled anxieties bruited about concerning the rights of migratory reindeer hunters, and the king made noises about the Russian threat, but he named his grandson after the Russian czar and the Norwegian parliament called his bluff about external threats necessitating integration.

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<sup>15</sup> On the agreement for complete formal equality, see Gjerset 1969, 2: 445. On the lack of legal consensus, see *ibid.*, 2: 536-538. On perceptions of legal supremacy, see *ibid.*, 2: 451-452; Nordlund 1905, 72.

There was the “Ships Crisis” of 1824-1825, an incident involving the sale of ships to South American liberators, but it was minor and quickly passed.<sup>17</sup> Another minor event was the alignment with France and England prior to the Crimean War. But the largest foreign policy events centered on Schleswig-Holstein.<sup>18</sup> In 1848, Sweden committed some troops to deter Prussia from attacking Denmark, but in 1864 Sweden left Denmark to fend for itself. Denmark’s defeat revealed Pan-Scandinavianism as a farce and eviscerated it as a political force. General weakness along with public opinion in Sweden and Norway solidly supporting neutrality, curtailed the capacity for foreign adventures. From 1864 to 1914, Sweden and Norway were not involved in any notable international incident; the union hardly had a foreign policy.

All the while Sweden lost legal ground against Norway. In 1842 the Norwegian parliament passed its own free trade legislation; in 1844 Sweden failed to gain passage of more unifying legislation; in 1859 Sweden lost a fight over political appointments; in 1866 Norway defeated a reorganization of its armed forces.<sup>19</sup> And still the legislative challenges kept coming: 1867-1871, 1877-1880, and 1882-1886 – all with defeats for

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<sup>16</sup> See Gjerset 1969, 2: 455-460; Boyesen 1886, 522-526; Oakley 1966, 187.

<sup>17</sup> On the Russian threat in this period, see Gjerset 1969, 2: 481, 516-517; Oakley 1966, 188. On the “Ships Crisis,” see Scott 1988, 318-319; Oakley 1966, 187-188. South America was not the only liberal cause espoused by Sweden-Norway. The union also borrowed from the American constitution and its men volunteering on the side of union in the American Civil War. See Gjerset 1969, 2: 418-419, 506n; Stomberg 1970, 579. Contrary to Hannah Arendt (1965, 134-135), the evidence thus far indicates that the American Revolutions were at least as exportable as the French Revolution.

<sup>18</sup> On events prior to the Crimean War, see Boyesen 1886, 530; Gjerset 1969, 2: 517; Oakley 1966, 198. On events in Schleswig-Holstein and Pan-Scandinavianism, see Gjerset 1969, 2: 529; Oakley 1966, 197-216. On the dearth of international events involving Sweden-Norway following 1864, see Scott 1988, 318, 326.

<sup>19</sup> Throughout this period, Sweden maintained approximately twice the relative power of Norway. See Hobsbawm 1996b, 311. On the evolution of the Norwegian flag, see Scott 1988, 328; Gjerset 1969, 2: 482; Derry 1957, 147; Boyesen 1886, 528. On the failure of attempted centralization in 1844, see Gjerset 1969, 2: 515. On Karl Johan being the first Swedish king to avoid a major war, see Oakley 1966, 192. On the 1848-1859 re-evaluations of the *Statholder* question, see Gjerset 1969, 2: 523-524. On the multiple futile attempts to militarily reorganize, see Gjerset 1969, 2: 515, 518, 530, 531-532.

Sweden. Norway had hollowed out the ambiguous and creaky agreement that was the Treaty of Moss, and union had persistently been crowded out by independence.

The most decisive political victory to date was 1886. Tensions grew after Sweden vetoed appropriations for shooting clubs in Norway in 1882, fearing that they could be used for national defense; money was later appropriated. There was also friction with regard to the Norwegian parliament voting in 1884 to decrease its military contribution available to the union to one third of its total army. In these, among other issues, Norway had asserted its supremacy with impunity; parliament successfully upheld its rights, “as an independent kingdom placed on equal footing with Sweden in the union.” As one observer noted in 1886, “All attempts to amalgamate the two nations have failed, and have, long since, been abandoned.”<sup>20</sup> This string of successes came with a cost, however. Victory, a lenient disciplinarian, splintered Norwegian liberals for a brief period, delaying the drive for formal independence.

