

AIR WAR COLLEGE

AIR UNIVERSITY

NORWAY'S CHALLENGES IN THE HIGH NORTH

by

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A Research Report Submitted to the Faculty

In Partial Fulfillment of the Graduation Requirements

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16 February 2016

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Biography

Lt Col Liv Judith Olsen entered the Royal Norwegian Air Force (RNoAF) in July 1986. Her basic training was as a weapons controller within the Air Command and Control (C2) system. Through her career she has worked at every level in the Norwegian Air C2 system, both operations and staff.

Regarding professional military education, Lt Col Olsen graduated from the RNoAF Academy and the Norwegian Defence Command and Staff College (2010-2011), a professional qualification requirement for staff officers within strategy, operations and staff service.

During operations abroad, Lt Col Olsen served as an A3 in the Norwegian Air Commander's staff in Kabul, Afghanistan in 2006 when Norway contributed to ISAF with a fighter aircraft detachment. In 2014, she was the Commander of the Air C2 at Iceland's Control and Reporting Center (CRC) when Norway conducted "NATO's mission to provide airborne surveillance and interception capabilities to meet Iceland's peacetime preparedness needs".

Lt Col Olsen's last two assignments were as the Commander of the RNoAF Officer Training School from 2007 to 2012, and she was the Ops Commander at one of Norway's two CRCs (CRC Maageroe) from 2012 to 2015. She is currently a student at the Air War College, Air University, Maxwell AFB, Alabama.

Abstract

Norway has an extensive coastline; facing the North Atlantic, the Barents Sea, and the Arctic Ocean: it creates an enormous expanse of territorial waters and a vast economic zone, making the High North an important area. Norway has jurisdiction over about one million square miles at sea, seven times larger than the mainland territory; therefore its prosperity is closely linked to the sea's considerable resources: oil, natural gas, minerals, and fish. While the situation in the High North today is characterized by stability and cooperation, the area possesses considerable resources and great opportunities, making it vulnerable to many types of influence. Norway will preserve stability and security in the High North in the future by ensuring its strategic interests, managing and protecting vulnerable arctic areas as well as their resources, and by claiming sovereignty through the exercise of authority in a credible, consistent, and predictable manner. To achieve this, the Norwegian security policy should be based on collective defense, bi-lateral relationships, and a sustaining presence in the High North. Collective defense is the cornerstone of Norway's security policy: throughout history its relationship with Russia has been balanced by deterrence and reassurance. Indeed bi-lateral relationships with all arctic nations are essential to manage the area's strategic resources; these will be even more important in the future as the ice melts and opens up for expanded oil production and new sea routes. In turn, as Russia increases its military presence in the area, Norway becomes more vulnerable and must sustain its presence in the High North. Although Russia is not considered a direct threat today, in the future, Norway might be drawn into a conflict with Russia because of its geographical location. Thus, this area will still be of great importance for Norway and sustaining a presence in the High North will continue to be essential.

Introduction

The High North is of high significance for Norway. Norway's extensive coastline, facing the North Atlantic, the Barents Sea and the Arctic Ocean creates an enormous expanse of territorial waters and a vast economic zone. Norway has jurisdiction over about one million square miles at sea, seven times larger than the mainland territory. Consequently, Norway's prosperity is closely linked to the sea's considerable resources: oil, natural gas, minerals, and fish. Indeed, Norway is among the largest exporter of fish as well as energy and has one of the world's largest merchant fleets. While the High North is a key priority for the Norwegian government, the terminology "the High North" can be an elastic concept and open to interpretation. The traditional definition refers to the northern parts of the Nordic countries and Russia, the oceans and islands from the Kara Sea (including the archipelago of Svalbard) to the southeastern shores of Greenland (a part of the wider "circumpolar North" or the "Arctic region", incorporating the USA, Canada and Greenland).¹ The terminology, however, is not synonym with "the Arctic".

