Poljarnyj vestnik: Norwegian Journal of Slavic Studies, vol. 29/2, 2026, pp. 65–87
https://doi.org/10.7557/6.8688
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A Large Scale Crisis: The Hopen Accident and the Struggle Against the Soviet Autonomy on Svalbard

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1. Introduction

The Soviet-Norwegian interrelationship on Svalbard during the Cold War was characterised by peaceful coexistence but also constituted challenges for the Norwegian rule. Throughout the interwar period *de facto* Soviet internal self-rule, or autonomy, had been the norm, and when Norway sought to end this, it met staunch resistance from its Soviet neighbours. One of the larger incidents in this context occurred in 1978, when a Soviet military aircraft crashed onto the remote island of Hopen and sparked one of the most significant crises in the bilateral relationship arising from a domestically generated incident. The dispute centered on who had the right to investigate the crash and take possession of the wreckage became symptomatic of a deeper issue. Ultimately, the Soviet Union not only challenged Norway's right to unilaterally enact and enforce laws, but also the scope and implications of the full and absolute sovereignty granted to Norway through the Svalbard Treaty. This article argues that the handling of the Hopen crisis should be understood within the larger effort to put an end to the Soviet self-rule. Through a detailed case study, it investigates the crisis' causes, management and consequences in relation to the overall effort to curtail Soviet autonomy, and asks how the Soviets responded, which factors led to a successful resolution of the crisis and whether it strengthened Norwegian sovereignty over the archipelago.[1]

The article relies on close study and analysis of primary archival sources and interprets these through neoclassical realist theories to provide a deeper understanding of the Hopen crisis. This approach is well suited for examining small states in international relations,

[1] I would like to thank two anonymous peer reviewers for their helpful and insightful comments. The article is a thoroughly revised and updated version of my master thesis submitted at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology in 2021, titled "En krise av stort format: Hopen-krisen og norsk suverenitetshevdelse på Svalbard", written under the excellent guidance of Professor Espen Storli.

allows for foreign policy analysis and considers how domestic factors influence international outcomes (Ripsman et al. 2016: 34). Although the Norwegian sovereignty on Svalbard has never been formally challenged it has had its fair share of challenges throughout the years, many of which concerned the Norwegian jurisdiction in the Soviet settlements and the Soviet opposition to Norwegian interference. While the sovereignty was legally secured through the Svalbard Treaty of 1920, Norwegian jurisdiction, which Malcolm N. Shaw defines as a vital and central feature of sovereignty, was not exercised in the Soviet settlements due to the Norwegian non-interference policy (Shaw 2008: 645). This gave the Soviet mining towns a *de facto* autonomy or self-rule, which was legally unproblematic in as far as it constituted the Norwegian policy (Berg 2020: 317). The problems arose as Norway attempted to end this *de facto* autonomy in an effort to strengthen its effective control and sovereignty on the archipelago. In describing the effort to curtail Soviet autonomy and strengthen Norwegian sovereignty, the article draws on Hans Mouritzen's understanding of small state's freedom of action in foreign policy in relation to great powers (Mouritzen 2022: 11). In this context, enforcing Norwegian laws upon the Soviets on Svalbard was viewed as a normatively unacceptable behavior by the Soviets, who attempted to discipline Norway when it overstepped its bounds. This can be termed subversive, as it actively aimed at influencing or changing the Norwegian Svalbard policy (Wohlforth 2020: 3). In contrast, the article argues that the persistent effort to enforce Norwegian laws, through incidents like the Hopen crisis, must be understood as an effort to expand Norwegian freedom of action on Svalbard in relation to the Soviet Union. This approach has already been used effectively to describe the exact opposite, namely how the Soviets attempted to limit the Norwegian freedom of action throughout the Cold War (Myklebost et al. 2025: 11).

Primary archival sources from the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs have been prioritized. However, material from other ministries could have served this article's research purposes, too, as there is a considerable degree of overlap between the ministries involved in Svalbard affairs. The issues at hand are judicial in nature, but their foreign policy aspects are of much greater interest in this context. Knowledge about the accident and its investigation is equally vital for understanding how the crisis developed, and my account of this is based on the aircraft investigation boards' files regarding the accident. Furthermore, foreign archives, newspapers and the archives of the Norwegian parliament have been used to highlight the allied support, public pressure and the opposition's stance throughout the crisis.

The Hopen crisis, often referred to as the Hopen accident, is a recurring feature in the broader works on the history of Svalbard, Norwegian foreign policy and Soviet-Norwegian relations. In his seminal work on Norwegian foreign policy between 1965 and 1995, Rolf Tamnes (1997: 260–62) termed it a large-scale crisis and described it as the climax of tensions during the Cold War on Svalbard. Thor B. Arlov (2011: 294–95) has conducted an extensive research into the governor's relation to the crisis and described it as the definitive low point in local relations but also how it helped gain respect for the governor's office in the eyes of the Soviets, ordinary Norwegians and the central government. Hallvard Tjelmeland (2015: 501) has summarized the crisis, stating that it primarily concerned reaching the scene first to secure vital parts of the wreckage, investigating the

incident and exercising Norwegian sovereignty. Jacob Børresen (2013: 109), who has conducted a short analysis of the crisis management, emphasizes the mutual interest of low tensions, and Norwegian legal basis and security guarantees as vital for the successful outcome. The issue of attaining Soviet respect for Norwegian law and curtailing Soviet autonomy has been sporadically covered by both historians and political scientists. There is a consensus that mounting challenges forced the Norwegian government to pay better attention to Svalbard affairs, and that the prior minimalistic regime had given mining communities an autonomy that the Norwegian government now sought to stifle (Østreng 1975: 110; Tamnes 2020: 140 & 154). Starting in the mid-1960s, more legislation was passed and the governor was ordered to uphold it in the Soviet settlements (Arlov 2020: 67). New legislation was generally not respected by the Soviets and, in an attempt to subvert it, met with formal diplomatic protests claiming that Norway was violating the Svalbard Treaty (Myklebost et al. 2025: 11; Jørgensen 2010: 33; Arlov 2020: 67). A substantial increase in the Svalbard governors' economic and material resources enabled enforcement, but it was still dependent on Soviet adherence and cooperation (Rowe, Hønneland & Jørgensen 2022: 51). The attempts did not succeed until the mid-1980s as relations were warming and the eastern bloc, the Soviet Union, and eventually the Russian economy collapsed (Tamnes 2020: 167; Ulfstein 1995: 69). In the 1990s and throughout the 2000s, the Norwegian control and the Russian adherence to it was firmly secured. The Hopen crisis is often mentioned *en passant* in this context, but its results and detailed descriptions of how the broader strategy affected crisis management are usually left out. Furthermore, detailed case studies of how the effort to curtail Soviet autonomy was carried out, and the role of incidents like the Hopen crisis, is lacking post-1970 and mostly centred on the fishery protection zone in the 2000s. The overall development is well accounted for but fragmented, and lacks the depth and explanation that case studies provide. In addition, the Soviet protests and insubordination are often described and rarely interpreted as anything more than legal disputes. This article aims to fill these gaps and provide a deepened understanding of both the crisis and the Cold War on Svalbard in general, by defragmenting the existing narrative and recontextualising the crises. The article's main objective is not to challenge previous accounts of the crisis but rather to shed new light on its significance in relation to the effort to curtail Soviet autonomy and include peculiarities regarding its management that are omitted from the concise accounts by Tamnes, Arlov and Tjelmeland.