#### D. Crises and Dissolution, 1887-1905

The final issue that crushed the Sweden-Norway union was foreign policy. Although both sides had extensive control over their own armed forces, they did have a unified foreign service that was predominantly Swedish.<sup>21</sup> Norway had a much larger merchant marine and believed its interest would be better regarded if it had its own

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<sup>20</sup> Gjerset 1969, 2: 560; Boyesen 1886, 535. Boyesen’s book is a contribution, curiously enough, to a series of books entitled “The Story of Nations,” which includes, exhaustively, Greece, Rome, Carthage, Spain, Norway, the Jews, and the Saracens. On the escalation of 1882-1886 and the fracture of the liberal party in Norway, see Gjerset 1969, 2: 539-544, 556-557; Oakley 1966, 216-217; Stomberg 1970, 747.

<sup>21</sup> On the foreign policy of Sweden-Norway, see Nordlund 1905, 64-65; Gjerset 1969, 2: 446, 561-562; Stomberg 1970, 747.

consular service. Yet a unified diplomatic corps was the last remaining vestige of union, and Sweden was loath to give it up.

The debate over foreign policy began in 1891 and escalated until 1894, at which time the conflict began to escalate militarily. Swedish leaders sympathetic to Norway warned, “The new act of union is to be adopted by the Rigsdag, and will then be submitted to the Storthing. If... no agreement can be reached with the majority in the Storthing, the Swedish army is to march against Norway.”<sup>22</sup> Norway’s defenses had fallen into desuetude and were in no shape to repel invasion, though in fairness, Sweden’s defenses were not in top form either. German general von Moltke was said to have laughed twice in his life: once after beating the French at Sedan, and once on being told that a forlorn structure outside Stockholm was a Swedish fortress. Further, emigration was a rival pursuit to military service, prompting the quip that if Sweden increased its military service, “we shall, indeed, have our officers here at home but our soldiers will be in the United States” (quoted in Stomberg 1970, 712). Whatever the sorry state of the Swedish forces, the Norwegians were yet worse, and Norway, for a change, was forced to back down.

Norway quickly set about improving its defenses. After 1895, it paid more attention and budgeted more money for its army, updated its navy, built fortresses on its coasts and along the border with Sweden, and stockpiled munitions. In 1902, a joint commission on consular service was appointed – by some accounts because a growing Russian threat encouraged Norway to press for such a commission and Sweden to accept it – and by 1903 the commission reported that Norway could indeed have its own

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<sup>22</sup> Adolf Hedin quoted in Gjerset 1969, 2: 566. On Norway’s decrepit defenses and conciliation, see *ibid.*, 2: 567. For the anecdote about Moltke, see Stomberg 1970, 711-712.

consular service. By 1904 the matter had become a crisis, bargaining grew intense, and Norwegian towns sent petitions to the capitol stating their willingness to fight. Shortly after, the Norwegian government floated an immense loan to be ready for war.<sup>23</sup>

Still, conquest was highly unlikely. The crisis caught Sweden in the middle of a military revamping, and even had its military been up to date, tactical victory was far from assured and strategic victory was out of reach by all accounts. England sympathized with Norway; the two were longstanding trading partners, though of timber, a commodity of declining strategic importance. To this must be added the king's mild reputation and popular demonstrations in Sweden protesting for peace. In 1905, the issue was put to a plebiscite. In a revolutionary vote, the Norwegian parliament declared that the king no longer ruled. The plebiscite results were ugly: on August 13<sup>th</sup>, 1905, with 85% electorate turnout, 367,149 voted for dissolution and 184 against.<sup>24</sup> Soldiers remained on both sides of the border and fleets remained on alert during August and September, but by October all the relevant authorities approved dissolution. And in November, Norwegian citizens voted to install their own constitutional monarch. A new set of conflicts faced decision-makers in each country, but the question of union was over.

