

Written exam SH-201 The History of Svalbard
The University Centre in Svalbard, Wednesday 17 February 2010
Solution example

Part I: Multiple choice test. Make only one cross for each question.

1.	Spitsbergen was discovered on one of Willem Barentsz' expeditions – when?	<input type="checkbox"/> 1594	<input type="checkbox"/> 1595	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1596
2.	When was the land based whaling terminated on Svalbard?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ca. 1680	<input type="checkbox"/> ca. 1750	<input type="checkbox"/> ca. 1850
3.	Which country did the <i>pomors</i> come from?	<input type="checkbox"/> Norway	<input type="checkbox"/> Iceland	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Russia
4.	When did A.E. Nordenskiöld winter in Mosselbukta on Svalbard?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1872-73	<input type="checkbox"/> 1882-83	<input type="checkbox"/> 1898-99
5.	Which of these polar explorers did <i>not</i> start from Svalbard?	<input type="checkbox"/> Phipps	<input type="checkbox"/> Parry	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Peary
6.	When did organized tourism on Svalbard start?	<input type="checkbox"/> ca. 1860	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ca. 1890	<input type="checkbox"/> ca. 1920
7.	When did Norway take over sovereignty on Svalbard?	<input type="checkbox"/> 1905	<input type="checkbox"/> 1920	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1925
8.	In which of these mining towns was there <i>no</i> coal mining in 1940?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Ny-Ålesund	<input type="checkbox"/> Longyearbyen	<input type="checkbox"/> Barentsburg
9.	When were the big nature protection areas on Svalbard established?	<input type="checkbox"/> 1952	<input type="checkbox"/> 1967	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1973
10.	When did polar bear hunting on Svalbard stop?	<input type="checkbox"/> 1962	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1973	<input type="checkbox"/> 1982
11.	When was the coal company <i>Store Norske</i> taken over by the State?	<input type="checkbox"/> 1933	<input type="checkbox"/> 1963	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1976
12.	When was UNIS founded?	<input type="checkbox"/> 1986	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1993	<input type="checkbox"/> 1998

Part II: Choose and answer one of the following questions:

A. Norwegians and Russians on Svalbard

Norwegians and Russians have long traditions on Svalbard. Give a historical overview of the two nations' presence and activity on the archipelago and describe the relation between Norwegians and Russians through time. Which role has security and foreign policy played in different phases?

1. Hunting and trapping

The first arrival of Russian hunters, the *Pomors*, on Svalbard is a disputed question. Russian archaeologists and historians maintain that they came before Barentsz' discovery in 1596, possibly in the mid-16th century. Western scientists generally agree that they arrived at a later stage, after the whaling period. Certainly, the Pomors were hunting and trapping from the early 18th century on.

There were both summer and winter expeditions. The latter probably numbered fewer men, but the activity was extensive. Remains of Pomor trapping stations are found all over Svalbard. While the summer expeditions primarily hunted sea mammals, the winterers could also hunt or trap fur animals and collect eider-down and eggs. Although a few trappers stayed voluntarily or by mishap for more years, the regular pattern was seasonal. The winterers were collected by the summer expedition the following year.

It seems Pomor hunting peaked before 1800, and the last expedition returned in 1852. There are numerous possible explanations as to why the activity stopped, but probably

structural changes in the Pomor economy are important. Fishing and trade received more attention in the 19th century.

Norway was slow in taking part in hunting and trapping. After a few unsuccessful attempts in the late 18th century, activity picked up from the 1820s. Hammerfest was the first town to engage; later (around 1850) Tromsø became the leading Arctic port. There were many accidents during the first winterings, and eventually summer expeditions became the favoured form. A more important activity, however, was sealing in the West Ice and East Ice – compared to these hunting grounds, Svalbard played a modest role.

From the 1890s winter trapping picked up again, but this time usually by smaller parties of 2–4 people. Svalbard was in practice divided into different hunting fields to reduce competition. Some of the trappers were fitted out by merchants who in return secured a part of the catch. Others were individual entrepreneurs who from time to time had to take other jobs to be able to afford a hunting expedition. After World War II only a handful of trappers continued the activity, mostly polar bear hunting until the ban in 1973.

2. Scientific exploration

While Norwegians often provided logistics for scientific expeditions to Svalbard in the 19th century, they did not carry out much research themselves until the beginning of the 20th century. In the decade before World War I, however, the activity picked up rapidly. After the war, and inspired by the Treaty of 1920, Norwegians dominated Svalbard research for a long period. This domination became less pronounced after World War II, and particularly from the 1960s, when international presence increased in connection with the petroleum activity. Today, Norway is a leading player in scientific research on Svalbard, not least thanks to heavy investments in infrastructure such as Ny-Ålesund, UNIS, EISCAT and KHO.

