Abstract: The Nordic Economic Community (Nordek) was a short-lived and ultimately unsuccessful attempt to strengthen cooperation between the four Nordic states. While the importance of the project to Britain has often been overlooked, this article suggests that Whitehall took considerable interest from the start. It demonstrates how, although officially neutral, London sought first to mitigate the effects of Nordek, then to undermine its establishment, and, finally, in the wake of Nordek’s collapse, to guard against its re-emergence. The aim throughout was to protect three central tenets of British foreign policy: EFTA unity in light of the second veto, Britain’s own application for EEC membership and a cohesive Western Europe militarily integrated in NATO. However, the article highlights the absence of a coherent strategy towards tentative Nordic integration and the mixed success this brought, the interdependency of Anglo-Nordic relations in the pursuit and success of British foreign policy goals, and the relative decline of the Britain’s influence in the Nordic region.

At the annual session of the Nordic Council on 17 February 1968, just a matter of weeks after France chose once again to block enlargement of the European Economic Community (EEC), the new Danish Prime Minister Hilmar Baunsgaard proposed that the four Nordic countries establish an economic and customs union of their own. The timing of Baunsgaard’s suggestion seemed instantly propitious. After all, Charles de Gaulle’s veto the previous November had halted Danish and Norwegian efforts to join the EEC as full members, put on hold possible Swedish

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membership of the Six and all but ended Finland’s ‘wait and see’ approach to enlargement, which could well have resulted in a free trade arrangement between Helsinki and Brussels. The pull of Nordic integration was also intensified by the fact that in early 1968 even agreement on a number of proposals designed to provide a temporary solution to the enlargement deadlock seemed improbable.²

And closer Nordic cooperation was given still greater urgency when the countries were reminded of the limited benefits offered by their continued membership of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA), the looser free trade bloc comprising Austria, Britain, Denmark, Finland (an associate member) Norway, Sweden, Switzerland and Portugal.³ This was first obvious with the re-emergence of well-trodden arguments with Britain about foodstuffs, in particular over expanding import concessions to EFTA partners – damaging in terms of Norwegian fish exports – and reforming EFTA to include free trade in agriculture – a debate which affected especially Denmark, a large agricultural exporter.⁴

And it was quickly underlined by a series of commercial conflicts within the association, notably between London and Oslo over aluminium smelting.⁵ Put another way, by early 1968 a Nordic initiative had never before been as economically or politically viable.

It was against this background that the Nordic Economic Community (Nordek) plan emerged.⁶ The aim, briefly, was to establish an organisation with an economic union at its heart but which extended integration in spheres as diverse as energy, agriculture, fishing, transport, finance, social policy, education and research. The community would be extensive; intergovernmental institutions

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³ Denmark, Norway and Sweden were among the seven original signatories of EFTA’s founding treaty, the Stockholm Convention, which was penned on 4 January 1960. Finland joined EFTA as an associate member through the FINEFTA agreement signed on 27 March 1961.
⁶ Nordic Economic Community derives from the Swedish Nordiskt ekonomiskt gemenskap. While the project did not adopt the name ‘Nordek’ until the beginning of 1969, to avoid confusion I refer to it as such throughout.
would oversee its work, while a common external tariff and shared currency would solidify economic links between the countries. Within just two months of Baunsgaard’s proposal, all four Nordic countries had agreed to a study leading to specific proposals for a new joint initiative. Protracted and problematic though the subsequent negotiations doubtless were, a draft treaty was finalised in the summer of 1969 and ready for signing at the start of 1970. A new chapter in Nordic cooperation, it seemed, was finally about to open.

From the start, Nordek was a prominent foreign policy concern for Britain. As we shall see, London saw a closely integrated Nordic bloc as having the potential adversely to affect three fundamental tenets of British foreign policy: unity in EFTA in light of the second veto, maintaining Britain’s own application for full membership of the EEC and ensuring that a cohesive Western Europe remain militarily integrated in NATO as the primary guarantor of the continent’s security vis-à-vis the Soviet Union. The aim of this article is to examine why Britain believed this to be the case and to investigate quite what Britain sought to do to confront the perceived risks of a Nordic union. It will first assess the state of Anglo-Nordic relations prior to 1968 and the relative importance of the Nordic states in British foreign policy. The main section of the article will then highlight the politico-strategic priorities that coalesced to shape Britain’s response to the Nordek negotiations. Finally, it will highlight why the British continued to attach prominence to the Nordic region in the run up to EEC enlargement in 1973.

Current British foreign and European policy literature has remarkably little to say about the Nordek episode. Several recent studies fail to mention the plan at all. 7 And what work there is somewhat imperiously concludes that London was largely unaffected by and uninterested in the entire endeavour. Melissa Pine, for example, dismisses its importance altogether, arguing instead that Britain’s response to Nordek was ‘relaxed’, that Whitehall officials ‘did not believe that much headway was being made’ and that, in any case, ‘the Nordic countries were

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merely seeking to fill the void left by the [French] veto’.

Kristian Steinnes, meanwhile, argues that the British ‘considered the proposed plans to create a Nordic union to have limited effects on the UK’. This is particularly unfortunate, since a deeper study of Britain’s response to Nordek reveals a good deal more about Britain, its world role and its own foreign policy in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

The literature related specifically to Nordek is little better. There has certainly been no shortage of studies about the plan. But almost all of these examine the project from the prospective of the Nordic states themselves. And yet the vast array of policy areas that the proposal covered meant it was always likely that many beyond the region would be closely following developments. How ‘outsiders’ reacted to the prospect of a more closely integrated Nordic bloc is thus worthy of historical study. A few attempts have admittedly started to challenge this Nordic-centric focus – Robin Allers’ work on West Germany’s reaction to Nordek and Suvi Kansikas’ examination of the Soviet viewpoint being the most noteworthy efforts. But mention of the British case is still notable by its absence.

An overview of Britain and the Nordek negotiations is therefore overdue. But before doing so three brief explanatory points are necessary. The first is to concede that while closely touching upon the question of the Nordics’ attitudes to Nordek and their foreign policies more generally, this article is concerned principally with British policy, how London reacted to the prospect of a more cohesive Nordic bloc and what Britain did to ensure that its interests remained unaffected. Those looking for a more thorough analysis of Nordic decision-making processes will therefore still need to consult the Nordic-centric literature.

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mentioned above. The second is to recognise the obvious danger in writing about the four Nordic countries as having uniform strategies. The politics around Nordek were enormously complicated and there were great divisions both between and within the four Nordic states. For Britain, Cold War realities certainly differentiated, at one extreme, NATO members Denmark and Norway from Finland and Sweden, both of which were in their own ways neutral. And as applicants for full EEC membership Denmark and Norway were more prominent in British thinking than Sweden and Finland. Even so, reference below to a single Nordic ‘attitude’ or policy orientation in the context of Nordek echoes British parlance and must be seen in light of the still endemic tendency in British foreign policy circles to treat the four Nordic states as one. And the third is to acknowledge the discernible gap which often existed between the Nordic states’ actual stances towards Nordek, and British perceptions of their attitudes, priorities and policies as explained below. As should become clear, the British were highly conscious of the political repercussions of the Nordek proposal. However, this argument is based on a reading of British archival material, and thus Nordic politics, through the eyes of British diplomats and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) and should not be taken as evidence of what the Nordics were in reality trying to achieve.