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<sup>23</sup> On Norway's defensive improvements, see Gjerset 1969, 2: 570; Nordlund 1905, 17. On escalation over Norway's "increasingly overwrought sensitiveness" and petitions, see Stagg 1956, 189; Nordlund 1905, 4; Gjerset 1969, 2: 571-574. On the growing Russian threat causing the appointment of the commission, see Stomberg 1970, 748. On the large loan floated in case of emergency in 1905, see Scott 1988, 330.

<sup>24</sup> On the quasi-unconstitutional preparation and passage of June 6-7, 1905 of measures to dissolve the king's authority, see Derry 1957, 200. Turnout is from Derry 1957, 202; electoral totals are Scott's (1988, 333), though Gjerset (1969, 2: 582) arrives at slightly different figures – 368,208 to 184 – they are nothing worthy of a recount. For military postures during this crisis, see Stomberg 1970, 750, 753; Oakley 1966, 217; Scott 1988, 325; Gjerset 1969, 2: 578, 582. For the inverse relationship between Swedish and Norwegian nationalism during this period, see Scott 1988, 326; Stomberg 1970, 746, 755. On the endgame bargaining between Sweden and Norway, see Oakley 1966, 217; Gjerset 1969, 2: 578-581; Stomberg 1970, 748-9, 752-753. On the revolutionary action by the Norwegian parliament, see Stomberg 1970, 751. On Norway's solicitation of international sympathy, see Stomberg 1970, 750; Gjerset 1969, 2: 576, 579; Nordlund 1905, 54; Scott 1988, 333.

## E. The Union Ledger

As the chapter title suggests, Sweden and Norway's union was neither here nor there. Their alliance had elements of union and elements of independence, with the latter predominating over the former. To make my accounting and analysis transparent, I here lay out the balance as I see it. On the union side, the two states shared a foreign policy, however limited it was in practice and consequence. Against this must be weighed that legal supremacy *de facto* and *de jure* rested with the state governments, that the power of the purse rested with state governments, that militaries were independent, and that trade policy was set at the state, not the federal, level. According to my definition of union, states: a) must centralize the means to pursue a single foreign policy and b) cannot legitimately resort to force to resolve disputes between each other. If one wanted to place a phone call to Sweden-Norway, there would not have been anyone on the other end (in fairness, there might not have been anyone on the other end of the Norway line either). Overall, the Treaty of Moss was in practice a covenant without a sword, and so union was largely, though not totally, false.

## II. Argument

### A. Opportunity: Background Conditions

Hence Sweden-Norway is an example of a quasi-union forming and dissolving. Sometime in the Napoleonic Wars, Norway transferred out of hierarchy with Denmark and into anarchy on its own. But after 1814, Norway did not transfer back into hierarchy

with Sweden; there was alignment without unification; and thereafter the two states drifted apart. In this section, I detail how and why.

1.) Intensity. Moderate threats pressed Sweden and Norway into a lethargic approximation of union, and as those threats dwindled the two states grew apart. True to traditional realism, Norway grew more restive the less international pressure it was under. So too Sweden pressed for union following the devastating loss of one third of Swedish territory to a very large neighboring state, but when the union did not yield the hoped-for security benefits, Sweden allowed Norway greater and greater autonomy. England, France, Germany, and Denmark did not menace the territorial integrity of Sweden or Norway, and Russia's ambitions lay elsewhere. Threats were never extreme enough to catalyze union.

From the deliberations of Norwegian elites, we know that security was the main cause for concessions to Sweden. Many worried that Norway was too small to be a viable state on its own (it is by population smaller than Scotland<sup>25</sup>). Nevertheless, Norwegian elites were not frightened enough by foreign threats to give up their constitution, and Swedish elites were not so terrified of foreign threats to force the issue. At Eidsvold, Norway did not feel an exigent enough threat to include the eleventh proposal in its constitution, which related to compulsory military service. As time went on, external threats were minimal, making it much easier for Norway to chip away at their bonds to Sweden. Sweden and Norway generally stayed out of world politics, and world politics generally returned the favor. Absent the sense of threat though, political union was a dead engine.

