

## Abstract

This thesis is an analysis of British foreign policy regarding Norway between September 1939 and April 1940. Its focus is on how the British Government adjusted its policy towards Norway's neutrality, from an attitude of respect to the final decision to break Norwegian neutrality was made. More specifically, the thesis recognizes the most important internal and external factors and investigates how they influenced the Chamberlain Government's attitude towards Norway, and measures and compares the amount of pressure these factors had on British policy makers. Norway's vast and neutral coastline emerged as one of the biggest problems for British war considerations during the period of this study, due to the German transport of iron ore, and the investigated factors represented different varieties of pressure on the British Government to do something about this growing issue.



## Acknowledgements

The finalization of this master's thesis has filled me with many thoughts and emotions. I am very proud of having completed such an extensive piece of work, something I have never done before, and something I could never see myself doing again (in the nearest future at least). I feel a sense of relief and happiness, as this work culminates my time as a student, and represents many of the things I have learnt and attained during my time here at NTNU.

I have many people to thank for making the road towards completion as pleasurable as it has been. I wish to honor my supervisor, Gary Love, who has guided me through this exciting process, providing me with solid advice and great encouragement during the ups and downs of my study. You have been a true inspiration, a pleasure to work with, and I wish you all the best in your future endeavors. Thank you.

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Torkel Vindspoll,  
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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Background narrative

From the mid 1930s, the idea of collective security in Europe started to crumble, and questions about the righteousness of neutrality and appeasement were looming.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, as war was threatening the balance of power, the neutral Scandinavian peninsula became an area of interest for the belligerents, and especially a free passage in Norwegian territorial waters presented itself as a potential problem for the Allies.<sup>2</sup> Still, the British respected Norway, and her neutrality was ‘largely taken for granted, mainly in view of the fact that she had remained neutral in 1914-18.’<sup>3</sup> At this point, mainly in fear of damaging Britain’s position in the eyes of other neutral nations, British policy makers recognised that neutrality was not to be tampered with. However, a view of potential intervention in Norway was growing.

After Britain and France declared war on Germany on 3 September 1939, the Scandinavian neutrals soon attracted increased attention from the Allies. This was due to the absence of the expected German assault on the Western front, and a result of two other developments. Firstly, Swedish iron ore was imperative in the building of German munitions. Consequently, the Allies saw this as the potential ‘Achilles heel of the German war economy.’<sup>4</sup> Secondly, when the Soviet-Finnish war broke out in November 1939, under the ostensible pretext of aiding Finland, Anglo-French forces could get a foothold in the Swedish iron ore fields. Dealing with both factors would have to involve Norway in one way or another.

Besides serving as a potential gateway into Sweden and Finland, Norway had other assets recognised by Britain, both in terms of economic warfare and strategic thinking. Still, Britain’s geographical position and financial resources could give her alternative sources to the

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<sup>1</sup> ‘The term appeasement is related to ‘the policy of the so-called National Government in Great Britain in the 1930s to reach a peaceful accommodation with the German dictator, Adolf Hitler. From that time, it has come to mean conciliation through concession – the policy of giving in to the threat of force.’ Adams, R. J. Q. (1993), *British Politics and Foreign Policy in the Age of Appeasement, 1935-39*, California: Stanford University Press. p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> ‘Norway’s long, indented coastline, with its chain of offshore islands, afforded an 800-mile “covered way” – the Leads – protecting Allied, German and neutral vessels from the naval patrol of both belligerents.’ Salmon, P., (1979), “Churchill, the Admiralty and the Narvik traffic, September-November 1939, *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 4:1-4, p. 317.

<sup>3</sup> Mee, R. C., (1998), *The Foreign Policy of the Chamberlain Wartime Administration, September 1939 – May 1940*, Thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, Department of Modern History, The University of Birmingham, p. 212.

<sup>4</sup> Salmon, P. (ed.), (1995), “From Neutrality to War 1939-40”, in *Britain and Norway in the Second World War*, London: HMSO, p. 3. The iron ore was transported to the ports of Narvik, and from there shipped to Germany via Norwegian territorial waters.

supplies Norway had to offer, meaning that the principal aim for Britain would be to deny these materials to Germany in an economic blockade.<sup>5</sup> However, the main problem for Britain regarding Norway was that her vast coastline offered a neutral corridor for German iron ore traffic from Narvik. This corridor also shielded enemy vessels of war, and proved to be a constant headache for the British Government as Norwegian territorial waters became a major gap in the British naval control of German vessels. Norwegian neutrality developed into a real problem for British war strategy, and the challenged policy of respect and appreciation could not hold indefinitely.

On 8 April 1940, the Norwegian wishes to stay neutral at a time of crisis were overshadowed by the Allied cause, with Britain as the vanguardist. Four British destroyers laid 234 mines in the far North of Norway. The minefield was positioned in Vestfjord, which lead to the port of Narvik – a place that was of great strategic importance for both the Allies and the German war machine. This marked the ‘first violation of Norwegian neutrality’.<sup>6</sup> The mining of the Leads, a plan which Winston Churchill had advocated strongly since the outbreak of the Second World War, represented a significant change in British attitude towards Norway as a neutral state.<sup>7</sup>

This study aims to understand the process of the abovementioned change in British foreign policy towards Norway between 1939 and 1940. It investigates the factors which influenced the Chamberlain Government’s handling of the delicate question of Norway’s neutrality. Furthermore, the thesis will explicate how these factors affected British foreign policy making over time, which ultimately led to the intervention in Norwegian territorial waters. The aim of this work is not to justify the actions of war belligerents, nor small state neutrals, but rather to identify the factors that influenced the British Government’s decision to violate Norwegian neutrality.

Understanding how the British Government developed its foreign policy concerning Norway and other war issues from 1939 to 1940 is crucial if we are to determine what influenced events in the decisive months and days before Norway was unwillingly dragged into the conflict. The timeline of the thesis stops just before the attack on Norway by Nazi-Germany on April 9, 1940, as the idea is to grasp the British Government’s mind-set towards Norwegian

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<sup>5</sup> Salmon, P., (2004), *Scandinavia and the Great Powers 1890 – 1940*, UK: Cambridge University Press. p. 317.

<sup>6</sup> Brown, D., (1995), “Norway 1940: the balance of interference”, in Salmon, P. (ed.), *Britain and Norway in the Second World War*, London: HMSO, p. 26.

<sup>7</sup> Mee, R. C., (1998), pp. 253-255.

neutrality before it ever realised the full capacity of the German threat to Norway. The thesis will therefore not pursue British attitudes towards Norway after she entered the war.

## 1.2 Research question

The scope of this study starts in September 1939, when the attention towards Norway and the iron ore question was intensified. Even though the possibility of ‘crippling any future German war effort’ by limiting her imports of iron ore was recognised unofficially a few years before, the matter was first officially raised in the War Cabinet on 19 September 1939 by Churchill<sup>8</sup> – making this a natural starting point for my study. The scope ends on the climax of Britain’s ‘readjustment of policy’ towards neutral Norway, in which British naval forces took control over the approaches to Narvik on April 8 1940.<sup>9</sup>

The focus of the work will be on the factors which influenced the British Government’s stance on the ‘Norway question’, and eventually led to a change in policy towards Norway as a neutral state. Many elements came into play, both external and internal, when the Chamberlain Government made decisions about how to approach these delicate issues, and the research question is raised to examine how these factors affected British decision making. The main question is as follows:

*How did external and internal factors influence the shaping of British foreign policy towards the issue of Norwegian neutrality between September 1939 and April 1940?*

To answer this question, I intend to look at British parliamentary debates and Cabinet papers of the Chamberlain wartime government to understand how the issues of neutrality and iron ore traffic in relation to Norway were viewed, discussed, and ultimately handled.

Furthermore, to answer a research question of such complexity, I must recognise several sub-questions. The list of potential factors is vast, so it is important to identify the main aspects which ultimately could have influenced British attitudes. Also, a distinction between “internal” and “external” factors will be made. Were external or internal factors more important when opinion was formed? Pressures from other belligerents, and perhaps most obvious the blatant disregard of international law by Germany towards Norwegian territorial waters, was a major external element. Did the view of Britain’s closest confederate, France, also play a role in the

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<sup>8</sup> Mee, R. C., (1998), p. 311.

<sup>9</sup> Salmon, P. (ed.), (1995), p. 3.

shaping of British opinion towards Norwegian neutrality? What about the sheer practical war considerations regarding the iron ore traffic and strategic thinking? The Altmark Incident, which will be discussed in Chapter 2, was the single most important event regarding Norway's neutrality as it revealed a weakness in her ability to stand firm when challenged by confrontational states. How did the decline of Norway's neutrality affect British attitudes?

Winston Churchill was a huge internal reminder of the abovementioned factors. How did he affect decisions over Norway? There was also internal pressure within the British Parliament. Where did it come from, and how much did it affect the Government? Were there disagreements or different views in Parliament on the matters in question? Was Norway a special case, or did the handling of her neutrality just reflect a more general stance from a British perspective? These are the factors and questions which will be scrutinised in this thesis to find an answer to my research question.

### 1.3 Historiography

The historiography on the Anglo-Norwegian relationship is extensive. Many scholars have written detailed studies of British attitudes towards Norway and Chamberlain's foreign policy from the outbreak of the Second World War. Patrick Salmon has raised several important debates which fit the framework of this study, and in his book *Scandinavia and the Great Powers 1890-1940* he assesses the position of the Nordic countries in relation to Europe's great powers. Chapter 9 "Scandinavia and the coming of the Second World War 1933-1940" is particularly useful as Salmon deals with the 'logic of British strategy' towards Scandinavia on the eve of war. He points to Churchill and how he portrayed the view that 'neutrality itself was dispensable', when promoting naval action in Narvik in December 1939 Churchill said 'we have a right, and indeed are bound in duty, to abrogate for a space some of the conventions of the very laws we seek to consolidate and reaffirm. Small nations must not tie our hands when we are fighting for their rights and freedom.'<sup>10</sup> By presenting this quote, Salmon recognises two factors which influenced British policy making in the period of this study. The first was the idea that neutrality was a failing concept, and that war practicalities and strategic thinking should not be narrowed by the neutrality of smaller nations, i.e. Norway. The second was Winston Churchill the interventionist, and by this time First Lord of the Admiralty, who was constantly trying to push his convictions regarding Norway's strategic importance onto his peers.

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<sup>10</sup> Salmon, P., (2004), p. 317.

Salmon also has a bibliography of less extensive, but more focused studies, in which he raises many discussions and arguments concerning the topic of my thesis. In “British strategy and Norway 1939-40”, Salmon raises an important question: ‘why did Great Britain decide to violate the neutrality of a country which it had pledged itself to defend?’<sup>11</sup> This is particularly relevant for my study, as he recognises many of the factors I wish to investigate in more depth. Salmon presents the elements but does not give any thorough account on their importance regarding British foreign policy. This thesis aims to dissect the factors even further by measuring their influence leading up to the violation. Additionally, in “Churchill, the Admiralty and the Narvik traffic, September-November 1939” Salmon looks at ‘the formulation of policy on the question of naval action against the German ore traffic in Norwegian territorial waters, through discussion (and argument) between Churchill and his professional advisers at the admiralty.’<sup>12</sup> In this work, he analyses Churchill as a factor between September and November, 1939, and presents the somewhat uncertain origin of his Narvik proposal and the methods he used in order to raise this issue as an important consideration for the Chamberlain wartime administration, making it more than ‘merely Churchill’s *idée fixe*.’<sup>13</sup> This article, however, stops on the verge of the Soviet-Finnish war, and my thesis aims to extend the timeline regarding Churchill, and see how he as a factor influenced British policy making over Norway.

Just as ‘Churchill the politician’ is an important figure *in* the historiography, ‘Churchill the historian’ is an important contributor *to* the historiography, and the issue of iron ore traffic and Norwegian neutrality is frequently mentioned in his extensive memoir *The Second World War – The Gathering Storm*. This book is important because it provides a broad historical overview of events and at the same time a focused look upon the shaping of war policies concerning Norway. Churchill represented the growing dissatisfaction regarding the British Government’s attitude towards Norway’s neutral territory after the outbreak of World War 2, and was not afraid to share his opinion on the matter:

The Norwegian mountains run into the ocean in a continuous fringe of islands. Between these islands and the mainland there was a corridor in territorial waters through which Germany could communicate with the outer seas to the grievous injury of our blockade. [...] To respect the

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<sup>11</sup> Salmon, P. (ed.), (1995), p. 3. This compendium of articles by various historians, edited by Salmon, came as a result of an initiative from the British Committee for the History of the Second World War, wishing to make the history on Anglo-Norwegian relations more accessible in English.