I will first provide an account of the genesis of the *status quo* the Norwegian authorities attempted to revise through incidents like the Hopen crisis. This, as well as the reasons that motivated Norwegian authorities to change the practice of non-interference, is essential for understanding how the accident developed into one of the largest crises in Norwegian post-war history. Secondly, I will describe the crisis, how the Soviets attempted to foil it, how it was handled and brought to a successful end for the Norwegian authorities. Third, I will discuss the crisis' consequences and whether/how it strengthened Norwegian sovereignty, expanded the Norwegian freedom of action, and affected the Soviet-Norwegian bilateral relationship. In conclusion, I will briefly discuss the circumstances that led to the crisis' successful resolution and how the crisis-related Soviet counter-arguments can be interpreted.

2. From inaction to action

Norwegian Svalbard policy has undergone substantial changes since Norway assumed sovereignty of the archipelago in 1925. In 1975, political scientist Willy Østreng divided the development into three phases termed the *laissez faire* period (1925-1950), the verbal period (1950-1965) and the action period (1965-) (Østreng 1975: 108–116). Although dated, this periodisation is still excellent for describing the developments leading up to the Hopen crisis and essential to explain the challenges faced by Norwegian authorities in the late 1970s.

After sovereignty was secured, the Norwegian agenda on Svalbard was for the most part fulfilled and the mining communities were left under near full company control, which is just how the government normally treated isolated mining communities on the mainland (Tamnes 1991: 37). International interest had waned in wake of Norwegian sovereignty and the turbulent coal market of the 1920s, and by the second half of the 1920s, two Norwegian companies ran the only active coal mines in the archipelago. A governor (Sysselmann) was appointed in 1925 as the government's foremost representative on Svalbard and was tasked with its administration. His wintering at Finneset in 1925/26 left him both unoccupied and immobilized, and a year-round presence was deemed both unnecessary from an administrative perspective and practically unfeasible due to the vast distances, harsh weather and total darkness of the polar night (Arlov 2011: 78–80). Even if his authority had been needed to enforce Norwegian law in the mining communities, reaching them was challenging at best (Pedersen 2009: 148). Due to this and budgetary constraints, the Norwegian government settled for a minimalistic regime. In Ny-Ålesund, temporary police authority was issued to the winter manager and other company employees (Hanoa 2016: 108 & 292). In Longyearbyen, fights and other misdemeanors were handled by Store Norske's HR-department well up until the 1970s, only involving the governor in more serious incidents (Evjen 2006: 223). The Russians return to Svalbard in the 1930s did little to change this, although an overwintering governor was eventually appointed and his year-round presence was later required (Arlov 2011: 89 & 96). The archipelago's minuscule strategic importance and peripheral location made such a legal regime sufficient in the eyes of the Norwegian government, even though Norway was no longer alone on the archipelago (Arlov 2003: 313). In the Soviet communities, Norwegian authority was practically absent as the governor had standing orders not to interfere or attempt to enforce the Norwegian law (Østreng 1982: 4). Due to this non-interference policy the Soviet communities governed themselves as autonomous company towns on Norwegian soil, and the responsibility for law and order informally fell to the Soviet consul and Trust Arktikugol's administration (Tamnes 2020: 140). It is well known that the NKVD/KGB had offices in Soviet miners' settlements, keeping an eye on the inhabitants as they were working in these remote outposts abroad (Jørgensen 2010: 29). Even Stalin's purges reached Svalbard, with suspected traitors being called back to the Soviet Union or laid off before being arrested and sentenced at home (Holtsmark 2015: 119).

According to Jørgen Holten Jørgensen, Norway interpreted its Svalbard mandate for a long time, even after World War II, as that of administration instead of actual governing (Jørgensen 2020: 85). The war did, however, reveal Svalbard's strategic importance to the

Soviet Union, leading foreign minister Vyacheslav Molotov in 1944 to suggest a Soviet-Norwegian condominium on Svalbard, Soviet annexation of Bjørnøya and joint militarization of the archipelago (Eriksen 1989: 117). This unfolded as Norway was still under German occupation and shortly after the Red Army had commenced the liberation of Finnmark, i.e. at a time when border revisions and spheres of influence in post-war Europe were being discussed regularly. Molotov cited economic, military/strategic and historical reasons for why revising the treaty was necessary to protect Soviet interests (Holtsmark 2004: 7; Bones & Myklebost 2025: 94). Although the Norwegian government ultimately managed to decline the Soviet demand in 1947, it had become clear that the archipelago was no longer a peripheral outpost free of strategic importance. Despite being perceived as such by Molotov and his cadres, the military leadership viewed things differently. According to Sven G. Holtsmark, they held it that the archipelago was of limited value as the Northern Fleet was littoral and had a defensive posture, although this would later change (Holtsmark 1993: 132; Tamnes 1991: 104). Instead, Soviet Svalbard policy aimed at maintaining the *status quo* and making further political developments a bilateral issue to be resolved by Norway and the Soviet Union without including other parties to the treaty, effectively seeking to establish a form of *de facto* condominium (Tamnes 1997: 34). Stian Bones and Kari Aga Myklebost have revealed how, to achieve this goal, the Soviet Union used strategies of subversion to exhaust and hollow out the Norwegian government authority during the Cold War (Bones & Myklebost 2025: 101).

The development did little to alter the *laissez faire* regime, and as reconstruction commenced the Norwegian Svalbard policy remained the same. It did, however, prove that Norwegian authorities needed to pay closer attention to the developments to avoid heightened tensions and Soviet challenges to Norwegian sovereignty. This became even more apparent as Norway cofounded NATO in 1949 and when it was affirmed that Svalbard was part of its defense area in 1951. This led to the second era in Norwegian Svalbard policy, known as the verbal period. Like the last, it was characterized by a continued minimalistic regime but with greater state attention and more internal discussion about future Svalbard policy (Østreng 1975: 108).