A Strained Relationship
In order to appreciate quite how Nordek became such a concern for Britain, it is crucial first to trace the complementary nature of Britain’s link with the Nordic countries. The better known aspect of this is Britain’s considerable standing in Nordic affairs. After 1945 Britain could boast about being by far the largest recipient of Nordic exports, their banker-in-chief and their main source of capital


12 Finland was considered neutral but was widely accepted as part of Moscow’s sphere of influence, whereas Sweden was seen a ‘friendly’ neutral power informally integrated into the Western defence framework.
and loans. At the same time, the British were readily willing to exploit their strong bargaining position for their own ends. This included using tactics akin to economic blackmail in order to extract highly advantageous trade deals, help Britain remain at the centre of international finance and offload many of its own economic problems on the Nordics, not least its successive balance of payment and sterling crises. Part of this strategy also recognised that the Nordic region was for Britain an important marketplace in its own right. Swedish and Finnish goods, to take one example, were considered vital to British house building, while the Nordics were a profitable market for the sale of British arms, chemicals, iron and steel, machinery, shipping, automobiles and textiles. It was therefore unsurprising that by 1950 exports to the three Scandinavian countries accounted for 9 per cent of all Britain’s external trade, and that outside the Commonwealth Sweden and Denmark were Britain’s second and third largest export market respectively, behind only the United States.

If highly asymmetrical, then, the Anglo-Nordic relationship was also mutually beneficial, based on a degree of economic interdependency. This in part explains the impressive degree of coordination between the British and the three Scandinavian countries in the Organisation for European Economic Cooperation (OEEC) – Finland, of course, did not participate in the Marshall Plan – which allowed them to discuss industrial growth, international trade and currency controls. It also helps account for the creation in 1950 of the Anglo-Scandinavian Economic Committee, Uniscan, which the British hoped would become an informal environment in which to discuss technical issues such as currency

convertibility and capital movement. Still more significant, it goes some way to explaining the decision by the three Scandinavian states, and later Finland, to join EFTA rather than seek membership of the nascent EEC.

To claim that for Britain each of these developments were driven principally by economic concerns would, however, be mistaken. Rather, British policy was conditioned first and foremost by political motives. Anglo-Scandinavian links within the OEEC were promoted primarily because they created a joint front against US demands for the organisation to establish a supranational authority and powerful secretariat. Uniscan was likewise politically advantageous to London. It helped demonstrate to Washington that Britain was not averse to some form of economic cooperation in Europe. It reinforced the political link between Britain and the Scandinavians following the Finno-Soviet Treaty of 1948 that marked Finland as part of the Soviet political sphere. It helped to guard against the revival of German competition for European markets, a development that increasingly challenged Britain’s role as the principal supplier of industrial goods to the Nordic countries. And Nordic membership of EFTA, which itself built upon the Uniscan group, was championed at a time when Britain’s standing in Europe was increasingly being undermined by the emergence of the six EEC states as a political unit.

Implicit in all of this was, first, that Scandinavia was seen to belong to a British sphere of influence and, second, that Britain saw that it could use its links with the region to meet much broader political challenges. These included maintaining its standing in Europe, preserving its freedom of action vis-à-vis pressure from the United States and its global power status more generally, and

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19 Brief for Prime Minister’s Meeting with the Danish Prime Minister, 11 Jun. 1959, PREM 11/2642, Prime Minister’s Office records, The National Archives, London (henceforth TNA).
wrestling with the emerging European integration process. British approaches to post-war Scandinavian security need to be seen against this same background. The perceived threat of the USSR added to the sense that Britain’s economic and political interests in the region could be jeopardised. In practice this meant ensuring that Denmark and Norway joined NATO, that the Swedish were integrated in an organisation such as Uniscan and that the West maintained good trading relations with Finland, which the British were quick to acknowledge fell within Moscow’s security sphere but not necessarily within its economic one. It followed that anything seen to undermine this balance would be deemed a serious challenge to Britain’s economic interests and much wider political ambitions.

None of this should be mistaken for blind obedience on the part of the Nordics, however. Certainly, the Nordic states often looked upon British – indeed Western – power with a degree of ambivalence. More specific examples reinforce the point. With regard to the Marshall Plan, countries like Norway were at first sceptical of being included, fearing that it would be inimical to its policies of neutrality and bridge-building between East and West. And when the Scandinavians did finally request assistance, this often complemented existing priorities. For the social democratic government in Denmark it would help promote its agenda for industrial reform and increased productivity. In Sweden the Marshall Plan was seen as a way of binding government, business and labour in order to promote long-term growth. And Norwegian support came within the framework of bridge-building and reflected concerns that staying outside the plan would itself imply a formal choice in favour of a bloc – in this case, the East. Moreover, within the OEEC Anglo-Scandinavian relations were fraught with difficulty. Fundamental disagreements emerged over how the countries hoped to pursue trade liberalisation and over the level of tariffs, so much so that

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Copenhagen broke ranks and supported calls for a supranational European Investment Bank to facilitate economic expansion. And then there was the Scandinavian Defence Union (SDU), a proposal which drew directly on pre-1939 policies of neutrality and anti-militarism and which sought to keep the region outside of the emerging East-West conflict. Denmark and Norway, it is true, would eventually join NATO in 1949 was after it became clear that a Scandinavian alternative would be unable to escape the realities of the Cold War divide, but even then each remained ‘allied with reservations’. In all three cases, London recognised that the any gap between the Scandinavians and the West could allow Soviet pressure to creep in and possibly isolate the entire Nordic region. This was a theme that would re-emerge over a decade later during the Nordek negotiations.

