Making Iron Curtain overflights legal: Soviet–Scandinavian aviation negotiations in the early Cold War

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Abstract

This chapter examines the intersection of international politics in the early Cold War with the negotiations of bilateral aviation agreements across the East-West divide. Following the Chicago Convention of 1944 and the Bermuda Agreement of 1946, the principle of state sovereignty in the air was established internationally. As interest in air travel soared in the wake of the Second World War, states around the world negotiated a flurry of bilateral agreements facilitating international flights. The Soviet Union, however, harboured a deep mistrust of Western intentions and remained outside the expanding air networks until the mid-1950s when Norway, together with its Scandinavian neighbours Denmark and Sweden, secured bilateral agreements with the Soviet Union as the first Western states. This chapter analyses the history of the Soviet-Scandinavian negotiations and discusses the role of air mobility in Cold War politics.

Aviation technology took tremendous leaps forward during the Second World War. In the 1950s, the new advances led to a rapid expansion of civil aviation. The technology allowed for the opening of commercially viable transcontinental routes. In Europe, Scandinavian Airlines System (SAS) was at the forefront of developments, taking advantage of its local experience of Arctic airspace as it pioneered routes to North America and later to the Far East.

At the same time, the 1950s was also a time of military build-up on both sides of the Iron Curtain. The only directly shared border in Europe between the Soviet Union and a NATO member was at the northernmost point of the Scandinavian Peninsula. Northern Norway and the Soviet-controlled Kola Peninsula thus underwent radical transformations from backward fishing and peasant societies to modern industrial regions, home to massive military installations. The opposing alliances' airports, missile sites, and fleet facilities were sometimes just a few miles apart. Both sides spied intensely on each other, and by the end of the 1950s both NATO and the Soviet Union undertook regular intelligence flights along each other's borders, attempting to penetrate the veil of secrecy. In 1960, the area famously hit the headlines when the Soviets shot down an American U-2 spy plane on its way from Peshawar in Pakistan to Bodø in Norway.

In this atmosphere of militarization and political distrust, however, Norway and the Soviet Union also negotiated a legal framework for commercial overflights and landing rights in each other's territory. In order to develop regular routes to the Far East, being able to overfly Soviet airspace was of great importance to the Western European carriers. In turn, for the Soviet Union, being able to overfly the Scandinavian Peninsula was essential to establishing intercontinental routes to North America and Cuba. Hence, both states had a strong interest in reaching an agreement on aviation and flying rights.

This chapter is a study of the diplomatic process leading up to the successful negotiation of an aviation agreement between Norway, Sweden, and Denmark and the Soviet Union in March 1956. It analyses how the agreement came about and the consequences it had for aviation between the blocs during the Cold War. The chapter also considers the interwoven role of the three Scandinavian states and their pioneering multinational flag carrier, SAS, in the 1956 negotiations and subsequent talks. Although the agreement was shaped by Cold War politics it in fact remains in force to this day. The final part of the chapter therefore discusses the lasting implications of the agreement for contemporary aviation over Russian airspace.

The birth of an international aviation regime

The end of the Second World War set the stage for concerted attempts to establish a new world order.[1] With the end of the war in sight, fifty-four nations, including all the Western allies, signed the Chicago Convention in December 1944. The Convention established the basic principles governing commercial aviation, and founded the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), which in 1947 became a UN specialized agency.[2] Most of the delegations at the Chicago Convention included airline representatives as advisers. Thirty-four of these airlines also met separately to establish a non-governmental airline association. At a second airline conference at Cuba in April 1945, the International Air Transport Association (IATA) was thus founded.

Even though optimism was high regarding the possibility of creating a truly international aviation regime, the primary result of the Chicago Convention was the confirmation of the right of states to control their own airspace, as well as their right to government involvement in commercial aviation. This meant that practical matters regarding the opening and maintenance of air routes needed to be settled in bilateral negotiations between states. The so-called “Five Freedoms” agreed by the participants concerned each state’s right to award airlines from other countries the freedom of transit, landing, taking on cargo and passengers,

of unloading cargo and passengers, and of bringing passengers or cargo to and from third countries. These freedoms were to be confirmed through bilateral negotiations.[3] Throughout most of the Cold War, aviation remained one of the most state-regulated businesses in the world.[4] Each nation acted as fully sovereign within its own borders, and thus could grant the freedoms agreed upon in Chicago as they saw fit.

Aviation was certainly not the only area where many nations had what the sociologist and negotiation theorist Anselm Strauss called "overriding common stakes."[5] Between Western countries where the level of trust was quite high, international agreements on a wide range of areas were made in short time in the 1940s, bilateral aviation agreements among them. The negotiations for aviation agreements are good examples, though, of Anselm's "overriding common stakes" eventually making agreements possible despite a certain level of distrust and opposition. Under Stalin, the fear of spies ruled out Western collaboration in civil aviation, even though the Soviet Union did recognize its potential. Soviet distrust was matched by a deep suspicion in the West of allowing foreign operators access to national airspace. When the Czechoslovak airline CSA applied for an air route between Prague and Oslo in 1952, Wilhelm Evang, Head of Norwegian Military Intelligence, told the Foreign Ministry that he could see no reason to grant this application, as the only people needing an air route from Prague to Oslo would be spies. The application for this particular route was subsequently denied by the Norwegian Foreign Ministry.[6]

The first major bilateral negotiations in the world took place between the two leading airpowers of the time, the UK and the US. The resulting Bermuda Agreement of 1946 established a precedent for other countries. Subsequent years saw a flurry of activity as states and airlines hurried to negotiate agreements and start flying. Aviation was the future and no country wanted to be left behind. After or parallel to successful negotiations, the airlines involved usually conducted their own negotiations to settle more practical matters such as

route schedules, access to fuel and maintenance, the organization of ticket sales, and so on. With its vast size and strategic location, access to Soviet airspace was a prize vied for by most Western airlines. However, mounting Cold War antagonism rendered negotiations difficult.

