

## Scandinavian Neutrality in the Crimean War

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The two Scandinavian kingdoms of the time, Sweden and Denmark, declared their neutrality in the Crimean War right at the outset of the conflict. They also maintained it throughout the war. However, their neutrality did not go uncontested. Denmark, caught between the great powers, was content with its role as a small-state neutral, but found itself in the position of having to fend off constant Allied demands. Sweden, which had its own lingering great power ambitions and still resented the 1809 loss of Finland to Russia, saw its neutrality as more of a matter of cost-benefit calculation. The Swedish King, Oscar I, repeatedly demonstrated his willingness to bring his country to war if the conditions were favourable enough. Nevertheless, the right offer from the Allies never quite materialised and the king's ambitious plans came to nothing.

From today's point of view, Danish and Swedish neutrality in the Crimean War appears as a milestone event in what became a successful tradition of Scandinavian neutrality, reaching down to the 20<sup>th</sup> century and, in the case of Sweden, even to the Cold War. However, a closer analysis reveals the essential fragility of this tradition. In the Crimean War, Scandinavian belligerency was only narrowly avoided, and against the intentions of some Scandinavians themselves.

The two Scandinavian kingdoms that existed at the time of the Crimean War, Sweden-Norway and Denmark, were amongst the most prominent European neutrals during the conflict. Indeed, their non-belligerency in the Crimean War was a milestone event in what became the Scandinavian tradition of successful neutrality, spanning from the post-Napoleonic wars in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the First World War and, in the case of Sweden, also to World War II and the Cold War.

As explained in Andrew Lambert's contribution to this volume, the Baltic theatre played a significant role in the Crimean War. The Scandinavian kingdoms, too, had to adapt to the fact that a major international war was taking place in their immediate neighbourhood. Their prompt neutrality declarations were a part of their response to the conflict, but so too was a line of thought, particularly in Sweden, that saw neutrality as temporary and provisional. The King of Sweden, who had taken personal control of Sweden's foreign policy, demonstrated on a number of occasions that his country was in principle ready to enter the war if it was able to achieve its goals of territorial revisions in Finland and of neutering the Russian threat.

This chapter provides an overview of Swedish and Danish neutrality in the Crimean War and tries to answer the question how close these two neutrals came to actually participating in the war as belligerents.<sup>1</sup> It also compares Swedish and Danish policies and attitudes, attempting to explain the essential differences between their neutrality stances.

## Neutrality in the Crimean War

The Crimean War was a significant conflict in the development of the modern understanding of neutrality. Indeed, as argued by Andrew Rath, the most enduring outcome of this war was not the Treaty of Paris, signed on 30 March 1856, but rather the Paris Declaration Respecting Maritime Law, signed on 16 April of the same year. This codification of wartime concessions to neutral rights at sea had had its origins in the Allied experiences in the recent war<sup>2</sup> and began the process that would eventually lead to the international enshrinement of neutral and belligerent rights in the Second Hague Convention.<sup>3</sup>

As pointed out by Maartje Abbenhuis, the potential costs of war to the belligerents and the possible benefits of neutrality had become a subject of much political and public discussion during the Crimean War. This was in no small measure due to the fact that industrialisation and colonialism had made uninterrupted foreign trade a vital backbone of modern European economies, including in wartime. Guided by their own commercial and imperial interests, the British cabinets had by the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century already adopted a much more liberal attitude to neutral commercial rights than had been the case in the Napoleonic wars.<sup>4</sup> In the Crimean War, the European neutrals would reap the benefits of this change of heart, which made their policy choice much more sustainable – even if belligerent criticism and countermeasures to neutral profiteering were still factors to be reckoned with.

The great powers' relative benevolence towards the idea of neutrality also resulted from their wish to keep the war limited and outside of the core parts of Europe. The neutral states that were geographically proximate to Russia were useful in this regard, since they naturally constituted a buffer zone on the Russian western frontier. The neutrals could also, at least in theory, take on the role of peace builders. Already after the Ottoman declaration of war in October 1853, neutral powers were brought together in Vienna to discuss a possible diplomatic solution to the war that would have involved neutral mediation.<sup>5</sup>

Of course, there were important differences inside the neutral camp. Some neutral powers might be called 'neutrals by default' since their territory was located at some distance from the major theatres of the conflict and/or they lacked the resources for power projection that could have made their belligerency nevertheless worthwhile. Others were located close to Russia and/or had commercial or territorial interests in this part of Europe. They could be more easily incentivised to join one of the belligerent sides, but also had a stronger stake in maintaining their neutrality. The European powers in this category included Prussia, Austria, Denmark and Sweden, a group that we might call 'neutrals by choice.' A notable extra-European neutral in a similar situation was the United States.