Also discernible in this trend was the tendency for the Nordic states to prioritise cooperation among themselves. This is not to say that the countries were united over how to approach European cooperation; as with the OEEC, the Danish were always more willing to accept supranational economic cooperation, with the Swedes at the other end of the spectrum and the Norwegians in the middle. Nor is it the case that Nordic cooperation efforts always succeeded, the SDU being a case in point. But what it does mean is that there was a marked tendency for the Nordic states to take solace in Nordic integration. Hence, the Nordic Council established in 1951 was very much a way to compensate for the failure of the SDU. The negative experience of the Scandinavians in the OEEC contributed to the emergence in 1954 of plans for a Nordic common market between the Scandinavians, Iceland and later Finland. The Helsinki Treaty – signed in 1962 by all four Nordic states and Iceland – likewise emerged from Swedish concerns that with possible Danish and Norwegian membership of the EEC it would be left

behind.\textsuperscript{27} And throughout the course of the 1960s Nordic cooperation in EFTA slowly increased when, as we shall soon see, Britain’s behaviour caused yet more concern for Anglo-Nordic relations.\textsuperscript{28}

On the whole, Britain considered these initiatives innocuous so long as they did not threaten its economic and wider political ambitions. But Britain’s inability to maintain its economic standing in the region had wider political implications: by the mid-1950s it was Germany that was increasingly seen as the major European power, while the United States positioned itself as the predominant political and strategic actor.\textsuperscript{29} If this was likely to expose further the gap between Britain and the Nordic states, Britain’s own behaviour was only ever going to deepen it.\textsuperscript{30} Signs of tension between the countries were already acute in 1961, when Sweden expressed considerable anger at Britain’s decision to launch an EEC application at a time when Stockholm much preferred a joint EFTA approach to the Community. On this occasion it took the London Declaration, which pledged that a solution for all EFTA members had to be found if one of them entered the EEC, to heal the rift.\textsuperscript{31} But it was not until January 1963, after the breakdown of the enlargement negotiations, that British obstinacy was to prove a genuine problem for the four Nordic capitals. The reluctance by the British Conservative government to contemplate even modest changes to EFTA, combined with its failure to alter fundamentally relations between the applicants and the Community, did much to undermine Nordic confidence in London. Such was the frustration at the apparent lack of British leadership in the post-veto period that Copenhagen resolved to undertake what turned out to be extensive

\textsuperscript{28} Olesen and Villaume, \textit{I Blokophyningens Tegn}, 511–2.
\textsuperscript{29} Aunesluoma, \textit{Britain}, 161.
bilateral discussions with Brussels about a possible trade agreement.\textsuperscript{32} A few lone voices in Christiansborg even questioned whether the Danes would be wise to abandon EFTA altogether in favour of EEC association.\textsuperscript{33} For most this was unthinkable – the British market was still too valuable to abandon in favour of isolated EEC accession – but it is doubtless the case that for the first time some were questioning whether waiting for London to apply to the Community was still in the Nordics’ best interest.

A second and altogether more serious indication that fissures were appearing in the Anglo-Nordic relationship came with the imposition in October 1964 of the 15 per cent import surcharge. The impact of the charge introduced by Labour Prime Minister Harold Wilson was not merely economic. Indeed, the Nordic governments were all politically sensitive to a move that seemed to demonstrate once again London’s proclivity to undermine the Seven and make life harder outside of the EEC.\textsuperscript{34}

Matters reached a nadir following the second French veto of November 1967. Britain’s continued refusal to expand EFTA once again did little to soothe some of the most pressing economic difficulties faced by the Nordic countries. London’s attitude in the wake of breakdown also exposed latent divisions over the best tactics to pursue in light of yet another de Gaulle snub. Whereas the British insisted on rejecting any proposals that were not tied explicitly to attaining full entry, the Nordics were more disposed to support any effort to bridge the gap between the Six and applicant states.\textsuperscript{35} British insouciance towards Nordic concerns, according to Swedish Prime Minister Tage Erlander at least, was such that the latter now increasingly saw London, not Paris, as the biggest obstacle to an arrangement between EFTA states and the Community.\textsuperscript{36}

All of this is not to claim, of course, that by the time of Baunsgaard’s speech relations had ceased to matter to either side. But by 1968 the Anglo-Nordic

\textsuperscript{32} Heathcote-Smith to Mason, 7 Feb. 1963, TNA, FO 371/171355; Marjoribanks to Keeble, 31 Jan. 1964, TNA, FO 371/177340.
\textsuperscript{33} O’Neill to Marjoribanks, 31 Jan. 1964, TNA, FO 371/177340
\textsuperscript{34} Record of conversation at lunch, 9 Nov. 1964, TNA, PREM 13/813.
\textsuperscript{35} Melville to O’Neill, 7 Feb. 1968, TNA, FCO 30/32.
\textsuperscript{36} Palliser to Day, 30 Sept. 1968, TNA, PREM 13/2413.
relationship had clearly entered a new phase. A combination of British neglect and economic weakness contributed to a belief among the Nordics that they now had little choice but to take matters more firmly into their own hands.\textsuperscript{37} Quite how troublesome this independent streak would turn out to be for the British is the focus of the enquiry that follows.

The Problem with Nordek
The British first heard of plans for a new Nordic union early in January 1968. Such was the level of unease about a possible Nordic initiative that British officials speculated immediately as to what impact any organisation might have.\textsuperscript{38} They were as quick to rule out any negative economic consequences. As various Whitehall departments saw it, the Nordic states had all developed highly favourable trade balances with Britain and they were unlikely to want this to change.\textsuperscript{39} Some, including Oliver Wright, the British ambassador to Denmark, even suggested that far from hampering the British economy the creation of a larger customs union might well benefit British exporters.\textsuperscript{40} Why, then, did Nordek go on to provoke a negative reaction from the British? The answer is threefold and linked to the perceived politico-strategic impact of a Nordic union.

First, the FCO came to believe that Nordek would isolate Britain in EFTA.\textsuperscript{41} On the face of it a development of this sort seemed highly improbable: Britain remained by far the largest economic and political power of the group. But the Nordic states had form when it came to acting as a unified actor at the international level. They had for instance already proved an effective force in the closing stages of the Kennedy Round, where they adopted a common position and elected a single negotiator.\textsuperscript{42} They were equally successful in the Organisation for

\textsuperscript{37} Hancock to O’Neill, ‘EEC: A Possible Scandinavian Union’, 12 Jan. 1968, TNA, FCO 30/32.
\textsuperscript{38} O’Neill to Gore-Booth, 12 Jan 1968, TNA, FCO 30/32.
\textsuperscript{39} Hancock to Statham, 18 Jan. 1968, TNA, FCO 30/32; Wright brief, ‘Background note on Nordic cooperation’, 25 Sept. 1968, TNA, FCO 9/280.
\textsuperscript{40} Wright to Hancock, 1 Feb. 1968, and Robinson to Barry, 21 Jun. 1968, both TNA, FCO 30/32.
\textsuperscript{41} Copenhagen to FO, tel. no. 154, 25 Apr. 1968, TNA, FCO 9/349.
European Cooperation and Development (OECD), in which they championed the expansion of development aid. And they had likewise leveraged fairly considerable influence as a unit within the United Nations. Moreover, the Nordics freely admitted that weakening Britain’s position in EFTA was part of the attractiveness of Nordek. As one Norwegian official put it, Nordek would give the Nordics the chance of ‘improving the balance of EFTA in which Britain was now perhaps disproportionately the biggest member’.