Past Norwegian–Soviet negotiations

The idea that Norway might play a key role in a transcontinental network of air routes predated the Second World War. In 1938, three years after being awarded the first public air route concession, Det Norske Luftfartsselskap (DNL, the Norwegian Aviation Company) struck a deal with British Imperial Airways and Irish Rianta for a transatlantic route to the US from the brand-new Sola Airport outside Stavanger, via Shannon in Ireland. DNL envisioned future possibilities for a transglobal route linking the US and the Soviet Union via Norway.[7] DNL's international agreements prompted Danish, Finnish and Swedish airlines to approach DNL for talks about transatlantic cooperation. At a meeting held in Berlin in 1939, the airlines agreed that a joint Nordic consortium would be a stronger player in negotiations with the US and the Soviet Union.[8] The outbreak of the war soon put an end to this idea, though. During the war, DNL's assets were seized by the occupying Germans, while its pilots and administrators escaped and joined the Norwegian Armed Forces abroad. Towards the end of the war, the Norwegian government in exile in London established a new government subsidiary, the Norwegian Aviation Board, to prepare a restart of civil aviation after the war.[9] The government in exile also informed the Soviet authorities in January 1944 that it would like to establish aviation connections once the war was over.[10] The Soviets welcomed the idea that same month. In fact, Sweden had already made a similar request, but the Chief of the Nordic Division in the Soviet Foreign Ministry, Mr Sergeev, and the Norwegian ambassador in Moscow, Rolf Andvord, had agreed that connections with Norway were much more important. After all, Norway and the Soviet Union were allies in the war against

Germany, and Scandinavian cooperation in the air at this stage was not as obvious as it had been before the war, or as it would later be.[11]

By 1945, however, the atmosphere in the Soviet Union had changed. Answering a request for negotiations on an air route between Oslo and Moscow in the autumn of 1945, Assistant Foreign Minister Dekanozov stated categorically that the Soviet Union did not give air concessions to foreign countries, and that it did not accept foreign air routes to cross its borders. For example, existing British and US air routes to the Soviet Union ended in Teheran. Swedish diplomats seem to have told the Norwegian ambassador that they were expecting Swedish routes to Moscow to commence any time soon. Dekanozov, however, denied this, and the ambassador reported home to the Norwegian Foreign Ministry that the case of routes to Moscow was a delicate matter.[12]

In March 1946, DNL was re-established and sought to set up a weekly courier route to Moscow. Joachim G. Urby, a DNL pilot and general manager, told the Norwegian Foreign Ministry that the Soviet ambassador in Oslo was positive.[13] Accordingly, a delegation from DNL, the Foreign Ministry, and the Ministry of Transportation went to Moscow to start negotiations with the Soviet Union on 4 May 1946. Even though the routes to the Soviet Union were less important to DNL than the routes to Scandinavia and Western Europe, it was still a priority to lay foundations for the future.[14] The Soviets were willing to negotiate, but flatly rejected the possibility of foreign aeroplanes in Soviet airspace, except for newly conquered Klaipeda, the former German city of Memel. The Soviets offered Norway a route to Klaipeda from which Soviet planes and staff would take over on the final leg to Moscow. Norway probably would have accepted this, had the Soviet Union not demanded the right to routes all the way to Oslo in return.[15]

This meant that the Soviets were not going to adhere to the principle of reciprocity, which had just been established by the Chicago Convention and the Bermuda Agreement as the

basis for international negotiations. By this point, several other Western countries had also started negotiations with the Soviet Union, and it appears that they all encountered the same demands: the Soviets wanted access all the way to the Western capital, while the Western side was not allowed to operate beyond Klaipeda. The Soviets seemed to fear that civilian aeroplanes would be used for spying, and after two months the negotiations collapsed. The only Western country to make inroads was Sweden. This deal resulted not from an official bilateral agreement, but from a company-based agreement between the Swedish airline ABA and the Soviet airline Aeroflot. It entailed a route from Stockholm to Moscow via Helsinki, with Swedish planes flying Stockholm–Helsinki and Soviet planes flying Moscow–Helsinki.[16]

No other air agreements were reached for the remainder of Stalin's reign, even though the Soviet ambassador in Oslo twice proposed a restart of negotiations. In 1947 and in 1948 he suggested to Foreign Minister Molotov that an aviation agreement might be a part of a diplomatic thrust to counter the growing British and American influence in Norway.[17] Yet nothing came of the initiative, probably owing to the growing mistrust and fear of spying on either side of the Cold War divide.