<sup>12</sup> Salmon, P., (1979) “Churchill, the Admiralty and the Narvik traffic, September-November 1939”, *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 4:1-4, p. 306.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 326.

corridor would be to allow the whole of this traffic to proceed under the shield of neutrality in the face of our superior sea power.<sup>14</sup>

Churchill also emphasised the fact that the Germans were ‘conducting war in a cruel and lawless manner’ by violating ‘the territorial waters of Norway, sinking without warning or succour a number of British and neutral vessels.’<sup>15</sup> This was a good reason to challenge Norway’s neutrality from the British side, according to Churchill. However, a policy of strict respect for the neutrality of small states was the main opinion until March 1940. Churchill appreciated the Government’s stance to some degree in his memoirs. ‘It was only natural and it was only right that His Majesty’s Government should have been long reluctant to incur the reproach of even a technical violation of international law.’<sup>16</sup>

As mentioned, his role as an active politician during the years in question makes ‘Churchill the historian’ an interesting addition to this study. Academics have questioned the reliability of Churchill’s works, because of his ‘double act’ as a contemporary politician and historian.<sup>17</sup> He is often presented as a man who wrote his own history, and was always quick to write reminiscences of what he had experienced as a parliamentarian. One should therefore approach Churchill’s wartime biography with caution, as the agenda of his memoirs was not only to tell a story, but also to shape the public’s image of himself as a politician and wartime leader. At the same time, one cannot fail to see the value of his insight, as no other historian has access to the information he possessed. Even though most of the primary sources are available today, none of us took part in the events, or had influence on foreign policies, as Churchill did.

Nils Ørvik addresses Norwegian Neutrality and its downfall in his extensive work *The Decline of Neutrality 1914-41*. He looks at the process in which Norway finally had to forfeit her neutral position from 1938 to 1940, and more specifically how ‘the future of neutral Norway

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<sup>14</sup> Churchill, W., (1948), *The Second World War: The Gathering Storm*, Boston: The Riverside Press, p. 531.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 545.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., pp. 532-533.

<sup>17</sup> Reynolds, D. (2004), *In Command of History*, London: Penguin Books.

Debates about Churchill’s reputation and his reliability as an historian are also presented in:

Addison, P., (2005), *Churchill: The Unexpected Hero*, Oxford: OUP Oxford.

Jenkins, R., (2001), *Churchill*, London: Pan Macmillan Ltd.

Ramsden, J., (2003), *Man of the Century: Winston Churchill and his Legend Since 1945*, London: HarperCollinsPublishers.

was [...] to rest upon the decisions taken by the three concerned parties, Germany, Great Britain and Norway.’ Ørvik recognises German aggression as a vital factor in the shaping of British foreign policy, and looks at the rivalry between the two belligerents in relation to Norway. ‘Norway [...] was thus squeezed and threatened by both belligerents. [...] one had to expect that, sooner or later, one or both would attempt to pull Norway over on their side and make her join the war or use her territory and resources to their own ends.’<sup>18</sup> Ørvik contextualises the position of the British Government in a time when they had to make vital decisions over Norway, and recognises many of the factors that influenced British policy making. Hence, his work is important for my thesis.

In connection with Ørvik’s proposal from 1953 that ‘in the realistic, interrelated world of today, a true, impartial and legal neutrality is impossible’<sup>19</sup>, the Altmark Incident served as an important event which revealed the fragile state of Norway’s neutrality in 1940. *Dramaet i Jøssingfjorden* by Jostein Berglyd has shed light on the incident in Norwegian territorial waters, as it deals with the actions and reactions related to what would prove to be the first technical infringement of Norway’s neutrality by Britain. The Altmark Incident had a large influence on the British attitude towards Norway’s neutrality, and per Foreign Secretary Halifax Norway had failed as a neutral state.<sup>20</sup> Berglyd’s book addresses the British Official’s reaction to the incident, and thus has some relevance for my thesis.

In his doctorate entitled *The Foreign Policy of the Chamberlain Wartime Administration, September 1939 – May 1940*, Richard Charles Mee argues that there is a lack of ‘appreciation of the external pressures bearing on British policy towards Scandinavia.’<sup>21</sup> In the two chapters about Scandinavia he proposes that external pressures, such as neutral opinion i.e. America, events like the Finnish-Soviet conflict and the Phoney War, were pivotal in the framing of policies. The pressures Mee addresses can be related to the factors I intend to scrutinise in my study, and in that sense his considerations are similar to mine. However, Mee argues that Anglo-French co-operation was the main factor which influenced Chamberlain’s decision to mine Norwegian territorial waters, and this argument will be challenged in this thesis. Furthermore, Mee deals with Scandinavia and has a focus on external conditions also after the German attack on Norway, whilst my study looks mostly on the Norwegian question

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<sup>18</sup> Ørvik, N., (1953) “The End of Norwegian Neutrality”, in *The Decline of Neutrality 1914-1941*, Oslo: Johan Grundt Tanum Forlag, p. 220.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 277.

<sup>20</sup> Berglyd, J., (2008), *Dramaet i Jøssingfjorden – Altmark-affæren februar 1940*, Oslo: Gyldendal Norsk Forlag AS, pp. 104-106.

<sup>21</sup> Mee, R. C., (1998), p. 210.

and does not investigate incidents after the German invasion. Additionally, my thesis looks to investigate internal factors as well as external ones, and this separates Mee's study from mine.

Magne Skodvin is also an historian who addresses external pressures on British foreign policy towards Scandinavia. In his chapter "Norge i stormaktsstrategien: Frå Finlandsferden til Wilfred" he looks at France as a contributing factor on British decisions about Norway and the iron ore traffic. The French Government indicated a willingness to intervene in Norwegian territorial waters, especially when Reynaud overtook the Premiership after Daladier. They also proposed a military expedition to secure territorial support points on land. However, the British military were only keen on navy missions, if the intervention were to take place at all.<sup>22</sup> France as a factor is investigated in my thesis, making Skodvin's overview of events and insight into the primary source material regarding the relationship between Britain and France valuable for this work.

We know based on the secondary readings that British foreign policy regarding Norway between 1939 and 1940 has been broadly covered. For this thesis, the works mentioned are useful as historic overviews and they have helped me to identify the most important factors that I wish to explore. In fact, there is no focused study of the factors *in relation* to other factors. There is no comparable analysis assembling the internal and external factors and evaluating which of them had the most impact on the policies leading up to the breach of neutrality in Norway. They are often recognised and mentioned in the literature, but investigated in isolation, and this is usually where the scope ends. Mee recognizes this in his chapters about Scandinavia and British policy making, 'in tending to deal with the campaigns in virtual isolation, the context within they took place is often ignored or passed over [...] we have several excellent accounts of what happened, but few attempts to link these events with developments elsewhere.'<sup>23</sup> This constitutes a gap in the historiography, and my thesis will investigate the correlation between the recognised factors to create a more nuanced picture of the period in question.

#### 1.4 Method and sources

The main body of the thesis draws upon both primary and secondary sources. By reading primary material, I as an historian have the opportunity to analyse the material directly and not

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<sup>22</sup> Skodvin, M., (1969), "Norge i stormaktsstrategien: Frå Finlandsferden til Wilfred", in *Norge og den 2. verdenskrig: 1940 Fra Nøytral til Okkupert*, Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.

<sup>23</sup> Mee, R. C., (1998), p. 210.

through the many ‘links of interpretations’ found in secondary literature.<sup>24</sup> This also offers me a chance to add a fresh perspective of the period in question without the possible biased view of other interpreters. However, a selection of sources seldom, or never, tells the full story. Realistically, there will always be discussions and activities of which no record can be found, therefore a gap in the archival records must be acknowledged and accepted, even when working with primary sources. I can only aim to paint the picture as fully as the source material allows me to, and by combining primary and secondary sources this is the intention of my study.

The primary sources in the thesis include government documents such as Cabinet papers (CAB), including both War Cabinet memoranda and conclusions, and Foreign Office papers (FO), which contain correspondence between British Ministers in Scandinavia and the British Foreign Office. The memos are untampered documents circulated between politicians, and the conclusions are summaries of War Cabinet meetings captured directly. Thus, the government documents are well suited for investigating high political developments surrounding the British policies towards Norway in the years in question. These documents were researched at The National Archives in Kew, London during the autumn of 2016, and via their website, as most of the relevant Cabinet documents have been digitalised in recent years.<sup>25</sup>

Parliamentary debates are also investigated in the thesis because they show the Parliament’s attitude towards Government policies, and indicate if they are tolerated, supported or criticised by fellow parliamentarians at a given moment. The opinion in Parliament could also, in some indirect way, hint at shifts of public opinion in Britain. In addition, by looking at both the parliamentary debates and the Cabinet papers, I can infer which policies the Government chose to share outwardly, to test the waters, and which to hold back, and this is a vital part of the shaping of policies. The debates were gathered from the Hansard Millbank systems online.<sup>26</sup> The thesis also draws upon Churchill’s post-war memoir, as it adds perspective provided by one of the most prominent political figures during the period in question. This is a valuable primary source, as it is written after the events took place, reflecting upon the incidents the thesis investigates. However, as discussed in the historiography, memoirs are to be addressed with caution, and one should always keep the possible inclinations and the context in which the author found himself in mind.

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<sup>24</sup> Discussions concerning the use of primary sources are found in Kjelstadli, K. (1999), *Fortida er ikke hva den en gang var: en innføring i historiefaget*, Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, and Williams, R. C. (2011), *The Historian’s Toolbox: A Student’s Guide to the Theory and Craft of History*, ME Sharpe, respectively.

<sup>25</sup> The National Archives home page: [nationalarchives.gov.uk](http://nationalarchives.gov.uk)

<sup>26</sup> The Hansard home page: [hansard.millbanksystems.com](http://hansard.millbanksystems.com)

The secondary sources are mainly used to provide a good overview of the timeline the thesis is built upon. They can also, in some cases, serve as a gateway into relevant primary source material, as many of the secondary works investigate aspects similar to the topic of this thesis. Gaining a solid overview of the secondary literature is important, as it tells me as a researcher of British foreign policies towards Norway during the Second World War, what has already been investigated, what views can be challenged, and what gaps there might be in the field of research. Therefore, a significant selection of secondary sources has been chosen for the thesis.

The thesis offers a chronological description of the period in question in order to recognise and investigate the factors which influenced British foreign policy towards Norway. The external and internal factors were all compelling forces when the Chamberlain wartime administration made decisions over Norway, and will be acknowledged as they appear in the timeline, and investigated throughout the main chapters and conclusion. A chronological approach is deemed best for my study, as it makes the relationship between cause and effect more manageable, especially when looking at specific factors and how they over time influenced Government decisions. Chronology also avoids unnecessary repetition. Therefore, the thesis is split into three main chapters because of the natural separation of historical events, which consequently exposed different factors at different times during the period in question, thus being an organised way of presenting and investigating the external and internal factors. In addition, the chosen structure offers roughly the same number of pages in each chapter, which is important for writing a balanced account of the evolution of British policy towards Norwegian neutrality. A conclusion will be provided at the end which summarises the most important findings in the three main chapters of my thesis, and links those findings to the most important historiographical debates.

In the field of historical research several methods can be applied, and the historical approach used in my study is known as the ‘high political’ approach. As the thesis mostly investigates factors which formed political opinion and policies, it makes sense to focus on the major political contributors. The fact that the internal factors were represented by prominent politicians, and that the external factors were discussed by the decision makers of the time, justifies the focus on ‘the politicians that mattered’.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, leading political figures and institutions are heavily represented in the source material at hand, and therefore a ‘high

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<sup>27</sup> Lawrence, J., (2010), “Political History”, in Berger, S., et al. *Writing History: theory & practice*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, p. 211.

political' approach is considered best. This traditional approach focuses on the 'macro-level' aspects, the politicians in question and what they communicated, which stands in contrast to the more modern 'new political history' method, where the focus lies on the 'micro-levels' of political history, i.e. the role of ideas, the behaviour of voters and psychological factors.<sup>28</sup> The latter approach would open up different research questions, but for the scope of my study and the nature of the main research question, the 'high political' approach is deemed sufficient.

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<sup>28</sup> Craig, D. M., (2010), "'High Politics' and the 'New Political History'", in *The Historical Journal* 53, no. 02, p. 454.



## 2. Britain and Norway from the eve to the outbreak of the Second World War.

### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter looks at British interests in Norway from the eve to the first months of the Second World War. During this period, questions regarding Norway and her neutrality, and the idea of intrusion on Norwegian neutral territory moved from the fringes of Britain's military circle to the policy makers in the Chamberlain War Cabinet. In the timeframe of this chapter, external factors, such as Germany's use of Norwegian territorial waters to transport Swedish iron ore, and internal factors, such as the Industrial Intelligence Centre (IIC), planners at the Foreign Office, and Winston Churchill, presented themselves as pressure builders which shaped the Government's understanding of Norway's role in the conflict. The years preceding the war and the first weeks after its outbreak revealed how these factors moved the issues regarding Norway from an unofficial level, 'scarcely mentioned at the outset of the conflict,'<sup>29</sup> to the Prime Minister's wartime administration. Moreover, a significant incident occurred on 19 September 1939, when Churchill first advocated the laying of mines in Norwegian territorial waters to the War Cabinet, officialising the proposal of this action in the British Government.<sup>30</sup>

Subsequently, these factors influenced the British policy makers at a time of crisis, and therefore deserves to be carefully examined to measure the extent of their influence on the Government's decision to violate Norwegian neutrality in April 1940. The research question of this thesis asks how internal and external factors were influential on British decisions over Norway, however, this chapter aims to investigate why Norway became important in the first place. Why did Norway become a priority in British politics? And more importantly, what factors pushed the view of intervening in Norwegian territory from being virtually unknown in the political scene to the forefront of British foreign policy considerations? This chapter aims to answer the abovementioned questions to establish a greater understanding of how Norway became important from a British viewpoint, which is the basis of this dissertation.