The concerns of the FCO relating to EFTA, even if implausible, were therefore legitimate. Consequently, it felt that a Nordic bloc would seek to reform EFTA against British wishes. Were this to happen Britain would possibly have to confront a coordinated Nordic attempt to put agricultural products on the same footing as industrial products. There could even be an Anglo-Nordic showdown over Britain’s recent introduction of an import charge on frozen fish or London’s decision to establish a new aluminium smelter in the north of England, moves that were likely to damage Norwegian exports to the United Kingdom. Such a development would in itself have been problematic enough for London at a time when its leadership position in Europe had already been undermined by the recent de Gaulle veto. More problematic still was that, a Nordic alliance would reduce the effectiveness of the association in the context of Britain’s post-EEC veto policy. London’s entire strategy rested on keeping up pressure on France in the hope of opening negotiations for full EEC membership. In this regard London saw a unified EFTA focused on nothing but enlargement of the Community as a key way of bolstering Britain’s chances of joining the EEC. Anything to suggest that EFTA states were instead more concerned in the minutiae of the association’s functions would only ‘dissipate our energies and create the impression that we were losing interest or confidence in our bid’.

45 Wright telegram, tel. no. 154, 25 Apr. 1968, TNA, FCO 9/349.
47 FO to Brussels, tel. no. 178, 26 Jan. 1968, TNA, FCO 30/125.
Second, and beyond the question of EFTA, Nordek was recognised by the FCO to have implications for Britain’s relationship with the Six. Opinions, however, differed greatly. For some, including Con O’Neill, the Deputy Under-Secretary in the Foreign Office, and Sir Eugene Melville, the head of the UK delegation to EFTA, while as things stood EEC membership remained Denmark and Norway’s ultimate goal, if they were resigned to a long waiting period a Nordic union would dilute their support for full entry. O’Neill reckoned this could provoke a loss of momentum behind Britain’s own application and provide de Gaulle with ammunition to reject British entry once again. Others worried that the four countries might be tempted to seek EEC membership within the framework of Nordek. According to one official, at best this would result in a situation in which ‘the Nordic countries would be strong enough to treat [the EEC] on almost equal terms to ourselves.’ At worst, as a more powerful bloc the four states would no longer see the need to synchronise their applications to the Community but instead would bypass London and either join or associate with the EEC independently of the United Kingdom. This, noted John Killick, then O’Neill’s assistant, would leave EFTA in tatters and Britain completely isolated.

Third, officials in Whitehall noted possible implications for European defence. The FCO had already expressed concern about the spread of Vietnam protests in the Nordic region. They had been similarly alarmed by the declining defence budgets of the two Nordic NATO members. Both developments were interpreted as signs that neutralist currents were still strong in Norway and Denmark. The main issue as far as the British were concerned was not so much these developments in themselves – the West was already undertaking efforts to counteract the Vietnam backlash that had spread throughout the Nordic states,

50 Barrett telegram, tel. no. 119, 3 May 1968, TNA, FCO 9/349.
51 East to Brown, 23 Feb. 1968, TNA, FCO 9/349.
while the effectiveness of the Danish and Norwegian contribution to NATO defence was always considered slight – but that a coming together of Nordic countries might further strengthen pre-existing neutralist tendencies and weaken the Danish and Norwegian contribution to NATO. If this happened, the FCO suspected that via Helsinki Moscow would use Nordek to extend its influence to the entire Nordic region. FCO officials therefore assumed that Nordek would ultimately disturb the so-called Nordic balance, provoke the ‘Finlandisation’ of the whole Nordic region, threaten the political value of the Nordics to Britain and, at a time when NATO had already endured France’s withdrawal from the integrated military structure, further undermine Western European security. The scale of the problem was made clear when The Times ran an article suggesting that Finland only had Moscow’s blessing to take part in the Nordek negotiations because it saw Helsinki’s involvement as a way of ‘helping to lure the Danes and Norwegians out of the embraces of NATO’. These discussions had the net effect of revealing how interlinked British foreign policy was with the actions of the Nordic states. Britain’s reaction to Nordek was guided by politico-strategic concerns relating to its own priorities in EFTA, the EEC and NATO, and a Nordic union was deemed to have potentially profound implications for the realisation of these goals. In this sense, Nordek revealed that there was much traditional in the way Britain saw the Nordic states as a cornerstone of its broader international political aims. But the real question now for the FCO was: what could Britain do about tentative Nordic union?

**Developing a Response**

The only reason for optimism was that the Nordics themselves seemed less than sure about how to proceed. Perhaps because of this indecision, Britain’s initial response was muted and hoped simply to minimise any impact Nordek might have on Britain’s relationship with the Community. The Wilson government had already sought to act as intermediary between the ‘friendly five’ – the EEC states

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55 O’Neill to Gore-Booth, 15 Jan. 1968, TNA, FCO 30/32.
56 Author’s correspondence with Tom McNally, 25 Jan. 2013.
minus France – and EFTA. In many ways, this was as much a defensive move against the Nordics as it was an opportunity to isolate the French within the Six. Indeed, Wilson, together with Foreign Secretary George Brown and President of the Board of Trade Anthony Crosland, agreed early on that by being go-between Britain could reduce the likelihood of unilateral discussions between a Nordic bloc and the Community.\(^58\) Crosland and Lord Chalfont, an FCO minister of state, were similarly adamant that London needed to do more to keep the Nordics informed of developments because it might reduce the risk of a newly formed Nordic bloc discarding EFTA in favour of a closer relationship with the Six.\(^59\)

But as negotiations for Nordek continued it quickly became obvious that these more limited steps would not in themselves be enough. There was, however, no palpable sense about how Britain should otherwise respond. For instance, the British ambassador to Sweden, Archibald ‘Archie’ Ross, wrote that while Nordek would doubtless have ‘dubious features’ it was probably advisable to do nothing for fear of provoking the Nordics to seek immediate entry to the EEC.\(^60\) Wright likewise argued that there was no point in adopting a harsh response when there was no certainty that Britain would get anything positive in return.\(^61\)

Nor did everyone agree that a Nordic union would necessarily be pernicious. Michael Palliser, Wilson’s private secretary, argued that the Nordics were entirely justified in establishing a Nordic union if it might help bridge the continuing gulf between EFTA states and the Six. Palliser also signalled concern that the FCO was far too rash in its response to Nordek. After all, it was still not entirely clear whether the Nordics would actually agree on the project.\(^62\) Stuart Holland, an Oxford economist and a political assistant to Wilson with close links to Scandinavian socialists, countered this view. In a missive to Downing Street following a visit to the region, Holland wrote that a Nordic union had now made

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\(^{58}\) Brown to Crosland, 3 Jan. 1968, Crosland to Brown, 5 Jan. 1968 and Stockholm telegram, tel. no. 58, 2 Feb. 1968, all TNA, PREM 13/2111.

\(^{59}\) Chalfont to Brown, 11 Jan. 1968, TNA, PREM 13/2110.

\(^{60}\) Ross to Hancock, 24 Jan. 1968, TNA, FCO 30/32.

\(^{61}\) Wright to Hancock, 1 Feb. 1968, TNA, FCO 30/32.