New winds from the East

With Stalin's death in 1953 and Khrushchev's rise to power in 1955, East–West relations relaxed considerably. Norwegian Prime Minister Einar Gerhardsen, his wife Werna and Trade Minister Arne Skaug visited Moscow in October 1955. The trip caused an internal dispute within the ruling Labour Party, and it was strongly opposed by Foreign Minister Lange and other leading Labour politicians, who feared that Khrushchev would try to convince Gerhardsen to leave NATO and collaborate more closely with the Soviet Union. The British ambassador in Oslo, Sir Peter Scarlett, worried that the Soviet Union was wooing Norway by offering it a special treatment—a sentiment he voiced in a letter to Foreign

Minister Selwyn Lloyd immediately prior to Gerhardsen's trip.[18] Scarlett recommended that Gerhardsen be invited to Britain afterwards, to be "educated". In a recent analysis of the visit, however, the historian Stian Bones concludes that Gerhardsen was only trying to improve the bilateral relations now that Khrushchev's leadership made rapprochement between Norway and the Soviet Union possible.[19]

The thaw put air routes across the Iron Curtain back on the diplomatic agenda, although the question was not officially mentioned during the visit. A letter from Soviet Prime Minister Bulganin of 19 March 1957 to Gerhardsen—made public in the press in both Norway and the Soviet Union a week later—declared, however, that the aviation agreement was one of the tangible results of the trip.[20] Indeed, just one month after the visit of the Norwegian Prime Minister, SAS CEO Henning Throne-Holst also travelled to Moscow, in order to discuss an extension of the Swedish 1946 ABA–Aeroflot agreement with the Soviet airline. The journey was evidently planned a couple of weeks beforehand, following an invitation from Aeroflot. This was no secret, although SAS does not seem to have informed all its owner companies prior to Throne-Holst's Moscow visit: there is no evidence in the archives that the CEO wrote to the Norwegian Foreign or Transport Ministry, nor do the minutes of the SAS board mention the upcoming trip. Director Boye of the Norwegian regional SAS office informed the Foreign Ministry by phone, and only once Throne-Holst was already in Moscow. He also said that the Soviet Union still seemed to be reluctant to allow aeroplanes and personnel from NATO countries into Soviet airspace.[21]

Throne-Holst's visit to Moscow was probably driven by two reasons. The first was the Soviet Union's renewed interest in Western connections, which led to aviation agreements struck with Finland on 19 October 1955, followed by agreements with Austria on 9 November and Yugoslavia by the end of that month.[22] Soviet newspapers hailed the agreement with Finland as the very first of its kind, ushering a new era in air travel.[23] The second was the change in

Scandinavian aviation between 1946 and 1955. On 1 August 1946, DNL, ABA, and the Danish airline DLL had signed the SAS Agreement that established a joint company named SAS Overseas, designed to handle transatlantic traffic between Norway, Sweden, Denmark, and North America. On 8 February 1951, the three national airlines became purely holding companies, and SAS was made responsible for all international and domestic traffic. Any renewal of the ABA–Aeroflot agreement would therefore require the inclusion of Denmark and Norway.

Actually, there had been a renewal of sorts of the Swedish ABA–Aeroflot-agreement covering SAS two years earlier, in 1954. On 1 October 1953, the Norwegian embassy in Moscow informed the Foreign Ministry that two SAS employees had travelled to Moscow for discussions with Aeroflot, to moot a joint venture route between Stockholm and Moscow via Helsinki and Leningrad. The embassy warned that bilateral agreements between the Soviet Union and Denmark and Norway might become necessary for these discussions to proceed.[24] Nevertheless, the negotiations seem to have led to a continued company-based agreement between ABA and Aeroflot concerning the route Stockholm–Helsinki–Leningrad–Moscow. The agreement did not imply any SAS traffic over Soviet soil, as SAS was to use the route up to Helsinki only, where Aeroflot would take over as before. What was new was that both airlines could sell through tickets to Moscow or Stockholm respectively.[25]

Whether Throne-Holst had anything to do with the Swedish–Soviet amendment in 1954 is unclear. He had become a member of the SAS board in 1954 and CEO of SAS in 1955, so it is quite likely. A memo of 2 February 1956 from the Norwegian ambassador Erik Braadland in Moscow to the Foreign Ministry, mentioned that Throne-Holst had begun thinking about a new deal with the Soviet Union early in 1955, and that he thought it would be in the Soviets' interest to reach an agreement.[26]

Why would the Soviets be interested? Because they needed access to Scandinavian airspace for routes onwards to the British Isles and North America. In Braadland's view, it was not necessary to appear too eager for an agreement at any price, as it was the Soviet Union that was boxed in on its western borders. The Soviets could fly to Eastern Europe, but in order to get further west, they needed access either to West German or Scandinavian airspace. Crossing West German airspace was out of the question, since Soviet aeroplanes would first have to cross East German or Czechoslovak airspace, and West Germany recognized neither country and could therefore not engage in bilateral aviation negotiations with them.