### 2.2 Germany, iron ore and neutral Norway

The issues of iron ore traffic in Scandinavia were well recognised before the war started. 'As early as December 1933 the Industrial Intelligence Centre (IIC) devoted a report to Germany's

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<sup>29</sup> Mee, R. C., (1998), p. 209.

<sup>30</sup> TNA CAB 65/1 W.M. 20 (39), 19/9/39.

*Imports from Scandinavian countries in Case of War*,<sup>31</sup> and in a memorandum called *Sweden*, the IIC declared that iron ore was one of the ‘German war economy’s key deficiency commodities.’<sup>32</sup> Salmon suggests that ‘the importance of Swedish iron ore became fixed in British minds in the years immediately preceding the Second World War’, and in a report by the IIC in June 1937 it was stated how effective the blockade of iron ore to Germany could be.<sup>33</sup> The planners at the IIC and the Foreign Office continued to look at possibilities for interrupting the iron ore traffic in Scandinavian territory between 1937 and 1939, moving away from action on German territory. These preliminary plans looked mostly at the possibility of mining operations on the railway lines between Sweden and Norway, and ‘the interruption of communications closer to source.’<sup>34</sup> And so, the earliest signs of British interests in Norway on questions regarding war started to present themselves, at least in the sphere of “economic warfare”. According to Medlicott, an historian of economic warfare, this relatively new term was closely related to the traditional blockades of the First World War, but ‘adorned and transmogrified with a new name and an ill-defined promise, it had become in 1939 Britain’s secret weapon.’<sup>35</sup>

As war drew closer, Admiral Godfrey, the Director of Naval Intelligence, confirmed the possibility for German ships to transport iron ore from the port of Narvik to Germany without having to leave the Norwegian neutral zone.<sup>36</sup> This constituted a major gap in the British naval control of German vessels. As a reaction to this, it was noted in the Foreign Office’s Northern Department in August 1939 that ‘it has generally been assumed that German imports from the Norwegian side would at least have to be reduced, if not discontinued altogether.’<sup>37</sup> Thus, the German use of Norwegian territorial waters to ship iron ore presented itself as a significant external factor that shaped British opinion towards Norway, and more specifically - the importance of blocking this transport. This factor was important because it was directly linked to Britain’s ‘secret weapon’, economic warfare and blockade, and Norway’s neutral coastline constituted a vast protected corridor, which the Germans utilised to the fullest. ‘The experience of the First World War had inculcated an exaggerated belief in the effectiveness of the blockade

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<sup>31</sup> Salmon, P., (1981), “British Plans for Economic Warfare against Germany 1937-1939: The Problem of Swedish Iron Ore”, in *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 16, No. 1, The Second World War: Part 1, Sage Publications, Ltd. p. 58.

<sup>32</sup> TNA FO 419/29 N1525/18/42, 13/12/34.

<sup>33</sup> Salmon, P., (1981), p. 54, and Mee, R. C., (1998), p. 213.

<sup>34</sup> Salmon, P., (2004), p. 343.

<sup>35</sup> Medlicott, W. N., (1952), *The Economic Blockade*, Vol I, London.

<sup>36</sup> TNA FO 371/23648 N3737/509/56, 8/8/39.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

in bringing about Germany's defeat.'<sup>38</sup> Therefore, as we shall see, a gap of such ample proportions, allowing German vessels to freely transport important munition supplies in Norwegian territorial waters, did become an important factor when decisions were to be made over Norway.

However, before the Second World War, this was only a minor issue in the grand scheme of things, and 'had to compete at Cabinet level with Germany's other major deficiency commodity: Oil.' In the pre-war years, iron ore never attained the same status as the question of Germany's oil supplies.<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, these years also saw little reference to the approach which ultimately would be the preferred method of interference in Norwegian territory – the laying of mines in the Vestfjord. 'This idea was discussed before the war, but only at the Admiralty, in isolation from the main stream of economic warfare planning.'<sup>40</sup> However, when the Second World War finally erupted, the plan to lay down mines in Norwegian neutral waters would make its way to the very top of British foreign politics.

As we have seen, up to the brink of war, British interests in Norway were mainly related to aspects concerning Britain's economic warfare. Norway's neutral position was recognised and appreciated, and the topic was discussed in both the Foreign Office and the War Cabinet. It seemed important from the British side that Britain and Norway were on good terms. On 24 August 1939, in a letter to the Committee of Imperial Defence (CID), Daniel Lascelles, of the Foreign Office's Northern Department, informed that the Foreign Secretary, Halifax, 'has had under consideration the means available for encouraging pro-British elements in Norway and thus influencing the general attitude of the Norwegian authorities in the event of war.'<sup>41</sup> Even though Norway was a neutral country, Britain was eager to keep a close and warm relationship with her in case she would have to choose sides. It was important that Norwegian attitudes should remain pro-British, and consequently it was suggested by the Foreign Office that the Norwegian authorities should be informed 'confidentially but formally that His Majesty's Government would regard a German attack on Norway as tantamount to an attack on (Britain).'<sup>42</sup>

Confidentiality was important, as Norway was not interested in an official British guarantee of protection, as this could have been regarded by others as a breach of neutrality.

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<sup>38</sup> Salmon, P., (1981), p. 54.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, p. 67.

<sup>40</sup> Chiefs of Staff Committee memorandum of February 1939, in Ibid, pp. 67-68.

<sup>41</sup> TNA CAB 66/1, W.P. 5 (39), 4/9/39, Annex: letter from the FO, 24/08/39.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, p. 5.

Terms of trade suggested by the British Government were also dismissed by the Norwegian Foreign Minister, Dr. Koht, as ‘Germany would be justified in saying that this constituted a breach of her (Norway’s) duties as a neutral.’<sup>43</sup> At this point, British attitude towards Norway was moderated by her wish to stay neutral, and Lascelle’s letter on behalf of Halifax further claimed that support of Britain’s economic blockade would never be officialised in the Norwegian government, and ‘that co-operation with British blockade measures in the fullest degree compatible with technical neutrality might be hoped for from Norwegian private interests, if not from the Government.’<sup>44</sup>

As a response to the letter from the Foreign Office Northern Department, the Chiefs of Staff Committee offered a report on Norwegian neutrality to the War Cabinet on 4 September 1939, the day after the Second World War started. This report supported the view of ‘a confidential communication being made to the Norwegian authorities in the sense suggested by Lord Halifax.’ It also addressed the issue of iron ore, and how the ‘refusal by Norway to continue exporting iron ore from Narvik would have a very large economic effect on Germany.’<sup>45</sup> Suggestions of ways to deal with this growing concern was traceable in the report, but this was still only related to economic warfare, and the ‘many essential foodstuffs and industrial raw materials’ Norway derived from the Allies. This meant that the Allies were ‘in a position to exercise very strong economic pressure upon Norway in war, if His Majesty’s Government should permit the exercise of this power to its fullest extent compatible with international law in order to stop exporting Swedish iron ore.’<sup>46</sup> Thus, even though an eagerness to interfere with the iron ore traffic was beginning to surface, the importance of staying within the framework of international law, and not tampering with Norway’s neutral position was clearly emphasized.

This suggests a lenient approach towards Norway and her significant neutral gap in the area of British naval control, and after the outbreak of war there were still no official proposals of intervening in Norwegian territorial waters, even though the passage of German iron ore exports had been recognised well in advance.<sup>47</sup> When the Second World War commenced, this external factor was beginning to make its mark on British officials, but on its own it did not affect the opinion of the British Government towards neutral Norway. However, as the war

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<sup>43</sup> Ørvik, N., (1953), p. 221.

<sup>44</sup> TNA CAB 66/1, W.P. 5 (39), 4/9/39, Annex: letter from the FO, 24/08/39.

<sup>45</sup> TNA CAB 66/1, W.P. 5 (39), 4/9/39

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> Mee, R. C., (1998), p. 213.

continued, internal forces would see to it that the issue of Norway's neutral zone could no longer be ignored.

### 2.3 Churchill and the interventionists

In the early days of the Second World War Norway was still thought to play a marginal role in the conflict. Her involvement was at this point in the range of economic warfare, and the 'connected issues of iron ore exports and the use of territorial waters' were the reasons for British interest in the Scandinavian peninsula.<sup>48</sup> There were no signs of official attitudes suggesting any form of intervention in Norwegian territorial waters. A few months before the war, however, in the outskirts of the military sphere in Britain, pugnacious ideas of intervention in Norway started to emerge. A small, unofficial planning staff, headed by Admiral Sir Reginald Drax, was concerned with the German use of Norwegian neutral waters. Drax - 'an 'intellectual' among Flag Officers who had helped prepare the navy's war plans as long ago as 1933'<sup>49</sup> - proposed early in 1939 that 'in the case of Norway, diplomatic pressure might be brought to get her to lay mines in her territorial waters. [...] If the Norwegians did not cooperate, the only course left to us would be [...] to enter territorial waters and sink enemy ships.'<sup>50</sup> Drax' suggestions constitute early signs of interventionistic ideas, and this belligerent attitude would eventually find its way to the official group of British policy makers, but for now it was confined to the unofficial fringes of the military circles.

In September 1939 Admiral Drax was again involved, working on unofficial war plans in collaboration with another renowned officer, Admiral Dickens, and 'one of their first priorities was the stoppage of the Narvik traffic.' Churchill, who had returned to the Admiralty as First Lord, took note of this and on 18 September he invited Drax and the Deputy Chief of the Naval Staff (DCNS) to a meeting. The meeting concluded with a discussion of the iron ore question, and Admiral Drax suggested that 'every possible effort should be made to get hold of this iron ore by diplomatic means, [...] If all other methods failed we should be prepared to violate Norwegian territorial waters.'<sup>51</sup>

And so, the pre-war views of Drax and his committee were now fully appreciated by the First Lord, and Drax' 'offensive-mindedness and readiness to disregard neutrality [...]

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid, p. 212.

<sup>49</sup> Roskill, S., (2004), *Churchill and the Admirals*, South Yorkshire: Pen & Sword Books Ltd, p. 146.

<sup>50</sup> DRAX 2/10 (Drax Papers) Paper O.P.C 4 'Destruction of Enemy Merchant Ships and Potential Raiders' 7/2/39, in Salmon, P., (1979), pp. 309-310.

<sup>51</sup> Meetings in the First Lord's room: first meeting, ADM 205/2; Salmon, P., (1979), p. 311.

corresponded closely to Churchill's inclinations.<sup>52</sup> Consequently, Churchill made a statement in the War Cabinet concerning the German use of Norwegian territorial waters on 19 September 1939.

Our policy must be to stop this trade going to Germany, and at the same time to provide it with an alternative market. The First Lord warned the War Cabinet that, if the desired result could not be attained by pressure on the Norwegian government, he would be compelled to propose the remedy which had been adopted in the last war, namely, the laying of mines inside Norwegian territorial mile limits, which had driven the ore-carrying vessels outside the three-mile limit.<sup>53</sup>

Hence, the first internal factor which had influence on the British Government's decisions over Norway presented itself, namely the "Interventionists", with Churchill as the most prominent figure. Starting with the pre-war views of Admiral Drax, which were further developed in an unofficial planning committee and meetings in the First Lord's room, before ending up as a suggested direct action in Norwegian territorial waters to the War Cabinet, the interventionists represented a significant part of the internal British pressure on the Chamberlain wartime administration to do something about the issue of Norwegian neutrality and the iron ore traffic.

Furthermore, as pointed out in Churchill's statement, the mining had also been carried out in 1918, but only after the United States had come into the war and consequently were not in a position to condemn the violation of Norway's neutrality. The situation was different in 1939. The United States had again declared her neutrality, making it 'dangerous to tamper with the rights of other neutral countries'. Therefore, the interventionists found it difficult to justify direct action in Norwegian territorial waters at this point. They 'understood as well as anyone that Roosevelt would find it much harder to ensure the supply of vital war materials to a Britain which violated the rights of neutral countries.'<sup>54</sup> However, the intervention *idea* was by now well lodged in Chamberlain's wartime administration, even though there were still not enough arguments in favour of violating Norwegian neutrality. Moreover, this internal factor was indeed related to the German use of Norwegian territorial waters, as the interventionist's main argument in favour of direct action was the importance of stopping the iron ore traffic.

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<sup>52</sup> Salmon, P., (1979), p. 310.

<sup>53</sup> TNA CAB 65/1 W.M. 20 (39) 19/9/39

<sup>54</sup> Mee, R. C., (1998), p. 212.

Churchill continued to advocate this view as the lack of initiative from both belligerents started to shape what would become the “Phoney War”<sup>55</sup>. In a memorandum presented on September 29, he again reminded the War Cabinet that ‘it must be understood that an adequate supply of Swedish iron ore is vital to Germany, and the interception or prevention of these Narvik supplies during the winter months [...] will greatly reduce the power of resistance.’ External circumstances regarding the iron ore traffic worked in favour of the Allies, and Churchill could further inform that ‘for the first three weeks of the war no iron ore ships left Narvik owing to the reluctance of crews to sail and other causes outside our control.’<sup>56</sup> Nevertheless, he continued to push for more radical deeds in Norwegian territory if this traffic were to be re-established, and as a reply to Churchill’s memorandum, ‘The War Cabinet took note that no action on our part would be necessary unless supplies from Narvik to Germany started moving once more. In that event the Royal Navy would take drastic action.’<sup>57</sup> Churchill became a continuous reminder of the iron ore question, and in that sense, he served as a factor in his own, constantly raising the issue to the policy makers of Chamberlain’s wartime administration.