From the point of view of this latter group, neutrality was a matter of cost-benefit calculation, and at least for the most part, the neutrals deemed its benefits to outweigh the costs. Prussia's neutrality, for example, has been characterised by Abbenhuis as 'pragmatic and opportunistic'; driven by the desire to keep trading with both belligerent sides for the benefit of its developing industrial economy, even if there was some domestic fear that neutrality might hurt Prussia's international reputation. Prussian neutrality also had an implicit pro-Russian bent, as it kept large swathes of adjacent Russian territory inaccessible to enemy troops. Moreover, Russia benefitted from both open and clandestine trade with Prussia that continued throughout the war.<sup>6</sup>

Austria's neutrality reflected the difficult situation that the country found itself in, as it was indebted to Russia for the substantial military assistance it had received during the 1848-9 revolutions. Simultaneously, however, the Habsburg monarchy was worried about Russian moves towards the Ottoman Empire and the Danube principalities. Consequently, the possibility of eventual Austrian belligerency remained a constant threat throughout the war. At the same time, Austria also embraced its role as a neutral. In May 1854, Austria and Prussia signed the Treaty of Berlin, ostensibly to seek an end to the war by neutral mediation. The belligerents were not ready to take up the offer, however, and the two neutrals were condemned as self-interested freeloaders, profiting from the war with Russia but leaving the burden of fighting it to the others.<sup>7</sup> In the end, as Baumgart concludes, this alliance remained a 'dead letter'.<sup>8</sup>

As the war progressed, the Allied efforts to conscript the neutrals grew more insistent. Particularly after Sardinia's declaration of war on Russia in January 1855, significant pressure to join the Allies was put on Belgium, as well as on Denmark and Sweden, as will be explored below. In January 1856, the king of Prussia was pressurised into warning the Tsar that Russia could not necessarily rely in Prussia's continuing neutrality. Russia itself, which had a history of pro-neutral advocacy and enjoyed a close relationship with the United States, courted the latter to join the conflict on its side.<sup>9</sup>

In the end, however, it is fair to say that the restraint shown by both the belligerents and the neutrals – and perhaps Austria in particular – was the main reason why the Crimean War did not take Napoleonic proportions. Grown out of the vital commercial interests of the European great powers and the increasing importance of their often war-adverse public opinion, the new mid-19<sup>th</sup> century climate of more limited wars made Scandinavian neutrality a feasible proposition not just during the Crimean War, but also going forward. Indeed, neutrality could even be maintained against the ultimate intentions of the Scandinavians themselves, as will be seen below.

### **Danish and Swedish neutrality**

By autumn 1854, the main theatre of the Crimean War had moved to the Black Sea region. At the same time, the Baltic remained of great strategic interest to the Allies and saw during the first year of warfare some limited naval action, as well as British blockade of Russian harbours.<sup>10</sup>

The Swedish government, which had already since February 1853 been anticipating that a war might break out soon, had had enough time in their hands to prepare for a neutrality policy. In July of 1853, king Oscar I personally took control of Swedish foreign affairs and ordered immediate negotiations with Denmark concerning a joint neutrality declaration. These negotiations broke down in the autumn but would be taken up again after war had already been declared.<sup>11</sup>

Immediately after the beginning of the war, Sweden ordered its embassies and legations to communicate to the respective foreign ministries that Sweden intended to remain neutral in the conflict. Discussions also resumed with Denmark on the question of neutral cooperation, and attempts were made to draw Austria and Prussia into the same initiative. When these broader efforts failed, Denmark and Sweden issued their official – and very similar – neutrality declarations both on the same day, 20 December 1853.<sup>12</sup>

As far as we can judge, the Conservative Danish government of Anders Sandøe Ørsted (prime minister) and Christian Albrecht Buhme (foreign minister), which had come into office in October 1853, was all set for a genuine neutrality policy. According to the neutrality declaration issued jointly with Stockholm, Denmark intended to retain good relations with both belligerent sides and refrain from participating in any hostilities. The reasons for it are not difficult to grasp. Denmark was still in the middle of reconstruction after the exhausting first Schleswig-Holstein War of 1848-1851. Joining Russia in the Crimean War would therefore have been impossible, since militarily weak Denmark would have been defenceless against Allied naval attacks. The British bombardment of Copenhagen in 1807 was still in living memory. But the prospect of joining the Allies also seemed to offer few positive benefits. Denmark tended to see Russia as a dynastic ally and was afraid that an anti-Russian stance would lead to a worsening of relations with neutral Prussia, the Russian-friendly non-belligerent. Finally, and perhaps most significantly, Denmark had no significant interests in the east and therefore little to gain from an eventual Allied victory.<sup>13</sup>

In summary, the Danish neutrality policy in the Crimean War was a rather principled one, unlike the much more opportunistic Swedish stance. Abbenhuis aptly characterises Danish neutrality as 'more conservative and fearful' than Sweden's<sup>14</sup> and in early 1855, Oscar I himself disparagingly referred to Denmark's 'beautiful dreams about a thousand years of neutrality' with the implication that the Danes could not be relied on to turn activist when the situation so demanded.<sup>15</sup> In the end, however, the real reason why the Danish neutrality stance proved to be sustainable was the fact that the Allies did not see its participation in the war as particularly crucial. As long as the Allied fleet was able to pass through Danish waters while entering and exiting the Baltic Sea, they were essentially satisfied. Denmark, for its part, unsurprisingly decided that it was unable to stop an Allied fleet from passing through, which was yet another argument in favour of remaining neutral in the war. Still, the visit of Sir Charles Napier's warships in 1854 was received with a polite welcome, rather than with enthusiasm.<sup>16</sup>