\(^{62}\) Palliser to Holland, 30 Apr. 1968, TNA, PREM 13/2112.
‘considerable headway’ and that a greater effort on the part of the British was needed if there was any hope of halting its advance.63

However, events only seemed to underscore the veracity of Holland’s claim that Nordek did indeed pose a threat to Britain. That a Nordic bloc might develop closer relations with Brussels independently of the United Kingdom certainty became more plausible and, for British officials, all the more worrying when it emerged that de Gaulle had publicly encouraged the Nordic countries to use Nordek as a springboard to secure access to the EEC.64 Even if de Gaulle’s comments were little more than political hyperbole, Paris was no stranger to acts of more Machiavellian proportions. A French parliamentary delegation had for instance already visited Sweden – seen as the ‘weakest spot’ in the Nordic region and susceptible to ‘French blandishments’65 – supposedly to pressure their counterparts in Stockholm to work towards a Nordic union with a view to it reaching a settlement (a new customs union or Nordic-EEC free trade area were mentioned specifically) with the Community and without the United Kingdom.66

Whether Stockholm ever seriously entertained using Nordek for this purpose is doubtful. It was for instance a huge simplification to think that all four Nordic states could so easily align with the EEC in this way. And the British market was simply too valuable to abandon. But French attempts did go as far as sounding out Danish and Norwegian parliamentarians about supporting a joint Nordic move towards the EEC.67 And Whitehall took France’s actions seriously. Michael Stewart, who replaced George Brown as foreign secretary on 15 March 1968, even caused a mild diplomatic spat with the Nordics when he reminded them that EEC enlargement could only ever be ‘a phased operation with the United Kingdom as the pioneer’.68 That the French proposals did not receive real support in the Nordic capitals, and indeed that an isolated Nordic application was

63 Holland to Palliser, 30 Apr. 1968, TNA, PREM 13/2112.
64 ‘Why be subordinate to Great Britain?’, Aftenposten, 28 Sept. 1968, transcript of article in TNA, FCO 30/257.
65 Melville to Hancock, 7 Feb. 1968, TNA, FCO 30/32.
66 Hancock to Wright, 5 Feb. 1968, and Ross to Hancock, 7 Feb. 1968, both TNA, FCO 30/32.
67 Wright to Hancock, 1 Feb. 1968; Ross to Hancock, 7 Feb. 1968; Hancock to Wright, 5 Feb. 1968; Melville to Hancock, 7 Feb. 1968, all TNA, FCO 30/32.
68 Stockholm telegram, tel. no. 585, 12 Oct. 1968, TNA, FCO 30/257.
more than unlikely, mattered less than the contribution French cunning made to a
Whitehall already panicked that Nordek would spell the end of Britain’s post-veto
enlargement strategy.

Despite the various apprehensions of Ross, Wright and Palliser, the rest of
the year saw several further attempts to dilute the possible impact of a Nordic
community on British interests. Britain’s objective at this stage was not to torpedo
Nordek but to pre-empt the effects of a Nordic federation and immunise Britain
from them. This was first obvious in Britain’s reassessment of EFTA-EEC
relations. Having read Holland’s report, Crosland wrote to Stewart that London
ought to look anew at its European policy. It was clear that the position of the
Nordic states was central to this reasoning. ‘Such a study’, Crosland wrote,
‘should take into account the desirability of showing our EFTA partners that our
stance is not entirely immobile’.69 Crosland felt that Britain had to regain the
initiative or risk losing out to a Nordic bloc eager for change in Europe and
unwilling to follow Britain’s lead for much longer. Concerns over Nordek were
also a factor in the increased number of bilateral meetings between Britain and its
North Sea neighbours. Such occasions were often used gently to emphasise that
despite all Nordek’s attractions Britain remained the Nordic region’s most
important overseas customer.70 And concern over Nordek was partly responsible
for a series of initiatives concerning Nordic security, focusing particularly on
Danish and Norwegian defence policy. The FCO even considered using the
Information Research Department – a body based in Foreign Office originally
established in 1948 to counter Soviet infiltration and propaganda – in the two
countries to offset a possible rise in neutralism through a public information
campaign.71 The benefits of such a drive were immediately obvious to the FCO,
although the embassy in Copenhagen was reluctant to go down a public
information route. Danish neutralism, one official maintained, was a ‘political
problem . . . and methods used to counter it should be political ones’.
Consequently, rather than undertaking a widespread public marketing campaign it

69 Crosland to Stewart, 6 May 1968, TNA, PREM 13/2112.
70 Wright to Stewart, 25 Sept. 1968, TNA, FCO 9/280.
71 Champion to Lloyd, 13 May 1968, TNA, FCO 95/55.
agreed instead to expand bilateral relations between ‘influential’ Danes and Norwegians and their British counterparts to help ensure that the two countries’ ‘foreign policy is based firmly in NATO’ – a strategy that met with some success.\(^{72}\) This came on the back of attempts to gain agreement for Danish and Norwegian membership of the new Eurogroup planned for NATO.\(^{73}\) The rationale was that integrating the two countries’ militaries into NATO would reaffirm their commitment to the alliance and help attenuate Soviet influence.\(^{74}\)

Important though all of this diplomatic manoeuvring doubtless was, tangible success was much harder to come by. Admittedly, not all British efforts were in vain. The Danish and Norwegian reaction to British defence proposals was positive, which helped temper immediate concerns that Nordek would see the two Nordic NATO members stumble out of the alliance – although this was doubtless helped by Soviet actions in Czechoslovakia.\(^{75}\) However, this demonstration of British diplomatic prowess did not automatically result in either improved Anglo-Nordic relations or a lessening of concern that Nordek would disrupt the pursuit of other key elements of British foreign policy. On the contrary, as 1968 progressed Britain found itself increasingly isolated in EFTA.\(^{76}\) And the FCO remained doubtful whether the Nordics would continue to resist French offers of isolated entry to the Community for much longer.\(^{77}\)

Hence, by the close of 1968 Britain had been unable to adopt a coherent strategy towards Nordek. The FCO was beset by internal disagreement, and the policies that did emerge were piecemeal and haphazard. The result of this was that Britain was no closer to mitigating the effects of Nordek on its foreign policy priorities at the end of the year than it had been at the beginning. Amidst all this, the Nordek negotiations had in fact made good progress, so much so that by the

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\(^{72}\) Lloyd to Champion, 20 Jun. 1968, TNA, FCO 95/55.


\(^{74}\) Stewart to Winchester, 13 Dec. 1968, TNA, FCO 33/657.

\(^{75}\) Wright to Stewart, 31 Dec. 1968, TNA, PREM 13/2572.

\(^{76}\) Barry to Robinson, 11 Nov. 1968, TNA, FCO 30/257.