In addition to being neighbors in the High North, Norway also shares a long history with Russia. The former Soviet Union was Norway's ally in the Second World War. In 1944, Soviet forces played a key role in the liberation of eastern Finnmark (the most northern county in Norway, bordering Russia) and together both countries won their freedom from Nazi Germany in 1945. During the Cold War, the nations were on opposite sides of the Iron Curtain; but, they still had a relationship due to their common interests in the northern region. After the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, Norway was among the first countries to seize the opportunity for increased cooperation with the new Russia. Today, however, we are facing a changed Russia; a Russia more willing to follow a course away from the democratic intimations we saw in the

1990's. These circumstances make cooperation more difficult. Nevertheless, Russia still remains a neighbor to Norway in the High North and it is important to maintain a positive relationship.

Thus, while it draws on the experiences of previous decades Norway's policy for the High North has been formed primarily after the end of the Cold War. Consequently, it has become an essential framework for Norwegian policy, both domestic and foreign, as well as security. While the situation in the High North today is characterized by stability and cooperation, the area possesses considerable resources and great opportunities, making it vulnerable to many types of influence. Russia, USA, EU, and China have shown increased interest in the area. These interrelated international interests, and the areas' increased importance for Russia, make it an important factor for Norway's defense policy. In the future, Norway must preserve stability and security in the High North by ensuring its strategic interests, through the management and protection of vulnerable arctic areas as well as its resources, and by claiming sovereignty through the exercise of authority in a credible, consistent, and predictable manner. In order to achieve this, Norway should base its security policy on collective defense, bi-lateral relationships, and a sustaining presence in the High North.

Collective Defense

The High North During the Cold War

First and foremost, the cornerstone of Norwegian security policy is collective defense. Norway has been a NATO member since the Alliance was established in 1949. Among the countries Norway cooperates with in the High North, Russia is the only one not considered a part of the western Atlantic security community. Consequently, the interrelationship Norway has with Russia as well as the members of NATO defines Norway's security policy.² Indeed, in 2005, the Norwegian Government declared the High North as Norway's most important future strategic priority. A High North Strategy followed in 2006.

During the Cold War, the region held critical strategic value; the Soviet Union resided on one side and NATO on the other side. With Soviet forces on the Kola Peninsula, the High North became a center of confrontation between the superpowers and their allies. The airspace, ocean and land were used as mediums of defense and surveillance. The threat from those forces made Norway's participation in NATO crucial. Consequently, Norwegian security policy was based on "deterrence" and "reassurance". For Norway, "deterrence" meant an attack from the east would risk bringing in NATO allies. "Reassurance" balanced deterrence through a number of self-imposed restrictions, making it clear to the Soviets Norway would not be a springboard for allied operations in peacetime. This was Norwegian balancing: deterring superior Soviet power in a way to prevent the High North from becoming militarized, while keeping allied powers "inside the heat".³ Balancing spared the High North from considerable tension during this period. As the closest neighbor to the Soviet Union, Norway's international balancing role characterized its security policy in the Cold War.⁴ In today's post-Cold War environment, a senior research fellow and an expert on Russian foreign and security policies at the Norwegian Institute of International

Affairs suggests Norwegian politicians must still simultaneously consider deterrence and reassurance.⁵ In addition to security concerns, Norway and Russia have a broader spectrum of interaction; these initiatives are meant to increase relations, create trust, solve conflicts, foster cooperation, and prevent crises.

The Change in Focus After the Cold War

In the Post-Cold War world, the High North became more peripheral to international politics. The known enemy disappeared and nations started to reorient themselves into a new world order. The maturity of the Russian military seemed to reduce it as a military threat. Norway was skeptical of these developments due to its location with Russia; the future seemed uncertain and Russia still possessed a large military capacity. However, Norway emphasized normalized relationship with Russia; but, at the same time, encouraged an increased allied presence in form of training and exercises while changing some of its self-imposed restrictions in Finnmark by hosting allied military forces. Russia perceived these actions negatively, even though the allied presence was at a very low level. To balance this, Norway established military relations with Russia in the High North, both in a bi-lateral and multi-lateral manner. This cooperation took the form of search and rescue, common exercises, and direct connections between the respective military headquarters.⁶ Gradually, however, NATO forces became more involved with operations outside the Alliance; Norway's focus shifted as well.