Sweden was a different case, not least from Russia's point of view. While Denmark could hardly be expected to deny passage to the Allies, Sweden was militarily stronger and the expectations on its neutrality were correspondingly higher. The clause in the Swedish neutrality declaration according to which all foreign ships would be allowed to enter Swedish ports was particularly controversial. As Russia already had its own Baltic ports, this permission was only important to the Allies who needed coaling stations on their way to blockading the Russian harbours.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, if Russian ships had wanted to visit the Swedish harbours, they could scarcely have avoided clashes with the Allied steam-powered fleet.<sup>18</sup>

Instead, Russia demanded 'strict neutrality', which would have amounted to an assurance that Sweden would not use weapons against Russia under any circumstances. King Oscar I refused to provide such a guarantee, claiming that doing so would amount to a conclusion of an alliance with Russia.<sup>19</sup> All appeals by the Russian government to make Sweden change its mind were unsuccessful, including a personal intervention by Tsar Nicholas I in the name of dynastic friendship. Finally, Russia reluctantly recognised Swedish neutrality on 7 March 1854.<sup>20</sup>

Apart from the very useful promise to keep open the Swedish harbours, another factor that influenced the Allied attitude towards Swedish neutrality was the possibility of a Russian encroachment of Finnmark, the northernmost territory of Norway. Since Finnmark had ice-free harbours – especially in Varangerfjord – it was feared that Russia would demand the cession of a stretch of its coast along the

sea. To ensure that this area would be defended, it made sense for the Allies to maintain good relations with Sweden. On 28 March 1854, the same day as war was declared on Russia by the Allies, the British decided to recognise Swedish neutrality without raising any protest.<sup>21</sup>

It is therefore fair to say that unlike the neutrality of Austria and Prussia, which was more beneficial to Russia, the neutrality of the two Scandinavian kingdoms rather served the interests of the Allies<sup>22</sup> – more passively in the Danish case, more actively in the Swedish. This was a major reason why Scandinavian neutrality remained more or less well-respected by Russia's enemies and why, when their cooperation was sought, they had more bargaining power and were more easily able to reject French and British demands.

At the same time, apart from their relative strengths and weaknesses, there was an essential difference between the two Scandinavian kingdoms. Unlike Denmark, Sweden saw Russia as a security threat. Russia's reputed territorial interests in Finnmark were just one reason. Even more importantly, Russia's recent fortification of the strategically important Åland Islands in the mouth of the Gulf of Bothnia between Swedish and Finnish mainland had been causing much anxiety in Sweden, especially since the construction of the major naval fortress of Bomarsund had begun in 1832.<sup>23</sup> Finally, there is a reason not to underestimate the importance of painful historical memories of Swedish defeats in the hands of Russians, which had occurred as recently as during the Napoleonic wars. By the 1850s, revanchist feelings against Russia had become a recurrent theme in the emerging Swedish public sphere.<sup>24</sup>

### **Swedish revisionism and Finland**

Sweden's surrender of the whole Finland to Russia in 1809 was still in living memory during the Crimean War. This was an event that had had far-reaching consequences not just for Finland but also for the rest of Sweden, triggering the abdication of king Gustav IV Adolf, the passing of a new constitution, and the ultimate end of absolutism. The newly recruited Swedish royal heir-presumptive, a former Napoleonic marshal called Jean-Baptiste Bernadotte, had in February 1818 been crowned King of Sweden under the name of Carl XIV Johan. The new king, learning the lesson of the defeat of 1809, adopted a new, Russian-friendly foreign policy (the so-called policy of 1812), which had the effect of stopping further Swedish revisionism in the Finnish question.<sup>25</sup> Instead, Swedish imperial ambitions were now supposed to have been satisfied by the 1814 acquisition of Norway from Denmark.

In the 1840s, a strong liberal nationalist movement known as Scandinavism (or Scandinavianism) had made an appearance in Denmark and Sweden. Its purpose was to strengthen the ties between the two Scandinavian kingdoms in cultural and academic spheres, but also in foreign and defence policy. The movement originated in Denmark, where the idea of military alliance with Sweden had become popular because of the fears that the largely German-speaking Danish duchies of Slesvig/Schleswig and Holstein would soon come under threat from the Prussian initiative to unify all German-speaking lands – as it indeed soon came to happen.<sup>26</sup> In longer term, many Scandinavists interpreted the similarities between the Scandinavian languages and cultures to mean that Scandinavia, just like the German-speaking or Italian-speaking small states in the continent, was a potential great power in waiting, an empire in need of political unification.<sup>27</sup>