Furthermore, on his own initiative, without consulting with the War Cabinet, Churchill approached the US Ambassador, Mr. Kennedy, mentioning ‘that, from the Admiralty point of view, it might prove necessary to place a minefield in Norwegian territorial waters,’ a point which Mr. Kennedy undertook to inform the President of the United States.<sup>58</sup> This could be seen as a bold initiative by the First Lord, as the neutral US might have had concerns about his proposal. However, according to himself, Churchill had privately attained a message from the US Ambassador ‘which indicated that the President’s reactions were more favourable than he had hoped.’<sup>59</sup> It is difficult to say whether or not Churchill received such a message, as no other reference to it is found. Moreover, he was inclined to overstate a potential support from the United States to promote intervention in Norway. In any case, Churchill raised the issue of Norway and iron ore traffic to an audience outside Britain and the Allies, and thus broadened the discussion regarding this topic.

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<sup>55</sup> ‘The period of comparative inaction at the beginning of the Second World War between the German invasion of Poland in September 1939 and the invasion of Norway in April 1940.’ Recker, M-L., (2006), “Appeasement Revisited: Chamberlain, Hitler and the Policy of Munich”, in Görtemaker, M., *Britain and Germany in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*, Oxford: Berg, p. 54.

<sup>56</sup> TNA CAB 66/2, W.P. 57 (39), 21/9/39.

<sup>57</sup> TNA CAB 65/1, W.M. 38 (39), 05/10/39.

<sup>58</sup> TNA CAB 65/2, W.M. 96 (39), 29/11/39.

<sup>59</sup> TNA CAB 65/2, W.M. 111 (39) 11/12/39.

Another issue that Churchill introduced to the War Cabinet, again testing the patience of British attitude towards Norwegian neutrality, was the proposed 'Northern Barrage'. This embankment would offer protection from 'enemy surface vessels, as well as against U-boats', and would be drawn from the Orkney Islands to Norway. Again, the problem was Norway's vast, and neutral coastline, offering a 'navigable passage between the end of the Barrage and the coast of Norway.' This hindered the true potential of the Northern Barrage as a support to Britain's contraband control, and as a method to lure the German vessels into open waters to give the British fleet 'the opportunity for seeking battle, which it desired.' Churchill emphasised the fact that 'the value of the Barrage would, of course, be enhanced if later it was found possible to carry it right up to the Norwegian coast.'<sup>60</sup> This would entail another violation of Norway's neutrality, just as the laying of mines in the Vestfjord. The War Cabinet agreed that preparations should be made for the laying of the Northern Barrage, but for now the planning of the Barrage should not include the Norwegian territorial waters. The First Lord saw no need to be concerned over the difficulties they might encounter 'with the Norwegian Government as regards measures to close the gap at the eastern end of the Northern Barrage.' He was convinced that they would have trouble with Norway over iron ore traffic between Narvik and German ports 'at a much earlier date.'<sup>61</sup>

The latter issue was now frequently up for discussion in the War Cabinet, as Churchill would often find it appropriate to put it on the agenda. He repeatedly pointed to the success of this action in the previous war, and how they had deprived 'Germany of these iron-ore imports by mining Norwegian territorial waters, and thus forcing the ore ships into the open sea.' On 30 November, he again proposed the action to Chamberlain and his officials: 'The time was coming when we should have to consider taking similar measures. A few small mine-fields, each of perhaps three or four miles square, would be enough for the purpose.' In a way, he tried to emasculate the momentousness of such an operation, and the effect it would have upon the neutral opinion towards Britain by pointing to its small-scale nature.

However, the Foreign Secretary was convinced that if they were to ask the Norwegian Government for permission to mine their territorial waters, they should meet with a 'flat refusal.' He therefore dismissed Churchill's ready-to-go attitude, and proclaimed how these very important decisions of policy would have to wait until they had investigated the military problems involved, the economic considerations, and 'the imponderable factors which ought to

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<sup>60</sup> TNA CAB 65/2, W.M. 99 (39), 30/11/39.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

be taken into account, including the moral and legal aspects of the violation of Norwegian neutrality.’<sup>62</sup> Churchill agreed, and admitted that the attitude of the United States was a determining factor. Consequently, the War Cabinet agreed to investigate the military factors involved if steps were taken to stop the importation of iron ore to Germany by the sea route from Narvik, and how this would affect the German economic position. Even though this was a ‘soft approach, so typical of the Chamberlain wartime administration’<sup>63</sup>, Churchill almost singlehandedly put this machinery to work, on his behalf, to investigate the potential intervention in Norwegian territorial waters. Churchill and the interventionists put Norway on the British foreign policy agenda, and swayed the Chamberlain War Cabinet towards a potential violation of Norwegian neutrality.

#### 2.4 Concluding remarks

Up to this point, two important factors were beginning to put substantial pressure on the Chamberlain Wartime Administration regarding the issue of the Norwegian neutral coastline. Germany’s use of Norwegian territorial waters as cover to transport munition supplies from Narvik to Germany was the initial, external factor, which raised a slight awareness from the outer field of the British military circles. The importance of this factor grew as the first internal factor, Churchill and the interventionists, brought the idea of direct action in Norway back to the Government, as it had been in the First World War. Churchill constantly reminded the War Cabinet about the issue, using methods such as repetition, emasculation of the seriousness of the operation, and including US officials in the discussion. Still, up to this point, the issue was up for debate on occasion in the Government, but the respect for international law and neutrality was still the main factor influencing British decisions over Norway. However, as we shall see, the eruption of the Winter War between Finland and the USSR and the disputed Altmark Incident introduced new factors regarding neutral Norway which the Chamberlain Wartime Administration had to take into consideration.

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Mee, R. C., (1998), p. 218.



### 3. The decline of neutrality

#### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter investigates the factors which shaped the British attitude towards Norway during the Winter War.<sup>64</sup> As we have seen, up to the Soviet invasion of Finland on 30 November 1939, the issue of Norway and the iron ore traffic became a frequent topic for debate in the War Cabinet, usually because of Winston Churchill, and this was the main focus regarding British interests in Norway. Still, in the British Government, the concept of neutrality outweighed the willingness of Churchill and the interventionists to engage in Norwegian territorial waters, and the respect of the opinion of neutrals, especially America, is traceable in the sources analysed so far. However, new developments created different circumstances regarding Britain's attitude towards Norway as a neutral small state, and eventually, as the Phoney War developed into a state of anticipation and uncertainty, and the Winter War opened an opportunity to justify British action in Norwegian territory, 'Norway [...] came to dominate British strategic thinking and planning during the first four months of 1940.'<sup>65</sup>

The growing view that neutrality was an outdated phenomenon, and especially the realisation that Norway was failing as a neutral state emerged as new, external factors during the timeframe of the Soviet-Finnish War. The latter was mostly related to two events in Norwegian territorial waters, namely the Deptford Affair and the Altmark Incident, which also will be investigated in this chapter, as they revealed Norway's incapability to stand her neutral ground to both Britain and Germany. Consequently, internal pressure started to increase within the British Parliament, and several Members of Parliament were beginning to express their concern in both the House of Commons and the House of Lords. They represented an internal factor which questioned the way the Government handled the issues of Norwegian neutrality and the iron ore traffic, and thus ultimately could have influenced the British decision to violate Norway in April, 1940. The abovementioned factors deserve attention, because their importance may have been underestimated in other works of literature on the topic. Therefore, it is interesting to see if their influence on British foreign policy regarding Norway was as pressuring as the German exploitation of Norway's 3-mile limit and Winston Churchill's inclinations to retaliate, which would continue to marquee the debate.

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<sup>64</sup> The Winter War was a military conflict between Finland and the Soviet Union which lasted from 30 November 1939 to 13 March 1940.

<sup>65</sup> Mee, R. C., (1998), p. 209.

### 3.2 Britain and Norway during the Winter War

The first months of the Second World War were quiet, and this became a time of strategic consideration and prediction of what the other belligerent was up to. Consequently, the confrontational ideas of meddling with the iron ore traffic in Norwegian territorial waters did not suit the current mood, and ‘made little headway against the arguments in favour of respecting Scandinavian neutrality.’<sup>66</sup> Fear of the opinion of other neutrals, mainly the United States, was still overshadowing the British interest to stop the supply of ore to Germany. Nevertheless, the British were ‘increasingly prepared to contemplate violating Scandinavian neutrality.’ However, the Soviet Union was the first power to actually do so when they invaded Finland on 30 November 1939, thus initiating the Winter War. This conflict also had an impact on the relationship between Norway and Britain, as the most obvious route to Finland from the British Isles was through Norway and Sweden.

Moreover, British troops could deal with the issue of Swedish iron ore under the pretext of aiding Finland, which preferably would happen with Norwegian blessing. As Churchill later wrote in his memoirs, ‘If Narvik was to become a kind of Allied base to supply the Finns, it could certainly be easy to prevent the German ships loading ore at the port and sailing safely down the leads to Germany.’ This would affect the neutrality of Norway, which ‘in equal fear of Germany and Russia, had no aim but to keep out of the wars by which they were encircled and might be engulfed.’<sup>67</sup> The Norwegian Government remained strictly neutral in fear of belligerent retaliation, and did not allow for Allied troops to operate in their territory. Britain’s attitude towards Norwegian neutrality was again challenged.

Furthermore, the Soviet invasion of Finland marked a scepticism towards small nation ‘declarations of neutrality, which were not supported by concrete guarantees,’ and this was made clear by the Soviet Union.<sup>68</sup> Albeit, this scepticism was not only in the mind-set of the USSR. A half-heartedness was also detected in Norway regarding her neutral position, and on 2 January the British Minister to Norway, Sir Cecil Dormer, informed the Foreign Office about this growing uncertainty expressed in Norwegian press and propaganda. Dormer reported that the Norwegian Prime Minister and Foreign Minister broadcasted ‘the Norwegian Government’s determination to maintain absolute neutrality’, but they admitted that ‘the position is becoming increasingly serious and neither they nor anyone else in the country seem to believe that Norway

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<sup>66</sup> Salmon, P., (2004), p. 318.

<sup>67</sup> Churchill, W., (1948), p. 543.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

can stay out much longer.’ Dormer could further report that Norway was going through an internal conflict regarding the question of help to Finland. The opinion was sharply divided, and the defence services and activists were becoming bitter over their Government’s inaction, and a leading article exclaimed ‘that as far as Finland was concerned Norway could not and would not be neutral.’<sup>69</sup> On the other hand, there was the understandable fear of German action against Norway, if any mutual support was officially given between Britain and Norway, and this was the argument which the Norwegian Government was adhering.

Consequently, a growing disbelief in the ability to justify neutralism generally, and Norway’s aptitude to protect her own neutrality specifically, was finding its way to the British policy makers. This scepticism was shared by Churchill, who wanted the neutral states to realise that their position was weak, and in a speech on 20 January he publicly addressed this issue.

At present their plight is lamentable; and it will become much worse. They bow humbly and in fear to German threats of violence, comforting themselves meanwhile with the thought that the Allies will win, that Britain and France will strictly observe all the laws and conventions, and that breaches of these laws are only to be expected from the German side. Each one hopes that if he feeds the crocodile enough, the crocodile will eat him last. All of them hope that the storm will pass before their turn comes to be devoured.<sup>70</sup>

### 3.2.1 The Deptford Affair

As the Soviet-Finnish calamity was intensifying, two incidents occurred in Norwegian territorial waters which tested Norway’s neutrality. The Deptford Affair put the issue of the neutral Norwegian coastline back on the agenda in the War Cabinet. On 14 December 1939, the First Lord could inform that the British steamship Deptford had been sunk off the Norwegian coast inside territorial waters. In the conclusion of a meeting held in the War Cabinet it was stated that ‘[t]his was the third ship in three days which the Germans had sunk inside neutral territorial waters, and he (Churchill) felt that we had the strongest possible case for retaliatory action.’ The issue was discussed in the Cabinet, and the attendees expressed a view that propaganda was the way to move forward. The whole world was to be informed of the ‘sinking of neutral ships and the inhumanity of German methods of sea warfare.’<sup>71</sup> Even though

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<sup>69</sup> TNA FO 371/24828 N214/211/30, 2/1/40.

<sup>70</sup> Churchill, W., (1940) *House of Many Mansions*, 20 January. Online: <https://www.winstonchurchill.org/resources/speeches/1940-the-finest-hour/the-war-situation-house-of-many-mansions> (Accessed 11/04/17)

<sup>71</sup> TNA CAB 65/2 W.M. 114 (39), 14/12/39.

Germany's blatant disregard of international law and neutrality was becoming more and more apparent, as frequently pointed out by Churchill, the Chamberlain Government upheld its soft approach. Still, the German use of neutral Norwegian territory as an external factor, was increasing its pressure on the British Government, as Hitler's navy not only utilised Norway's 3-mile limit to transport iron ore, but also to sink British and neutral ships.