\(^{77}\) Wright to Stewart, 10 Jan. 1969, TNA, FCO 30/257.
beginning of 1969 British officials concluded that the treaty was now likely to be signed.\footnote{Hancock to Robinson, 17 Feb. 1969, and East to MacGlashan, 18 Feb. 1969, both TNA, FCO 30/258.}

**Benevolently Neutral?**

Belief that the Nordics were close to agreeing a final version of the Nordek treaty galvanised the British government into reconsidering its approach to the project. London now adopted a policy of ‘benevolent neutrality’, publicly supporting the initiative while refraining from taking a definitive stance either way.\footnote{Wright to Hancock, 25 Feb. 1969, and Hancock to Robinson, 18 Mar. 1968, both TNA, FCO 30/258.} Privately, however, Whitehall officials were increasingly shocked by what they saw as the ineluctable rise of a new Nordic union.\footnote{Summary Record of Council Meeting, 13 Mar. 1969, and Hancock to Robinson, 18 Mar. 1969, both TNA, FCO 30/258.} So deep were these fears that Britain pinned its hopes on outside events undermining support for Nordek. This was most obviously the case with the infamous ‘Soames affair’ – the offer by de Gaulle in a meeting with the British Ambassador to France, Christopher Soames, for London and Paris to work together to form a looser European organisation.\footnote{See among others Gerrard Bossuat, ‘De Gaulle et la second candidature britannique aux Communautés Européennes’, in Wilfried Loth, ed, *Crises and Compromises: The European Project, 1963-1969* (Banden-Banden: Nomos, 2001), 511–38; Pine, *Harold Wilson*, ch. 6}

The FCO expected that the affair would undermine the Nordek negotiations by demonstrating to the Nordics that Britain was capable of offering an alternative to the enlargement stalemate. But as quickly became clear, far from slowing progress, the Nordics chose instead to expedite agreement on Nordek in order, as one unnamed Norwegian official put it, ‘to take refuge in Nordic cooperation from a Europe where the small nations would be so many Luxembourgs’.\footnote{Oslo telegram, tel. no 7, 1 Mar. 1969, TNA, FCO 30/258.}

Because of this, London concentrated on Nordek with a renewed sense of vigour from spring 1969 onwards. In early March, John Robinson, the head of the European Integration Department inside the FCO, penned a report in which he adopted a familiar tone – that Nordek risked British strategy with regard to EFTA,
the EEC and NATO – but added that officials now ought to take a more concerted approach:

I recommend that in the coming months we should take advantage of any opportunity which arises for exploring with the Nordic countries and particularly with Denmark and Norway the implications of Nordic economic co-operation. While we must not attempt to give the impression of intervening in matters which are not our affair, we should clarify the Nordic countries’ attitudes . . . and point out to them as appropriate the possible implications.83

This new calculation of how likely were the Nordics to reach agreement suggested a radically different method in how the British approached the Nordek proposal. No longer did the FCO want simply to inoculate Britain from a new Nordic bloc – rather it hoped to undermine its actual creation. In order to do so, the British argued that Nordek was insufficient to meet the economic needs of the Nordic states and that Nordek was likely to exacerbate rather than heal the EFTA-EEC split. During gatherings of the Anglo-Danish Liaison Committee, for instance, Whitehall officials suggested that Nordek was unlikely to help Danish agricultural exports and implied that the creation of an integrated Nordic bloc would almost certainly be detrimental to bilateral relations between the Nordics and the Six.84 In a similar vein, in a meeting in July 1969 meeting with Finnish President Urho Kekkonen Harold Wilson spoke of the dangers posed by ‘inward-looking Scandinavian solutions.’85

While warnings of this sort proved a useful way to educate the Nordics, they could only be so effective. The FCO was certainly convinced that despite its recent efforts Nordek still posed a risk to Britain.86 Wilson was likewise highly

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83 Robinson to Hancock, attaching note Nordic Economic Cooperation, 3 Mar. 1969, TNA, FCO 30/258.
84 Summary Record of Anglo-Danish Liaison Committee Ninth Meeting, 3 Oct. 1968, TNA, FCO 9/349; Minutes of Tenth Meeting of the Anglo-Danish Liaison Committee, 30 Sept. 1969, TNA, FCO 67/1.
85 Visit of the President of Finland to London: Record of a Meeting held at 10 Downing Street, 17 Jul. 1969, TNA, FCO 30/258.
critical of a report produced in mid-1969 by the Joint Intelligence Committee, which claimed that with de Gaulle having left the Élysée the momentum behind Nordek had decreased. Concern of this sort helps explain why the British once more resorted to confronting closer Nordic economic cooperation through the guise of defence. 1969 was itself a key year, the date when member countries could decide to leave NATO after just twelve months’ notice. In Denmark, and to a lesser extent Norway, this fact alone caused debate over whether there should be ‘automatic renewal’ of NATO membership. Having previously succeeded in dampening concerns about NATO, the first choice of the FCO and the Ministry of Defence, in an unusual display of unity, was to expand contacts with the military establishment in the two Nordic NATO countries. Defence, it seemed, was the only real area in which the British could still hope to exert influence in the Nordic area.

Visits were all very well and good but it was clear that something concrete needed to come out of them. Consequently, in a meeting in Copenhagen in the autumn of 1969, Defence Secretary Denis Healey went as far as to suggest that there were grounds for closer integration between British, Danish and Norwegian forces under the NATO umbrella. For Britain, such offers were based on the belief that a more closely integrated defence regime could shore up Norwegian and Danish support for NATO, tie both countries more firmly to the West, seek to nip increasing Danish and Norwegian neutralist tendencies in the bud and guard against an increase in Soviet influence in the Nordic region as a whole.

Nor were British efforts on defence restricted solely to the governmental level. As late as February 1970, ministers reiterated their policy on Nordek in a meeting with the Danish Social Democrats (SD). The SD had been out of power since 1968 but, as the largest single party in Denmark, remained a crucial component in foreign policy-making. While it was adamant that Denmark should

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89 May to Andrews, 10 Jul. 1969, TNA, FCO 33/458.
remain part of NATO, the SD was also committed a dramatic reduction in force numbers and an acceleration of East–West détente. The party’s attitude to NATO, and Nordek more generally, was hence crucial. Invited to London in early February, the SD’s foreign affairs spokesperson, Kjeld Olesen, explained to George Thomson, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster charged with negotiating Britain’s EEC membership, that NATO was unfit for this new defence posture. ‘NATO is lagging behind’, Olesen explained. As an organisation it was not only ‘detrimental to the process of détente’ but was also ‘only able to express the policies of the big powers’. And here Nordek had a role to play: ‘I think’, Olesen went on, ‘that the Nordic countries as a closely cooperating bloc can play a role in détente in Europe. Nordek gives another opportunity for the realisation of the Kekkonen plan’.