Meanwhile, important developments occurred on the mainland, with the concepts of deterrence and reassurance towards the Soviet Union and integration and screening towards Norway's allies becoming important pillars of Norwegian security policy (Riste 2005: 210; Skogrand 2008: 105). In addition to specific self-imposed restrictions, e.g. a low military profile on Svalbard, it was in its essence measures aimed at keeping the High North as a low-tension area and maintaining relatively good relations with the Soviet Union (Tamnes 1997: 100). The continued minimalistic regime and Norwegian restraint regarding asserting sovereignty should therefore be understood within this context, as a Norwegian consolidation of power on the archipelago was expected to be viewed provocatively by the Soviets (Tamnes 1992: 67). The "airport affair" which arose in 1956 when a private enterprise planned to establish an airport outside Ny-Ålesund, is an example of such restraint. The Norwegian government was initially positive about the airport, acknowledging its logistical value, but turned negative after the Soviet accusations of militarization (Den utvidede utenriks og konstitusjonskomiteen (DUUK)

1959). These accusations were not completely unfounded, as part of the project's planning stage was indirectly funded by the U.S military and one of the project's main instigators was an active-duty officer in the Norwegian army (Tamnes 1992: 20). Despite the factual, albeit loose, military connections, the Soviet opposition was categorical. The airport had a military potential, and according to the Soviet interpretation of the treaty, this was enough to term it a violation of article 9 (DUUK 1959), stipulating that the archipelago should be kept permanently demilitarised. The Norwegian government therefore chose to intervene to avoid heightened tensions and potential Soviet reactions (Tamnes 1992: 67). The Ny-Ålesund airport did not get built.

The implications of article 9 were one of the main points of disagreement during the Cold War. The Soviet Union insisted on full demilitarization, while Norway held that the limitations in essence implied a ban on military bases, as well as using the archipelago offensively, but did not rule out visits by Norwegian naval vessels and military aircrafts, or taking measures to defend it in wartime (Ulfstein 1995: 476, Løvenskiold & Mysanger 2023: 180–181). A civilian airport was therefore considered to be in compliance with the treaty, and Norwegian governments continued to pursue it as a state-run project. Even though a sovereign state should have been free to build a civilian airport on its own sovereign territory, the idea was not brought to fruition until a bilateral agreement was concluded with the Soviets in 1974. Although the airport was built and controlled by Norway, the decision to construct it was made bilaterally – exactly the way the Soviet Union wanted decisions about Svalbard to be made.

By the 1960s the challenges started to mount up for Norwegian authorities. The Kings Bay accident of 1962 revealed an insufficient political control of the state-owned coal company, and in Longyearbyen Store Norske's financial difficulties led some to discuss shutting down the mining operations, which would all but eradicate the Norwegian presence (Kvello 2004: 11). The biggest challenge, however, was that geological surveys had revealed the possibility of discovering workable oil and gas deposits. From 1960, companies from Norway, USA, Western-Europe and the Soviet Union began land-based oil and gas exploration on Svalbard, which brought new administrative and environmental challenges. The potential ramifications of discovering workable sites were, however, of far greater concern. Under the current regime, American and Western-European companies would be allowed to establish a presence on the archipelago under the same terms as the Soviets, in accordance with the treaty's central principle of non-discrimination. Autonomous Soviet settlements were challenging enough; autonomous Soviet and American settlements side by side could pose existential challenges to Norwegian rule. While the Soviet Union was still the primary threat to Norwegian sovereignty, foreign or domestic third parties could provoke Soviet reactions. Rolf Tamnes (1992: 6) therefore termed actors like Norwegian and other western oil companies a secondary threat to Norwegian sovereignty.

To make matters worse, Svalbard's strategic significance for the Soviet Union increased as its Northern Fleet and naval bases at the Kola peninsula expanded. The strategic concerns that had prompted Molotov to suggest bilaterally revising the treaty became more relevant than ever before, as Svalbard was strategically located vis-à-vis the Northern Fleet's primary transit route and operational area (Østreng 1982: 19). Control

of Svalbard in the event of war became part of the bastion defense aimed at protecting the Soviet Union's second-strike capability and access to the Norwegian sea (MccGwire 1987: 151). The control was not as much necessitated by the Soviet's need to use the archipelago for war purposes themselves, but rather to deny NATO the opportunity to utilize it against the Northern Fleet (Tamnes 1987: 34). The Soviet naval doctrine therefore planned for submarine barriers in both the Bear-gap and the GIUK-gap to establish sea control in the Barents Sea and sea denial in the Norwegian Sea (Tamnes 2017: 11). Svalbard was given little heed in US war plans up until the 1980s, but the development was closely monitored, and Norwegian sovereignty was firmly backed diplomatically, if not militarily, due to actual and Norwegian self-imposed restrictions (Tamnes 2020: 155 163). Furthermore, détente, while generally decreasing tensions in central Europe, led to increased pressure on the flanks and a renewed interest from both the United States and the Soviet Union in the Norwegian High North (Tamnes 1991: 234–237). Combined, these challenges forced Norway to adopt a far more active Svalbard policy that initially led to drastically increased funding for the governor, giving him more resources to carry out his new orders.

In the 1970s the action period gained momentum. Around 50 % of the archipelago was protected in 1973 in accordance with article 2 of the Svalbard Treaty which grants Norway the responsibility to look after Svalbard's flora and fauna (The Svalbard Treaty 1920). While officially aimed at and legitimated by environmental concerns, it was evidently a useful tool for limiting unwanted business activity and presence in certain areas by the "secondary threats" (Jørgensen 2020: 94). That is at least how the Soviets interpreted the regime, leading to formal protests.

Regardless of its real intent, the environmental protection regime had to be enforced. Although this stemmed the pressure from the oil and gas industry, it was still considered necessary to curtail the Soviet autonomy. Doing so demanded the enforcement of both new and old laws and setting new precedents for how Svalbard was to be governed. One of the primary issues, but also opportunities in this context was aviation regulation.