Even so, the Soviets appeared somewhat reserved at first. Throne-Holst initially suggested a renewal of the ABA–Aeroflot deal, using only Swedish-registered SAS planes and pilots.[27] In reaction to this, there was a meeting on 28 November between the Norwegian Foreign and Defence Minister and the new head of the Norwegian Division of SAS, Nils Langhelle.[28] Those present agreed that Norway would not block a Swedish–Soviet agreement involving the Swedish-registered parts of SAS. Such an agreement, however, would give the Soviet Union access to Swedish airspace only. If the Soviets wished to fly to or over Norway, they would need an agreement with Norway.[29]

Soviet–Scandinavian air rights negotiations in the 1950s

Throne-Holst's November meeting in Moscow led to formal Swedish–Soviet negotiations in January 1956. According to Norwegian sources, the Swedish negotiators preferred an agreement that included the whole of the SAS over a purely Swedish–Soviet agreement. Towards the end of the month, the Soviet negotiators for the first time indicated that they might also be interested in an agreement with Norway and Denmark.[30] Soviet diplomats continued to tell the press that they preferred a purely Swedish–Soviet agreement, due to Norway's and Denmark's NATO membership.[31] Behind closed doors, though, they suggested

to Swedish, Danish and Norwegian diplomats that they put the Swedish–Soviet negotiations on hold for a month to await possible Norwegian and Danish overtures.[32]

At the same time, the two sides were apparently busy planting stories in the Norwegian newspaper *Verdens Gang* (VG) in order to steer the negotiations. One article mentioned how previous agreements with the US had restrictions on Swedish pilots, probably due to Sweden's neutral stance in the Second World War and after. What was left unsaid but had been implied was that some restrictions could be acceptable in a deal with the Soviet Union. Moreover, the article warned that if an agreement was not reached quickly, the Finnish airline Aero might "steal" the traffic, since Finland had already negotiated an agreement.[33] Perhaps it had been the Soviet Union that had attempted to peddle such notions in parts of the Norwegian press. Another article in *VG* toned down the need for an agreement, though, and accused the Soviet Union of trying to sow discord.[34]

In fact, the secret Soviet invitation to negotiate triggered a fast and positive response from all three Scandinavian countries. As early as 10 February 1956, the Norwegian embassy in Paris was instructed to brief its NATO partners there on the planned negotiations.[35] Moreover, the three Scandinavian governments closely aligned their positions. Sweden sent Norway and Denmark detailed accounts of its earlier negotiations with the Soviet Union.[36] The sending of a Swedish note to the Soviet Union, officially asking for negotiations, was closely coordinated with Denmark. For the Soviet Foreign Ministry, Mr Gribanov made it clear to the Norwegian embassy that rumours in the press suggesting that Norwegian NATO membership was an obstacle to an agreement were false.[37]

On 24 February, the Norwegian Foreign Ministry published a press release about the forthcoming negotiations.[38] On 9 March, the Norwegian Council of Ministers was officially informed that an agreement had been reached with the Soviet Union to start negotiations on

21 March.[39] The Norwegian ambassador was authorized to sign a deal if it were done before Easter, and if Denmark and Sweden were also ready to sign at the same time.[40]

The negotiations were conducted jointly with Denmark and Sweden, and it was intended that the joint company SAS should operate on each Scandinavian country's behalf instead of the original national airlines, DNL, DDL, and ABA. In fact, by 1956 these airlines existed in name only, as the formal joint owners of SAS. The teams from Norway, Sweden, and Denmark negotiated with the Soviet Union together, but when the agreement was signed on 31 March 1956, the four parties entered separate yet identical agreements, thus keeping them strictly bilateral. Therefore, a note was added to the agreement stating that the Soviet Union accepted the suggestion (made in a special letter from the Norwegian ambassador) that DNL should use aeroplanes and personnel from SAS, be they Norwegian, Danish, or Swedish.

The agreement was extremely specific by modern standards, and stated that all matters regarding flights between the two states, such as the price of tickets, time schedules, technical running of operations, or the number of personnel stationed (four Norwegians in Soviet Union and four Soviet citizens in Norway) should be specified in particular agreements between the two airlines.[41] The employees whom DNL were allowed to station in the Soviet Union to maintain operations could be SAS staff, though SAS as a whole could only station four employees in the Soviet Union, while the Soviet Union could deploy four in each of the three Scandinavian countries. Since DNL, DDL, and ABA were now shell companies without employees this clause stretched the principle of reciprocity: the Soviet Union was allowed to deploy twelve people in Scandinavia while the Scandinavian countries, through SAS, could only station four in the Soviet Union.

On the same date as the bilateral agreements were signed, SAS also concluded a company agreement with Aeroflot. This agreement covered maintenance issues such as rules for discounted tickets, ticket systems, conditions of carriage, and so on. The agreement referred

to the bilateral agreements, showing that both airlines were well informed of the negotiations before the actual signing.[42]

These speedy negotiations were followed by an equally speedy implementation process. The agreed-upon routes opened almost immediately. Soviet aeroplanes could operate on the Riga–Stockholm–Oslo, Moscow–Stockholm–Oslo, and Leningrad–Helsinki–Stockholm routes; Norwegian aeroplanes, Oslo–Stockholm–Riga, Oslo–Stockholm–Riga–Moscow, and Oslo–Stockholm–Helsinki–Leningrad. The agreement specified that the planes operating had to be owned and manned by Norwegian or Soviet personnel respectively. It also stressed that all rights and regulations for the airlines' operations should be reciprocal. This would prove an obstacle later, as it meant that if Norway wanted to upgrade its operations to larger planes than the Soviet Union wanted to operate, they would not be admitted on Soviet routes. All aeroplanes had to be comparable in size and capacity. If the Soviets used a twin-engine 44-seater aeroplane, Norway could not upgrade to a four-engine 80-seater.

