

The Korea Question and the Nordic Response: *From War Participation to Diplomatic Recognition*

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Abstract

While Korea-Nordic relations predate the liberation of the Korean peninsula from Japanese occupation, developments on the Korean peninsula became an issue in the foreign policymaking of the Nordic countries first with the division of the peninsula by the two superpowers and the move of the Korea Question to the newly established United Nations. The deliberations behind the decision by the Nordic countries to act on the United Nations request for Nordic assistance in the defense of the recently established Republic of Korea was influenced not only by humanitarian issues but also, in particular, by national security considerations Nordic countries faced in the early Cold War. All three Nordic countries decided against deploying military units in the Korean War and instead decided to assist with medical resources. Nevertheless, non-military participation provided an impetus, driven to a significant degree by the individuals involved in Nordic medical assistance, to seek diplomatic normalization between the Republic of Korea and the Nordic countries, which was finally achieved in 1959.

Keywords: Korea, Nordic countries, Korean War, diplomatic recognition, National Medical Center

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Introduction

Korea is very much in the news these days in the Nordic countries, particularly as South Korean consumer goods and the K-wave have been gaining a significant following, while South Korea's interest in the so-called Nordic model has significantly increased with regard to welfare, anti-corruption, and education issues. However, unfortunately, the impressive economic and political development of the Republic of Korea (subsequently, the terms Republic of Korea and South Korea will be used interchangeably) or the increasingly close, and diverse, relationship between South Korea and the Nordic countries did not receive most of the attention. Instead, very often the North Korean nuclear and missile issue receives most media attention in the Nordic countries. This emphasis, regrettably, blurs the fact that Korea and the Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden) for almost sixty-years have had close contact and cooperated in a variety of fields, such as education, agriculture, shipbuilding, and now alternative energy forms.¹

However, relations between the Nordic region and Korea predate the twenty-first century. Already in the early eighteenth century, Lorenz Lange, a Swede who was a Russian special envoy in Beijing from 1715 to 1717 and again in 1719, apparently met Korean diplomats on a tribute mission to China. Amanda Gardelin, also from Sweden, stayed at the court of King Kojong in the 1880s, and William Grebst visited Korea and upon his return to Sweden published *I Korea: minnen och studier från "morgonstillhetens land"* (Grebst 1912), the first Swedish book on the country. While famed Swedish explorer Sven Hedin also spent a few days in Seoul in 1908, Erland Richter and Verna Olsson, missionaries from the Salvation Army, stayed in Korea from the 1910s, with Verna Olsson having stayed on in Korea until 1938. In addition, the Danish official Janus F. Oiesen worked for several years in the 1890s as a customs officer in Wonsan. During his stay, he acquired 98 paintings by Kim Chun-gun (Kim Jun-geun 金俊根 in Revised Romaniza-

1. Trade between South Korea and the Nordic countries was more than US\$10.3 billion in 2015 (Export-Import Bank of Korea 2015).

tion; pen name: Gisan 箕山) that are currently part of the Korean collection at the Danish National Museum in Copenhagen (Petersen 2009).

However, while Korea and the Nordic countries entered into agreements on amity and commerce (Denmark, for instance, in 1902), as with other treaties Korea had, they became void due to the Eulsa Treaty of 1905 that Imperial Japan forced on the country only a few years later. Still, even after the Eulsa Treaty, exchanges between Korea and the Nordic countries continued, including even royal exchanges. In 1926, the Swedish crown prince, who later would become King Gustav VI Adolf, went to Korea and took part in excavations in Gyeongju, and in 1927, during a tour of Europe, the Korean crown prince answered by paying a visit not only to Stockholm, but also to Copenhagen. However, while an interesting discussion may be found in Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs archival material on how to treat this prince, they were aware that the Korean peninsula was by then seen as a permanent part of the Japanese Empire. Hence, exchanges between Korea and the Nordic countries were soon put on hold as Japan tightened its grip after the end of the Taisho period, and the world as such entered a period of economic crisis and war. Hence, it was not until 1947 that Korea was brought back to the attention of the Nordic countries. In that year, developments on the Korean peninsula and Korea's future were first brought before the United Nations with the Nordic countries having to deal with calls for assistance for a country far away in East Asia.

Notably, while previous scholarly work regarding the Nordic countries' reaction to the Korean conflict examined how Nordic countries responded to this call, these studies have been single country studies, focusing either on the individual Nordic country's decision to participate in the Korean conflict (Aunesluoma 2003; Holmström 1972; Midtgaard 2011; Stridsman 2008) or on the medical assistance provided by the Nordic countries (Östberg 2014). In contrast, this article takes an explicit comparative approach in seeking to shed light on what exactly were the considerations, context, and the explicit collaboration, behind the Nordic countries' decision to answer that call for assistance. It further examines how decisions on the form of Nordic assistance during the Korean conflict and some of the individuals involved in providing that assistance were essential in establishing conditions that were

instrumental in the later move toward diplomatic recognition of the Republic of Korea.