Much to Russia's dismay, the champions of Scandinavian unity also took an interest in Finland, which they regarded as a lost member of the Scandinavian family. In Sweden, this sentiment was connected to a broader liberal discontent with Carl XIV Johan. Amongst other facets of his illiberal rule, the king's Russian-friendly policy of 1812 also came under criticism, and the Scandinavists pro-Finnish views naturally came to be linked to negative attitudes towards the autocratic Russian Empire. An important venue for airing such views was the leading liberal daily *Aftonbladet*, established in 1830.<sup>28</sup>

However, the liberal preoccupation with Finland also suggests that many in Sweden continued to see its takeover by Russia as deep national humiliation. Especially as Scandinavism was leading to some demonstrable consequences – Sweden provided limited military aid to Denmark and acted as a mediator in the first war against Prussia over Schleswig-Holstein – calls for Swedish reconquest of Finland grew more frequent. The new king Oscar I (ruled in 1844-1859) had taken up more active policy towards Denmark probably as way of deflecting domestic demands for broadened political representation, but as witnessed by his diary, he also held private anti-Russian views. There is certainly a sense that his revanchist aspirations regarding Finland might have been genuine.<sup>29</sup>

#### **Allied attempts to conscript Sweden in 1854**

The Russian diplomatic pressure and its ramping up of troop numbers in Finland and the Baltic provinces that followed the Swedish neutrality declaration,<sup>30</sup> were taken in Stockholm as a clear sign that Sweden was now exposed to a considerable Russian threat. These were not just empty fears. As we now know, Russian naval commanders were proposing deployment of divisions of battleships in the Great Belt and the Sound (Öresund) in order to close the entrance of the Baltic Sea, and a plan was floated to concentrate all Russian steamships into the Swedish harbour of Gothenburg in order to tow Russian divisions to the rear of any attacking Allied fleet. Essentially, the Russian view was that Scandinavian neutrality could not be relied on, especially when Sweden and Denmark were subjected to Allied pressure.<sup>31</sup>

In this situation, Oscar I felt the need to back up the neutrality declaration with some actual military strength. Against much domestic opposition, he was able to raise in the Swedish parliaments the funds needed to strengthen Swedish defences.<sup>32</sup> By doing that and by rebuffing Russian demands for 'strict neutrality', Sweden kept open the possibility of joining the war at later date. This meant that it continued to be regarded as a potential belligerent. Soon after the beginning of the war, Great Britain and France indeed initiated secret negotiations with Sweden, hoping to entice it to join the Allies.

The French and the British had good reasons to seek Sweden's assistance. While the Allied powers were able to dispatch a strong fleet into the Baltic, they faced the very significant limitation of having to operate without the support of troops and gunboats. As they were determined to keep military expenditure limited despite the ongoing war, a large army and gunboat flotilla could be organised in 1854 only by securing a Swedish intervention. Britain and France were furthermore sympathetic to Sweden's traditional enmity with Russia, which had led to the loss of Finland in 1809 and festering conflicts over the fortification of the Åland Islands and territorial rights in Finnmark.<sup>33</sup>

A memorandum on war aims against Russia was circulated by the then-British Home Secretary Lord Palmerston in the British cabinet on 19 March 1854, a few days before the declaration of war. Amongst

plethora of ways he envisioned that Russia could be hurt and divided up, Palmerston suggested that Finland and the Åland Islands should be restored to Sweden. Although dismissed by his cabinet colleagues at the time as 'daydreams', his ideas nevertheless indicate that parts of the British political elites were receptive to aiding Swedish revanchism. In February 1855, when Palmerston became the British Prime Minister, a modified version of this proposal would lead to the November Treaty, as explored below.<sup>34</sup>

However, it was rather the French that made the first steps towards trying to conscript Sweden. On 25 March, just before the declaration of war on Russia and as the Allied fleet was already on the way to the Baltic, the French envoy in Stockholm was instructed to approach the King of Sweden regarding possible alliance.<sup>35</sup> These overtures eventually led to a secret meeting with two special envoys of Napoleon III on the island of Gotland on June 15, 1854. There, Oscar I was offered the Åland Islands as a prize for Sweden's participation on the Allied side with 60 000 troops and 200 gunboats – vessels that were particularly useful for manoeuvring in the shallow coastal waters of the Baltic.<sup>36</sup>

Sweden for its part was receptive to the Allied overtures. The Crimean War had whipped up the revanchist sentiment in the liberal press, as it seemed to open a real possibility of reconquest of Finland and weakening of Russia's dominance over the Baltic. By the time the meeting took place on Gotland, preliminary plans for Swedish invasion in either the Baltic provinces or in Finland had already been drawn up. However, before agreeing to implement them, Oscar I presented the envoys with extensive counter-demands, which included large subsidies (6 million francs per month), the deployment of 60-70 000 Allied troops in the Baltic region, Austrian participation in the coalition against Russia, and an Allied promise to not to lay down arms before Finland was conquered. Furthermore, Sweden wished to retain any Allied conquests in Finland. As long as these demands remained unfulfilled, the king refused to intervene.<sup>37</sup>

Napoleon III's diplomats were in favour of accepting the Swedish terms, but soon found out that Lord Aberdeen's British government was not. Guaranteeing conquests in Finland was thought to be particularly difficult to accept in London, as – it was argued – such a promise would have taken the war on a completely different level, making it impossible to achieve peace before Russia was completely destroyed. Furthermore, the British highlighted that Swedish cooperation was contingent on Austria's, and any Swedish declaration of war on its own would therefore be illusory. It also seems that the British were irritated by the fact that the French had approached Oscar I on their own without properly coordinating this move beforehand.<sup>38</sup> In the end, nothing came of the initial French-Swedish negotiations.