Furthermore, even though the scepticism towards direct action was noticeable, Churchill was gaining support in Chamberlain's war administration. He again proclaimed the German abuse to the Cabinet and 'considered that this action on the part of the enemy made it necessary that we should [...] claim and make use of a similar latitude, without delay.'<sup>72</sup> In response, Sir Samuel Hoare, the Lord Privy Seal, thought that they should exploit the goodwill they enjoyed from the Scandinavian countries by the action which the First Lord proposed, and Lord Hankey, the Minister without Portfolio, supported the First Lord's proposals in principal. Viscount Halifax, the Foreign Secretary, still cautioned the assembly, stating how it was important to consider the effect of such action would have in Norway and other neutral countries. Sir John Simon, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, also foresaw strong objections from the neutrals, but proposed that their action would be easier to justify 'if we seized only German ships as a measure of rough justice to an enemy who had broken all the rules.'<sup>73</sup> The two factors - Germany's violation of Norway's 3-mile limit, exemplified through the iron ore traffic and the Deptford Affair, and Winston Churchill – were to this point the clearest pro-intervention influences on British decisions over Norway.

Discussions about potential intervention in Norway continued throughout December, and even though there was a cautious mood in the War Cabinet because of the possible German retaliation and the reaction of other neutral states, important political figures were beginning to contemplate how a violation of the Norwegian neutral zone could be rationalised. Justifications for disrupting neutrality became more accepted in the inner circle of Britain's policy makers, something which was traceable in War Cabinet Conclusions at the time:

*The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs* said that [...] in the event of the War Cabinet deciding to take some such action in violation of Norwegian rights, he thought it would be better to say frankly that we were taking action in retaliation [...] for the ruthless treatment of our ships in what was proving a cruel and merciless struggle. We should admit that our action was an

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<sup>72</sup> TNA CAB 65/2 W.M. 116 (39), 15/12/39.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

infringement of neutral rights, but that it was as nothing compared with the completely unscrupulous manner in which these rights had been violated by Germany.<sup>74</sup>

Such statements show how important the German use of the Norwegian coastline was as an external factor. Her blatant disregard of international law, exemplified through the Deptford affair, and the shipment of munitions were now constantly challenging Britain's attitude towards Norwegian neutrality, and it became harder for the British Government to justify its soft approach. Churchill's view of intervention was beginning to internalise, and the War Cabinet agreed that the First Lord of the Admiralty was to set out 'his proposals for action in Norwegian territorial waters', but only after 'the papers on the military and economic aspects of the problem were available.'<sup>75</sup>

The sinking of Deptford did not only demonstrate Germany's callous warfare, it also exposed a potential problem regarding the Norwegian handling of the German defilement of her neutral zone. The reaction the Norwegian Government had after the incident was minor, something Laurence Collier of the Foreign Office's Northern Department took notice of. In a letter to the Oslo Chancery he pointed to a report saying that after the affair, in which a Norwegian pilot lost his life, the Norwegian Government forced the remaining pilots to continue conducting German ore ships, even though they had initiated a strike, refusing to do so.<sup>76</sup> This was a peculiar conduct by the Norwegian leaders, revealing that even though Germany were consistently violating their territory, they did not want to stand up to the injustice to avoid further retaliation from the German side. Collier identified this lack of toughness from Norway, and noted that if the Chancery could confirm the story, then 'it might be a good stick with which to beat the Norwegian Government.'<sup>77</sup> The British Legation in Oslo believed that Collier's information was well founded, but they were not able to obtain any proof.<sup>78</sup> Nevertheless, the scepticism towards Norway's capability as a neutral state to defend her position when threatened was established in the Foreign Office, and started to make its mark as an external factor which influenced British attitude towards Norway. This was something which potentially could strengthen British arguments for violating Norwegian neutrality.

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<sup>74</sup> TNA CAB 65/2 W.M. 117 (39), 16/12/39.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> These were not pilots of aeroplanes, but navy personnel that guided foreign ships in Norwegian waters.

<sup>77</sup> TNA FO 371/24828 N2141/213/30, 2/3/40.

<sup>78</sup> TNA FO 371/24828 N3177/213/30, 9/3/40.

### 3.2.2 The Altmark Incident

The Deptford Affair might have scraped the surface of the Norwegian defence problem, but the Altmark Incident on February 16 completely exposed the Norwegian incapability to defend her neutral territory. This ‘vivid episode now sharpened everything in Scandinavia,’<sup>79</sup> as ‘a British destroyer entered Norwegian waters near Bergen and boarded the German tanker Altmark,’ killing seven Germans.<sup>80</sup> Altmark served as a tank ship supporting the battleship Admiral Graf Spee, and had 299 British prisoners on board when trying to reach German ports via Norwegian waters.<sup>81</sup> The British Government saw multiple faults in the way Norway handled Altmark in her own neutral zone, and these were pointed out by The Prime Minister when he addressed the incident in the House of Commons on 20 February, ‘awaiting full reports from the naval officers concerned in this very gallant affair.’<sup>82</sup> Chamberlain praised his navy’s achievement, and did not understand how the Norwegians could be so negligent to the fact that Altmark was containing 299 British prisoners of war.

The Norwegian Government protested against the British interference. Foreign Minister Halvdan Koht stated that the British government had put itself above International Law and the consideration of a small state that only wanted to protect its neutrality. The Norwegian Government expected of the British Government to hand the prisoners over to Norway and make ‘due compensation and reparation.’ Furthermore, a protest note was handed to the British foreign minister, including that the destroyer, Cossack, had acted on orders from the British government, and that they had made a technical violation of neutrality in Norwegian territory.<sup>83</sup> The local reactions eventually softened, according to the British Vice-Consul at Tromsø. He reported to the British Minister at Oslo, that after the initial shock the leading articles of the Norwegian press ‘toned down and a feeling of regret, that England should have acted as she did, crept in.’ Moreover, he reported that some Norwegian naval officers, ‘while agreeing that the British had committed a technical infringement, also felt that Norway had not done enough and not called the German bluff.’<sup>84</sup> This was followed up in a later report from the British Vice-Consulate in Haugesund, stating that ‘while the general understanding of the situation is somewhat confused, by the conflicting reports regarding International Law [...] the reaction, is

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<sup>79</sup> Churchill, W. (1948), p. 561.

<sup>80</sup> Roskill, S., (2004), p. 97.

<sup>81</sup> A chronological account of the Altmark Incident can be found in Berglyd, J., (2008). Winston Churchill also gives his own version of the affair in Churchill, W. (1948), pp. 561-564.

<sup>82</sup> Hansard, HC Deb 20 February 1940 vol 357 cc1161-4.

<sup>83</sup> Berglyd, J., (2008), p. 103.

<sup>84</sup> TNA FO 952/2 N1211, 27/2/40.

questionably, in favour of Great Britain.’ Furthermore, the report claimed that ‘Norway, was indeed rather idle, in the handling of the whole situation.’<sup>85</sup> This was agreed upon in Britain, but they had even stronger opinions about Norway’s incapability, and meant that the Norwegian Government should be held accountable for not having searched the ship thoroughly, which would have led to the finding of the prisoners.<sup>86</sup>

Churchill was of the same impression, and on 23 February he held a public speech in which he praised the action of his navy, and thus indirectly praised himself, as he was the commander in charge of the operation. The First Lord also accused Norway of being a “one sided neutral”, which indicates the importance the Altmark Incident had on British attitude towards Norwegian neutrality.

The rescue last week by the *Cossack* and her flotilla [large cheer from the audience] under the nose of the enemy and **amid the tangles of one-sided neutrality**, [laughter] the rescue of British captives taken from the sunken German raider, [...] the rescue at the very moment when these unhappy men were about to be delivered over to indefinite German bondage, proves that the long arm of British sea power can be stretched out not only for foes, but also for faithful friends. (my emphasis)<sup>87</sup>

The growing view that Norway had failed as a neutral state, due to incidents such as Altmark and Deptford, was surfacing as another important factor which influenced British decisions over Norway. Many claims have been made as to whether the boarding of the Altmark was the first British violation of Norwegian neutrality, and in some aspects it was, as stated above. However, this was more a result of impetuous decision making from the First Lord of the Admiralty, Winston Churchill, of which he became famous during the entire Second World War, and not a thought-out policy from the Chamberlain Government. The British Government still appreciated Norway as a neutral state, and therefore it is regarded that the change of policy towards Norway’s neutrality did not happen during the Altmark Incident, but that it rather affected the attitude towards Norway’s ability to protect her neutral stance.

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<sup>85</sup> TNA FO 952/2 N1269, 27/2/40.

<sup>86</sup> Berglyd, J., (2008), pp. 104-106.

<sup>87</sup> Churchill, W. (1940) *The Navy is Here*, 23 February, Recorded speech (2:09 – 3:25) Online: <https://www.winstonchurchill.org/resources/speeches/1940-the-finest-hour/the-navy-is-here> (Accessed 11/04/17)

### 3.3 The aftermath

After the two incidents, heated debates about Norway continued in Parliament, and pressure from various MPs on the Government to take further action in Norwegian territorial waters was beginning to present itself as a factor. On February 27, The First Lord put some points to the House of Commons about the ‘present doctrine of neutral states’, heavily endorsed by the German Government, and how Germany were gaining one set of advantages by committing ‘foul outrages upon the seas’, and another set of advantages by insisting ‘upon the strictest interpretation of the International Code she has torn to pieces.’<sup>88</sup> The attending MPs recognised Norway’s neutral corridor as the main issue related to Churchill’s statement, and Baronet Sir Archibald Southby begged the honourable Members to realise that ‘whatever difficulties there may be in regard to neutrals it is not possible to allow indefinitely the use of neutral waters to a belligerent to whom we are opposed. [...] Nobody has ever suggested that under international law a belligerent can make use of the whole 800 miles of Norwegian territorial waters.’<sup>89</sup>

The War Cabinet was, of course, fully aware of the situation, and shared memorandums amongst themselves, but these were not shared publicly. On 26 February, the Foreign Secretary circulated a proposed statement by the Government on the “Stoppage of Traffic in Norwegian Territorial Waters”. The issue of the *Altmark* led ‘His Majesty’s Government [...] to review the position arising from the methods employed by the German Government in the conduct of the war at sea.’ The incident was an example of how Germany utilised long stretches of neutral waters for protection, and the Government saw this use, which did not form a ‘normal route for shipping’ as an abuse of the ‘right of “innocent passage” which is recognised by international law.’ This was, according to Halifax, intolerable, and a more decisive attitude was beginning to take shape in the British Government:

Germany is flagrantly violating neutral rights in order to damage the Allied countries. [...] His Majesty’s Government in the United Kingdom therefore hold themselves entitled to take such actions as they may deem appropriate to the present circumstances, not excluding the prevention of the continued use by the enemy of stretches of territorial waters which are clearly of particular value to him.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Hansard, HC Deb 27 February 1940 vol 357 cc1923-2019.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> TNA CAB 66/6 W.P. 75 (40), 26/2/40.

This was, as the title of the memorandum states, directed towards Norwegian territorial waters, but in what way the potential ‘prevention’ would happen was still not established. The memorandum, however, indicated a Governmental justification of intervention in neutral territory, and shows the importance of Germany’s use of the Leads as a factor which influenced British decisions over Norway.

Furthermore, Members of Parliament were getting impatient towards what they felt was the lack of ability in Norway to maintain neutrality within their territorial waters. Sir Annesley Somerville questioned how neutral countries, i.e. Norway, attached more ‘importance to possible slight breaches of neutrality than to the sinking of scores of their own ships and the drowning of hundreds of their own seamen.’<sup>91</sup> Topics regarding Norway’s neutral coastline were now frequently up for discussion in Parliament, and questions were being directed towards the Government and their conduct of the situation:

Mr. Mander asked the Prime Minister whether, in view of the persistent breaches of international law by the German Government in sinking Norwegian and other neutral ships and the inability of the Norwegian Government on occasion to prevent the sinking of British and neutral shipping within the three-mile limit, he will consider the advisability of action being taken by the British Government, by way of reprisal against German action, to stop the further conveyance of Swedish iron ore to Germany in any section of the seas?<sup>92</sup>

To which the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Butler, said, ‘this matter is under constant and careful consideration, but I have nothing at present to add.’<sup>93</sup> The Admiralty had been advocating what Mr. Mander<sup>94</sup> was asking since September 1939, and the War Cabinet was very aware of the situation, but no proposed policies of intervening in Norwegian territory were revealed in Parliament. Mr. Mander, famous for his determined use of parliamentary questions, again addressed the Government: ‘Is it not the case that the Norwegian Government are unable to maintain neutrality within their territorial waters and that three ships have been sunk, two British and one Greek, by German action? Is it not about time that we took some steps to stop this sort of thing happening?’<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Hansard, HC Deb 27 February 1940 vol 357 cc1923-2019.

<sup>92</sup> Hansard, HC Deb 13 March 1940 vol 358 cc1170-1.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Mr. Mander was Parliamentary Private Secretary to the Secretary of State for Air during the Second World War.

<sup>95</sup> Hansard, HC Deb 13 March 1940 vol 358 cc1170-1.