Specifically, the following discussion is divided into three parts. The first part deals with the Nordic response to the establishment of the Republic of Korea prior to the Korean War. In the second part, Nordic responses to the call for assistance by the United Nations while the North Koreans attacked the South are analyzed. Finally, the establishment of the National Medical Center in Seoul by the Nordic countries and how it served as an impetus for normalizing the diplomatic relationship are examined.²

The Division of the Korean Peninsula, the Establishment of the Republic of Korea, and the Issue of Nordic Recognition

With high hopes that the organization would enhance the possibility of a more peaceful world, the three Nordic countries joined the United Nations soon after its establishment. This new organization was soon very busy dealing with more than a dozen applications for membership—many of them opposed by one of the UN Security Council's five permanent members (the P5), namely China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States—the conflict in Northern Greece, as well as the border conflict between newly independent Pakistan and India. Many of these issues were increasingly affected by the emerging Cold War conflict. Unsurprisingly, the negotiations between the United States and the Soviet Union on the future of Korean peninsula broke down in this atmosphere marked by a general deterioration of relations between the two superpowers. The U.S. government under President Truman had in September 1947 decided to hand over the issue to the United Nations (Hart-Landsberg 1998, 84). On November 14, the United States was able to get a resolution passed in the

2. The focus in this article is on the *de jure* recognition of the Republic of Korea. It could be argued that a *de facto* recognition took place when the Nordic countries in the fall of 1949 voted in favor of South Korea joining the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). The Republic of Korea's joining the FAO was ratified on November 25, 1949.

General Assembly that sought the establishment of a UN Temporary Commission on Korea (UNTCOK) with the purpose of promoting moves towards independence and the holding of elections on the peninsula.³ Nine countries, Australia, Canada, the Republic of China, El Salvador, France, India, the Philippines, Syria, and the Ukraine—who would later refuse to participate—were appointed to UNTCOK in order to oversee the envisioned election in Korea (Kleiner 2001, 59; Koh 2015, 97). While the majority of member states supported the resolution (43 votes), East European countries under Soviet direction boycotted the vote, and six countries, among them the three Nordic countries, abstained. The reason behind the Nordic countries' abstention was that they saw the Korean question as dominated by the East-West conflict. The Swedish, feeling that the UN member states had not been given enough information or time to analyze it, were also very critical of the way the United States had turned the Korean question over to the UN in fall of 1947. Norway and Denmark also sought not to offend the Soviet Union.

In January 1948, UNTCOK started its work in Korea, and while the Americans were willing to allow the commission to enter the Southern zone of the peninsula, the commission was refused entry into the Northern zone. Australia and Canada, in particular, resisted the idea because they believed that the mandate of UNTCOK could not be carried out since elections could not be held in the North. Nevertheless, under U.S. pressure, the General Assembly Interim Committee decided on February 26 that elections should be held in the Southern zone (Hart-Landsberg 1998, 85). This decision led to the establishment of two separate states on the peninsula with the first UN-supervised general election for a Constituent National Assembly held on May 10, leading to establishment of the Republic of Korea on August 15, and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea then following suit on September 9.

Since the Korean question was deliberated in the UN in the fall of 1948 and spring of 1949, the discussion started with the report that UNTCOK had submitted to the organization. In the report, UNTCOK noted its con-

3. See GA Resolution 112 (II), November 14, 1947.

troversial approval of the election in the South, leading the United States, supported by Australia and the Republic of China, to promote a joint resolution proposal (the so-called Three-Power Proposal) that called for the recognition of the South Korean government as a legal entity having effective control and jurisdiction over the part of Korea to which UNTCOK had access. The proposal further argued that this government was the result of a free election, the only government on the peninsula, of such a kind, and also recommended that U.S. and Soviet troops be withdrawn from the peninsula as soon as possible.

On the other hand, the Eastern Block, led by the Soviet Union, countered with a proposal of its own in which the election in the North was claimed to have been free whereas the election in the South had been conducted in an atmosphere of terror. The Soviet proposal also recommended that UNTCOK be abolished, foreign troops withdrawn from the peninsula, and the Koreans left to decide their own fate. On December 12, both proposed resolutions came to a vote. The proposal (General Assembly Resolution 195 [III], December 12, 1948) promoted by the U.S. was passed with 48 votes in favor and six against—with the abstention of Sweden—while the Soviet proposal was rejected with 46 against and six in favor, with Sweden voting against the Soviet proposal (Stridsman 2008, 40). Whereas Denmark and Norway earlier had abstained together with Sweden, from the fall of 1948 they began to follow the policies on the Korea Question suggested by the United States.

While all three nations in the immediate aftermath of WWII had pursued a similar foreign policy emphasizing a strong engagement in the UN and a desire to bridge the differences between the East and West, by the fall of 1948 Norway and Denmark began increasingly to turn toward the Western alliance as they took part in the negotiations on the establishment of NATO. Moreover, while the Nordic countries were not suffering to the same extent as the rest of Europe as a consequence of World War II, the European Recovery Program—also known as the Marshall Plan—implemented from April 1948 also generated keen interest from the Nordic countries in being aligned more with the United States (Cox and Kennedy-Pipe 2005). The Nordic countries would each over the next four years receive

more than \$300 million, and the amounts going to the Nordic countries increased significantly after the North invaded the South in June 1950 (Schain 2001).⁴

Within a few days after Resolution 195 (III) was passed on December 12, 1948, the South Korean government, in an attempt at receiving diplomatic recognition from as many of the UN member states as possible, contacted both the Norwegian and the Swedish representatives at the UN even though Sweden had abstained from voting on the resolution. The United States was the first country to grant the new South Korean state diplomatic recognition and on January 1, 1949 extended formal diplomatic recognition (Koh 2015, 100). Having received diplomatic recognition by the United States, the South Korean government immediately began to reach out to European nations.