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<sup>25</sup> See Connor 1994, 172.

One could argue that some of the pressure to unify came from outside powers. True, England and Russia did offer men and supplies to Sweden to assist the unification process, and such outside help could qualify as external impetus to union. For this reason, I could be accused of silently trying to pass off a case that violates my scope conditions as comparable to the others. But although the case is not an ideal example of an internally impelled unification attempt, it is far more internally than externally impelled. Sweden spearheaded the attempt; Swedish decision-makers distrusted the offers of outside assistance, and found its allies commitment to its union weak. Norway certainly was wary of external intervention, but if Norway and Sweden really thought that 30,000 Russians and the military stores of England – in addition to the full might of the Swedish army – would potentially invade, the terms at Moss would have been drastically different. England and Russia's offers had a positive but minor contribution to union, and the Sweden-Norway case is, for the purposes of this work, analytically indistinct from the other cases.

2.) Duration. The Russian threat was clearly the one viewed as most pressing and abiding. Witness the loss of Finland and Norway's balancing behavior during that episode. Outside this event, relations with great powers were strikingly tranquil. Great power interference in Scandinavia was occasional and limited, insufficient to create a political union. Unsurprisingly, an alliance masquerading as a union was the result.

3.) Symmetry. Sweden, Norway, and Denmark felt similar security threats throughout the period under study, Pan-Scandinavian ideology and many of their alignments attest to this. Yet, there are important exceptions: Denmark's alliances during the Napoleonic Wars and Schleswig-Holstein in 1864 demonstrate that at times of high

danger, Scandinavian states were not painted into the same corner. Separation by water caused a separation of interests that stranded Denmark. Denmark aside, the differences in trade and security desires – to say nothing of the atypical ethnic homogeneity between the two states – attest to the asymmetry of interests between Sweden and Norway.

Because Sweden and Norway were so peripheral to European power politics and had mildly divergent foreign policy goals, common foreign policy was not necessary. Norway had a significantly smaller fear of abandonment than Sweden, and evidence of this can be found in the plebiscite results of 1905. One commentator remarked that the two countries were “like two twins grown together in the back, and therefore continually turning away from one another, the one looking eastward and the other westward.”<sup>26</sup>

## B. Fortune: Crisis Trigger

Sweden faced a clear and present danger that forced it to rethink its security in different directions. And the crisis that triggered thoughts of union with Norway was the loss of Finland to Russia. Sweden deposed its king, anointed a foreign general, and immediately sought compensatory territory. To deal with a threat on its eastern flank, Sweden shored up its western flank by uniting with Norway.

As for dissolution, there were two serious efforts to dissolve the union: one that ended in 1895 and the other in 1905. As disunion became a greater possibility, both sides readied for an armed confrontation. Norway was unready to offer stiff resistance in 1895 and so relented. But in 1905, Norway moved at a time when Sweden could no longer win at low cost. Nonetheless, there is an important difference between unification and

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<sup>26</sup> Quoted in Gjerset 1969, 2: 452. Remote geography is not the only variable at play here. Norwegians are, genetically, more homogenous than the ultra-remote Icelanders.

de-unification. When states unify, a security crisis is used to justify new thinking and policies as radical as political unification. When states dissolve three kinds of security crises, on my logic, may arise. A security crisis may be so intense it reveals that balancing is futile; a crisis may underscore asymmetries in vulnerability; or elites may manufacture a crisis to loosen ties against an insufficiently durable threat.

Sweden-Norway's dissolution was of this latter type. It was a lack of intense and durable threats that did the quasi-union in. The security crisis that ensued was a consequence, not a cause, of dissolution, but because the two states were not unified, the response was not what one would expect as an ideal-type de-unification response. When states centralize their coercive authority, they have to overcome commitment problems. These commitment problems are even graver if the parties decide to break apart because there are severe incentives to prevent one of the new states from becoming a threat to the other. Although they engaged in joint exercises and were committed to integrated defense, Sweden and Norway retained supreme control over their militaries. Their relationship was distant, not intimate, and this encouraged a safe, more amicable divorce.