Members of Parliament were questioning the Government's conduct of the situation in Norway, and this did form a noticeable factor. However, preparations for a potential intervention were already taking place in the inner circles of British policy makers, even before the issue caught attention in the Parliament. The questions raised in the House of Commons had already been addressed at length in the War Cabinet, but they did represent a rising opinion of the need to do something about the 800-mile-long problem of Norwegian territorial waters.

### 3.4 Concluding remarks

The Winter War opened an opportunity for the Allies “to kill two birds with one stone”, to save Finland in an operation through Narvik, and at the same time cut off the iron ore.<sup>96</sup> Again, the British attitude towards Norwegian neutrality was tested, as they would need approval from the Norwegians to land forces in Narvik. Two British divisions were prepared for fighting in Norway, but, as Churchill later wrote in his memoirs ‘on the twelfth (12 March), the Russian terms were accepted by the Finns. All our plans for military landings were again shelved.’<sup>97</sup> Thus ‘The issue of what to do if Norway and Sweden refused, as seemed probable, was never faced.’<sup>98</sup> One can only speculate as to whether the British Government would have gone through with the plans of transporting military forces through Norway without Norwegian consent. However, a mentality of “asking the Norwegians first”, and seeking permission is traceable during the whole of the Soviet-Finnish war. Churchill reflected upon this in his post-war memoirs, saying that ‘[e]very effort should be made to procure the assent and if possible the co-operation of the Norwegians.’<sup>99</sup> His motives behind this statement could be questioned, however, as he might not have been interested in revealing the aggressive attitude he was advocating during the war, in times of peace. In any case, as we have seen, the forbearing mentality of the British Government was at a breaking-point, and would certainly change during the last days of March, as ‘the first priority for Britain was to formulate a policy towards (Scandinavia) in the light of the Finnish surrender,’ due to the ‘absence of dramatic events elsewhere in the world.’<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Butler, J R M., (1957) *Grand Strategy: September 1939-June 1941*, Vol. II, London: The Stationery Office, p. 107.

<sup>97</sup> Churchill, W. (1948), p. 574.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid*, p. 561.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid*, p. 561.

<sup>100</sup> Mee, R. C., (1998), p. 249.

The decline of Norway's neutrality was exemplified through the Deptford Affair and the Altmark Incident, and in the latter Churchill took charge and conducted his navy to perform an infringement in neutral territory. The two events revealed an incapability in Norway to protect her neutrality, and Germany's inclinations for using Norwegian territorial waters. Members of Parliament used this to put pressure on the Government, which at this point, outwardly, was still tolerant in its attitude towards Norway. However, the Cabinet Papers from this period show that the War Cabinet had a large focus on the issues regarding Norway before these were addressed by MPs. Albeit, this does not rule out the inter-parliament pressure as an internal factor. The parliamentary discussions indicated if Government actions regarding Norway would be tolerated or supported, or heavily criticized, when or if they were publically announced. At this given moment, the Parliament showed increased support of action in Norwegian territorial waters, and this would certainly make it easier for the Chamberlain war administration to justify the proposed belligerence, knowing that the Government was in favor of the decision.

Another internal factor, Winston Churchill, remained a consistent reminder of the issues regarding Norwegian territorial waters. Under Churchill's influence the possibility of taking action in Norwegian waters remained a recurrent topic for debate in the War Cabinet, before it became a reality in April 1940.<sup>101</sup> Germany's use of the Leads and Norway's failure to protect her neutral territory were, up to this point, the most prominent external factors. The four mentioned factors continued to influence Government decisions as March was coming to an end, when the final decision to violate Norwegian neutrality was made.

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<sup>101</sup> Munch-Petersen, T., (1981), *The Strategy of Phoney War: Britain, Sweden and the Iron Ore Question 1939-1940*, Stockholm.



## 4. The adjustment of policy

### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter looks at the weeks from the end of the Winter War to the final decision that was made in the last days of March, 1940 to lay down mines in Norwegian territorial waters. During this period, the factors that were already putting pressure on the Government to act in Norway became acute. As we have seen, the external factors - Germany's pugnacious use of Norway's neutral coastline and the decline of Norway's neutrality – and the internal factors - Churchill and the interventionists and the increased pressure in Parliament - were beginning to make their mark on British decisions over Norway, and this chapter investigates their influence when the final decision was made. All the factors had some part to play up to this point, and the last weeks before Norway was dragged into the war revealed the balance between the internal and external elements.

On 12 March 1940, a peace treaty was signed by Finland and the Soviet Union, bringing the conflict between the two nations to an end. This drastically changed the British approach towards the delicate issues concerning Norway. The cause of aiding Finland was gone, leaving Britain with no real excuse for landing forces on Norwegian territory. But, as R.C. Mee argues, 'the iron ore problem – which was the real reason for wanting to send Allied forces to the area – remained.'<sup>102</sup> Churchill continued to raise the issue of the iron ore traffic, which immediately after the Russo-Finnish war emerged as the only solid argument for intervention in Norwegian territorial waters. Again, this was rejected by Chamberlain, but Churchill would find other arguments as the reverberation of the Soviet-Finnish war brought with it new external factors that put even more pressure on an already hesitant Government.

The Soviet Union was suddenly able to move freely into the Scandinavian peninsula, something Churchill early recognised as a potential problem. In addition, the growing distrust in the Allied cause after they failed to protect Finland created a sudden need from the French Government to show strength and character. An aggressive attitude was directed towards Norway, making France an eager external interventionist in Norwegian territory. Thus, the aftershock of the Winter War created unfavourable circumstances for the Allies, joining the list of important factors which influenced British attitude towards Norway, and the impact of external and internal pressures finally forced the Chamberlain war administration to make a definitive decision about the Norwegian situation.

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<sup>102</sup> Mee, R. C., (1998), p. 249.

## 4.2 The effect of the Russian-Finnish treaty

### 4.2.1 The Russian threat

In a memorandum circulated to the War Cabinet on 14 March 1940, Winston Churchill tied together the effect of the Russian-Finnish treaty with the question of intervening in Norway. According to Churchill, some of the clauses in the treaty enabled the Russians to threaten the Northern area of Norway ‘for they can now move via Murmansk and Petsamo into Norway; and across the new railway into Sweden and on by rail to Narvik.’ This could entail a demand by Russia for Norwegian Atlantic ports, and Germany’s price for this demand would be ‘the fullest possible supply of iron ore.’ The Admiralty’s main fear was that Germany and, now, Russia could base naval forces on the ice-free ports in Narvik, threatening Britain’s vital interests in Norway. This would also jeopardize the plans for the previously mentioned Northern Barrage scheme, of which Churchill had very high hopes. He proposed to his colleagues what almost seemed like an ultimatum.

If we are to act at all we should act now when all is moving. [...] we can at least take our stand on the principles of the Covenant and declare that we shall now take all steps to stop supplies from members of the League to the German aggressor, and as a start **we are going to Narvik**. This is dictated by ordinary prudence in order to deter the almost certain aggression upon Norway and Sweden that may be expected from Russia or/and Germany in the near future.<sup>103</sup>

This was not enough to convince the Government. Halifax had previously mentioned in relation to the Altmark Incident that opportunities would arise when action in Norway could be properly justified, but this was not the time for such drastic deeds. Churchill continued his fixation towards Narvik and tried to use external factors such as the new Russian threat and the already established German use of Norwegian territorial waters, but Chamberlain continued to dismiss Churchill’s tactics, because he wanted a more diplomatic approach. The British Government wanted to strengthen its relationship with Norway and the first policy towards Scandinavia after the end of the Russo-Finnish War was the proposal for joint protection of the Nordic countries ‘from the Russian menace.’<sup>104</sup> This policy, however, did not last very long, as new circumstances made the British Government adopt a tougher mind-set towards Norway.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> TNA CAB 66/6 W.P. 96 (40), 14/3/40.

<sup>104</sup> TNA CAB 65/12 W.M. 68 (40), 14/3/40, in Mee, R. C., (1998), p. 249.

<sup>105</sup> Mee, R. C., (1998), p. 251.

#### 4.2.2 The decline of Allied prestige and French pressure

After the Finnish surrender, the image of the Allies was failing and the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Lord Halifax, was considering ‘the steps open to us to offset the damage to our prestige resulting from the collapse of Finnish resistance.’<sup>106</sup> On 18 March a document was circulated to the War Cabinet, containing communication between the French Ambassador, M. Corbin, and Halifax, regarding Norway. Corbin could inform that the French Government, with M. Daladier at the helm, recognised the ‘inability of Norway to make Germany respect the neutrality of her territorial waters.’ Furthermore, the French were far from impressed with the role of the Norwegians during the Winter War. They felt that Norway had not been ‘as neutral as the Allies had a right to expect,’ and that the adopted attitude was in favour of the German recommendations. Moreover, the French Government insisted that the Finnish surrender gave the neutral opinion an unfavourable impression of the potential energy, initiative and daring of the Allied coalition. Daladier expressed a clear desire for ‘a bold and immediate initiative’ in Norway to reverse this growing trend.

It is a question of intercepting the Swedish iron ore destined for Germany; of inducing a reaction on the part of Germany which might itself eventually provide the justification for a more far-reaching undertaking; finally, of establishing permanent control over the disposal of the Scandinavian ore.<sup>107</sup>

France was beginning to put more pressure on the British Government regarding the issue of the iron ore traffic, and thus became an influential external factor. As Halifax stated in the War Cabinet on 19 March, the French were, at this point, actually more anxious than Britain ‘that action should be taken against the Narvik iron ore traffic.’<sup>108</sup> The British Government did also recognise the need to end ‘the appeasement of Norwegian concerns.’<sup>109</sup> However, Halifax was more cautious than his French allies, and even though the British Government acknowledged the importance of taking initiative and to ‘impress the neutrals with our ability to take strong action’, it still suggested a possible alliance between the Nordic states, and therefore did not want to take action ‘which might none the less be sufficient to forfeit a measure of Norwegian

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<sup>106</sup> TNA CAB 65/6 W.M. 71 (40), 18/3/40.

<sup>107</sup> TNA CAB 66/6 W.P. 100 (40), 18/3/40.

<sup>108</sup> TNA CAB 65/6 W.M. 72 (40), 19/3/40.

<sup>109</sup> The term is found in Mee, R. C., (1998), p. 251.

and Swedish goodwill that might otherwise be useful to us.’<sup>110</sup> The decline of the Allied prestige and the external factors – France and the new Russian threat to Norway – joined the already established factors in an ongoing campaign for British engagement in Norwegian territory. However, Chamberlain and his Government were still clinging on to their forbearing policies over Norway, echoing the pre-war years of appeasement.

### 4.3 Pressure in Parliament

On 19 March, the British Prime Minister, Chamberlain, took the stand in the House of Commons, stating a sympathy for the neutrals and ‘their comparatively unarmed position.’ He shared to his colleagues the current policy of tolerance, and stated that small state neutrals were in a position to save themselves by joining the Allied cause. ‘Nothing will or can save them but a determination to defend themselves and to join with others who are ready to aid them in their defence.’ Impatient MPs were not impressed, beginning to voice their concerns regarding Norway’s failing neutrality. The Conservative MP Henry Page Croft, who later would become Under-Secretary of State for War, did not agree on the Prime Minister’s view that all small state neutrals were alike. He felt that Britain needed to make a ‘distinction between those countries which are neutral in the sense of the word [...], and those countries which are endeavouring to help the aggressor and, I might also say, sustaining the aggressor in a lengthy war.’ Other MPs recognised Croft’s indirect reference to Norway’s neutral zone and the iron ore traffic, and Mr. Buchanan asked him to say what he really meant, to which he responded:

[W]hen you see those smaller countries actually sustaining Germany with the one essential commodity with which she can pursue a long war, namely, iron ore, and when you see it is being conveyed through Sweden into Norway and overland on a Norwegian railway and then brought down over 400 miles of sea coast under the protection of the Norwegian flag, the time has come when we should say that we do not regard that as fighting for collective security against aggression.<sup>111</sup>

Other MPs expressed their support for Croft’s arguments. The Labour MP Hugh Dalton, later Minister of Economic Warfare and a strong opposer of Chamberlain’s pre-war appeasement policies, pointed his finger directly at the Government, stating that even after Altmark, ‘German warships are being allowed to go slinking up the coast of Norway within

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<sup>110</sup> TNA CAB 66/6 W.P. 100 (40), 18/3/40.

<sup>111</sup> Hansard, HC Deb 19 March 1940 vol 358 cc1833-952.

territorial waters in order to start attacks’, and that ‘His Majesty’s Government are allowing it to go on.’ In response, Chamberlain started criticising the oppositional statements, asking for evidence and pleading for an understanding of the small proportion of the ‘leaks’ happening within Norway’s 3-mile limit in relation to the total blockade of German transport. The Prime Minister accused Mr. Dalton of being willing to ‘drive a coach and horses through any protest made by the United States of America on account of interference with their exports; he would not hesitate to violate the territorial waters of Norway.’ He then claimed that over a long period the Government had been unable to prove any violation by Germany, which would justify Britain going into Norwegian waters, violating her neutrality.