The increased involvement in stabilization and peacekeeping operations led to less attention to security challenges within the geographical areas and peripheries of the NATO alliance. In September 2008, Norway, together with Poland and the Baltic states, promoted the Core Area Initiative, calling for a renewed focus on security challenges within the historic areas of NATO interest. The most important aim of this initiative was to strengthen NATO's

credibility concerning collective defense of its members as well as raise the level of training and exercise activity within NATO's traditional sphere of influence.⁷ One of the reasons for this initiative was Russia's intervention in Georgia and their more assertive policy against neighboring countries. NATO's 2010 strategic concept stressed these core tasks in a clearer way than earlier. Norway perceived this initiative a response to Russia's increased military activity in the High North and the renewed importance of getting assurance of collective defense from its NATO allies.

The need for assured collective defense became even more important when Russia intervened in the Crimea and made the push on Ukraine. If Norway is to expect support from NATO, it must take responsibility for its own security. As US Congress representatives told the Norwegian Minister of defense, "Why should we invest in European security when Europeans are not interested in investing in their own security."⁸ To ensure assistance when needed, Norwegian military forces must contribute to the collective defense. Norway accomplishes this by participating in NATO operations and exercises to maintain interoperability between allies and partners. However, it is not only important for ensuring interoperability; it is also a vital element in showing alliance cohesion and strength of will, thus contributing to the Alliance's deterrence and reassurance. Norway has a long history of hosting allied training and exercises, and will continue to do so.⁹

Yet, an increase in NATO presence so close to Russia's borders and with a growing anti-Western sentiment at home, Russia may increasingly come to perceive the High North as a source of security policy challenges. The desire among key Russian decision makers to restore Russia as a great power could give rise to a more unpredictable and challenging Russia in the area.¹⁰ However, Norway's deterrence posture is closely linked with the credibility of collective

defense; therefore, it needs an alliance capable of addressing these challenges in a coherent and credible way.

Bi-lateral Relationships

Responsible Management of Resources

Russia is not only a potential counterpart to Norway in the High North. It is also a collaborator within areas of common interest. This is especially applicable when it comes to the management of renewable resources; consequently, continuous monitoring between responsible authorities must be sustained. The best example of Norwegian-Russian cooperation is the bi-lateral management of fisheries in the Barents Sea. Responsible management of living marine resources and the need to combat illegal, unregulated, and unreported fishing are central elements in Norwegian policy, both national and international, because Norway's two largest consumables and exports are oil and fish. These are strategic resources for Norway. Control over and access to these resources is therefore extremely important.¹¹ Russia, like Norway, wants the region to remain stable and peaceful and share Norway's resource concerns. As such, Russia and Norway work closely together on the management of resources, environmental issues, as well as search and rescue operations. Indeed, they are both members of the Barents Cooperation and the Arctic Council. For both countries, the Law of the Sea is important in securing their national interests as well as their common interests. In addition, the Maritime Delimitation and Cooperation in the Barents Sea and Arctic Ocean agreement came into effect in 2011 and has reduced the key outstanding issues between Norway and Russia through the last decades, contributing to more predictability and stability in the area. However, disputes about the continental shelf can lead to challenges in the future. In fact, Russian authorities aim to develop the region into the country's foremost strategic base for natural resources by 2020.¹² However,

these investments will be affected by the plummeting oil price and the western sanctions introduced in response to the Ukraine crisis. As Russia is first and foremost a commodity exporting country, where gas constitutes 70% of the country's export income, the decreasing price of oil could slow Russia's initiatives.¹³ However, onshore oil and gas production in the Russian Arctic is expected to continue despite the sanctions and lower oil price because there are enormous undeveloped deposits available to compensate for falling production on older fields further south.¹⁴ This increases the importance of the High North to the Russian economy.