The same story with a slight variation was repeated in early autumn 1854. This time, Oscar I was offered the Åland Islands in the most credible fashion, since the islands were at the time under the occupation of 10 000 French troops. This conquest, perhaps the main reason for which the British-French 1854 campaign in the Baltic is remembered today, was indeed made with the specific intention of bringing Sweden into the alliance.<sup>39</sup> The Allied governments were hoping that Oscar I would be 'inspired' by the prospect of Swedish military presence in the islands for the first time in almost half a century, and a chance of removing any threat to Sweden from Bomarsund.<sup>40</sup>

Nevertheless, the offer was not attractive enough and the king declined, just as he had indicated he would even before the islands were occupied. His reason was, as he put it, that any Swedish troops occupying the islands 'would be crushed by the Russians come the freeze'.<sup>41</sup> The Allies had therefore

nothing else left to do than to destroy the fortress of Bomarsund and return home for the winter.<sup>42</sup> In the following year, they would commit more fully to their Black Sea campaign. Nevertheless, the option of future Swedish intervention was kept open. To some extent probably secretly encouraged by the king, the liberal Scandinavist press began calling for Sweden's entry into the war, reconquest of Finland and either its outright annexation by Sweden or inclusion in a Nordic federation as a separate state.<sup>43</sup>

### **Allied pressure on Denmark in 1854-1855**

The Allies did not put strong hopes on Denmark relinquishing its neutrality policy. However, they did not preclude it as a desirable possibility. Allied envoys in Denmark were certainly acting with this goal in mind from the beginning of the war onwards, even if they had achieved next to no success by the end of 1854.<sup>44</sup>

New hopes were raised by the change of Danish government in December 1854, with moderate Peter Georg Bang as the Prime Minister and Ludvig Nicolaus von Scheele as the Minister of Foreign affairs. Although Scheele asserted immediately that the Danish foreign policy course would remain unchanged, the departure of the previous government with its rather pro-Russian reputation gave the Allied diplomats a sense that the new cabinet would be more pro-Western in orientation. The Russian envoy, at the same time, had little confidence in it, suspicious of the liberal and Scandinavist ideas that some of its members allegedly represented.<sup>45</sup>

At the same time, the Allies had embarked on a broader and much more forceful campaign to enlist the neutrals on their side. As the thinking went, if one neutral country joined the Western coalition, others were likely to follow, resulting in a domino effect that would leave Russia isolated. On 2 December 1854, a treaty was concluded with Austria, providing for joint Allied military action in the event of its war with Russia. Attempts to influence Prussia towards joining this treaty followed, but failed, which gave Denmark some breathing space. However, when the Allies subsequently turned their attention to Italy and achieved on 10 January 1855 Sardinia's declaration of war on Russia, Danish confidence that its neutrality could be maintained for much longer was seriously undermined. What would happen if Sweden decided to join the Allies? asked the Danish newspapers. If Sweden regained Finland, would Denmark receive Norway?<sup>46</sup>

Soon, rumours began circulating that Prussia, in return for its possible accession to the treaty of 2 December, had been promised some form of reward on Danish expense; perhaps a share of the duties collected in the Sound. Subsequently, an official approach was made by the French, suggesting that time had come for the Scandinavian states to join the Allies. Confidential information was also received from Sweden, indicating that it intended to join the alliance as soon as Austria and Prussia had done the same. The French Foreign Minister stated that if Prussia would supply the Allies with 200 000 troops, it would be given free hands to pursue its interests in Denmark – that is, unless the latter 'with its magnificent fleet and competent army' was the first to offer cooperation.<sup>47</sup>

This amounted to the first instance of serious pressure being put on Denmark to give up its neutrality and enter the war on the Allied side. Denmark, for its part, persisted in its belief that participation on either side would be catastrophic, and it soon became clear that the Allies had little actual political clout to back up their threats. Scheele was helped by news from Stockholm and Berlin which suggested that

Sweden and Prussia did not agree with the French point of view and were in favour of both their own and Danish continuing neutrality. This made it possible for Denmark to ignore the Allied intimidation.<sup>48</sup>