That same summer, SAS began pushing the Soviet Union for permission to fly the more modern Convair planes instead of the already old-fashioned Scandias mentioned in the agreement. The Soviet Union announced that it might consider starting tests by flying its first proper jet passenger aircraft, the TU-104, on the route to Copenhagen, thereby making it possible for SAS to use the larger Convair in return. However, the Soviet Union claimed that the runway at Copenhagen's Kastrup Airport was too short for its jet. It took until the winter schedule started in October 1957 before SAS finally obtained permission. By then, the even newer and larger DC 6B had also been permitted to operate on the Moscow route in December, just as Aeroflot finally started using TU-104s on the Copenhagen route. In November 1956, the Norwegian Ministry of Transportation asked the Norwegian Foreign Ministry to lean on the Soviets to agree to an expansion of the route network to include another route—Oslo–Stockholm–Helsinki–Narva–Velikie Luki–Moscow—as an alternative

route and airports were needed to circumvent weather constraints. This turned out to be difficult, though. The Soviets were not prepared to expand the number of routes and airports that fast.[43]

The final agreement did not include overflying, or transit rights to points beyond. Ambassador Braadland had initially thought that obtaining this would be the primary objective of the Soviet negotiators. However, the question only came up in the talks when the Scandinavian team raised the issue, asking whether the Soviet authorities intended to start air traffic to points beyond the ones stated in the routes list. The Scandinavians signalled they were interested in such routes via Soviet airspace themselves, primarily to Pakistan or India, but also to Tokyo and Beijing. Aeroflot's director Marshal Zhavoronkov replied that the Soviet Union was also interested in points beyond. At this stage, however, such routes had too many problems and would better be left to future negotiations.[44] This came as a surprise for the Scandinavian negotiating teams, and it continues to be something of a mystery. By 1956, when the Soviet Union was finally ready to enter into aviation agreements, its main concern was not as ambassador Braadland had believed, transit rights through Norwegian airspace to third countries, but rather just routes between the USSR and Norway. Similar limits were put on subsequent agreements with other Western nations. And only three Soviet cities were opened to foreign routes: Moscow, Leningrad and Riga. One could speculate why, but I would argue that the main reasons for this somewhat baffling lack of Soviet concern was the old fear of giving foreign aeroplanes access to Soviet airspace. One hallmark of aviation is the difficulty of controlling what an aeroplane actually does in the sky. The fear of aerial espionage was strong, and the Soviet Union was not prepared to let foreign aeroplanes deeper into its airspace.

Two years later, though, on 31 August 1958, the Soviet Union did sign an addition to its aviation agreement with Denmark, allowing Danish planes to cross European Soviet airspace

en route to the Middle East. In return, Soviet planes were permitted to transit Denmark on their way to the UK, France, the Netherlands, and Belgium.[45] Remarkably, no such addition was agreed with Sweden or Norway.

In a comparative perspective, there were no significant differences between the Norwegian–Soviet agreement and the bilateral agreements the Soviet Union signed with other Western countries in the following months and years. The British ambassador's fears that the Soviet Union would woo Norway into closer relations were unfounded. Norway did not receive any special privileges in the air rights negotiations. Instead, it was the Soviet side that changed its position, having warmed to the idea of cooperation in aviation—as the Soviet ambassador in Oslo admitted during a dinner with the Norwegian Foreign Minister Hallvard Lange in March 1957.[46]

The agreement kept to the fiction of dealing with national operators, even if the Scandinavians had merged them in one company, SAS, in 1946. It was closely modelled on the two previous aviation agreements the Soviet Union had signed with Austria and Finland. Indeed, emulating the Austrian agreement was a stated ambition of the Scandinavian negotiators.[47] In practice, the agreement with the Scandinavian countries was unique insofar as SAS was the flag carrier of three nations simultaneously. But the style, content, and limitations mirrored most other Soviet bilateral aviation agreements.

Lasting impacts

In 1958, the recently retired head of SAS Overseas, Hjalmar Riiser-Larsen, was travelling to Japan on the airline's new route from Copenhagen to Tokyo to lecture on polar aviation. As a young man in the 1920s, Riiser-Larsen had attempted to cross the North Pole by air several times, before he finally succeeded in 1926 with Roald Amundsen and Umberto Nobile. Having a keen eye for PR, Riiser-Larsen made a short documentary film of the flight. Titled "Over Nordpolen", and thereby awakening memories of past heroic attempts to traverse the

inhospitable Arctic, this journey, however, was luxurious. The food and drink was good, and the cabin even had a bed for passengers who wanted to rest. Moreover, the journey lasted only a little over 30 hours. Riiser-Larsen marvelled at the wonders of modern aviation, which had made the North Pole a perfectly navigable airspace.[48] In the beginning of the film, though, the plane is seen to take a considerable detour via Alaska rather than flying directly over the Pole, which would have required permission to cross Soviet airspace.