The Russians were pioneers in Svalbard research with the Chichagov expedition of 1764–66, but did not follow up for a long time. There were but few Russian scientists on the archipelago in the 19th and early 20th centuries, save for a few geological exploration missions, for instance Rusanov's. The great expansion came with the petroleum and mineral exploration in the 1960s, when the base at Heerodden was established. From this time on and into the 1970s the Russians were the most numerous scientists on Svalbard, covering a wide array of disciplines. After the break-up of the Soviet Union in 1991 the activity has been reduced significantly, but is currently being stepped up.

3. Coal mining and settlements

It was Norwegians who started prospecting and mining coal around 1900, but soon foreign actors moved in and dominated until the outbreak of World War I in 1914. There were also Russian prospectors who occupied coal fields. During the war Norwegian mining interests grew and a number of coal companies were established. The Russians, however, were occupied with war and revolution and did not keep up coal mining. After Norway took over sovereignty in 1925, Norwegian mining companies were virtually alone on Svalbard, the only active mine being in Longyearbyen. This situation lasted until 1932, when the Soviet Union bought the Barentsburg coal mine from a Dutch company, Pyramiden from a Swedish one, and re-established the mine in Grumant. They expanded rapidly in the 1930s, soon outnumbering the Norwegians.

In 1941 all settlements were evacuated, the Russians to Archangelsk and the Norwegians to Scotland. When the war was over in 1945, Norway started mining again in Longyearbyen, Ny-Ålesund and Svea. The Russians came back in 1946–47 and resumed mining in all their three settlements. Grumant was closed in 1962, and also Ny-Ålesund stopped mining in 1963. Into the 1970s there were approximately twice as many Russians as Norwegians on the archipelago. It was not until the 1980s that Norwegians became more numerous. Since the

dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 the Russian presence has gradually been reduced, and Pyramiden was abandoned in 1998. Longyearbyen, on the other hand, has doubled in size since 1990.

4. Norwegian-Russian relations and politics

The close trade connections between Northern Norway and the White Sea region in the 18th century might explain why Norwegians were able to employ the more experienced Pomors in their first attempts at trapping on Svalbard. Nevertheless, they were competitors until around 1850, when the Russians quit the industry. Contacts were rare, conflicts too. Since the 1930s both nations have been engaged in coal mining. The companies helped each other out when needed and neighbourly relations were friendly, but the populations were quite isolated from each other and contact was limited to organised exchanges and events. This changed with the *glasnost* policy after 1986, when the Soviet settlements were opened to visitors. In general, the political tensions on the international level during the Cold War did not affect the good local relations much.

When Svalbard was put on the diplomatic agenda in 1871–72, Russia protested against Swedish-Norwegian annexation and kept a keen eye on other nations' pretensions in the period that followed, as exemplified by the so called "Svetlana affair" at Bjørnøya in 1899. Russia also demanded a hand on the wheel when the administration question turned up before World War I – she took part in the two preparatory conferences in Kristiania (Oslo) in 1910 and 1912, and aspired to be one of the three states governing the islands. Due to the Bolshevik revolution Soviet Russia was not represented at the peace conference in Paris in 1919–20, when the Svalbard Treaty was created. The Soviets protested initially, but were invited to join the treaty. In 1924 Soviet Russia recognized Norwegian sovereignty and became a signatory power in 1935. Until World War II the great powers did not consider Svalbard to be a strategically important area.

In 1944, when the war was drawing to a close, the Soviets demanded that the Svalbard Treaty should be annulled and that Norway and the USSR should share responsibility for military defence. This so called "Svalbard Crisis" lasted until 1947 when the Norwegian parliament and government rejected the claim. Norway joined NATO in 1949 and when Svalbard was included in the alliance's defence area in 1952, the Soviets protested fiercely. Throughout the Cold War they repeatedly protested against anything that resembled military activity and resisted Norwegian administrative measures of all kinds, in effect questioning Norway's sovereignty. This resistance was stepped down in the 1980s.

All in all, the bilateral foreign policy and security issues regarding Svalbard have been handled without serious conflicts, let alone violence. A possible explanation might be that Norway and Russia have a mutual interest in preserving Svalbard as an area of low tension.

B. An international Svalbard?

For a long time Svalbard was terra nullius (no man's land), but the Treaty gives Norway sovereignty over the archipelago. Some will maintain that Svalbard has been and is international. Give examples of international presence through history. What significance has the Treaty had for Svalbard as international arena for scientific and economic activity?