As a result, the Norwegian UN delegation had already been contacted by a representative of the South Korean government in December 1948, so when the Nordic ministers of foreign affairs met in Oslo later in January 1949, the issue of the diplomatic recognition of South Korea was discussed in the context of the recent formal recognition of the Republic of Korea by the United States. However, the Norwegian foreign minister, Halvard Lange, argued that the Nordic governments should not rush ahead with diplomatic recognition because doing so would have to depend on further developments on the Korean peninsula. The Danish foreign minister Gustav Rasmussen and the Swedish foreign minister Östen Undén concurred with this view (Stridsman 2008, 42). The question was discussed again when the three foreign ministers met in Copenhagen in September the same year. By then, the attempt at creating a Scandinavian Defense Union had failed for good. Already in March and only a month before the NATO treaty was to be signed, U.S. Secretary of State Dean Acheson, at a meeting with the Danish minister of foreign affairs in Washington, D.C., and while affirming that all Danish territory, including Greenland, would be covered by Danish membership in NATO (something the Danish foreign minister

4. See also U.S. Census Bureau, *Statistical Abstract of the United States: 1953*, 74th ed. (Suitland, MD: U.S. Census Bureau, 1953).

explicitly asked about in the meeting), had expressed his disappointment at the failure of the Nordic countries to establish a Scandinavian Defense Union.⁵ Both Denmark and Norway would in April of 1949 be among of the original signatories of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (Midtgaard 2011, 150). However, while the South Korean desire to join the United Nations was running into difficulties, the country was strengthening its efforts in reaching out to European countries.

Hence, while the Soviet Union had vetoed South Korea's attempt at gaining UN membership on April 8, 1949, by the fall of the same year a number of Western countries had recognized the Republic of Korea, and not only Norway but all three Nordic countries had in fact received inquiries from the South Korean government through its embassy in Washington, D.C., on the issue of diplomatic recognition. Meeting in the late summer of 1949 in Copenhagen, both the Danish and the Norwegian foreign ministers seem to have been in favor of recognizing South Korea. However, the Swedish foreign minister argued that he did not presently see any need to move towards recognition and argued that the Nordic countries should instead see how the situation on the peninsula would develop in the near future.

This preference for waiting not only resulted from uncertainty about the current state of affairs on the peninsula. In fact, knowledge of the Korean peninsula was very limited at the time. As mentioned above, while a number of travelers had visited and written about Korea, the general public and policymakers had almost no access to up-to-date information about the peninsula, and the few sources available tended to be rather negative in their evaluation of Korea and Koreans (Ek 2006). Like the Norwegian foreign minister in January 1949, the Swedish foreign minister was now able to convince the other two that a wait-and-see approach might be the most appropriate policy for the time being. This position would remain as the common policy of the three countries until North Korea invaded the South on June 25, 1950.

5. See U.S. Department of State, Memorandum of Conversation with the Foreign Minister of Denmark and Others, Secretary of State File, Acheson Papers, March 11, 1949.

Participate or Stay Out? The Korean War and the Nordic Countries

The June 1950 North Korean invasion of the South saw the young United Nations requesting that member nations come to the aid of the new South Korean state. Security Council Resolution 84 (July 7, 1950) called upon all member states to “furnish such assistance” to the Republic of Korea that may be necessary to “repel the armed attack and restore international peace and security in the region.” As members of the UN, the Nordic countries felt obligated to furnish some kind of assistance to the actions of the UN in Korea.

However, this feeling of humanitarian obligation, one viewed more important by Sweden than Norway and Denmark, was not the only motive behind the considerations of the Nordic governments. Denmark and Norway, as members of NATO (established only the year before) and as recipients of significant Marshall Plan aid, felt pressure to furnish some kind of assistance to the mainly American defense of South Korea, as the minutes of a meeting in the Danish Foreign Affairs Council meeting in early July makes clear (Midtgaard 2011, 151).⁶ Only two days after the North Korean invasion had the U.S. embassy in Copenhagen contacted the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Midtgaard 2011, 151). During discussions between the government and the opposition parties in Denmark on how to answer the call for assistance, the Minister of Foreign Affairs Gustav Rasmussen made clear that the government preferred to find the “least negative solution” to this request.⁷ The discussions held in the Danish Foreign Affairs Council took place because of the direct request for assistance Denmark received from the UN on June 29.

This first request would be followed by two further requests on July 14, 1950 and June 22, 1951, respectively. During the discussions on the first and second of these requests, it became clear that both the Danish government and parliamentary opposition were against sending military

6. See also Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, Resumé af Møde i Udenrigspolitisk Nævn (Summary of Meeting in the Foreign Affairs Council), Foreign Ministry Archive, 3 E 92nd, June 29, July 5, and July 19, 1950.

7. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, Resumé af Møde i Udenrigspolitisk Nævn (Summary of Meeting in the Foreign Affairs Council).

forces to Korea. The primary concern was that they did not want to provoke the Soviets, but they also wished to keep Danish military forces at home in case the Korean War escalated and spread to the European continent (Midtgaard 2011, 161). However, due to Danish dependency on NATO and the wish to remain on good terms with the Americans, the Danish government with opposition support did not see how it could reject the request outright. While U.S. policy accepted pretty much all offers of direct aid, military or otherwise, the initial Danish offer of a Red Cross ambulance and some medical supplies was rejected by the United States as too little, and the Danish government instead on August 18 decided to offer a fully equipped hospital ship, the *Jutlandia* (Midtgaard 2011, 167; Schnabel and Watson 1998, 61, 69). However, even this limited offer raised a number of important considerations when it came to circumstances of the deployment of the hospital ship.