The debate continued, and two days later the Liberal MP Geoffrey Mander accused the Prime Minister of giving an untrue picture regarding the importance of the iron ore traffic. Moreover, he pointed to well-known external factors such as Norway’s inability to maintain the neutrality of her waters. Mander presented four specific cases, including the Deptford and the Altmark, where ‘Norway has failed in their international duty.’ He also pointed to the events of the Winter War, in which Norway were under an obligation ‘under the Covenant of the League (of Nations) to permit British and French troops to go through their territory to help Finland.’<sup>112</sup> The Conservative MP Robert Boothby, a politician in Churchill’s circle, followed up by saying that Britain’s inability to follow up the good and ‘energetic’ policy of the successful action during the Altmark Incident was unfortunate.<sup>113</sup>

Several Members of Parliament were beginning to grow tired of the situation in Norway and their Government’s unwillingness to handle the situation by other than diplomatic measures. As the parliamentary debates indicate, a soaring opinion was taking form against the Chamberlain war administration and their handling of events in the Nordic countries, and it served as an internal factor to be considered. The Prime Minister became very defensive when questioned and criticised in Parliament. However, his diplomatic approach was perhaps a concealment of a hidden, more aggressive agenda. In the closed circles of the War Cabinet, a trace of willingness to review the situation in Scandinavia, and a necessity to ‘formulate our policy anew’, was expressed by Foreign Secretary Halifax on 20 March. ‘We should make it plain that we should regard certain forms of action by the Scandinavian Government as threatening to our vital interests.’<sup>114</sup> The Government was close to a turn in policy regarding neutral Norway, and in Parliament, one could certainly trace a public support of intervention in

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<sup>112</sup> Hansard, HC Deb 21 March 1940 vol 358 cc2210-30.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> TNA CAB 65/6 W.M. 73 (40), 20/3/40.

Norwegian territorial waters, if the Government decided to go down that route. Thus, Chamberlain and his Cabinet could infer a sense of support both directly from Members of Parliament and indirectly from the public, and in the next few days, official policies regarding Norway would rapidly change.

#### 4.4 The turn-around

France continued to fuel the debate about Norway. A note from the newly appointed French Prime Minister, Paul Reynaud, dated 25 March, was translated and circulated to the War Cabinet by Lord Halifax. This note clearly portrayed the French stance towards the future conduct of the war and specifically pointed to the situation in Norway. It served as a summary of the pro-intervention aspects, and drew on all the external factors which Churchill had been using as arguments since the outbreak of the war, and thus the French Government joined, or even overtook, Churchill's role as the most eager interventionist. Reynaud considered that 'the Allies should proceed at once to take control of navigation in Norwegian territorial waters.' He pointed to several legal reasons, justifying the action, drawing on the Altmark Incident and the Winter War. Furthermore, the failure of Norway's neutrality was a strong argument for intervening within Norway's 3-mile limit, according to the French Government.

After having allowed Germany to abuse her neutrality in order to cover operations of naval warfare, Norway pleaded the obstacle to our providing assistance which arose out of this very neutrality, as a pretext to compel Finland to capitulate; in so doing she has lost all moral right to oppose this fictitious neutrality to the measures which the requirements of our security demand that we shall take.<sup>115</sup>

Reynaud then pointed to the potential outcome of operations in Norwegian territorial waters, claiming that '[t]he actual reactions of Germany will in all probability set in motion the machinery of operations, the course of which should permit us to obtain control of the Scandinavian ore fields and thus strike a decisive blow at the war economy of the Reich.'<sup>116</sup>

France's concerns had a clear influence on Britain, and on 26 March, Halifax expressed the stance of the British Government towards Norway in a memorandum shared with the War Cabinet, showing signs of a new attitude towards Norway.

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<sup>115</sup> TNA CAB 66/6 W.P. 109 (40), 26/3/40.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*

‘(The British Government) are as deeply impressed as are the French Government with the importance of reasserting their authority in neutral countries, and more particularly in Sweden and Norway. As far as these two governments are concerned this will require that the Allies should readjust their policy, which hitherto has been based on the assumption that Sweden and Norway are free agents capable and ready to exercise benevolent neutrality towards the Allies. Now that their subservience to German influence and pressure has been clearly shown, the Allied governments will be compelled in self-defence to take special precautions to protect their vital interests and requirements in Sweden and Norway.’<sup>117</sup>

And so, Britain’s adjustment of policy towards Norway and her neutrality became officialised. The British Government was at this point very close to a firm policy of direct action in Norway, as an act of ‘self-defence’, and, as we have seen, the laying of mines in the Vestfjord was certainly established as the best way to intervene in Norwegian territorial waters.

The following day, as the War Cabinet was preparing for the Supreme War Council meeting which was planned to take place on 28 March, the Prime Minister said he fully supported the plan of a formal notice to the Norwegian Government ‘that we should not allow the course of the war to be influenced against us by the advantages derived by Germany from Norway [...] thus preparing the ground for action when it suited us.’ Chamberlain now endorsed the policy of intervention, although he felt that there was ‘no immediate urgency for carrying out the Narvik plan.’<sup>118</sup> Churchill was, of course, enthusiastic about such communications with the Norwegian Government.

Moreover, the Narvik operation was linked with another operation, called Royal Marine, in which several thousand fluvial mines were to be laid in the Rhine, affecting the river ‘for the first hundred miles below Karlsruhe’ in Germany.<sup>119</sup> The First Lord suggested that ‘in discussion with the French we should first obtain their agreement to carry out the Royal Marine operation, but he hoped that we could also get them to agree to the stoppage of traffic in Norwegian Territorial Waters.’ The Foreign Secretary pointed to the expected protests from the Norwegian Government after the formal notice of policy was given, but that these protests would not be ‘much stronger if we went further and took steps to stop traffic’ in Norway by laying a minefield. Halifax was, therefore, ‘prepared to agree in principle that we should take

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<sup>117</sup> TNA CAB 66/6 W.P. 107 (40), 26/3/40.

<sup>118</sup> TNA CAB 65/6 W.M. 76 (40), 27/3/40.

<sup>119</sup> Churchill, W. (1948), p. 717.

this action.<sup>120</sup> Finally, agreement was made in the War Cabinet that direct action was to take place in Norwegian territorial waters, it was just a matter of deciding when the ideal timing for such an operation would be. And thus, the final turn-around by the British Government on the question of intervening in Norwegian territory, which marked the ultimate turn from a policy of trust, via a policy of preparedness, to the actual readiness to execute operations in Norway was a fact. The War Cabinet agreed that this new ‘policy to be adopted towards Norway [...], should be handed to the French Ambassador.’<sup>121</sup>

#### 4.5 The violation of Norwegian neutrality

The new policy was formalised by the Allied Governments on 28 March, in the Supreme War Council meeting. Churchill later wrote in his memoirs, that the French Prime Minister, Reynaud, was sceptical about the Royal Marine operation, due to the potential retaliation by Germany which was most likely to fall upon France, but that he was ‘far more responsive about cutting off supplies of Swedish iron ore. [...] his conclusion was that the Allies should lay mines in the territorial waters along the Norwegian coast.’<sup>122</sup> The attendees agreed on a programme, stating when certain operations were to happen, and the ‘laying of mines in Norwegian territorial waters’ was to take place on ‘Friday, 5<sup>th</sup> April, 1940.’<sup>123</sup>

Circumstances delayed the laying of mines, as the French Government were wavering over support for Royal Marine<sup>124</sup>, jeopardising the ‘package which the Supreme War Council had agreed to, combining the two operations.’<sup>125</sup> This led to a few days of hesitance in the British Government towards the violation of Norwegian neutral waters, as the plan was to overcome the infringement by taking ‘vigorous and effective action against Germany herself in her own waters.’<sup>126</sup> In other words, if the French vetoed against the laying of fluvial mines in the Rhine, Chamberlain did not want to go through with the operation in Norway at this point in time – ‘No mines, no Narvik’.<sup>127</sup> However, the decision to take action in Norwegian waters had been made, as shown in the source material, and this was probably an attempt to press the French Government to go through with both operations, which in any case proved to be futile.

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<sup>120</sup> TNA CAB 65/6 W.M. 76 (40), 27/3/40.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> Churchill, W. (1948), p. 578.

<sup>123</sup> TNA CAB 65/12/14, Conclusion of Supreme War Council: 6<sup>th</sup> meeting, 29/3/40, p. 1.

<sup>124</sup> A chronology of events is found in Skodvin, M., (1969), pp. 115-124.

<sup>125</sup> Mee, R. C., (1998), p. 255.

<sup>126</sup> TNA CAB 65/6 W.M. 78 (40), 1/4/40.

<sup>127</sup> ACAD 1/9 (Diary 1940) Entry for 2/4/40, in Mee, R. C., (1998), p. 255.

On April 5, Halifax could inform ‘that M. Reynaud’s days would be numbered if we did not carry out’ the Narvik operation.<sup>128</sup> This was an important consideration, as the British Government regarded that ‘it was vital that Reynaud should not fall from power’, and was cautious not to discredit his Government.<sup>129</sup> The Foreign Secretary said that ‘if M. Reynaud fell, and was replaced by M. Daladier, it was inevitable that a period of internal difficulty would follow in France’, and this could only do damage to the Allied coalition. Prime Minister Chamberlain agreed to this, and further expressed his concerns about doing nothing at all, and as Royal Marine was not likely to happen, due to French resistance, the Narvik operation was the only real alternative for direct action. The thought also occurred, that by going through with the mining of the Leads, the British could potentially get consent by France to go through with Royal Marine at a later stage. In any case, Chamberlain believed that ‘if we were to do nothing, the result would be most unfortunate from the psychological point of view. He was, therefore, definitely in favour of carrying through the Norwegian Territorial Waters operation.’<sup>130</sup>

A general communication was made from the Foreign Office to Norway and Sweden, regarding Britain’s new policy and the ‘circumstances attending the termination of the war between the U.S.S.R and Finland.’ It was expressed how the German Government was not allowing Norway and Sweden ‘liberty of action in foreign affairs’ and the Secretary of State could inform that ‘H.M.G. sympathise with the difficult position in which (Norway is) placed as a result of German threats and pressure’, but they were in any case ‘bound to draw therefrom the inevitable conclusion that (Norway is) not, in present circumstances, entirely (a) free agent.’ The Foreign Office also pointed to the new situation created by the end of the Winter War with regards to the Soviet threat, and expressed how ‘any attempt by the Soviet Govt. to obtain from Norway a footing on the Atlantic seaboard would be contrary to the vital interests of the Allied Govts.’<sup>131</sup> The British Government justified their intentions of taking direct action to the Scandinavian Governments by using the external factors of Germany’s misuse of Norwegian territory, and also the fear of Soviet involvement in the same area.

Finally, the Admiralty was authorised to mine the Norwegian territorial waters on 8 April, leaving Churchill himself in charge of the method he had advocated since the beginning of the Second World War. When the War Cabinet met on Monday the 8<sup>th</sup>, ‘The First Lord of the Admiralty said that the minefield in the Vest Fjord had been laid between 4.30 and 5.30 that

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<sup>128</sup> TNA CAB 65/6 W.M. 82 (40), 5/4/40.

<sup>129</sup> Mee, R. C., (1998), p. 256.

<sup>130</sup> TNA CAB 65/6 W.M. 82 (40), 5/4/40.

<sup>131</sup> TNA FO 188/343 Neutrality: Scandinavia, 4/4/40.

morning,<sup>132</sup> and thus the deed was done - Britain had violated Norway's neutrality. This was a political victory for Churchill, and the final step towards full naval control of the Northern sea areas. However, in his post-war memoirs, he downplayed the operation, as he had done since he first proposed the idea in the War Cabinet in September 1939. One of his arguments for doing it was because the operation was very easy to perform. Churchill saw the procedure of the violation as a mere technicality, even though its consequences could be of great importance. 'I called the actual mining operation Wilfred, because by itself it was so small and innocent.'<sup>133</sup>

#### 4.6 Concluding remarks

The end of the Winter War marked a turning point in the British attitude towards Norway. The Finnish-Russian treaty allowed Russia to roam more freely in the Scandinavian peninsula, posing a new threat to British interests, something Churchill could use as a new argument for intervention in Norway. Germany were still seen as a violator of the failed Norwegian neutrality, and continued to be the most constant factor, and something the Government had been aware of since the eve of the Second World War. In the weeks following the Soviet-Finnish armistice, the image of the Allies was deteriorating, and the French Government started to push for intervention in Norwegian territory to show strength, joining Churchill as the most eager interventionists. Moreover, debates about Norway in Parliament started to show a more direct and clear criticism towards the Government's handling of the delicate issues in Norway, and prominent Members of Parliament were growing tired of the Norwegian incapability to protect her own neutrality against Germany. In the War Cabinet, the debates about Norway shifted from whether the laying of mines in Narvik should take place, to when the best timing for it would be. As the sources from this period indicate, these are the weeks in which Britain's official attitude towards Norway as a neutral state changed.

Furthermore, in the last days of March, Chamberlain showed a stronger willingness to take control over the conduct of the war, and especially the situation in Norway, something also Churchill noticed when his Premier was advocating the Narvik operation in the Supreme War Council on 28 March. 'I listened to this powerful argument with increasing pleasure. I had not realised how fully Mr. Chamberlain and I were agreed.'<sup>134</sup> This stood in contrast to the Prime

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<sup>132</sup> TNA CAB 65/6 W.M. 82 (40), 8/4/40.

<sup>133</sup> Churchill, W. (1948), p. 579.