Operating flights to the Soviet Union was not the main interest of the Norwegian negotiators in 1956. The bilateral agreements reached by the Soviets and the Scandinavians were regarded as stepping stones towards overflight rights, even if negotiations on that particular issue were postponed in 1956, and the Siberian route had to wait another fifteen years. Meanwhile, the Norwegian–Soviet aviation agreement was officially revised and supplemented in 1967, 1971, 1976, 1981, 1987, 1988, and 1989 and for the last time in 1990.[49] Its core regulations remain in force, and after 1990 there have been several, albeit sporadic, negotiations that have resulted in some informal agreements on changes and revisions. The only formal revision of the agreement after 1990 was to change the country name of the Soviet Union to Russia.[50]

The main issues driving these negotiations during the Cold War were aeroplane size and permission to transit Siberia for routes to the Far East. For the Soviet Union, by contrast, transit of Norwegian airspace to Cuba was the highest priority. The 1967 revision gave the Soviet Union the right to transit Scandinavia when bound for the US, Canada, and "one point in the Americas south of the USA." In return, SAS received permission to cross Soviet airspace via Tbilisi or Tashkent towards Asia, known as the trans-Asian route.[51]

One thing worth noting about the 1967 revision was the small but very important difference between the Norwegian and the Swedish–Danish agreements. The agreement with Norway specified that the eventual route which the Soviet Union might open to America outside the

US or Canada had to include a transit landing in the US or Canada. In practice, that made it impossible for the Soviet Union to use Norwegian airspace for direct flights to Cuba. In his presentation of the agreement to the Council of Ministers in February, the Norwegian Transport Minister also categorically stated that "the route cannot continue to Havana."[52] It was imperative for the US that the Soviet Union not be given easy air access to Cuba. Plainly, it could not deny Soviet air traffic via international airspace north of Norway, but to be able to cross Norwegian airspace towards Cuba would significantly shorten the route. The US Foreign Ministry asked Norway not to grant the Soviets this and Norway complied.[53] Denmark and Sweden did not yield to US pressure, so the Soviet Union could cross Danish airspace to Cuba without having to land in the US or Canada first. This was a more complicated route, though, involving either a negotiated path along the English Channel or a sharp turn north in the North Sea to avoid British airspace. Formally, Russia is still only allowed to transit Norway to Cuba if Russian planes make a transit landing in the US.

The 1967 revision also contained a Soviet concession that allowed SAS into Siberia when a corridor for civilian traffic became available. When this happened in 1971, it was a major asset for Scandinavian aviation.[54] The opening of the Copenhagen–Tokyo route on 3 April 1971 cut flying time by a whopping thirteen hours.[55] Nevertheless, it would be another decade before wide-bodied jets such as the DC-10 or Boeing 747 were permitted to operate on this route.[56] The Siberia corridor continued to be the trickiest part of Scandinavian negotiations with the Soviets/Russians.[57] The Soviet Union was loath to open Siberia at all for security reasons. Keeping Siberia as closed as possible to foreign eyes was (and, it seems, still is) an important security consideration. The downing of the civilian Korean aeroplane KAL 007 in 1983 was testimony to the deadly risks of not following Soviet regulations to the absolute letter.

Access to Russian airspace remains essential to contemporary aviation as traffic to Asia is growing. However, Russia has continued its traditional conservative and highly regulatory stance on aviation rights. The original part of the 1956 agreement that gave SAS a monopoly on Norwegian aviation in Russian airspace remains in place. Since the agreement specified that the planes operating had to be owned and manned by Norwegian or Soviet personnel respectively, low-cost carriers such as Norwegian Airlines operating with sub-companies and personnel registered in several different countries are barred from Russian airspace. Ever since the end of the Cold War, Scandinavian governments have sought to negotiate more flexible terms with Russia. In 2017, Norwegian Airlines was finally allowed to operate a trans-Asian route over Russia, but the trans-Siberian route remains open to SAS only, as a curious remnant of Cold War politics and old monopolistic aviation regimes.

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[1] International agreements on commercial aviation had barely begun before the Second World War. In 1919, airlines from Norway, Denmark, Sweden, Germany, and the UK met in The Hague to found the International Air Traffic Association, a predecessor to the International Air Transport Association (IATA) established by several Western airlines in 1945. Another airline-based agreement, the Warsaw Convention of 1929 (reframed as the Montreal Agreement of 1966 and Montreal Convention of 1999), limited airline liabilities on international routes.

[2] For the birth of international aviation, see Peter P. C. Haanappel, *Ratemaking in International Air Transport* (Deventer: Kluwer, 1978), 9–32; Andreas Papatheodorou, "The Impact of Civil Aviation Regimes on Leisure Travel," in *Aviation and Tourism,* ed. Anne Graham, Andreas Papatheodorou and Peter Forsyth (Farnham: Ashgate, 2008), 49–57; and Arne Rosenberg, *Air Travel within Europe* (Stockholm: National Swedish Consumer Council, 1970), 26–38.

[3] Rosenberg, *Air travel*, 28.

[4] Audun Tjomsland and Kjell G. Wilsberg, *Mot alle odds* (Oslo: Braathens SAFE, 1995), 50.

[5] Anselm Strauss, *Negotiations: Varieties, Contexts, Processes and Social Order* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1978), 159.

[6] Wilhelm Evang, Head of Norwegian Military Intelligence to the Norwegian foreign and defence ministers, 5 January 1953, Box 3556, Norwegian Foreign Ministry Archives (UD) 1950–59, Norwegian National Archives Riksarkivet (RA), Oslo, Norway.

[7] Unsigned note marked "Oslo 7.5.1943" (probably written by de facto DNL Head of Operations in 1940–43, Leif Villars-Dahl), Box "DNL's utvikling frem til SAS—Diverse brev og dokumenter 1945–47," SAS Museum Archive, Gardermoen, Norway.

[8] Ibid. 7

[9] Norwegian Aviation Board to the Norwegian government in exile in London, 22 October 1945, box marked "DNL's utvikling frem til SAS—Diverse brev og dokumenter 1945–47," SAS Museum Archive. The Norwegian Aviation Board was founded in exile in London in 1943.