Among those considerations, the government was at pains to make sure that a military hospital would not be going to Korea, as it wanted to keep military medical personnel in Denmark in case the war spread. But political considerations regarding Danish relations with the Soviet Union also played a significant role when the Danish government decided that the mission should be organized and run by the Danish Red Cross and not the Danish military. Hence, the supervision of the Red Cross mission was placed under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and not the Ministry of Defense. Throughout the hospital ship's missions in Korea from March 1951 (the ship departed from Denmark on January 23) to August 1953, the Danish government and the personnel aboard, at times in conflict with the Americans, kept emphasizing that the effort was a civilian, humanitarian mission.⁸

When the Norwegian government was informed that the Danish government would send a hospital ship to Korea, it too discussed what the

8. The *Jutlandia* left Korea for good on August 16, 1953. During her missions in Korea, the Danish medical crew aboard cared for 4,981 wounded allied soldiers from 24 different nations. In addition, emphasizing the humanitarian character of the mission, the crew also treated enemy combatants as well as more than 10,000 civilian Koreans. Most famous among them was the South Korean president, Syngman Rhee [Yi Seung-man], who was treated by the ship's dental clinic.

Norwegian response to the UN request should be, and contacted the Norwegian Red Cross asking for suggestions on how the government could help refugees in South Korea as requested through Security Council Resolution 85 (July 31, 1950).

The first suggestion made by the committee organized with the purpose of analyzing available options was to establish a camp for 2,000 Korean refugees in Japan and attach a 200-bed hospital to the camp. However, while the UN Command thanked the Norwegian government for its offer, it strongly suggested that not only should the hospital be located in Korea, it should also be an army surgical hospital. Taking into consideration the wishes of the UN command, the committee in early 1951 suggested to the Norwegian government that a military hospital modeled after the American Mobile Army Surgical Hospitals (MASH) be organized and sent to Korea. While the government and the Norwegian parliament on March 2, 1951 accepted this suggestion, similar concerns held by the Danish government also led the Norwegian government to place the administration of the Norwegian MASH under the Norwegian Red Cross. By late May 1951, the unit was in place in Uijongbu north of Seoul before later moving to Dongducheon.⁹

Since the Secretary-General of the UN on June 29, 1950 had sent a telegram to the member states requesting information on support for the action in Korea, the Swedish government, after consultations with the parliamentary opposition, let it be known in its answer on July 3 that it would not be able to supply military forces, but that it would “consider other non-military assistance.”¹⁰ Sweden was worried that military support for the U.S.-dominated UN action in Korea would endanger its policy of neutrality, which it believed might be compromised in the eyes of the Soviet

9. The Norwegian MASH (NORMASH) remained in Korea until the end of 1954. In that period, more than 90,000 patients were treated, and two Norwegian nationals died while serving in Korea. As with the Danish Hospital ship *Jutlandia* and the Swedish field hospital, the doctors and nurses of the Norwegian MASH served under very difficult circumstances (see, for instance, Östberg 2014).

10. Royal Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Kungl. Utrikes Departementets Protokoll (Royal Ministry of Foreign Affairs Protocol), vol. 5, A2, RA, July 3, 1950.

Union through such military support from Sweden (Östberg 2014, 135).

In fact, Sweden would not only have these concerns about neutrality in connection with the Korean conflict. When in 1957 the issue of membership in the UN for South Vietnam, the Republic of Korea, and Mongolia, came up for a vote in the Security Council, the issue of potential impact on Swedish neutrality was raised again. The General Assembly had in February passed resolutions recommending that the Security Council, of which Sweden at that time was a member, admit South Vietnam and the Republic of Korea as members. While Sweden abstained from voting on the amendment suggested by the Soviet Union that North Korea be granted membership, it did vote in favor of proposal S/3884 that would have granted the Republic of Korea membership. However, the Soviet Union vetoed the proposal.

As with the proposal on South Korea, the Swedish Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Gunnar Jarring, also voted in favor of proposal S/3885 that would have granted South Vietnam membership in the UN. An attempt by the Soviet Union to delay a vote on the admittance of South Vietnam was defeated; thereafter, the Soviet Union used its veto to block South Vietnam's membership as it had previously blocked the Republic of Korea.

While the Swedish government had some concerns in supporting the admittance of states that had unsettled territorial issues, it emphasized that Swedish recognition only applied to territory in which these countries were in "de facto control." Also in a response to the Swiss embassy in Stockholm asking the Swedes "what political considerations of neutrality" (*welche neutralitätspolitische überlegungen*) were behind the Swedish diplomatic recognition of South Korea and South Vietnam, the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs made it clear that the establishment of diplomatic relations was in fact "for practical reasons" (hopes for future trade and Nordic involvement in the National Medical Center).¹¹ It also stated that such recognition should

11. While Sweden exported just over 6.7 million Swedish kronor to South Korea in 1952 (and imported nothing), after the Korean conflict ended, trade between the two countries deteriorated, and only in 1971 did Sweden's exports to South Korea surpass that of 1952 (see *Månedsstatistik över Handeln* [Monthly Trade Statistics] [Stockholm: Isaac Marcus Boktryckeri-Aktiebolag, 1953], <http://www.scb.se/H/Statistiska%20meddelanden%20>

not be taken to indicate a Swedish stand on demarcation lines nor on possible territorial disputes.¹²

Furthermore, the issue of neutrality throughout the 1960s would lead the Finnish government to reject South Korean requests for diplomatic relations as it had a policy of not establishing relations with divided nations. Only in mid-April 1973 did the Finnish government inform the South Korean government that it would be willing to recognize it. This recognition would also be extended to North Korea. The rationale behind this move was that Sweden had recognized North Korea on April 6 with Norway (June 22) and Denmark (July 20) soon to follow.