### C. Virtue: Elite Persuasion

Elites in Sweden and Norway were busy advocating their agendas for and against union for decades. They set up leagues, started newspapers, and lobbied legislators. At the end of the struggle, conditions favored Norwegian elites and they ultimately carried the day. Yet there was a lack of perceived threat for some time; structural conditions were biased towards dissolution of union well before dissolution took place. How and when Norwegian elites won was a noisy, drawn-out process, and deserves greater detail.

1.) Media.<sup>27</sup> Both sides armed themselves with formidable propaganda arsenals. On the Swedish side there were pro-union societies, Pan-Scandinavian ideology, and (ineffective) attempts to influence the Norwegian press. On the Norwegian side, there were nationalist shooting clubs, nationalist political movements, and the propagation of Norwegian folklore and culture. At the time of unification, coercion necessitated Norwegian concession, but over time unthreatening conditions supported appeals to Norwegian nationalism over Swedish Scandinavianism.

2.) Military. Military bargaining explains a great deal of when and how Sweden and Norway came together and split apart. Early on in the Napoleonic Wars, Norwegians established a reputation for toughness. Despite being half as powerful as Sweden, Norway's determined resistance made up for some of its material weakness, and this tenacity yielded political dividends when Sweden sought union. With Norway's impressive record fighting Sweden, docile acquiescence was not to be relied upon. When the King of Sweden needed a quick victory in 1814, he was compelled to seek it more at the negotiating table than on the battlefield. Had Norway been bested in 1808 or had the King of Sweden tried to unify by conquest rather than diplomacy, Norway may have received a more decisive settlement. And it was the shrewd indecisiveness of the settlement that Norway used to lever itself out of its Swedish commitments. Nonetheless, Sweden was stronger than even a tenacious Norway and Sweden was backed by the fearsome might of England. This lopsided balance is what coerced acceptance of liminal union at all.

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<sup>27</sup> On media in Sweden and Norway during the period under consideration, see Hobsbawm 1996a, 266; Hobsbawm 1996b, 85; Nordlund 1905, 54; Oakley 1966, 190; Stagg 1956, 156; Stomberg 1970, 619, 630.

The military balance also played a part in explaining dissolution. Sweden was manifestly reluctant from the beginning to use force on Norway (e.g. the potential coup of 1821); not only would that offer dicey prospects for success, it would also taint relations with a state whose cooperation was necessary for common endeavors. Norway took advantage of this reluctance by strengthening its defenses prior to de-unification such that invasion was all but certain not to pay. On this view, Norwegian forces deployed on the border were doubly effective. If they were successful on the battlefield, they repelled the invasion. If they were unsuccessful on the battlefield, their deaths would be a tripwire that would trigger revulsion with the Swedes and make Norway ungovernable.

3.) Political Procedures. Regular conflict took place in the political procedures of Sweden and Norway. The Norwegian parliament eroded Sweden's power steadily for decades until what passed for union toppled. Veto after veto was voted down, exasperating the Swedish king and preparing both sides for independence. By the time dissolution was impending, Sweden and Norway had essentially been dealing with each other little differently than any other two foreign nations for some time (see Gjerset 1969, 2: 568). Yet it took a revolutionary vote in Norway to end the union, and there were reasonable fears that the split would not take place pacifically.

To sum, Sweden and Norway were an alliance more than a union. Even in theory it was not clear where supreme authority lay, but when push came to shove, Norway asserted its sovereignty with nearly unanimously success. As it became clear that the two states did not face an intense, durable, symmetrical threat, they drifted apart until Norway

punctured the legal fiction that they were not autonomous. Both the attempt at union and attempts at dissolution ran along media, military, and procedural tracks determined by elites.

### III. Alternate Hypotheses

#### A. Constructivism

Sweden, Norway, and Denmark are difficult cases for constructivism because their identities are so similar and connections so extensive. For Sweden and Norway, poor communication was not an obstacle to union – they could hear each other just fine. Better communication was not a cause of increasing integration – they grew farther apart as modern media expanded its reach. Improving communication correlates with Sweden and Norway growing apart.