Consequently, Norway's relationship with Russia, based on common interests, must be managed wisely. Russia is an important and demanding neighbor for Norway. In light of the Ukraine crisis, Norway's endorsement and support of NATO's policy towards Russia is important. However, Norwegian Russian bi-lateral relations go back centuries. Especially in the northern part of Norway, there have been extensive trade and cultural relationships throughout history. After the Cold War, the Norwegian-Russian political relations grew closer through the Barents cooperation, one of the efforts to bring Russia closer to Europe.¹⁵ Active collaboration, however, does not mean there is a contradiction in policy when a firm line must be drawn toward Russia. Norway has a long tradition of using this dual policy.¹⁶ When Norway entered the fisheries commission in the mid-1970s, it did so as a counterpart to the Soviet Union super power status. Thus, management on fisheries in the Barents Sea became a good example of how cooperation across the geopolitical fronts of the Cold War could work. In the Soviet period the cooperation was mainly quotas and overall management. Seven good years followed the Soviet Union's collapse, with high cod quotas, close cooperation, and a wide expansion of the commission's scope. In line with the political changes in Russia, the cooperation at the end of 1990's became more difficult and, in the 2000's, it has been the decade of pragmatism and

compromises.¹⁷ As long as Russia's orientation is considered to be interest based, cooperation will be possible when deemed useful to both parties.

The Norwegian archipelago of Svalbard, and the importance of protecting its unique environment, is high on Norway's policy agenda. The archipelago is also of common interest for Norway and Russia. Under the terms of the Svalbard Treaty of 1920, Norway gained sovereignty over the group of islands and they have been a part of the Kingdom of Norway since 1925. According to the Svalbard Treaty all treaty participants have the same right to harvest in this area; however Norway is responsible insuring it happens in accordance with the law of the treaty.¹⁸ Russia keeps a visible presence on Svalbard and aspires for special arrangements to maintain its historical position on the islands, like the Russian mining community situated in Barentsburg. In turn, Norway exercises authority in the Fishery Protection Zone around Svalbard. While there have been conflicts regarding fishing rights in this zone, and conflicts also may occur in the future, Russia respects Norway's enforcement of the protection zone. As the Norwegian Minister of Foreign Affairs states, "Russia recognizes the Svalbard policy and respects Norway's exercise of authority, and we assume they will continue to do so in the future."¹⁹ Norway needs to keep a tight line to make sure the fish stock is properly maintained for the benefit of both countries.

Future Development in the Arctic

The High North can also develop into a major shipping route for strategic commodities like oil and gas. Today, 90% of the merchandising transport is on the sea and new lines of communications may open in the north as the ice continues to melt. Consequently, this warming trend will most likely lead to a profitable trade route between Europe and Asia along the Norwegian-Russian coast lines.²⁰ According to the 2009 Russian Arctic strategy, the Arctic will

constitute Russia's key strategic resource base in the future. If the construction of new oil shipping ports and liquefied natural gas plants progresses as planned, these installations will generate considerable traffic along the Northeast Passage for years to come. In fact, existing gas pipelines predominantly connect the country's gas sector to a stagnating European market; shipping gas and other natural resources from Arctic ports would enable Russian fuel to reach other markets and increase their strategic importance.

Although the Russians will be using the Northeast Passage to develop its northern regions, international interest in the Passage is expected to remain low. In recent years, its strategic importance as a shortcut between Asia and Europe has fallen sharply. Even with major climate change and a dramatic melting of sea ice in the summer, the Northeast Passage will largely remain a seasonal alternative for a select few. Even in summer, challenges such as ice and icing, difficult seabed conditions, overstretched icebreaker capacity, stricter ship design and insurance requirements as well as a lack of infrastructure along the route, including limited search and rescue capabilities, will keep traffic low.²¹ Nevertheless, Russia has taken steps to tighten national control of the Northeast Passage by introducing federal legislation. This could spark disputes with other countries. Indeed, Russia's introduction of a regulations regime covering the entire economic zone could spark international discord. While Russia refers to the country's right by international law to take non-discriminatory measures in waters covered by ice for whole or parts of the year, other nations may believe Russian regulations violate the freedom of the seas.