The importance of Olesen’s reference to the Kekkonen plan – an idea for the creation of a nuclear free Nordic area and the complete disengagement of the superpowers from the region – hardly needed stating. Somewhat astounded, Thomson and Denis Healey, who met Olesen the same day, sought in their replies to calm SD fears, stressing that NATO was as geared towards détente as the Nordic countries themselves. Thomson likewise maintained that Nordek would be redundant if as a bloc it could not negotiate reasonable relations with the Six, especially when it came to Sweden and Finland as neutrals. Britain, Thomson insisted, would be vital in ensuring that the Six made special arrangements for neutral states in any enlarged Community. In short, Britain attempted to appease the SD. It hoped to provide room for domestic debates over defence while binding Britain and the Nordics together, ensure that Nordek would not become a substitute for Denmark’s inclusion in NATO and emphasise that only Britain could help secure important concessions for the Nordics in the event of EEC enlargement. In turn, the FCO was encouraged that its message seemed to be

91 Note of Olesen-Thomson meeting, 10 Feb. 1970, box 440, Social Democrat Archives (SDA), Danish Labour Movement Library and Archives, Copenhagen.
94 Note of Olesen-Thomson meeting, 10 Feb. 1970, SDA, box 440.
getting through to the SD. As a later report indicated, while the SD leadership would continue to advocate cuts to defence in order to placate its left wing, such sentiments were ‘unlikely to result in very much real action’.  

Hence, British policy towards Nordek was not without success. But by this stage officials had seemingly come to terms with the fact that, while their efforts might attenuate the impact of Nordek, the organisation would itself still be established. Had Britain’s standing in the region been greater, its attempts to ‘clarify’ the wider implications of a Nordic union might perhaps have had a more direct impact on the course of the negotiations themselves. Instead, there was an apparent hardening of the Nordics’ position. The creation of Nordek thus appeared all but a certainty and the British could seemingly do nothing about it.

**Towards the Community**

It was therefore a mixture of surprise and relief for Britain that on 24 March 1970 Finland announced that it would not sign the Nordek treaty in its current form. The reason for Finland’s decision has been a source of debate for historians. Lasse Sonne and Juhani Suomi have emphasised the importance of domestic politics and in particular the role played by President Kekkonen, who thought that Nordek could damage relations with the USSR. Others, by contrast, prioritise external determinants, viewing the collapse of Nordek as a direct result of Moscow’s intervention. Suvi Kansikas demonstrates that the Kremlin feared that Nordek would connect all four Nordic states to the EEC and that this would both damage Finno-Soviet trade and, still more significant, undermine the USSR’s security vis-à-vis NATO.

Whatever its roots, as far as Britain was concerned Finland’s refusal to take part in Nordek bore all the hallmarks of Soviet intervention. Certainly, Nordek’s downfall tempered more immediate doubts about whether a Nordic bloc

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95 Dales to MacGlashan, 30 Apr. 1970, TNA, FCO 33/886.
100 Lever to MacGlashan, 8 Apr. 1970, TNA, FCO 33/1111.
might disrupt British EEC negotiations. London was similarly relieved to learn that the Scandinavians would, on a country-by-country basis, seek negotiations with the Six for full membership of, or in Sweden’s case association with, the EEC. But British jubilation was quickly dampened by two factors. First, Nordek could be kept in reserve in the event that the EEC applications were again to fail. 101 Second and equally problematic for Britain was the manner in which Nordek had collapsed. Moscow’s supposed intervention only strengthened the conviction of British officials that the Soviets had originally planned to use Nordek as a way of leaning on all four Nordic states. 102 If Moscow’s actions ultimately helped provoke the fall of Nordek, they also acted as a reminder to Britain of the USSR’s willingness to intervene in Nordic affairs and its capacity to shape the course of Nordic politics.

The emergence of growing popular opposition to the EEC from within the Nordic countries together with renewed doubts about Nordic defence policy only added to this anxiety. The former issue came to light in early 1971 when news filtered through that because of constitutional quirks Danish and Norwegian EEC membership would likely be subject to national referenda. 103 Such a development, of course, did not simply make their entry to the EEC all the less likely but correspondingly increased still further the likelihood that the Danish and Norwegians would turn once again to Nordek. 104 Renewed anxieties about defence, meanwhile, came at a moment when the Soviet Union had achieved nuclear parity with the West, the American guarantee of European security seemed increasingly uncertain and NATO had formally accepted proposals to participate in a European Security Conference. The British also looked unfavourably on the fact that between them Norway and Denmark were responsible for around half of the shortfall in the target figure of European contributions to NATO’s European Defence Improvement Programme. 105 British

101 Dales to MacGlashan, 10 Apr. 1970, TNA, FCO 33/1111.
104 Stark telegram, tel. no. 19, 19 Sept. 1972, TNA, FCO 30/1555.
105 Cable to Brimlow, 4 Mar. 1971, TNA, FCO 41/819.
officials similarly poured scorn on the decision by the Danish SD, now in
government, to pursue a restructuring of the Danish armed services as it had
originally planned.\footnote{Peck to Bridges, 22 Dec. 1971, and Bridges to Beck, 6 Jan. 1972, both TNA, FCO 41/988.} This, it was thought, risked a chain reaction in Norway,
where the government had already provoked disquiet by becoming the first
NATO member to recognise North Vietnam.\footnote{Culham to Kerr, 6 Mar. 1972, TNA, FCO 41/989.} All of this was enough for Edward
Heath, who replaced Wilson as prime minister in June 1970, to hint that both
countries were in danger of reverting to a pre-war stance of neutrality and
allowing the Soviet Union to expand its influence in northern Europe.\footnote{Hansard, Parliamentary Debates, 812 House of Commons Debates, 2 Mar. 1971, cols. 1416–7; Oslo to FCO, tel. no. 61, 4 Mar. 1971, and Cable to Brimlow, 4 Mar. 1971, both TNA, FCO 41/819.}

For the British the challenge posed by these various developments could
be best overcome by tying the Nordics as closely as possible to an enlarged
Community.\footnote{Stark telegram, tel. no. 19, 19 Sept. 1972, TNA, FCO 30/1555.} Given the proven influence of the Soviet Union in the region and
the vacillating defence stance of the two Nordic NATO members, Community
membership would pre-empt a Nordek revival and, as one future Foreign Office
minister wrote, be ‘an important signpost to the strength of [neutralist] tendencies’
in the Nordic region.\footnote{Report by Tom McNally, ID/1971-72/39: Further Developments in European Security, undated, National Executive Committee Minutes 23 Feb. 1972, Labour Party Archives, Manchester.} The FCO was consequently willing more actively to
intervene in Nordic politics in order to try and influence the domestic debate over
enlargement of the EEC.