As regular flights to Svalbard became the norm, aviation regulation became necessary to avert potentially catastrophic accidents between flights bound for Longyearbyen and Soviet helicopters stationed at Kapp Heer, less than 35 kilometers further west. Although this should have been in Norway's and the Soviet Union's common interest, it fundamentally undermined the Soviet interpretation of the legal regime as the laws were enacted without prior consultation. As a result, Soviet helicopters disregarded numerous Norwegian regulations, like the requirement to communicate with air traffic control in Longyearbyen. Unsurprisingly, this led to Soviet helicopters and SAS flights occasionally coming on collision course, although catastrophes were averted (Utenriksdepartementet (UD) 1978a). Other issues included flights without prior authorization, unauthorized landings in national parks, the use of a mobile approach radar without a permit, and perhaps most notably the fact that the helicopter base itself was most likely a covert military base up until the 1990s (Horensma 1991: 155; Arlov 2011: 290-291; UD 1975). In relation to the Hopen crisis, there is especially one incident that is highly relevant and deeply related to its management.

In 1977, Governor Leif Eldring accidentally stumbled upon the wreck of a Soviet Mil Mi-8 helicopter from Kapp Heer, while out on a routine inspection flight in his newly

acquired helicopter, on a glacier a few kilometers north of the Polish research station in Hornsund. He notified the Soviet consul, and Trust Arktikugol's management, of his intent to investigate the crash with the help of the Norwegian accident investigation board and ordered them to leave the wreckage untouched. However, before the investigation board could reach the scene, the Soviets removed several components that were vital to the investigation, claiming the helicopter had not crashed, but merely been damaged in the incident (UD 1977a). This proved to be untrue, as the wreck was later cannibalized and used for spare parts for the remaining helicopters at Kapp Heer. The investigation was further hampered by Soviet refusal to allow first-hand statements from the crew, forcing the aircraft investigation board to rely exclusively on second-hand accounts provided by the Soviet consulate. The board eventually filed their report which concluded that human error most likely caused the accident, but it was severely lacking, and technical errors could not be ruled out (UD 1977b). The board also noted that either the consul's protest originated from a misinterpretation of the Chicago convention on International Civil Aviation, or that he denied facts because of special motives (UD 1977c).

It could be argued that investigating a crash involving a helicopter type that was not used in Norway, apart from at Kapp Heer, had limited value for the safety of the Norwegian civil aviation. The effort to investigate the crash can therefore be understood as a demonstrative act aimed at curtailing the autonomy of the Soviet enclaves and expanding the Norwegian freedom of action, or as a test balloon aimed at gauging Soviet respect for Norwegian authority (Mouritzen 2022: 6). The Soviet refusal to collaborate in the investigation undermined Norwegian sovereignty. It was clear that the attempts to enforce Norwegian laws and putting an end to the Soviet autonomy would not go unchallenged. The enforcement of Norwegian laws did not perhaps infringe on Soviet security interests directly but was still meddling with the legal practice and scope of action. As Willy Østreng argues, protecting Soviet influence on Svalbard was directly tied to protecting Soviet military strategic interests in the surrounding waters (Østreng 2025: 51). The unwanted Soviet interference had led to an unsatisfactory conclusion that it could only have been avoided had the governor arrived at the accident scene before the Soviets had time to react. The governor could not be everywhere at once, and it was unlikely that the Soviets would ever notify him of such incidents. Successfully handling similar incidents in the future was therefore dependent on a good amount of luck, but also on quick resolve.

3. The governor strikes back

In 1978, suspicions regarding the helicopter base at Kapp Heer reached a climax. Norwegian tabloids claimed the facility was a military installation and the Norwegian government had lost control of Svalbard. The Norwegian public was losing faith in the government's ability to protect and enforce Norwegian sovereignty. The U.S. state department closely monitored the developments and expressed full support for the increasingly assertive Norwegian Svalbard policy in annual bilateral Svalbard talks (U.S. Department of state (U.S. DoS 1979b)). But the support did not come without warnings. Since 1974, they had in fact been warning Norway that the Soviet Union might seek to erode Norwegian sovereignty on Svalbard to further its own strategic interests in the area

(U.S. DoS 1974). As the Kapp Heer affair reached its climax the wreck of a recently crashed Soviet maritime patrol aircraft was discovered on the island of Hopen. Norwegian authorities were presented with a full-blown crisis. Yet as the adage goes, a crisis is also an opportunity.

The Hopen accident had the potential to further undermine Norwegian sovereignty and send Russophobia soaring among the public. Combined with Kapp Heer, it conjured an image of a powerless Norwegian administration that had allowed Svalbard to become a spy-infested *locus liber* for the Soviet Union. On the other hand, if handled successfully, it could help cement Norwegian rule and the governor's authority, as well as reassuring the Norwegian public and Norway's allies about who's in charge on the archipelago.

It all depended on a successful outcome and avoidance of a repetition of the failed investigation into the helicopter crash in 1977. The key to this was to be the first on the scene and create what Jacob Børresen referred to as a *fait accompli,* making the Soviet Union the reactionary party of the crisis (Børresen 2013: 107-108). Loosely based on Halvard Tjelmeland's account, the Norwegian governments priorities in the crisis can be summarized as follows: The primary aim was to conduct a thorough investigation of the crash without an unwanted Soviet interference, thereby strengthening Norwegian sovereignty. Simultaneously, it was crucial to minimize the foreign policy fallout and detrimental effects to the bilateral relationship. To achieve this, it was essential to reach the scene first and secure vital pieces of wreckage, including the flight data recorder. To mitigate the damage caused to the bilateral relationship it was important that the Soviet authorities were notified through the proper channels and that Soviet observers were allowed to participate in accordance with international law. Finally, to prevent escalation, it later became important to decode the flight recorder on the Norwegian soil (Tjelmeland 2015: 500–501). The following is a summary of the chain of events, which has already been described in the concise works on the subject while omitting certain details, necessary to fully explain and appreciate the handling of the crisis.

Due to the circumstances of the crash, the odds were in the Norwegian government's favour. After the Northern Fleet lost contact with the aircraft, on 28 August, the Soviets initiated a search and rescue operation in the Barents Sea but stayed clear of Svalbard. On 30 August, two people from the Hopen's four-man weather station accidently stumbled upon the crash site while hiking to a cabin in the south of the island. They quickly returned and notified their superiors in Tromsø, who further notified the governor (Justisdepartementet (JD) 1978a). If it hadn't been for the crew of the island's weather station, considerable time could have passed before the wreck was discovered. Had the crash occurred in an unpopulated area, it could have afforded the Soviets ample opportunity to retrieve the wreckage covertly. The fact that the crash occurred in an area with an exclusively Norwegian presence must therefore be termed fortunate.