[10] Norwegian Ministry of Defence in exile in London to the Foreign Ministry, 6 January 1944, Box 12017, UD 1940–49, RA.

[11] Ambassador Andvord to the Norwegian Aviation Board, 11 February 1944, Box 12017, UD 1940–49, RA.

[12] The Moscow Embassy to the Foreign Ministry, 29 September 1945, Box 12017, UD 1940–49, RA.

[13] Unsigned Foreign Ministry memoranda 15 March 1946, Box 12017, UD 1940–49, RA.

[14] Set out in a long memo by the Board of DNL, "Fremstilling av hovedtrekkene i Det Norske Luftfartsselskap A/S's utvikling 1946–1948 og forslag til retningslinjer for selskapets fremtidige virksomhet," 14 January 1949, 124, Box "DNL's utvikling frem til SAS—Diverse brev og dokumenter 1945–47," SAS Museum Archive.

[15] The Norwegian embassy to the Foreign Ministry, 15 May 1946, Box 12017, UD 1940–49, RA.

[16] The Embassy in Stockholm to the Foreign Ministry, 25 January 1954, Box 3563, Archival Code 55.15, UD 1950–59, RA, with the Swedish press release of a 1954 amendment to the 1946 agreement. Strangely, this agreement is not mentioned in the Foreign Ministry archives for 1940–49. The ongoing Swedish and Danish negotiations (which happened at the same time as the Norwegian ones) were noted, but the last reference to Swedish negotiations, in a message from the Norwegian embassy to the Foreign Ministry on 29 June 1946, was that the Swedish delegation were deeply offended, having left Moscow after five weeks without having met the Soviet negotiators once.

[17] *Norge og Sovjetunionen 1917–1955: En utenrikspolitisk dokumentasjon,* ed. Sven G. Holtsmark (Oslo: Cappelen, 1995), "Excerpt from the USSR ambassador to Norway N. D. Kuznetsov's report on Norway's strategic importance and USSR policy towards Norway, " 8 June 1946, at 376–9; and ibid., "Excerpt from the USSR ambassador to Norway N. D. Kuznetsov's correspondence to Foreign Minister V. M. Molotov on Norway's relationship with USA and Great Britain and USSR policy towards Norway," 5 May 1947, at 403–404.

[18] Knut Einar Eriksen and Helge Øystein Pharo, *Norsk Utenrikspolitikks historie*, v: *Kald krig og internasjonalisering 1949–1965* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1997), 197.

[19] Stian Bones, "Med viten og vilje: Einar Gerhardsens reise til Sovjetunionen i 1955," *Nytt Norsk Tidsskrift,* no. 3 (2006): 286.

[20] Minutes of the meeting of the Extended Foreign and Constitution Committee of the Norwegian Parliament, 23 March 1957, https://www.stortinget.no/globalassets/pdf/stortingsarkivet/duuk/1946–1965/570323u.pdf.

[21] Finn Skartum, Head of the Foreign Ministry's 5th Office of Trade Policy, memo, 23 November 1955, Box 3542, UD 1950–59, RA.

[22] Head of the Finnish negotiating team to the Head of the Soviet team, copy, 22 October 1955, Box 3542, Archival Code 55.4, UD 1950–59, RA. The letter confirmed that an agreement between Finland and the USSR had been reached on 19 October 1955, and the full agreement was attached. It is not clear how this came into the hands of the Norwegian Foreign Ministry. In the same archive box is an undated copy of the Austrian–Soviet agreement of 5 November of the same year (1955 being the year when the joint Allied–Soviet occupation of Austria ceased and Austria regained its independence, which may be why Austria was the first country after Finland to obtain an aviation agreement with the USSR).

[23] The Embassy to the Foreign Ministry, 19 October 1955, Box 3563, UD 1950–59, RA, to report Soviet press reaction to the agreement with Finland.

[24] The Embassy to the Foreign Ministry, 1 October 1953, Box 3563, UD 1950–59, RA.

[25] The Embassy in Stockholm to the Foreign Ministry, 25 January 1954, Box 3563, UD 1950–59, RA, enclosing a Swedish press release about the agreement.

[26] Ambassador Braadland in Moscow to the Foreign Ministry, 4 February 1956, Box 3542, UD 1950–59, RA, reporting the Swedish–Soviet negotiations.

[27] Finn Skartum, memo, 23 November 1955, Box 3542, UD 1950–59, RA.

[28] Nils Langhelle had been Norwegian Transport Minister in 1946, when he signed the initial agreement establishing SAS Overseas. In 1952–1954 he was Defence Minister, before he became a Norwegian Labour Party MP and Head of SAS Norwegian Division in August 1955.

[29] Finn Skartum, memo "Rettigheter for SAS i Sovjet-Samveldet," 28 November 1955, Box 3542, UD 1950–59, RA.

[30] Finn Skartum, memo "Luftfartsforhandlinger med Sovjet-Samveldet," 31 January 1956, Box 3542, UD 1950–59, RA.

[31] "Vil Sovjet springe SAS-samarbeidet?," *Aftenposten*, 8 February 1956.

[32] Finn Skartum, memo "Rettigheter for SAS i Sovjet-Samveldet", 9 February 1956, Box 3542, UD 1950–59, RA, enclosing a memo from the Swedish embassy in Oslo.

[33] "Svenskene skal fly til Moskva," *VG* (*Verdens Gang*), 9 February 1956.