### **Allied attempts to conscript Sweden in 1855**

The action of the war had moved to the Black Sea, but it seems that Oscar I, who tended to refer to the main theatre of the war as 'the giant's little toe,' found it strange that the war was fought so far away from St Petersburg. The Swedes probably expected that the conflict would soon return to the Baltic and there would thus be a need for Swedish involvement.<sup>49</sup> Indeed, there were some promising signs in early 1855. Sardinia had joined the war against Russia, demonstrating that the Western Powers were still in need of new allies. Tsar Nicholas I died, freeing the King of Sweden from his previous obligations of dynastic friendship. Finally, the new British Prime Minister, Lord Palmerston, who entered to office in early February 1855, was much more anti-Russian in his inclinations and more concerned about Russian interests in Finnmark.<sup>50</sup>

At the end of February, Oscar I dispatched to France the so-called Barck mission, named after his emissary in Paris, Count Nils Barck. Barck, a personal friend of Napoleon III, managed to obtain a French promise to supply Sweden with 60 000 troops in exchange for its participation on the Allied side. However, while other Swedish conditions had not essentially changed since the previous summer, their demand for troops had increased to 100 000 men. Napoleon III found this requirement difficult to accept, and the talks did not reach a speedy conclusion. Over the course of the spring, it became clear that the Allied commitments to the campaign in Crimea would stand in the way, and the likelihood of a French-Swedish agreement decreased. At the same time, the Allied public opinion was increasingly turning against the war.<sup>51</sup>

A community of interest nevertheless existed, as the Allied continued to be interested in the Baltic. Since their previous operations in the Baltic Sea, with exception of the siege of Bomarsund, had been rather fruitless, the French and the British again came to see Swedish cooperation as a possible way of achieving a breakthrough. Now, talks with the British would prove to be more successful than Barck's efforts in France. In June 1855, Palmerston proposed to Oscar I an Allied guarantee of Swedish territorial integrity in Finnmark in return for a Swedish promise to make no territorial or other concessions to Russia in the same area. Oscar I was in favour of the proposal but would have liked to see the Allied guarantee to be extended to the whole of the Swedish territory. The British were inclined to go along with this amendment, but they first needed to overcome French resistance to a guarantee that did not oblige Sweden to enter the alliance outright.<sup>52</sup>

By the end of August, both London and Paris had accepted the extension of the guarantee, while Oscar I had softened his demands, no longer necessarily demanding the restitution of Finnish mainland to Sweden. By that point, however, the prospect of Sweden immediately joining the Allies had grown unlikely, as the siege of Sevastopol dragged on and Austria had distanced itself from the Allies. Nevertheless, as put by Palmerston in a secret war aims memorandum in September, the Allies did not have just an essential interest in keeping 'the Russians out of Turkey' but also in 'keeping the Russians out of Norway and Sweden'.<sup>53</sup>

In late autumn, as Sevastopol had been conquered and the Russian defeat seemed imminent, Oscar I felt that it was time for Sweden to get involved. In November 1855, he proposed to Napoleon III an ambitious plan for a combined British-French-Danish-Swedish offensive against St. Petersburg in the following year. His demands, however, were also extensive: the acquisition of preferably the whole of Finland, or at least the Åland Islands, formal alliance with Austria, large subsidies for the Swedish war effort, deployment of 60-70 000 Allied soldiers to the Baltic, and, finally, the restoration of Russia 'to a position less threatening to the future of Europe' as an official war aim.<sup>54</sup>

Oscar I's ideas were compatible with Napoleon III's far-reaching plans of transforming the Crimean War into a general war of liberation of the oppressed nations of Europe. According to this idea, the Scandinavians were to be called in to incite Polish, Finnish and Estonian uprisings against the Russian rule. In June 1856, 20-30 000 Swedes and Norwegians, supported by the British navy, were supposed to occupy the Åland Islands, while 40 000 Allied troops would land on the Estonian islands, supported by the French fleet. Afterwards the Swedes would land in Finland, while the Danes and the Western Allies would occupy Livonia and Estonia. The main force would be directed towards St Petersburg, while the force operating in – what is now – Latvia would join the Polish revolutionary troops. Sovereignty over Finland, and possibly also over the Baltic provinces, would be handed over to Sweden.<sup>55</sup>

### **The November Treaty and the end of the Crimean War**

As a preliminary step towards Swedish intervention, Sweden and the Allies concluded on 21 November the so-called November Treaty, an outcome of the negotiations with the Allies over the summer. Sweden thereby promised not to cede any land to Russia in the north in exchange for an Allied pledge to help and support Sweden in case of possible Russian incursions.<sup>56</sup> Sweden had thereby moved very close to joining the Allies, even if the treaty was a least outwardly defensive in appearance.

The Danish government was officially informed about the existence of the treaty only on 17 December, but the air was rife with speculation. Many doubts were raised over whether Denmark would be able to remain isolated in its neutrality in case Sweden joined the Allies. Danish newspapers reasoned that unless Denmark joined either Sweden or Prussia, there was a likelihood that the misfortune of 1807 would be repeated. Since it could not join its Prussian enemy, it followed that Denmark needed to take up the cause of the Allies together with Sweden.<sup>57</sup>

In Stockholm, the Danish envoy was told that Sweden's neutrality had not undergone a change, even if it was difficult to predict what would happen in case the war moved back into the Baltic – perhaps in 1857, as the Swedes suggested. The Danes nevertheless found it difficult to be reassured, since there were certainly signs that Sweden was considering a full-out involvement on the Allied side. When the Danish government was eventually informed about the treaty's existence, the Swedes made it clear that the it was purely defensive in nature and did not contain any secret additional clauses. Taking this information at face value, Scheele adopted the view that Danish policy would not change. But the treaty was nevertheless an unmistakable sign of the two Scandinavian governments diverging on the question of neutrality policy.<sup>58</sup>

In fact, while it was true that the November Treaty was essentially defensive in nature, unpublished notes also established conditions under which it could have been converted into an offensive alliance.