<sup>134</sup> Churchill, W. (1948), p. 577.

Minister's mild approach which hitherto had marked his policies during the pre-war years of appeasement, and the start of the Second World War. These were disputed and criticised policies, and perhaps something he now wanted to avoid when dealing with the issues regarding Norway's neutral coastline.

After the adjustment of policy, in which Norwegian neutrality was outweighed by the factors discussed in this thesis, the fear of political chaos in France and the potential bad effect of doing nothing proved to tip the scales in favour of direct action in Norwegian territorial waters. Mee suggests that 'the sudden turn-around by Chamberlain on the question of mining Norwegian territorial waters' was mostly because of 'the politics of Anglo-French co-operation'.<sup>135</sup> However, per the sources investigated in this chapter, and my interpretation of these, the turn-around was not so sudden as Mee proposes. The policy had already been decided and agreed upon in the War Cabinet before the French factors - the potential downfall of Reynaud, and 'the use of the Narvik mines as a bargaining counter with which to secure French agreement to *Royal Marine*' - came into play.<sup>136</sup> The decision to violate Norwegian neutrality was more complex than a mere appeasement of the French, it was also a result of the other internal and external factors presented. Furthermore, Chamberlain advocated for the mining operation in Narvik in the Supreme War Council, and the War Cabinet was unsure if they would even get support by the French on Churchill's operation *Wilfred*, which proved to be an unwarranted doubt.

However, in terms of the timing of the operation, the final date of the laying of mines was only set after the potential shift in French leadership and the bargaining scheme were taken into consideration by Prime Minister Chamberlain and his peers. Britain wanted to perform both operation *Royal Marine* and interrupt the iron ore traffic in Norway, but Reynaud was only able to get consent for the latter in his Government, and risked to lose his Premiership if nothing was done about Norway's failed neutrality and the German disregard of international law in her waters. Thus, the need to keep political stability in France, maintaining order in the Allied coalition, and the fear of the effects of doing nothing proved to speed up the final decision of when the infringement of Norwegian neutral waters should take place.

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<sup>135</sup> Mee, R. C., (1998), p. 254.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*



## 5. Conclusion

The development of the British Government's attitude towards Norwegian neutrality both on the eve and after the outbreak of the Second World War was influenced by many different factors. These factors offered varied degrees of pressure at different times during the period from September 1939 to April 1940. This thesis has highlighted and scrutinised the most important external and internal factors that shaped the Chamberlain war administration's mind-set towards Norway and its decision to violate Norwegian territorial waters on 8 April 1940. More specifically, the focus has been on determining which of the external and internal factors were most pivotal when it came to making British policy on Norway at different stages of the lead up to Britain's violation of Norwegian neutrality.

As we have seen, serious discussions about the neutral corridor in Norwegian territorial waters started in the outer military circles in Britain in the mid 1930s, when the Industrial Intelligence Centre (IIC) declared that the imports of iron ore by Germany was of vital importance to the potential German war machine. When the Director of Naval Intelligence, Admiral Godfrey, confirmed that the iron ore could be transported via Norwegian waters under the protection of neutral flags on 8 August 1939, the first external factor presented itself – the German use of Norwegian territorial waters to ship iron ore. The pre-war years also saw the emergence of a small, unofficial group of navy war planners, headed by Admiral Drax. This group planted the idea of intervention in Norwegian territory to stop the iron ore traffic, and this idea made its way from the unofficial fringes of the British Admiralty, via First Lord Winston Churchill, to the Chamberlain War Cabinet, on 19 September 1939. By November, after he had been influenced by Drax and his committee, Churchill convinced the Government to investigate the potential intervention in Norwegian territorial waters. And so, the internal factor “Churchill and the interventionists” put Norway firmly on the agenda.

A series of events tested the British attitude towards Norway's neutrality as the war progressed. The Winter War opened an opportunity to justify an operation in Scandinavia, as the British would have to move through Norway in order to aid Finland against the Russians. This could be a pretext for British troops to meddle with the iron ore traffic “on their way to Finland”. Norway refused to let this happen in fear of German retaliation, and her neutrality was respected by Britain. However, the Deptford Affair and the Altmark Incident epitomised the failure of Norwegian neutrality, which then became a massive external factor, and something which internal forces in Britain could use as argument for intervention in Norwegian territory. At the same time, the British Parliament was starting to address the issues of the

Norwegian waters, and an internal pressure from its members was beginning to present itself as a factor.

After the Winter War, the British attitude towards Norway shifted. The already recognised factors sustained, but new factors emerged, putting more pressure on the policy makers. Russia was suddenly a potential threat to British interests in Norway due to some of the clauses in the Russian-Finnish treaty, something Churchill recognised. Furthermore, the decline of Allied prestige made France develop an eagerness to show strength. The French belligerence was directed towards Norway and the iron ore traffic, and not directly towards German territory, because of the French fear of German retaliation. Thus, France became an external factor heavily in favour of intervention in Norwegian territorial waters. Consequently, during the weeks after the Winter War, an agreement was first made in the British War Cabinet and then in the supreme War Council to violate Norwegian territorial waters.

Mee suggests in his dissertation that Chamberlain's decision to lay down mines in the Vestfjord was ultimately a result of the politics of the French-Anglo relationship.<sup>137</sup> This was undeniably an important factor, as the decision to execute the Narvik operation happened when the British were trying to get French support for operation Royal Marine, and the decision to violate Norwegian neutrality could be seen as an appeasement of the French. However, according to my analysis of the sources from 1939 to 1940, this is only part of the equation. As discussed in the three main chapters, during this period external and internal factors influenced the British Government over time, and the pressure on Chamberlain to intervene was gradually building from the day when Churchill first brought up the issue of the German use of Norwegian neutral waters to the War Cabinet on 19 September 1939. I infer from the investigated source material that it is the sum of the elements and their influence which ultimately outweighed Norway's wish to stay neutral at a time of crisis. As I understand it, the adjustment of British policy was officialised on 27 March 1940, when the War Cabinet agreed to share the new attitude 'to be adopted towards Norway [...] with the French Government',<sup>138</sup> and the road to this decision was created by a merger of many aspects.

The external and internal factors represented different effects and pressures at different times throughout the investigated timeline. However, to measure whether external or internal factors were most important on British decisions over Norway has proven complicated. As the war progressed, all factors regarding Norway became intertwined, and as more external factors

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<sup>137</sup> Mee, R. C., (1998), p. 254.

<sup>138</sup> TNA CAB 65/6 W.M. 76 (40), 27/3/40.

emerged, more pressure could be put on the Government from the internal ranks. Germany and the iron ore traffic was the most consistent external factor, and something which had been investigated as early as 1933 by the IIC. It is reasonable to say that if there were no iron ore traffic by Germany in the Norwegian neutral zone, then there were no viable reasons for Britain to seek control of this area in the first place. Thus, if it had not been for this factor, Norway would not have become important. However, when the decision to alter the policy towards Norway was agreed in the War Cabinet, in the spring of 1940, iron ore in itself was not the main argument for intervention. It was only in the winter months that Narvik was crucial for German ore exports, due to frozen ports elsewhere, and in the spring and summer Germany could attain their munition supplies from the Gulf of Bothnia and other ports, lessening the importance of Narvik.

This does not, however, dismiss the iron ore traffic's importance on the whole period in question. This was the first argument Churchill and the interventionists used, which put Norway on the agenda in the Cabinet. Furthermore, Germany's use of the neutral Norwegian corridor was not only related to iron ore traffic. It also revealed Norway's 'subservience to Germany'<sup>139</sup> during the incidents of Deptford and Altmark, which consequently exposed Norway's incapability to defend her neutrality against belligerent action. These were important considerations when the British Government justified its turn in policy towards Norway in the aide-mémoire shared with France.<sup>140</sup> In the weeks after the Winter War, France as an external factor acted as a reminder of the other external factors which justified intervention in Norway – Germany's use of the Leads, and the decline of Norway's neutrality. Albeit, this was also something Churchill, as an internal factor, had done since September 1939.

The main internal factors consisted of pressures from impatient MPs, and an eager First Lord of the Admiralty; Churchill was unrelenting from the start of the Second World War. As the sources reveal, the First Lord was usually the initiator of discussions regarding Norway in the War Cabinet, and started the process of investigating the possible direct action in her territorial waters, which became a reality after Britain's adjustment of policy. He also brashly included the biggest neutral actor at the time, the US, and thus broadened the debate about Norway's role in the conflict between bigger states. In many ways, Churchill embodied the interventionist group. This group did also eventually include several Members of Parliament. During the Winter War, when growing attention was turned towards Norway, the parliamentary

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<sup>139</sup> TNA CAB 66/6 W.P. 112 (40), 27/3/40.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

debates show how MPs were quick to use the external factors as arguments for operations in Norway, accusing the Government of being too forbearing towards Norway's failing neutrality. From the reactions in Parliament, the Government could deduce a potential support for a more aggressive policy towards the Scandinavian peninsula, and this did perhaps make it easier to justify and reveal the new policy.

The internal factors were important, as they put increased attention towards the situation in Norway throughout the period investigated in the thesis, and were clearly determined to sway the Government towards naval control over their nearest Nordic neighbour. In the end, Churchill was the one who conducted the operation which exemplified the British policy to violate Norwegian neutrality, a policy he himself was the first to propose to Chamberlain's wartime administration. However, as much as the internal factors operated as reminders of the issues in Norway, the pressing war considerations - the German use of the Leads, the unfavourable outcomes of the Winter War, the deterioration of Norway's neutrality, the wish to avoid internal political conflict in France and the need to get their consent for Royal Marine - these were the real reasons for involvement, and these were the arguments used by the British Government which overshadowed Norwegian neutrality.

Norway was a special case, and as we have seen, Britain's decision to take control of her territorial waters was due to geographical aspects, economical aspects, and war considerations, and not a clear-cut act against neutrality per se. Norway's impressive coastline and the fact that this was blatantly abused by Germany posed the initial British interest, which the rest of the internal and external factors built upon. Norway's neutrality was therefore a bigger problem for Britain than the neutrality of other states. The above findings contribute to existing studies of the Anglo-Norwegian relationship, and the thesis is especially related to Salmon's question, which is raised in the historiography; Why did Britain chose to violate a country it had promised to protect and defend?<sup>141</sup> The investigated factors all had a part to play, more or less, during the period from September 1939 to April 1940.

Looking forward, my thesis is applicable to contemporary discussions regarding big-state versus small-state politics. This topic has always been relevant, ever since the emergence of nations, and by the looks of the political situation today and the future scenario of the balance of power in the world, the relationship between nations will be a relevant topic for quite some time. Using history as an instrument to learn from might therefore prove more and more important in times to come. Bearing this in mind, as Ørvik suggests, 'Norway has provided (an)

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<sup>141</sup> Salmon, P. (ed.), (1995), p. 3.

example of (a state) being too small to remain neutral [...] the small states have no claims to world domination and would, because of their economic and military weakness, prefer to hide until it was all over; but they will not be allowed to do so.<sup>142</sup> In this case, Britain was not willing to allow Norway to remain neutral when the country was judged to be of such great strategic importance to the war effort.

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<sup>142</sup> Ørvik, N., (1953), p. 277.



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## Appendix

### The thesis' relevance for my work in the Norwegian educational system

Even though the topic of my thesis is “dated”, the process of the study has taught me some valuable methods in terms of handling many different types of source material, and how to use these to create a piece of work. Similarly, in the process of developing English language skills, my future students will have to rely on information attained elsewhere, be it in a textbook or on the Internet. So, the ability to recognise reliable sources, and to use these to build solid arguments in written and/or oral productions, is something I feel confident in teaching.

The English curriculum in Norwegian lower and upper secondary schools is divided into specific competence aims which comes from The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training (Udir). These competence aims are broad, and not tied down to specific methods of teaching, nor do they pinpoint specific historical events which needs to be included. It is up to me, as a teacher, to choose these methods and matters. The nature of my thesis is therefore connected to a few of Udir's competence aims. The study looks at British high politics, and has provided me with a solid understanding of how the political system in Great Britain is built up. This is highly relevant for the subject ‘Social Studies English’ in which students should be able to ‘elaborate on and discuss political issues and systems in the English-speaking world, with a specific focus on Great Britain and the United States’.<sup>143</sup>

Furthermore, the curriculum calls for an analysis of an ‘international conflict in which at least one English-speaking country is involved’.<sup>144</sup> My work has provided me with a good example of such a conflict, as the study focuses on the initial months of the Second World War, which indeed was one of the most important international conflicts of the twentieth century. This is also a major historical event, and one aim of the English subject in lower secondary school is to ‘explain features of history and geography in Great Britain and the USA’.<sup>145</sup> My future students may even find the thesis topic, which addresses the Anglo-Norwegian situation, to be of relevance, as it addresses the historical relationship between Great Britain and the country in which they reside.

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<sup>143</sup> Udir online: <https://www.udir.no/kl06/eng4-01/Hele/Kompetansemaal/samfunnsfaglig-engelsk> (Accessed on 04.05.2017)

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

<sup>145</sup> Udir online: <https://www.udir.no/kl06/ENG1-03/Hele/Kompetansemaal/competence-aims-after-year-10?lplang=eng> (Accessed on 04.05.2017)