Back in Longyearbyen, Governor Jan Grøndahl, who had just succeeded Leif Eldring in February of the same year, had barely returned from his summer vacation as he was notified of the incident (Arlov 2011: 292). It was clear that the incident had to be investigated, but first, however unlikely it was that any of the crew had survived, he had to treat the incident as a search and rescue operation. Regardless, he had to make his way to Hopen, which was at the very extreme of his newly acquired helicopters' operational

range. Backup plans were therefore quickly prepared to have the governor transferred to a Sea King helicopter at Sørkapp (JD 1978b).

The Norwegian search and rescue agency, seemingly treating this as any other accident, failing to understand the delicacy of the situation, urged the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) to contact Murmansk to attain details about the plane and its crew. The Norwegian MFA promptly declared that nobody but them were to contact the Soviet authorities (JD 1978b). The search and rescue service in Murmansk was later informed at 08:26 on 31 August, presumably by the Norwegian MFA, hours before the governor would reach the scene and before it was clear that he would be able to land there at all. Furthermore, representatives of the weather service and the Norwegian armed forces leaked information about the incident to the press, despite having been ordered not to do so by the MFA the day prior (Arlov 2011: 293; JD 1978b). In the morning of 31 August Norwegian tabloids brough news of the crash, informing the Norwegian public and Soviet officials alike. This lack of situational awareness could have had large ramifications for the further development of the crisis. It was important that the governor arrived at the scene first, and notifying Soviet authorities could jeopardize that. It was diplomatically important that the Soviet ambassador in Oslo was informed directly about the incident, through proper channels and not through Norwegian tabloids. Unfortunately, it happened exactly the other way round.

The governor arrived on the accident scene at 11:00 on 31 August. Nine hours later it was ascertained that all those onboard the fallen aircraft had perished and the search and rescue operation was called off (JD 1978c). The investigation phase could now begin, and the aircraft investigation board along with Soviet observers arrived the following evening. Meanwhile, a flock of seemingly civilian ships, along with submarine periscopes, dotted the waters outside the territorial limit and the missile cruiser Marshall Timoschenko arrived carrying a crew of over 2 000 men (Jørgensen 2010: 33; Tamnes 1997: 261).[2] Although no verbal threats had been made yet, this show-of-force or political use of the military signaled what the USSR could potentially do, thereby increasing the pressure on the Norwegian authorities (Åtland et al. 2022: 65–66).

4. Threats, bluffs and protests

With the investigation underway Norway's minister of foreign affairs, Knut Frydenlund, met the Soviet ambassador to Norway, Jurij Kiritsjenko. The meeting was afterwards described as "*occasionally unpleasant*" by a Norwegian MFA employee (U.S. DoS 1978a). While angered by having been informed about the incident through the press, the ambassador demanded access to and possession of the wreckage, and that the Soviets themselves would be allowed to remove it. He threatened a severe escalation and stated that the naval infantry onboard the Marshall Timoschenko could at any time go ashore and remove the wreckage (Tamnes 1997: 261). Jacob Børresen argues that due to the *fait accompli* that was established by the governor and the coast guard presence, such an act

[2] This number seems disproportionately large for a ship of this size (designed for a crew of about 350) but is widely cited as carrying 2000 men. The number might be referencing the combined Soviet personnel in the area, placed on different ships, submarines and aircraft.

would not be possible without the use of force (Børresen 2013: 108). Whether such an incursion would be enough to trigger article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty is debatable, but violating both the Norwegian sovereignty and the Svalbard Treaty in this manner would still risk a US interference.

Geir Ulfstein argues that the treaty allows Norway and its allies to respond to such violations with military force (Ulfstein 1995: 362). Norway's NATO allies might not have been directly involved in the crisis, or taken measures to protect Svalbard, but the security guarantee alone still constituted a strict limitation on the Soviet scope of action (Berg & Dodds 2023: 31). However unlikely it was that the Soviets would follow through on this threat, it was taken seriously. The Norwegian government caved in, setting a deadline for the aircraft investigation board at 14:00 on 3 September. Fifty men were set ashore unarmed and allowed to retrieve the debris under the supervision of the governor, while still retaining the flight data recorder for further investigation. The aircraft investigation board was dissatisfied and considered the mere forty-two hours they had been allocated as insufficient to conduct a proper investigation (JD 1979a). Although investigating the crash had top priority, mitigating the damage caused to the bilateral relationship was still considered important. The threats therefore succeeded in restricting the Norwegian freedom of action (Mouritzen 2022: 8). Børresen, on the other hand, argues that the Norwegian government stood firm, but, although the Norwegians managed to retain the flight recorder, the Soviets succeeded in foiling the investigation somewhat (Børresen 2013: 108).

A similar incident had occurred in 1967, when a French maritime reconnaissance plane crashed on the Prince Charles Foreland. The aircraft made a navigational error during a military exercise in the Greenland Sea and the entire crew perished in the incident. During the search, a submarine entered the Foreland sound and a surface ship later brought out the casualties. According to Thor B. Arlov, the Norwegian authorities unsuccessfully attempted to stop this and later granted permission *post festum* to make the violation of Norwegian sovereignty less severe (Arlov 2020: 66-67). This became publicly known but was not met with Soviet protests at the time and was not used against the Norwegian government in the initial phases of the Hopen crisis either, although this precedent could have served as a potent argument for the Soviets during the most critical hours of the crisis. When it eventually was used in the crisis' aftermath, it was too late, as the entire ordeal was a foregone conclusion (Forsvarsdepartementet (FD) 1979).

With the flight recorder secured, the investigations board would hopefully be able to attain the data they needed to submit a satisfactory report, presumably revealing it as a navigational error. There was only one problem: there were no domestic capability in Norway for decoding flight recorders, as standard procedure was to send these to the United Kingdom (Tamnes 1997: 261). When the Soviet ambassador was informed about the intent to do this, he stated it would be regarded as an "unfriendly act."[3] This strong diplomatic wording was clearly intended to pressure the Norwegian government into surrendering the flight data recorder, and any hope of exercising Norwegian jurisdiction

[3] "En uvennlig handling", author's translation.

along with it. While not going as far as terming it a "hostile act", the formulation still made withholding the flight recorder more costly for Norway, considering the country's interest in maintaining good relations with the Soviet Union. The Soviet ambassador argued that withholding the flight recorder was a violation of international law and furthermore stated that the Norwegians would be unable to "crack the code" regardless (JD 1979b; U.S. DoS 1978b). Instead, he offered that Norwegian observers could be present while the Soviets themselves decoded the flight data recorder in Moscow or alternatively at the Soviet embassy in Oslo (DUUK 1978a). By simply withholding it, he claimed, Norwegian-Soviet relations would go down the drain and be seriously damaged for years to come (U.S. DoS 1979a). Once again, the Soviets attempted to use the interests of the Norwegian government against itself.