Despite many efforts, Pan-Scandinavianism never got off the ground – and this in the face of massive cultural, religious, legal, and linguistic congruence. Of course, Swedes and Norwegians do not see matters in this light. Where outsiders see vast cultural congruence, insiders immediately see differences between the two peoples, and this is instructive. Karl Deutsch asserts that union is a factor of shared values, yet on nearly every formulation of values the Scandinavian countries have more in common across them than most states have within them. “Shared values” and “a distinct way of life” either predict unification poorly or are hopelessly amorphous and in dire need of respecifying. Compared to previous cases of political unification like the United States and Switzerland, Sweden and Norway should have unified long ago if culture drove

union. But the tyranny of small differences triumphed for reasons that Deutsch cannot explain.

No doubt the tide of nineteenth century nationalist discourse played a role in the efforts to unify and de-unify the two states; there is much to Miroslav Hroch's account of nationalism.<sup>28</sup> Elites did champion folk culture and traditions; they did lead the nationalist mobilization movement through communication and a nationally relevant conflict of interest; propaganda was a key component of these efforts. However, I would like to stress that these actions happened within an international political context. Folk traditions were incubated within Norway because political forces contained them there; longstanding strategic factors helped create Norwegian culture, and those same factors encouraged elites to spout nationalist ideas and publics to listen to them.

Swedish and some Norwegian elites were also busy fomenting Pan-Scandinavian ideas, but their ideas resonated less because external threats did not nurture or make such ideas profitable. Conservative Norwegian elites longed for "the organic beginning of an articulation of civilized human society which we regard as the task of the new age" (quoted in Gjerset 1969, 2: 515), but such integration did not grow under the cold indifference of distracted threats. Factors like mobility and communication do not explain radical changes in government policy well in the case considered here, and the nationally relevant conflict of interest (here depicted as a crisis trigger) was often epiphenomenal and constructed by elites. Ideas play a role in threats, but threats explain

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<sup>28</sup> For a brief sum of Hroch's main hypotheses, see Hroch in Eley and Suny eds. 1996, 60-68; see also Hobsbawm 1996b, esp. 90, 104. Sweden has past success with changing the nationality of people in territory it conquered, see Østergård in Eley and Suny eds. 1996, 169-170. On the high congruence between Scandinavian states, see Scott 1988, 327-328.

more about ideas than vice versa, and ideas alone cannot explain why and how Sweden and Norway approached union then shied away.

## B. Liberalism

Once again, the events under scrutiny in this chapter predate major international institutions. Thus, it is hard to credit institutions with facilitating the union or dissolution of Sweden and Norway.

With regard to interdependence, trade is a weak explanatory variable in the Sweden-Norway case.<sup>29</sup> In 1814, the King of Sweden couched unification predominantly but not exclusively in terms of protection. There were few gains from trade before, during, or after union. Norway and Sweden had different trade orientations and policies. Although both were a source of timber, Norway espoused free trade much more than Sweden did, and their economies never realized returns from scale. Likewise with dissolution, trade was an issue of contention but not the decisive one. It was the dispute over united foreign policy and consular service that led to the breakup of the union. It is possible that foreign policy was a subterfuge issue and that trade was really the ulterior motive for dissolution. Yet then we should see changes in trade policy after the split, and we do not – Sweden continued its economic nationalist course and Norway continued its free trading.

It is difficult to tease out the effects of democracy, but its explanatory power appears to be mixed. Was democracy a chief cause of union? Elected bodies were key actors in union, yet the Norwegian people were opposed to union and if stronger powers

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<sup>29</sup> On trade in the Sweden-Norway case, see Nordlund 1905, 12; Gjerset 1969, 2: 568.

had not forced the issue, the democratic outcome would have been for a less binding association than the resultant quasi-union. Furthermore, it is debatable that Sweden and Norway were democracies in 1814, and that Sweden was a democracy in 1905. Norway does not receive a sufficient polity score to count as a democracy until 1898 and Sweden does not qualify as a democracy until 1914. Was democracy a chief cause of disunion? There seems to be some evidence for this claim. Democratic institutions did an excellent job signaling popular Norwegian disaffection from Swedish union, which contributed to the king's decision-making process. Was democracy a chief cause for the peaceful relations between the two states? For this question, the evidence points to no. Both sides saw nothing illegitimate about militarizing their disputes between 1895 and 1905, and there was no mention made of democratic norms or procedures deterring force. Were both states non-democracies they had as much incentive to avoid conflict as their democratic doppelgangers.