As came to be seen in January 1856, Oscar I clearly intended to make use of this right.<sup>59</sup> But quite separately from Swedish intentions, the real effect of the November Treaty came to be to finally take the prospect of Swedish involvement off the table. This was because it played a role in bringing the Crimean War to a close.

Russia had reacted extremely negatively to the November Treaty, seeing it as an act of hostility and a significant step towards a declaration of Sweden's entry into the war. As Denmark tended to be seen as an appendage of Sweden, this Russian reaction also put a lot of pressure on Denmark, which in its turn took pains to assert its intention to continue the neutrality policy.<sup>60</sup> Nevertheless, the prospect of neutrals turning belligerents had become too much for Russia to bear, and on 28 December, it decided to accept the Austrian ultimatum in face of the possibility of a widened war against Austria and Sweden.<sup>61</sup>

The fact that the prospect of Swedish involvement was one of the final straws that broke the camel's back is well-documented. At an initial meeting with his advisors, the new Tsar Alexander II (ruled 1855-1881) made sure to cite the information he had received about a secret agreement between Sweden and the Allies, with the supposed outcome that 80 000 French soldiers landing in the Baltic the following spring. At the next meeting two weeks later, it was again emphasised that unless Russia unconditionally accepted the Austrian terms, it would face war not only with Austria, but possibly with the other German states and the Scandinavian kingdoms as well. At the same time, an instructive example was made of Swedish misfortunes in the 18th century, as it had been relegated from the status of a great power to that of a small state due to king Charles XII's insistence of stubbornly continuing an unequal fight. Shortly thereafter, the Tsar decided that Russia had to end the war, accepting defeat.<sup>62</sup>

The French were happy to hear of the Russian decision. After the fall of Sevastopol, Napoleon III had become sceptical of the idea of extending the war into Northern Europe<sup>63</sup> and was now worried that by going down this route, France would be assisting the British in a part of Europe – the Baltic – where France had no interests and would accrue no benefits. For this reason, Napoleon III welcomed Russia's acceptance of peace as an alternative to going along with the British and Swedish plans.<sup>64</sup>

In London and Stockholm, Alexander II's decision to accept the ultimatum was received with regret. Oscar I still tried to rescue the idea of Swedish involvement. On 12 January 1856, he proposed a new, offensive alliance to the Western powers and substantially toned down his demands, now content only with the acquisition of the Åland Islands and giving a promise to provide 165 000 Swedish soldiers. But it was already too late. Rather than destroying Russia in a grand war of national liberation, the danger of Swedish and Austrian invasion had been used to put more pressure on the new Tsar who finally gave way.<sup>65</sup>

### **The outcomes of Scandinavian neutrality in the Crimean War**

The peace of Paris was concluded on 30 March 1856 and memories of the possible Scandinavian participation in the Crimean War waned quickly. In the end, Sweden was not even invited to participate in the peace talks – an honour that was accorded to two neutral non-coalition members Prussia and Austria.<sup>66</sup> Almost nothing came of Oscar I's ambitious war aims, which had included limitations on

Russian naval forces in the Baltic and in the White Sea, prohibition of Russian fortifications northwest of Sweaborg and the restoration of the Åland Islands to Sweden.<sup>67</sup>

Sweden did gain one important outcome, however. At the Paris Peace Conference, the Åland islands were demilitarised, guaranteeing Stockholm's security and ending one of the troublesome factors that had plagued Swedish-Russian relations ever since 1815 and had made blockading the Russian harbours more difficult.<sup>68</sup> The activist sentiment in Stockholm was thereby weakened, as the provocation posed by the fortress of Bomarsund was no longer in sight, giving Swedish neutrality a stronger basis in future wars than had been the case in the Crimean War.

The eagerness with which both Sweden and the Allies had pursued the goal of Swedish participation in the Crimean War was soon forgotten. Nevertheless, it is a fact that Sweden had come very close to intervention on the Allied side. Probably the main stumbling block, which had stopped this from happening, was the fact that Oscar I's cautiousness, in the end, had proven to be ever so slightly greater than his opportunism. But there were also other reasons why the conscription of Sweden failed, including disagreements between the British and the French, the chronic inability of the Allies to attract any of the more significant European 'neutrals by choice', thereby failing to create the desired domino effect, and the demonstrable failures of Allied naval operations in the Baltic.