At the political level this more officious strategy materialised in a series of
visits designed to promote the virtues of Community membership. Such trips
tended to focus on Denmark, considered a more urgent case given Copenhagen’s
role in originally proposing Nordek.\footnote{Stark telegram, tel. no. 19, 19 Sept. 1972, TNA, FCO 30/1555.} Heath thus travelled to the Danish capital
in the summer of 1972 and extolled the virtues of EEC membership and outlined
the dangers were Denmark not to join the Community alongside Britain.\footnote{Robinson to Franklin, 30 May 1972, Brief for Prime Minister’s Visit to Copenhagen, 5 Jun. 1972, and transcripts of Heath’s speeches in Copenhagen, 8-9 Jun. 1972, all TNA, FCO 30/1464.} Where
the FCO could be especially useful was in supplying technical information and
arranging political visits, as it did when George Brown and Duncan Sandys took
part in rallies just a week before the Danish referendum in support of EEC membership.\footnote{Stark to Robinson, 11 Oct. 1972, TNA, FCO 30/1556.}

Norway was not forgotten, however, and the FCO’s strategy extended to using Britain’s newfound leverage as a member of the Community to try and secure as best a deal for Oslo in the wake of its referendum ‘no’ vote. To this end, the position of the French and the Commission caused a slight problem for the British. As the new ambassador to Oslo, Ralph Selby, wrote in a dispatch early in October, not only were Paris and Brussels both privately satisfied with the result – they believed, according to Selby at least, that ‘the enlarged Community has been spared an awkward partner’ – but both were also apparently content that ‘Norway should be left to “stew in its own juice” for the time being’ without being offered any concessions from the newly enlarged EEC.\footnote{Selby to Douglas-Home, 4 Oct. 1972, TNA, FCO 30/1556.} Not surprisingly, the British were wholly against this state of affairs and it is clear that a mixture of concerns over Norwegian neutralism, the continued danger of the ‘Finlandisation’ of non-EEC Nordic members and the potential resurgence of Nordek shaped British thinking.\footnote{Stark telegram, tel. no. 19, 19 Sept. 1972, and Crossley note, 27 Sept. 1972, both TNA, FCO 30/1555.} The FCO thus decided to lead efforts for a favourable solution to Norway’s continued exclusion from the Community. This translated into a decision to offer Oslo an interim bilateral trade pact to avoid discrimination on Norwegian exports to Britain. And it was quickly followed by a more substantial proposal whereby Britain, indefinitely if necessary, would maintain Anglo-Norwegian free trade as previously provided by EFTA.\footnote{FCO telegram, tel. no. 770, 27 Oct. 1972, TNA, FCO 30/1557.} By so prominently placing the matter on the EEC agenda, London ensured that the Commission and other member states could not simply sweep Norwegian concerns aside. As it happened, this in fact helped ensure a quick and favourable resolution to the Special Relations Agreement, the basis of Norway’s relations with the EEC for the next decade.

**Conclusion**

\begin{itemize}
\item \footnote{Stark to Robinson, 11 Oct. 1972, TNA, FCO 30/1556.}
\item \footnote{Selby to Douglas-Home, 4 Oct. 1972, TNA, FCO 30/1556.}
\item \footnote{Stark telegram, tel. no. 19, 19 Sept. 1972, and Crossley note, 27 Sept. 1972, both TNA, FCO 30/1555.}
\item \footnote{FCO telegram, tel. no. 770, 27 Oct. 1972, TNA, FCO 30/1557.}
\end{itemize}
This article has sought to highlight British policy towards the Nordic region during and after the Nordek negotiations, and to situate this within the wider context of British foreign policy in the late 1960s and early 1970s. In doing so it challenges the idea that Britain was unconcerned about the prospect of a more tightly integrated Nordic bloc. Nordek, it is doubtless true, did not pose an economic challenge as far as Whitehall was concerned. But Britain’s policy was conditioned by politico-strategic concerns that arose from Britain’s wider international ambitions relating to EFTA, its application to the EEC and the Western European contribution to NATO in the face of the perceived threat from the Soviet Union. Moreover, it shows that Britain’s ability to safeguard its interests was compromised by a lack of a coherent strategy. The Nordek negotiations exposed rifts within Whitehall and British embassies in the Nordic countries over how best to confront Nordic union. The policies that subsequently emerged were haphazard and evolved in four distinct stages in response to perceived developments in the Nordic region. Initially, there was a muted response, which focused on retaining Britain’s links with Brussels. By the middle of 1968, however, the majority of policymakers thought that the Nordics were more determined to secure agreement; policy therefore developed in order to preempt the effects of Nordic integration on Britain. In early 1969 the strategy changed once again. The FCO undertook a more offensive approach designed to undermine Nordek’s actual creation and offer alternatives to Nordek. Finally, the collapse of Nordek forced Britain to tie the Nordic states, principally Denmark and Norway, to an enlarged EEC in order to guard against what it saw as the possible resurgence of the plan and the still palpable influence of the Soviet Union.

The results of Britain’s Nordek strategy were mixed. More often than not the British were unable to bring to bear the sort of pressure needed to influence the ongoing negotiations. This stood in stark contrast to Moscow, and it is telling that Nordek collapsed in March 1970 ostensibly because of Soviet, not British intervention. Where British influence could play a more significant role was in the months after Nordek collapsed, and especially in the run up to EEC enlargement.
London not only had a hand in securing Danish entry but also in ensuring that Norway was adequately aligned with the Community following the negative referendum result. This latter finding reveals how the United Kingdom was able to make great use of its newfound status as an EEC member state, leveraging its position in Brussels to meet traditional foreign policy aims.

British foreign policy throughout continued to be interdependent. The Nordic states had long been a strategically important area for Britain, and the Nordek episode revealed that they remained indispensable. In this way, British foreign policy displayed traditional elements. Small states they may well have been, but the Nordics’ attitudes and policies continued to be deemed crucial to the overall pursuit and success of Britain’s external policy objectives. It is a reminder that the historian seeking to tease out the complexities of the external policy of larger states must be prepared to acknowledge the significance of smaller states as an important determinant in the workings of the international system. In much the same way, the Nordek episode serves to highlight how the changed realities of Britain’s place in the world and its broader decline as a world power in the post-war period affected specifically Anglo-Nordic relations. What had clearly changed by 1968 was the relative significance of Britain to the Nordic states. Nordek is therefore a case study of how Britain responded to this new reality by trying, and in large part failing, to lure them back as part of London’s wider foreign policy ambitions. Conversely, the Nordek case study also exposes the lack of confidence Britain had in its own power and ability to effect change in Europe in the months following the second de Gaulle veto. That a more independently-minded Nordic region was considered by Britain to pose such wide-ranging dangers to existing British policy goals allows us to better understand the fragility of Britain’s position and quite how much France’s rejection affected the collective psyche of FCO officials and British diplomats.

Finally, this article highlights where the process of EEC enlargement and the development of the Cold War were most obviously linked. Only relatively recently have historians sought to bridge the artificial divide that separates Cold
War history and the writing of the early European integration process.¹¹⁷ For the British, Nordek clearly touched on both arenas and, ultimately, safeguarding Nordic membership of the EEC was deemed the best response to the security challenge posed by both a resurgent Nordic bloc and the ongoing influence of the Soviet Union in the region.