Svalbard was discovered by the Barentsz expedition in 1596 and in the first decades of the 17th century a whaling industry developed around the archipelago. This activity was highly international; the British and Dutch were pioneers, but very soon Spanish, French, Norwegian, Danish and German whalers followed. During the first seasons there were

conflicts over access to the hunting grounds, sometimes resulting in violence. At one point the British claimed to have effectively occupied the area, whereas the Dutch maintained that Spitsbergen must be considered a part of the free High Seas and open for all. The Danish-Norwegian king's pretensions about a general sovereignty over these northern areas were not respected by anyone else. At least by the 1630s the concept of Svalbard as a *terra nullius*, a no man's land, was well established. The area was regarded as an international commons.

In the 18th and 19th centuries Svalbard was exploited on a regular basis primarily by Russian and Norwegian hunters and trappers, and the question of sovereignty was never raised in this context. From time to time the archipelago was visited by expeditions from different nations, either for scientific purposes or as part of polar exploration voyages. Some of these expeditions were international by themselves, such as the *Recherche* expeditions in 1838–39, which was initiated and led by France, but which invited scientists from other countries to take part. From the second half of the 19th century Svalbard became an increasingly popular arena for tourists and travellers as well as for scientists from many different nations.

A diplomatic initiative from Sweden in 1872 to annex Svalbard under Norway failed due to Russian opposition, and in effect this exchange of notes confirmed the archipelago's legal status as a no man's land. It was not until the start of mineral exploration, mining and modern whaling in the beginning of the 20th century that the issue was raised in an international setting. Norwegian, British, American, Russian and German companies were present on Svalbard. Conflicts over land claims and labour unrest in some of the mining camps spurred a diplomatic process that tried to solve the administration question. Although Norway had obvious ambitions of gaining a leading position, the only realistic model seemed to be a kind of shared responsibility, a *condominium*. There were conferences in 1910, 1912 and 1914, but no final agreement was reached. During World War I the international presence on Svalbard was significantly reduced, and Norwegian coal companies and scientific activity became dominating. When the "Spitsbergen issue" was raised in connection with the peace conference in Paris in 1919, Norway formally claimed sovereignty. A special commission of the leading states was formed to examine the question, and on their recommendation a treaty was concluded and signed on 9 February 1920, granting Norway "the full and absolute sovereignty over the archipelago of Spitsbergen" (article 1). The treaty, however, contains many provisions that secure the interests of signatory powers. For example, there shall be equal and open access to the archipelago and equal opportunities for specific kinds of economic activity such as mining. Taxes are limited to the local needs of Svalbard, and the area must hold no permanent military installations. Acquired property rights of foreign nationals must be respected. Thus, the principles of an international commons are in many ways maintained in the Svalbard Treaty, although the area is Norwegian territory and only Norwegian laws apply. The key element is that Norway cannot discriminate on grounds of nationality.

The Treaty solved the administration question permanently and laid down the foundation for future economic activity. A particular Mining Code (*Bergverksordning*), which is foreseen by the Treaty, regulates mineral exploration and exploitation. When Norway took over sovereignty in 1925 a special Svalbard Law was introduced that provides the legal framework for all activity on Svalbard, regardless of nationality. In practice, only Norwegian and Russian companies have exploited the opportunities for mineral extraction in the long term, but in the 1960s and 1970s also other nations were involved in petroleum exploration. The service sector, particularly the tourist industry, is highly internationalized. Since Svalbard is exempt from Norwegian immigration regulations due to the Treaty, no visa or special permission is required to live and work here. This, and the low tax, has proved attractive to many people and businesses.

The Treaty (article 5) also foresaw an agreement on scientific research, but this was never followed up. On the other hand, Norway has encouraged international scientific activity and cooperation on Svalbard, and has in later years invested large sums in infrastructure for research. The research site in Ny-Ålesund, EISCAT and UNIS are all examples of that. International scientific presence is big – and growing; this is in keeping with the spirit of the Treaty, which speaks of peaceful utilization of the archipelago. Whether this would have happened even *without* the Svalbard Treaty is hard to tell; it is perhaps not likely that Norway would have spent so much money had she not been granted sovereignty in 1920.

In conclusion, the international presence on Svalbard during more than 400 years is striking. It includes economic and scientific activity, as well as tourism and private travel. The Treaty of 1920 did not change this, but did establish a legal framework for the activity and reduced uncertainty about property rights, which was important not least for industrial companies. It also abolished the lawlessness that prevailed, for the benefit of people as well as the environment. Svalbard is now more internationalized than ever. The Treaty denies Norway's ability to discriminate by favouring her own nationals, and some will argue that this implies a limitation of sovereignty. On the other hand, Norway's sovereign right to regulate is generally accepted by the international community today – however reluctantly.