Also, as in the Danish case, the Swedish government feared that the war in Korea would spread, and it would need all its military forces at home in case it had to defend itself against a Soviet attack. However, as stated by the Swedish Minister of Foreign Affairs Östen Undén on September 26, 1950 in front of the UN General Assembly, Sweden, as a small neutral country with an interest in peace, also viewed it important that “the world community made sure that aggressive behavior such as the North Korean invasion of South Korea did not succeed.” Since it decided against supplying military forces but still wanted to support the UN action, the Swedish government in mid-July determined that it would send a mobile field hospital to Korea. The first group of volunteers to staff this hospital would leave by the end of August, and the hospital opened its doors to patients in late September of 1950.¹³

When on June 22, 1951, the UN Secretary-General, at U.S. suggestion,

(SM)%201912-1953/SM%20Ser.%20C,%20M%C3%A5nadsstatistik%20%C3%B6ver%20handeln%201913-1953/Manadsstatistik-over-handeln-1953.pdf, accessed November 12, 2016; and *Statistisk Årsbok för Sverige 1973* [Statistical Yearbook of Sweden 1973], [http://www.scb.se/H/SOS%201911-/Statistisk%20%C3%A5rsbok%20\(SOS\)%201914-/Statistisk-arsbok-for-Sverige-1973.pdf](http://www.scb.se/H/SOS%201911-/Statistisk%20%C3%A5rsbok%20(SOS)%201914-/Statistisk-arsbok-for-Sverige-1973.pdf), accessed November 12, 2016).

12. Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Pol II, Erkännada av nya stater: Sydkorea och Sydvietnam (Recognition of New States: South Korea and South Vietnam), Byrån, Stockholm, August 17, 1962.
13. While the Danish hospital ship *Jutlandia* left Korea in August 1953 and the Norwegian MASH closed down in October 1954, the Swedish field hospital in Pusan would gradually be phased out, finally closing in April 1957 (Östberg 2014, 149).

sent out a request for additional military support for the “police action” in Korea, the request was implicitly directed towards those nations that supported UN action in Korea but that had not supplied actual military forces. With Norway and Denmark being the only NATO members without military forces in Korea, the Danish minister of foreign affairs upon receiving this request contacted the Norwegian and Swedish governments to see if they would come to Copenhagen to discuss a joint Nordic response to the request.

While the Norwegian Foreign Minister Halvard Lange was willing to come to Copenhagen, the Swedish minister of foreign affairs stated that the Swedish government was still discussing the issue and felt that the Korean situation was changing as the Soviet ambassador to UN, Yakov Malik, on June 23 suggested that peace negotiations should begin with a ceasefire being established on the 38th parallel (Stridsman 2008, 194). In fact, the Swedish government was firmly against sending military forces to Korea and was annoyed over the apparent change in the position of the Danish government.

When peace negotiations then began in Korea on July 10, the Swedish government did not see any further reason to respond to the request from the UN Secretary-General. However, as the peace negotiations broke down later that summer, the Americans again requested that the Swedish government send troops to Korea. Stalling for time, the Nordic governments were delighted as peace talks resumed in October 1951. The Swedish government, along with the Danish and Norwegian governments, with the Danish government at this point under significant pressure from the Americans, was able to use this negotiation as an excuse for declining to send troops (Midtgaard 2011, 164). Due to their NATO membership, both the Danish and Norwegian governments had been *forced* to promise the U.S. government that if peace negotiations broke down for good, they would consider sending troops to Korea.

The Norwegian government, however, worried about potential negative effects on its relationship with the United States, decided on October 26 not only to extend the stay of the Norwegian MASH, but also to change the status of the hospital from having been run by the Norwegian Red Cross to now becoming a regular military hospital with doctors and nurses

of the hospital wearing U.S. military uniforms for the rest of their stay in Korea. However, the Supreme Headquarters of the Allied Powers in Europe (SHAPE) argued that whatever small number of troops Norway and Denmark had been able to deploy to the Korean theater of war be much better used for the two countries' home defenses and, hence, requested that the U.S. State Department "put no further pressure" on the two countries (Midtgaard 2011, 166). In contrast to the Norwegian MASH, however, the Danish hospital ship, *Jutlandia*, as well as the Swedish field hospital would continue to be run by their respective national Red Cross agencies throughout their stay in Korea.