As for Denmark, its neutrality played out very differently compared to Sweden's, even though they had issued joint, near-identical neutrality declarations in the beginning of the war. While Sweden tried to take advantage of the Crimean War to satisfy its anti-Russian revanchism and security interests in the east, Denmark possessed no such interests. Indeed, its neutrality was merely a function of seeing no benefit in participation on either side in the conflict. The only factor that could have made the Danes to change their mind would probably have been Swedish involvement on the Allied side, threatening Denmark with a neutral isolation. In that sense, Denmark did come close to failing its neutrality policy, but completely by accident, rather than by choice. Yet in the future, the neutralities of the two Scandinavian kingdoms would often be mentioned together, their differences in actions and outlooks obscured by presumed cultural and (geo)political similarities.

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<sup>1</sup> See also Kuldkepp 2019 on a closely related subject.

<sup>2</sup> Rath 2015: 197.

<sup>3</sup> About the genesis of the Second Hague Convention, see Abbenhuis (2014: 178-218).

<sup>4</sup> Abbenhuis 2014: 67-68, 77-78.

<sup>5</sup> See Abbenhuis (2014: 70).

<sup>6</sup> Abbenhuis 2014: 70-71.

<sup>7</sup> Abbenhuis 2014: 71-73.

<sup>8</sup> Baumgart 1983: 70.

<sup>9</sup> Abbenhuis 2014: 74, 81, 85.

<sup>10</sup> Anderson 1969: 264.

<sup>11</sup> Rath 2015: 7.

<sup>12</sup> Jonasson 1973: 244.

<sup>13</sup> Halicz 1977: 182.

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- <sup>14</sup> Abbenhuis 2014: 73.  
<sup>15</sup> Jonasson 1973: 249.  
<sup>16</sup> Rath 2015: 40-41.  
<sup>17</sup> Jansson 1961: 79-80.  
<sup>18</sup> Rath 2015: 39-40.  
<sup>19</sup> Elgström 2000: 56.  
<sup>20</sup> Jonasson 1973: 246.  
<sup>21</sup> Jonasson 1973: 245.  
<sup>22</sup> Abbenhuis 2014: 73.  
<sup>23</sup> Anderson 1969: 263-264.  
<sup>24</sup> About this topic in more detail, see Kuldkepp 2019.  
<sup>25</sup> See Munch-Pedersen 1996.  
<sup>26</sup> Stråth 2012: 105-108.  
<sup>27</sup> Elvander 1961: 368.  
<sup>28</sup> Zetterberg 1999: 102-103.  
<sup>29</sup> Stråth 2012: 52-67, 105-106, 109-112; Eriksson 1940: 666-668.  
<sup>30</sup> See Rath (2015: 20).  
<sup>31</sup> Rath 2015: 21.  
<sup>32</sup> Jonasson 1973: 245.  
<sup>33</sup> Rath 2015: 37-38.  
<sup>34</sup> Baumgart 2020: 33.  
<sup>35</sup> Baumgart 2020: 49.  
<sup>36</sup> Anderson 1969: 266, Baumgart 2020: 50.  
<sup>37</sup> Anderson 1972: 48-50.  
<sup>38</sup> Rath 2015: 38-39, Baumgart 2020: 50.  
<sup>39</sup> Jonasson 1973: 246.  
<sup>40</sup> Rath 2015: 67.  
<sup>41</sup> Rath 2015: 67-68.  
<sup>42</sup> Jonasson 1973: 247.  
<sup>43</sup> Eriksson 1939: 30-60; Holmberg 1946: 231-233.  
<sup>44</sup> See Halicz (1977: 129).  
<sup>45</sup> Halicz 1977: 131-136.  
<sup>46</sup> Halicz 1977: 136-138.  
<sup>47</sup> Halicz 1977: 139-141.  
<sup>48</sup> Halicz 1977: 143-144.  
<sup>49</sup> Jonasson 1973: 247.  
<sup>50</sup> Jonasson 1973: 248, Rath 2015: 17.  
<sup>51</sup> Jonasson 1973: 249.  
<sup>52</sup> Jonasson 1973: 248.  
<sup>53</sup> Baumgart 2020: 51, 179.  
<sup>54</sup> Jansson 1961: 104-109; Elgström 2000: 57.  
<sup>55</sup> Anderson 1969: 270-271, Halicz 1977: 171.  
<sup>56</sup> Elgström 2000: 57.  
<sup>57</sup> Halicz 1977: 170-171.  
<sup>58</sup> Halicz 1977: 172-173.  
<sup>59</sup> Jonasson 1973: 248.  
<sup>60</sup> Halicz 1977: 176.  
<sup>61</sup> Jonasson 1973: 250.  
<sup>62</sup> Rath 2015: 191-193.  
<sup>63</sup> Baumgart 2020: 51.  
<sup>64</sup> Rath 2015: 194.  
<sup>65</sup> Baumgart 2020: 51, 90; Anderson 1969: 274.  
<sup>66</sup> Anderson 1969: 275.

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<sup>67</sup> Rath 2015: 198.

<sup>68</sup> Abbenhuis 2014: 85.