Due to the potential ramifications of the Norwegian government's confrontational line in this matter, it was decided to inform both NATO and the opposition in the Norwegian parliament. Standing firm could have severe consequences and it was important to make sure that the government had the necessary backing of the Norwegian allies, as well as the Norwegian parliament (Tamnes 1997: 262; FD 1978). Support from the former was later described by Knut Frydenlund as especially reassuring while he found himself in the midst of the crisis (Frydenlund 1982: 100). By relying on NATO's security guaranties, the government was balancing externally, giving it the necessary deterrence to confidently pursue a confrontational line (Schweller 2004: 179–180). The opposition gave the government its full support, too. The threats regarding the future of the Norwegian-Soviet relationship were deemed to be bluff, but it was of vital importance that this perception did not leak to the press as it could force the Soviets to follow through (DUUK 1978a). This had in fact occurred after a prior committee meeting, and with one of the most notorious spies in Norwegian history (Arne Treholt) present, the chances of Soviet authorities being informed about the parliament's views on this matter were potentially high (DUUK 1978a).

Opinions about the importance of the flight data recorder varied among Norwegian experts, with some stating it probably contained limited relevant information for the further investigation, as they considered the accident to be a result of a textbook navigational error (U.S. DoS 1978a; U.S. DoS 1978b). Others viewed it as fundamental, considering the short time the accident investigation board had been given on Hopen. Concerns that the recorder's contents were rapidly deteriorating put a time pressure on the government to reach a decision (DUUK 1978a). Regardless, the statements made by the Soviet ambassador made decoding it without Soviet interference a matter of principle. According to foreign minister Frydenlund, the decision to do so was also largely influenced by public opinion, clearly demonstrating how media pressure can shape foreign policy (U.S. DoS 1978b). Additionally, as noted by Hallvard Tjelmeland, media coverage of earlier incidents had contributed to restricting the government's room for maneuver in this question (Tjelmeland 2015: 501). The government set its course, and the flight data recorder had to be decoded regardless of its contents.

Sending it abroad meant escalating the crisis. Handing it to the Soviets meant defeat and a further loss of public faith in the government's ability to enforce Norwegian sovereignty. Lodged between a rock and a hard place, the government and parliamentary

opposition still agreed that sending the flight data recorder to Farnborough was preferrable (DUUK 1978a). In an effort to expand their scope of action, the government found a third option (Fermann 2014: 40). The Norwegian defense research institute at Kjeller (FFI) could attempt to develop the capability to decode the flight data recorder domestically. Doing so would provide a way to bring the crisis to a successful end without either escalating or surrendering.

FFI managed to decode the flight data recorder in October 1978, and the aircraft investigation board proceeded to analyze the data and finish its report of the accident. This work was concluded in June 1979 and presented to Soviet authorities in accordance with the Chicago convention. The accident report revealed to no surprise that the crash had occurred due to a navigational error, although some has suggested that the violation of Svalbard air space was intentional.[4] The board initially wanted to include a statement, declaring that the work at Hopen had been done under time pressure from the Norwegian government, essentially admitting that the work had not been as thorough as they would have preferred. The statement admitted that the Soviets had been somewhat successful in thwarting the enforcement of Norwegian sovereignty by pressuring the Norwegian government into giving them access to the wreckage. Due to the potential foreign policy impact the government forced the investigation board to withdraw the statement from the report's final draft (JD 1979a).

On 11 June 1979, a representative from the Soviet embassy in Norway knocked on the door of the accident investigation boards headquarters. He handed the report back to the employees and said, "*One cannot accept a document that has been compiled on the basis of actions that are contrary to the generally recognized principles of international law concerning the inviolability of a foreign state's property*" (JD 1979c).[5] The Soviet attitude to the whole affair persisted but the crisis was now officially over and brought to a successful end.

5. Further development

The consequences to the bilateral relationship, that the Soviet ambassador had warned would go down the drain and the Norwegian government with support of the parliament had deemed a bluff, appears to have been exactly that. There were, however, a few events that were interpreted as short-term deterioration. Secretary Johan Jørgen Holst's scheduled visit to the USSR was postponed early in the crisis, but he was welcomed again by late November the same year (DUUK 1978b). The Norwegian defense attaché in Moscow reported an increased reluctance to allow him to visit facilities and institutions he previously was free to visit, a development he claimed started after the Hopen crisis (FD 1980). Such withholding of cooperation can be considered a minor punitive action,

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[4] Several journalists conducting research into the accident state that the investigation board suspected the Tu-16 was headed toward a chain of DECCA radio transmitters placed in Storfjorden by the Norwegian Polar institute. The MFA allegedly forced the investigation board to remove this conjecture as the Norwegian government found it difficult to treat the crash as an intentional violation of Norwegian air space by a military aircraft (see Hansen et al. 2015 and Totland 2016: 137–138). This is based on a folder from the MFA that, unfortunately, I was not given access to in 2019–2021.

[5] Author's translation.

used to "strike back", but could be just as costly for the "aggressor" if they themselves has an interest in cooperation with the target country (Hall 2015: 50). This appears to have been the case in this context, as a five-year cultural agreement was signed just eleven days after the ambassador's threats (U.S. DoS 1979a). During a visit to Moscow by a delegation of the Norwegian Labour Party, the Hopen crisis was discussed with the Soviet deputy foreign minister Igor Zemskov. He told the Labour Party leader Reiulf Steen that the way Norwegian authorities had handled the incident was incomprehensible and brought up how the French had been treated in 1967. The most concerning part of the whole ordeal was what he claimed was a Norwegian unwillingness to cooperate (FD 1979). As Hallvard Tjelmeland has written, the relationship was temporarily damaged, but returned to normalcy by itself, as the Norwegian interest of maintaining good relations was reciprocal (Tjelmeland 2015: 501). It was perhaps most of all considered a humiliation, as Rolf Tamnes has suggested (1997: 45). On the subject of "anger diplomacy" as a coercive measure, Todd H. Hall (2015: 48) notes that failed attempts by the offensive party signals weakness and reveals impotence that could only be avoided through escalation, which the Soviet Union evidently did not wish to pursue.