Diplomatic Recognition

After the Korean War ended in a ceasefire in 1953, the issue of what should happen to the Nordic-run medical facilities in Korea was raised. Already in 1951, the possibility of Nordic medical aid for Korea after the war had been discussed. In the fall of 1953, discussions between the South Korean government, the United Nations Korean Reconstruction Agency (UNKRA), and the Nordic governments were initially focused on the establishment of a hospital with 1,000-beds and educational opportunities.¹⁴ However, financial constraints on all governments involved resulted in a smaller, less ambitious plan for a 400-bed hospital to be established on the grounds of Seoul City Hospital. An agreement to that effect was signed on March 13, 1956 by representatives of the governments of Sweden, Norway, Denmark, the Republic of Korea, and the UN Korean Reconstruction Agency.¹⁵ The Nordic staff working at the hospital would be given the privileges and immunities conferred on UNKRA personnel under the terms of the Convention on Privileges and Immunities of the United Nations. As no diplomatic relations existed, the Nordic countries were represented at the signing

14. UNKRA was established in 1950. It continued operations until 1958.

15. See National Medical Center, *Gungnip uiryowon 50 nyeonsa* (The 50 Years' History of the National Medical Center of Korea) (Seoul: National Medical Center, 2008).

ceremony by their ambassadors stationed in Tokyo.

In the agreement on the medical center, the South Korean government made available such buildings and land necessary for extending the existing Seoul City Hospital, and it also provided for the maintenance of the facilities, including the payment of local staff. The Nordic governments would recruit, appoint, and pay foreign medical staff to run the hospital, as well as finance the necessary procurement, transportation, and maintenance of the medical equipment. All materials, equipment, supplies, and services imported through the agreement would become property of the medical center. The initial agreement signed in 1956 was extended in October 1963 for a five-year period at the request of the South Korea government. In 1968, the hospital was handed over to the South Korean government, but Nordic assistance to hospital continued until 1971. During the decade when it was run by the Nordic governments, 367 doctors and nurses from the Nordic countries served at the hospital.

As construction of the hospital began, the South Korean government, very aware of the fact that no diplomatic relations existed with the Nordic countries, had its ambassador in Washington, D.C., Dr. Yang You Chan, contact the chargé d'affaires at the Swedish embassy there in August 1957.¹⁶ Dr. Yang informed the Swedish that the South Korean government was very interested in establishing diplomatic relations with the Nordic governments and that South Korea was considering accrediting its ambassador in London or Paris to the Nordic countries.¹⁷ However, the Swedish government hesitated in moving forward on this issue without participation of the other Nordic countries. Hence, it brought up the issue of diplomatic recognition of South Korea at the Nordic foreign affairs ministers' meeting held on September 9–10, and the South Korean ambassador in Washington was told

16. Dr. Yang was a close personal friend of Syngman Rhee after having at one point been his personal physician. He served as ambassador in Washington until 1960 when he resigned after the Rhee regime was toppled by the student uprising.

17. Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Political Department, Ang. Erkännanda av republiken Korea (Syd-Korea) och frågan om Sveriges diplomatiska förbindelser med denna stat (Regarding the Recognition of the Republic of Korea [South Korea] and the Question of Sweden's Diplomatic Relations with that State), Stockholm, September 19, 1958.

in October that the Nordic government would accept the South Korean request for diplomatic relations under the condition that it be acceptable to the South Korean government, that Nordic ambassadors in Tokyo be accredited to Seoul, and that no Nordic embassy for the time being would be opened in Seoul.

However, when the Swedish representative to the Neutral Nations Supervisory Commission in November 1957 talked to the South Korean Foreign Minister, Cho Chung-whan, and made clear to him that the Nordic countries sought to accredit their ambassadors in Tokyo to Seoul, the foreign minister indicated that while his government was very interested in diplomatic relations with the Nordic countries, the government had decided that due to bad relations with Japan, it would not accept the accreditation of a Tokyo-based representative. Either the South Korean ambassador in Washington, D.C., was badly informed about his government's policies, or the policies had changed since first contact with the Swedish. The Swedish ministry of foreign affairs reached the conclusion that the South Korean government, being keen on having as many embassies as possible present in Seoul while engaged in diplomatic competition with North Korea, was against accrediting diplomats stationed in embassies in other countries.¹⁸

However, the Swedish government, seeing no immediate need for an embassy in Seoul, and under economic constraints, decided to take a wait-and-see approach on the issue. Nevertheless, the issue was discussed at the spring 1958 meeting of the Nordic ministers of foreign affairs since the three Nordic countries as much as possible wanted to coordinate their policies because of their joint involvement in the medical center in Seoul.¹⁹ Yet again, they decided that the most practical solution would be to have the Nordic ambassadors in Tokyo also become accredited in Seoul. The Japa-

18. Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Political Department, Ang. Erkännada av republiken Korea (Syd-Korea) och frågan om Sveriges diplomatiska förbindelser med denna stat (Regarding the Recognition of the Republic of Korea [South Korea] and the Question of Sweden's Diplomatic Relations with that State), Stockholm, September 19, 1958.

19. Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Telegram til den Kgl. Norsk Ambassade i Washington, D.C., (Telegram to the Royal Norwegian Embassy in Washington, D.C.), Kgl. Utenriksdepartement, 1085 U. 30.6.5, June 30, 1958.

nese ministry of foreign affairs had already been contacted and had no objections to this proposal.