### C. Realism

Again, neorealists do not pay much attention to marginal states. The longstanding Scandinavian tradition of neutrality looks very much like a “hiding” strategy, where small powers do their best to stay out of the way of great powers. Sweden and Norway have attempted this for centuries, and are therefore of little interest to neorealists and their focus on great power politics. Also again, neorealism accounts very well for the present case. As external threat bore down on Sweden, it had clear incentives to solve collective action problems by leading a balancing coalition, and neighboring Norway was a natural choice for a partner. As that threat declined, the fetters loosened and the states

opted for an increasingly less binding alignment. While neorealism has trouble accounting for many of the variations in balancing behavior, particularly political unification, Sweden and Norway's nominal union is not a difficulty.

#### IV. Conclusion

The union of Sweden and Norway is not a prototypical case of political unification because it was more alliance than union. Tellingly, the states did not centralize the authority to control armed forces, they did not espouse comparable trading policies, and no federal body overruled a state parliament with much success. The lack of an intense, abiding, symmetrical threat predicts the loose association that elites negotiated.

Along the way, this chapter made an incidental case for running the logic of the argument in reverse to explain political de-unification. With a decline in unifying threats, elites spearheaded de-unification through the media, the military, and political procedures. We have already seen what forms a security crisis may take for dissolution and why (to recap: the crisis might reveal an asymmetric threat, an intense threat that would overwhelm a balancing coalition, or it would be a consequence of elites provoking a crisis because perceived national threats are not sufficient to require sacrificing autonomy).

One miscellaneous point I would like to address is why Norway did not continue to fragment into statelets after distancing itself from Sweden. I conjecture that Norway fragmented into the smallest possible defensible state, and the record with Norwegian

autonomy since formal independence has tended to bear out the belief that Norwegian elites gambled rationally in separating from Sweden<sup>30</sup> – and something similar can be said of Sweden’s endurance. However, one should not lose sight of the small number of possible outcomes in the fragmentation process. There were not several likely successor territories; the bargaining range was lumpy. Path dependence probably explains part of this lumpiness; historical accidents likely had a seminal impact on what later became the Norwegian nation.

Yet like decisive battles or game-winning plays, I counter that some of these influential historical moments reflect abiding, underlying, geopolitical realities. While the political forces that forge nations often appear and are arbitrary in fine detail, in broad strokes they may not be as capricious as thought. Over the sweep of history, randomness is likely to be cancelled by later randomness. And though an event can always be found that indicated an outcome in hindsight, deeper causes may cause both the event and the outcome, rather than simply the event causing the outcome. In short, some of what appears as path dependence may be the test of time, and much of Norway’s borders may be where they are because, across time, that has proven a sturdy, expedient way to draw them.

Lastly, there are piquant parallels between Sweden and Norway’s union and the European Union. Both unions were born in the ashes of major European war; both are ostensibly unions without the centralized capability to pursue a unified foreign policy and preclude the use of force between members; both enjoyed/enjoy long periods of peace without serious plans to attack each other; both had/have great difficulty politically

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<sup>30</sup> Of course, there is a glaring anomaly to this statement. Nazi Germany did commandeer the country for five years – it is the reason Quisling enters the English lexicon as a term of disparagement. Yet it is hard to

integrating. Of course, no parallel is perfect. The European Union has a more uniform economic policy than Sweden-Norway ever did; the EU is more politically important in absolute and relative terms than Sweden-Norway. And while Sweden-Norway did not have a great power pacifier, though England at the time resembled one, countervailing this is the fact its borders incorporated relatively minor differences in law, culture, language and religion. To close, those seeking historical analogies for the EU are hard-pressed to find a better one than the understudied union of Sweden and Norway.

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rationality plan for a Hitler.