

The plan for a Scandinavian Defence Union

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The plan for a Scandinavian Defence Union

On 10 May 1948, just three months after the 'Prague coup' which had heightened Western fears of the threat of Communist expansion, Sweden proposed to Denmark and Norway the establishment of a neutral Nordic Defence Union. This would initially be for a period of ten years and would be neutral in the sense of being conditional on none of the members of the Scandinavian bloc joining the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) then under discussion. The plan also stipulated that the signatory states would remain outside any armed conflict unless directly attacked. Sweden, a neutral country that had been totally spared the devastation of the Second World War, was actually in a powerful military and financial position. In particular, it had a significant military aircraft industry and sought single-handedly to safeguard its 'armed neutrality'.

The United States, however, being particularly interested in gaining privileged access to strategic air and sea bases in the North of Europe and the Baltic Sea and considering the Scandinavians incapable of standing up to Soviet pressure on their own, let it be known on 14 January 1949 that only Member States of the Atlantic Pact would qualify to receive US military support. At the same time, Denmark and Norway, having been badly affected economically by the war and by the German occupation, notified the Swedes of their urgent need of American aid for reconstruction. Sweden, holding fast to its traditional policies of external neutrality and national independence, then refused to join the Western bloc. The plan for a Scandinavian Defence Union effectively collapsed on 30 January 1949.

On 4 April 1949, despite pressure from Moscow against the American plan, Denmark, Iceland and Norway signed the North Atlantic Treaty. Finland, however, was anxious to ensure stable and peaceful relations with its Soviet neighbour, and so it signed a 10-year treaty of friendship, cooperation and mutual assistance with the USSR on 6 April 1948.