Not only were diplomats stationed in Washington and Tokyo working on the issue of diplomatic recognition. In fact, individuals associated not only with Nordic participation in the Korean War, but also with Nordic medical staff working in South Korea had also been pushing for diplomatic normalization. Among them was the Swedish head of the National Medical Center, Carl-Erik Groth, who would serve in a capacity almost like an informal middleman between the Nordic countries and the Republic of Korea. His mediation was essential in keeping the negotiations going and ultimately leading to an arrangement.²⁰ In March 1958, Dr. Groth made the rounds of the Nordic embassies in Tokyo. When he returned, national assembly elections were under preparation in Seoul. However, he did not have a chance to talk with anybody from the South Korean ministry of foreign affairs until mid-May when he met the vice-foreign minister, as he had to wait for any changes in the composition of the South Korean government as a consequence of the May 2 election.²¹ The contact with the ministry of foreign affairs led to a discussion of the issue on June 7 between Dr. Groth, Vice- Minister of Foreign Affairs Kim Dong Jo, and the private secretary to the president, Mr. Yu.²² Dr. Groth led it be known that he was on his way to Tokyo to meet new staff that were arriving for the medical center, and that he expected during his visit to meet the Nordic ambassadors in Tokyo.

20. Carl-Erik Groth had been head of the Swedish field hospital from 1950 to 1951 and later served at the National Medical Center. He also served as a medical volunteer in the war between the Soviet Union and Finland in 1939–1940 (see, for instance, *Chosun Ilbo*, March 25, 2004).

21. The National Assembly election in 1958 saw a severe confrontation between the ruling Liberal Party, led by Syngman Rhee, and the main opposition Democratic Party. In order to ensure victory, the ruling party forced the opposition into a compromise on a new election law that was passed on January 1, 1958. While the election held in May saw the opposition gain in the cities, the ruling party still won a majority of seats in the assembly (Choi 1996, 316–323).

22. The following is based on a classified report written by Dr. Groth for the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and shared with the two other Nordic governments (Royal Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, June 20, 1958, CEG/MD 20.6-58[6]).

While Vice-Foreign Minister Kim reiterated the South Korean government rejection of having Tokyo-based ambassadors accredited in Seoul, he did, however, suggest that a single representative stationed in Seoul could represent all of the Nordic countries. The private secretary to Syngman Rhee even offered a solution in which doctors stationed at the medical center would be accredited as representatives for the Nordic countries. However, while the South Korean government was clearly showing some flexibility in considering a number of potential solutions to the issue of representation, the Nordic governments saw no need for establishing a permanent diplomatic presence in Seoul.

Hence, when Dr. Groth met the Swedish ambassador in Tokyo on June 10, he was informed that the joint position of the Nordic governments was that no solution other than the accreditation of the Tokyo-based ambassadors would be entertained. Dr. Groth was to let the South Korean government know this position of the Nordic governments and that diplomatic recognition would not take place unless the South Korean government could accept it. At the meeting with the Danish ambassador in Tokyo on June 14, Dr. Groth was basically told the same. In addition, the Danish ambassador informed Dr. Groth that unless the accreditation issue had been resolved before the opening of the National Medical Center, it would be difficult for the Nordic governments to be present in an official capacity at the ceremony. Accordingly, on his return to Seoul on June 18, Dr. Groth, as he had promised at their talks on June 7, informed Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs Kim Dong Jo of his talks in Tokyo.

During Dr. Groth's stay in Tokyo, the South Korean government announced that it was working on increasing the number of its diplomatic mission overseas and that it intended in the near future to exchange diplomatic representations with Thailand, Brazil, a country in Africa, and a Scandinavian country.²³ South Korea at that point only had six overseas embassies in the United States, the Republic of China, the United Kingdom,

23. A newspaper article detailing South Korea's intentions in establishing diplomatic relations with these countries was included in the report that Dr. Groth sent to the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (*Korea Times*, June 16, 1958).

the Philippines, South Vietnam, and Turkey. Based on a January 19, 1959 report to the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which refers to a press release by the South Korean government in the Brazilian newspaper *Correio da Manhã*, the Norwegian embassy in Brazil argued that one reason the opening of an embassy in Brazil was seen as necessary by the South Korean government was the “large number of South Koreans who were expected to immigrate to Brazil in the near future.”²⁴ While the South Korean government wanted to establish more overseas missions, it also wanted to see more missions established in Seoul; hence, no change took place in the government’s policy on not accepting the accreditation of Tokyo-based ambassadors, raising questions on who would represent the Nordic countries at the opening of the medical center.

As the opening drew closer, the Norwegian ambassador in Washington, D.C., went to see the South Korean ambassador, Dr. Yang You-chan, on June 20.²⁵ The Danish ambassador, Henrik Kauffmann, had already on May 27 sent a letter stating that, unless there had been a change in the South Korean government’s policy on accrediting the Nordic Tokyo-based ambassador, he would have to inform Dr. Yang that the Danish government saw no possibility of establishing diplomatic relations with South Korea at this time.²⁶ During a later meeting between the Norwegian ambassador and Dr. Yang, the Norwegian ambassador also inquired if there had been any improvement in the relationship between South Korea and Japan. Ambassador Yang stated that some improvement had been made and he himself in fact had chaired three delegations to Japan that had discussed Japanese reparations for the colonial period and the return of Korean artifacts taken by the Japanese.

However, in a meeting with the South Korean vice-minister of foreign affairs on June 7, 1958, Dr. Groth, as the administrating director of the

24. Royal Norwegian Embassy in Rio de Janeiro, Oprettelse av diplomatisk forbindelse mellom Brasil og Sør-Korea (Establishment of Diplomatic Relations between Brazil and South Korea), JN 002265 UD 1959, January 19, 1959.

25. The Swedish ambassador visited Ambassador Yang on June 13.

26. Royal Danish Embassy in Washington, D.C., Letter from Ambassador Henrik Kauffmann to Ambassador Dr. You Chan Yang, ref. No. 3. Ø. 50, May 27, 1958.