[34] "SAS og Moskva," *VG*, 9 February 1956.

[35] Finn Skartum, memo "Luftfartsavtale med Sovjet-Samveldet," 10 February 1956, Box 3542, UD 1950–59, RA. It ends with Skartum's handwritten note that the Paris Delegation had been asked to inform NATO.

[36] The Swedish Embassy in Oslo to the Norwegian Foreign Ministry, 14 February 1956, Box 3542, UD 1950–59, RA, with a 54-page report on the negotiations from 27 January to 7 February.

[37] The Embassy in Moscow to the Foreign Ministry, telegram, 15 February 1956, Box 3542, UD 1950–59, RA.

[38] Foreign Ministry press release, 24 February 1956, Box 3542, UD 1950–59, RA.

[39] Foreign Minister Hallvard Lange presentation to the Council of Ministers, 9 March 1956, Box 3542, UD 1950–59, RA.

[40] The Embassy in Moscow to the Foreign Ministry, 23 March 1956, Box 3542, UD 1950–59, RA. Includes a handwritten note that the Foreign Minister gave ambassador Braadland leave to sign the agreement

[41] Contrary to aviation agreements of the kind preferred in Europe today, which usually do not go into operational details, this agreement was intended to regulate operations very closely, the specifics were integrated either into the agreement or (if to be agreed) into the sub-agreements between the two preferred airlines, DNL (later SAS) and Aeroflot.

[42] Agreement between SAS and Aeroflot, 31 March 1956, Box 3542, UD 1950–59, RA.

[43] The Ministry of Transport to the Foreign Ministry, 2 November 1956, Box 3542, Archival Code 55.4, UD 1950–59, RA, asking the Foreign Ministry to secure this alternate route in the agreement. For Soviet intransigence, see Ambassador Braadland in Moscow to the Foreign Ministry, 26 June 1957, Box 3543, UD 1950–59, RA.

[44] The Norwegian delegation to the Scandinavian aviation negotiations with the Soviet Union, report for the period 21–31 March 1956, 5 May 1956, Box 3542, UD 1950–59, RA: 9.

[45] Foreign Ministry memo 31 March 1958, Box 3542, UD 1950–59, RA.

[46] Minutes of the meeting of the Extended Foreign and Constitution Committee of the Norwegian Parliament, 23 March 1957, https://www.stortinget.no/globalassets/pdf/stortingsarkivet/duuk/1946–1965/570323u.pdf, with foreign minister Hallvard Lange's account of what the Soviet ambassador said at dinner.

[47] The Swedish Embassy to the Norwegian Foreign Ministry, 8 February 1956, Box 3542, UD 1950–59, RA, , asking for Norway's view on entering into an aviation agreement with the Soviet Union modelled on the Austrian-Soviet agreement of the autumn of 1955.

[48] Hjalmar Riiser Larsen, *Over Nordpolen*, 8 mm film (Oslo: SAS/Norsk Dokumentarfilm, 1958). The 18-minute-long film has been digitized and can be viewed at the Norwegian National Aviation Museum.

[49] Agreement between Norway and the Soviet Union concerning aviation, 31 March 1956, https://lovdata.no/dokument/TRAKTAT/traktat/1956-03-31-1.

[50] In the updated agreement on lovdata.no, the name change is annotated as "The agreement is carried on with Russia."

[51] *Norges traktater 1661–1966*, iii: *1956–1967* (Oslo: Det Kgl. Norske Utenriksdepartement, 1968), 47 and n. 1. See also the Transport Minister's presentation to the Council of Ministers, 3 February 1967, Box S-1713/D/Db/L0122, Folder 03: Luftfartsforhandlinger Sovjet 1967–68, Ministry of Transportation Archive (SD), RA.

[52] Ibid. 4.

[53] The Foreign Ministry to the Transport Ministry, the Defence Ministry, the Norwegian Civil Aviation Authority, and the Norwegian Embassy in Washington DC, 8 November 1966, Box S-1713/D/Da/L0069, SD, RA, reporting on a visit to the Foreign Ministry by the US Chargé d'affaires in Oslo, Mr Bovey. Mr Bovey delivered a US memo asking Norway to show understanding for the US view on Cuba and reject Soviet demands for transit rights to Cuba via Norwegian airspace.

[54] The Transport Minister's presentation to the Council of Ministers, 11 December 1970, Box S-1713/D/Db/L0124, SD, RA. The negotiations were prolonged—5 rounds of negotiations between 24 November 1969 and 2 October 1970—and the agreement was signed by the Soviet Aviation Minister B. P. Bugajev and the Norwegian Transport Minister Håkon Kyllingmark when Bugajev visited Oslo on 27–30 January 1971. The official records in Lovdata has the agreement, which was registered on 11 February, as effective from 19 May 1971, but SAS was allowed to start operations the month before.

[55] Anders Buraas, *Fly over fly: Historien om SAS* (Oslo: Gyldendal, 1972), 271.

[56] "Agreement between the government of Norway and the government of the Union of Socialist Republics regarding development of the Trans-Siberian route, 10 April 1981," *Overenskomster med fremmede stater 1981* (Oslo: Det Kgl. Utenriksdepartement, 1982), 693.

[57] Interview with Øyvind Ek (Head of the Aviation Section in the Norwegian Transport Ministry) by Karl L. Kleve, Oslo, Norway, 18 October 2017.