In relation to media and public perception of Norwegian sovereignty the results can be described as mixed. According to Thor B. Arlov (2011: 295), foreign minister Knut Frydenlund came off as doubtful and wavering, while the governor managed to show decisiveness and adamancy. This was still not the main objective of the crisis, and one could certainly argue that the Norwegian authorities at least managed to avoid the detrimental impact that an unsuccessful end to the crisis could have caused. Its relation to Kapp Heer in terms of the media coverage is interesting given that the situation there was practically unresolvable. Sanctions against it could stem the public outcry but could also harbour severe foreign policy implications. Kapp Heer was unrelated to the Hopen crisis and successfully handling it did not resolve the issues there, but in the eyes of the public they were viewed in relation to one another. The Hopen accident essentially gave the government a crisis that could be resolved, and I would therefore argue that the crisis in hindsight occurred at a convenient time for the Norwegian authorities, although it is doubtful that they viewed it that way as events were unfolding.

The handling and successful outcome of the Hopen-crisis was a breakthrough in the effort to curtail the Soviet autonomy on Svalbard, but there is little evidence to suggest that it improved the situation and provided more freedom of action to enforce Norwegian laws there. The Soviet opposition against unilaterally enacted legislation persisted, although the situation was reported to be somewhat improved as aviation regulations were eased up. The previous aviation regulation demanded that the Soviets had to apply for permission before every flight from Kapp Heer, but from November 1978 they only had to notify Longyearbyen about their planned flight paths in advance (UD 1978b). It's also worth mentioning that the public administration act was made applicable to Svalbard on 1 January 1978, prior to the Hopen crisis, and has been credited by Jørgen Holten Jørgensen for improving the situation. This gave the Soviets a channel for influencing the Norwegian Svalbard policy, which was perfectly legitimate and the norm on the mainland (Rowe, Hønneland & Jørgensen 2022:53).

In direct relation to jurisdiction and the governor's right to enforce Norwegian laws in the Soviet communities there are especially two post-1978 incidents that stand out as highly relevant. The first concerned a fire in a cabin owned by Trust Arktikugol. What became known as the fire incident, was less dramatic than the Hopen crisis, but in principle very similar and led to statements from the Soviet consulate that were interpreted seriously by the Norwegian MFA. Just like in 1977, the governor informed the Soviet leadership on Svalbard of his intent to investigate the incident and collect first-hand statements from eyewitnesses. The Soviet consulate stated that they would handle the investigation themselves and furthermore questioned whether the governor had the legal basis to carry out such investigations at all (UD 1979a). The governor persisted, and this time all eyewitnesses were sent back to the Soviet Union, undermining the governor's investigations yet again. The Hopen crisis might have proved that Norwegian authorities were willing and able to enforce Norwegian laws, but this incident demonstrates clearly that the Soviet adherence was still lacking, and how vital the issue of compliance remained in the process of enforcing Norwegian laws in matters that necessitated Soviet cooperation.

In conversation with the Soviet vice-consul, the governor was informed that the Soviet view of jurisdiction on Svalbard was that Norwegian law was only applicable to Norwegians, while Soviet citizens were under the Soviet jurisdiction (UD 1979b). The vice-consul even openly stated that the Soviets did not recognize the Svalbard act of 1925 that specified which laws were made applicable to the archipelago and made it a part of the Kingdom of Norway (UD 1979a). These were serious statements that led to great concern in the Norwegian MFA, revealing that the Soviet view on Norwegian rule had drastically deteriorated. It directly contradicted previous statements where Soviet officials had recognized Norway's sole right to enact laws on the archipelago, so long as they were not in violation with the treaty (UD 1979c). It was initially interpreted as an intentional policy change that had to be viewed in relation to previous incidents. Although the Hopen crisis was not named explicitly, the accident investigation board's report had just been submitted and shared with the Soviet authorities as the fire incident was unfolding (UD 1979c). Soviet officials later retracted the above-quoted statements, but the mere fact that they had been made was deeply concerning. This could be interpreted as an attempt to punish Norway for its change of policy and deter further attempts at enforcing Norwegian laws.

The second relevant incident came in 1983, when another helicopter from Kapp Heer crashed near Hansbreen north of the Polish research station in Hornsund, providing us with an especially relevant case. The media coverage of this event described the incident as unproblematic, that the investigation was unhampered and that the governor discovered the wreck on the day of the crash during a routine inspection flight (Nordlys 1983: 2 & 8). The Norwegian Minister of Justice (MoJ) Mona Røkke told the press that the Soviets had not notified the governor about the crash, but that there was no indication of them not intending to do so either (Arbeiderbladet 1983: 11). Although the governor's handling of the incident was successful, the statement from the Norwegian MoJ relating to the Soviets' respect for Norwegian law still puts their obedience in doubt.

This incident has been untouched in the research literature, as documents regarding the crash remain classified. Still, according to a Norwegian journalist, the incident was far less harmonious than the official statements from the Norwegian MoJ would have us believe. Based on first-hand accounts from one of the helicopter's Polish passengers, he claims the governor was notified of the incident by the Polish research station in Hornsund, after the Soviets had picked up their pilots and left the Polish passengers behind. When the governor arrived at the scene, the Soviet salvage operation was already under way. Despite initial protests, they eventually allowed the governor to do his work (Amundsen 2024: 87). The lack of primary archive sources verifying the account is problematic, but regardless of whether we trust the available accounts, there is little evidence to show that the Soviets proved cooperative and had come to accept the governor's authority and Norwegian laws. The fact that the governor yet again stumbled upon the wreck by accident, which was confirmed by official statements, seems suspicious and the statement from the MoJ claiming there was no indication that the Soviets did not intend to notify the Norwegian authorities about the accident suggest that the governor arrived at the scene before they had time to react. According to a Senior Inspector at the Civil Aviation Administration, they were not involved in the investigation which was conducted by the governor's office, and the wreck was released to the Soviets the following evening (Sunnanå 1983: 7, Morgenbladet 1983: 7). The investigation appears to have been expedited, which could explain the choice not to involve the accident investigation board as was done in 1977. This incident deserves closer investigation once the relevant files are made available, but for the time being the circumstances surrounding it give little evidence to conclude that the Soviets were cooperating.

With Gorbachev's rise to power and the advent of glasnost and perestroika, the Soviets became more willing to collaborate and increasingly started to respect unilaterally enacted Norwegian laws and regulations. As the Cold War came to an end, the Berlin Wall fell and the Soviet Union dissolved, the Norwegian rule and Russian adherence on Svalbard were firmly secured (Tamnes 2020: 166–167).

Although the direct consequences of the Hopen crisis were limited, it did teach the Norwegian administration several valuable lessons. It became evident that the governor's presence at, and mobility around, accident sites were essential for enforcing Norwegian laws before the Soviets had time to react. In the wake of the fire incident, the MFA recommended to up the frequency of general inspections and official visits from the governor in Barentsburg, as well as requesting permission to establish a permanent governor's office in the town itself (UD 1979c). The latter was perhaps too ambitious, but in 1980 an office was indeed established on a Norwegian-owned parcel of land just outside town, that was later reinforced with its own car in 1986 (Jørgensen 2010: 33).