Scandinavian teaching hospital in Seoul, was informed that no changes had been made in the South Korean government's rejection of the suggestion that Nordic countries ambassadors in Tokyo be accredited to Seoul. However, the South Korean vice-minister suggested yet again that Nordic members of the medical center be accredited as diplomatic representatives, and the June 1958 report, written by Groth to the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, indicates that Groth was not necessarily against the possibility of appointing Nordic medical staff at the National Medical Center as diplomatic representatives to South Korea.

Groth's report also makes clear that, even though he himself might see such an appointment as a short-term practical solution, he realized that it would most likely not be possible due to resistance to the idea by the Nordic governments. Still, he conveyed the suggestion of the South Koreans to Swedish government. As expected, he was told in mid-June that he should let the Korean vice-minister know that the South Korean government could either accept or reject the suggestion by Nordic governments that their ambassadors in Tokyo become accredited in Seoul, but that a rejection would mean that any further progress on this issue would be suspended by the Nordic governments. Despite significant attempts, in particular by Carl-Erik Groth, at finding a solution, it was increasingly likely that the establishment of diplomatic relations would not happen before the opening of the National Medical Center.²⁷

Nevertheless, by early 1959, signs of a loosening of this policy by the South Korean government became apparent as diplomatic and economic competition with North Korea was increasing. In fact, in a report prepared in Hong Kong in early 1959 for the Norwegian foreign ministry, this change was explicitly recognized. In the report, the South Korean government made it clear it would seek the establishment of diplomatic relations with countries in Europe. The purpose was not only to enhance trade opportunities, but also to achieve recognition as the "sole legal government" on the

27. Royal Norwegian Embassy in Washington, D.C., Spm. om akkreditering i Korea (The Question of Accreditation in Korea), JN018148 UD, July 22, 1958.

Korean peninsula by as many countries as possible.²⁸ This meant that the South Korean government was now willing to accept the Nordic demand on the form of representation, and in late January 1959, the South Korean embassy in Washington, D.C., informed the Danish embassy that its policy on accrediting Tokyo-based ambassadors had changed and that it would welcome the establishment of diplomatic relations with Nordic countries under Nordic terms. The Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs reacted positively to this change in policy, and in early February informed the Norwegian and Swedish governments that its ambassador in Tokyo, Torben Busck-Nielsen, would be accredited to Seoul while the South Korean ambassador in London, Kim Yu Taik, would be accredited to Copenhagen.²⁹

By February 13, the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs concluded its own agreement on diplomatic recognition of South Korea as its ambassador in Tokyo, Eigil A. Nygaard, was accredited to Seoul, while Kim Yu Taik, who had also been accredited to Copenhagen, was accredited to Oslo as well. The decision was followed by the establishment of diplomatic relations between Sweden and South Korea only a few days later. By the late summer of 1959, the Tokyo-based ambassadors from the Nordic countries had been received by President Syngman Rhee and the entire South Korean government, and the National Medical Center on Eulji-ro, where it still remains, served as the most physical manifestation of diplomatic normalization between the Republic of Korea and the Nordic countries.³⁰

28. See Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Oslo, Korea's utenrikspolitikk i 1959 (Korea's Foreign Policy in 1959), JN004474 UD, February 18, 1959. Interestingly, the report mentions that, as part of South Korean policy, Koreans who had immigrated to other countries would "receive particular attention."

29. Royal Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Telegram til den Kgl. Dansk Ambassade i Oslo (Telegram to the Royal Danish Embassy in Oslo), February 25, 1959.

30. The Norwegian Ambassador Eigil A. Nygaard wrote an interesting account of his reception in Seoul on June 1, 1959. In the report, he states that President Syngmann Rhee made it clear that he would run again for president in 1960, and while the president, due to his advanced age (84), is known to be "obstinate and inflexible," he would probably be reelected unless "something unforeseen" happened (Eigil A. Nygaard, Telegram til Det Kgl. Utenriksdepartement i Oslo, June 4, 1959). Pak Chi-Yong (1980, 135) argues that while significant movements by the opposition were taking place against Rhee's potential reelection, the opposition had in reality pretty much accepted the lifetime presidency of

Conclusion

Traditionally, the Republic of Korea's foreign policy was dominated by three themes: legitimacy, security, and development (Kihl 2005). In the early years of its existence, the focus of the Republic of Korea was very much on the first two; from the early 1960s, development would continue in the search for legitimacy and security. From its establishment in 1948, the Republic of Korea, seeing itself in a constant struggle for legitimacy, reached out to countries in the West, among them the Nordic countries, for the purpose of achieving diplomatic recognition. However, when it came to Nordic-South Korean relations, the role played by the Nordic governments in establishing the National Medical Center was paramount, and individuals like Dr. Groth, pushed for a deeper, more sustained, Nordic involvement with South Korea that went beyond the minimal involvement of the three countries during the Korean War. In fact, the aforementioned significant Nordic involvement in the establishment of the National Medical Center pushed the issue of diplomatic recognition to forefront of the discussion taking place between South Korea and the Nordic countries in 1959. Hence, Nordic participation in the Korean conflict, as well as subsequent diplomatic recognition by the Nordic countries, was not so much the result of general interest in or concern for the Republic of Korea per se, at least on the Nordic side, but instead was much more driven by practical considerations as well as national security concerns.

Rhee as *fait accompli* and were basically waiting for "age or death to end his rule."

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