With regard to mobility, having access to a helicopter had proved invaluable on several occasions, but the Hopen crisis showed that the helicopter model that the governor used at the time was not up to the task. There was a critical need for a helicopter that would comfortably bring the governor to any part of his jurisdiction, even in severe weather conditions. Such a possibility was granted to him in 1980 (Utenriks- og konstitusjonskomiteen 1980).

6. Conclusion

This article has demonstrated how the Hopen crisis was part of a larger effort by the Norwegian authorities to curtail the autonomy that Soviet settlements on Svalbard had acquired during the *laissez faire* period. Putting an end to this was necessitated by oil and gas exploration, as well as the heightened strategic importance of the area in relation to the Soviet rearmament at the Kola peninsula. Earlier attempts to deal on Norwegian terms with Soviet accidents on Svalbard had failed, due to the governor reaching the scene too late and thus giving the Soviets time to obstruct investigation procedures. As public pressure was mounting on the Norwegian government, the crash of the Tu-16 occurred at a favourable place, and in hindsight, a convenient time considering the delicacy of the Kapp Heer affair. The Norwegian government was presented with a crisis, but at least this was a crisis that could be resolved.

The outcome of the crisis, both regarding the limited damage to the Soviet-Norwegian relationship, as well as the successful investigation, must be considered a success. As previous research has already shown, arriving at the scene first and decoding the flight data recorder in Norway was central to achieving such an outcome. Although this victory does not appear to have led to more Soviet acceptance for Norwegian governance, it was still a breakthrough. The government managed to do what it set out to, and succeeded in enforcing Norwegian law in relation to the Soviets, thereby somewhat strengthening Norwegian sovereignty. If anything, it was proof that surveillance and swift action was key to enforcement, although it does not appear to have led to larger freedom of action for Norwegians in their Svalbard policies, as proved by the Soviet response to the fire incident.

Mistakes were made along the way, but they do not appear to have had an overly negative impact on the outcome. One of these was the decision to notify Murmansk and inquire about the plane hours before anyone could say with certainty that the governor would be able to reach the scene in the foreseeable future. Another was leaking information to the press, thereby informing the Soviet ambassador through improper channels. Both mistakes can be said to have been caused by a lack of situational awareness. What's interesting in this regard is that this could be explained by the fact that the weather service, the rescue agency and even the armed forces treated this as a normal search and rescue operation, as if the plane had crashed in mainland Norway. This was in fact exactly how the Norwegian government wanted to handle the incident, but the special circumstances surrounding Svalbard necessitated that it was handled differently at an operational level. It was an extraordinary incident that some Norwegians involved sought to handle ordinarily, but handling it ordinarily was dependent upon extraordinary care and precautions. With this in mind, the lack of situational awareness is unsurprising and further underscores the importance of such awareness in all agencies involved in the execution of relevant policies.

Public pressure played a substantial role in influencing how the crisis was handled, considering how central the flight data recorder was to the crisis, and that Norway withheld it partially, if not mainly, due to public pressure. It also appears to have been a substantial motivating factor for pursuing such a confrontational line with the Soviet Union, although previous incidents show us that it was mainly pursued as part of the new and more active Svalbard policy. It appears that the question of decoding the flight

recorder eventually evolved into a nested game, aimed at appeasing the public and standing up to Soviet pressure.

An interesting aspect of the Soviet rhetoric throughout the Hopen crisis and similar incidents is the reliance on international law to further Soviet interests, especially regarding how Jacob Børresen (2013: 109) notes the fact that Norway had the international legal basis for their actions as essential for the successful outcome. Both the stipulations of the treaty, the international convention on civil aviation and general international law were actively used to attempt to stop the governor and Norwegian authorities from carrying out their investigations and maintain the minimum regime, that up until now had constituted the *status quo*. The way international law was used and at times willfully misinterpreted can be considered subversive, as it sought to weaken the Norwegian grip on the archipelago, or rather keep it weak, or alternatively coerce Norway to abandon its new policy. It can furthermore be termed covert, as it was carried out under the guise of a legal dispute, something Stian Bones and Kari Aga Myklebost have revealed as a central feature of the Russian *modus operandi* on Svalbard (Bones and Myklebost 2025: 101). Considering differing interpretations of the treaty and how international law was used against Norway, I would argue that the legal basis played a minor role in achieving a successful outcome.

Threats regarding the future of the bilateral relationship was also a central and recuring feature of the Hopen crisis, that appears to have sought to, at times successfully, limit the Norwegian freedom of action. This too could be viewed as a subversive measure aimed at increasing the cost, pressuring the Norwegian government to change its course and make the investigation a bilateral affair. Although the Soviets did manage to coerce the Norwegian government and somewhat undermine the accident investigation through their threats or "anger diplomacy", the Norwegian government still saw off the crisis by not admitting this publicly. In relation to the flight data recorder the Soviet attempts proved unsuccessful, even making preferable decoding it in Norway.

The Soviet strategies ultimately failed, and I would argue that the fact that the Norwegian government refused to allow itself to be disciplined into submission and chose to continue the effort to curtail the Soviet autonomy and push for a larger freedom of action, was perhaps one of the more important aspects of the crisis. The Norwegian government calling the Soviet bluffs is something that appears to be taken for granted in other works on the crisis, but I would argue that doing so and thereby standing up to the Soviet pressure was of fundamental importance. In contrast to the Svalbard crisis of 1944, the Norwegian government had a credible security guarantee that allowed it to stand firm in the face of Soviet pressure, while considerably limiting the Soviet Union's room for escalation.

This is still not something to be expected from Norway in this period, given its asymmetry in relation to the Soviet Union and traditional approach to foreign affairs. Taking such a confrontational stance was novel and constituted a clear break in the execution of Norwegian Svalbard policy, which up until now had been careful not to infringe on Soviet security interests. The action period might have begun in 1965 on paper, but the Hopen crisis was its trial by fire. Later incidents demonstrated that the Hopen crisis did not expand the Norwegian freedom of action, as the Soviet disobedience and self-

serving appeals to international law persisted, but it did draw a line. From here onwards, the Svalbard governor would not shy away from enforcing Norwegian law. If anything, standing up to Soviet pressure with limited consequences to the bilateral relationship gave the Norwegian administration the confidence and reassurance to continue pursuing this practice, which they ultimately succeeded in.

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