The Arctic Ocean seabed will receive a great deal more attention in the coming years. Russia and Denmark have already submitted their continental shelf claims for the Arctic Ocean. Canada is expected to follow suit within a short period of time.²² While Russia and Canada may

present equivalent claims, the submission of extensive and partly overlapping claims should not lead to confrontation or conflict.²³ Nevertheless, increased interest in this area requires close cooperation with all coastal states. Especially when considering the ice melting can also lead to the opening of more oil fields and larger production rates in the High North, both because other fields run empty and because the world wants more oil. Export from production in the area could, therefore, become an increasingly important source of income for both Norway and Russia. Norway will facilitate a close and open cooperation with all the stakeholders who want to be involved in the further development of the possibilities in the region.

Sustaining a Presence in the High North

Increased Russian Military Presence

In the 2000's, and especially from Putin's second presidency (2004-2008), the High North has come to play an increasingly larger role in Russia's domestic, foreign, and defense policy. The opening of new sea lines and easier access to rich natural resources, especially oil and gas on the continental shelf, has created new possibilities as well as security challenges. Russian authorities want a rapid development of the Arctic on a broad front. These ambitious plans also include security and defense resources.²⁴ Despite having primarily a strategic role, Russian armed forces in the High North are central to ensuring Russia retains its desired degree of control in the Arctic. Overall, the High North has seen elevated levels of intelligence aircraft flights. Additionally, Russia continues its strategic patrols using heavy and medium bombers in Norway's vicinity. Norwegian Intelligence Service suggests the Russian activity is: "One of the key purposes of these patrols is to demonstrate Russia's ability to conduct operations involving

strategic air launched nuclear weapons and to signal to the world, especially USA, that the Russian military cannot be ignored.”²⁵ This is a clear sign of a strengthened Russia.

Importantly, the Russian military force has, after a maturity period in the 1990’s, gradually been rebuilt. Russian defense reforms, begun in 2008, will continue to affect capability, development, and force structure. Their reforms have resulted in a much slimmer and more flexible military organization with a shorter response time. Long range aviation, nuclear forces, airborne forces, air defense forces, and naval forces continue to take priority in their modernization plans. In 2013, for the first time since 2003, Russia spent a larger proportion of its GDP on defense than the US.²⁶ Indeed, the Norwegian Intelligence Service’s assessment for 2015 says, “2014 saw an increase in the construction of military infrastructure in the High North and Arctic.”²⁷ Consequently, modernization of Russian nuclear and conventional forces is underway, making Russia more able to project power to the north and west. In fact, Russia has taken a number of steps to secure its interests. As part of their protection of the strategic nuclear submarine capacity and of Russia in general, a robust aerial defense system is being built in the form of additional air bases, anti-air assets, and radar stations for air defense and early warning.

The number of ground forces in Northwest Russia is relatively modest at present, but are increasing. In December 2014, Russia established a joint military command for the Arctic region, based on their Northern Fleet. It will have command authority across Arctic Russia, and replaces the current structure dividing responsibility between three military districts. Their new Arctic command will improve Russia’s ability to plan, coordinate, and conduct operations in the High North, as well as enhance interdepartmental cooperation. A motorized infantry brigade, decommissioned in 2008, is now being re-established in Alakurtti in the Murmansk region, on the border with Finland. Additionally, Russia has announced the establishment of yet another

brigade in the autonomous Yamalo-Nenetsk region, 1600 kilometers east of the Norwegian border, by 2016.²⁸ The addition of these two new Arctic brigades will reinforce the land based Russian military presence in the High North.

Nuclear weapons play a key role in Russia's deterrence policy, and the country's strategic submarines are crucial in this regard. These submarines and the Northern Fleet's ability to protect them both in port and on patrol form the core of Russian military activity in the High North. Russia is also improving its ability to deliver weapons as well as protect strategic capabilities and core areas, including those weapons whose ranges cover large parts of Norwegian land, air, and sea territory. As Russia's strategic submarines patrolled and tested new capabilities, number of tests of a new intercontinental ballistic missile capable of carrying nuclear warheads took place in Norway's vicinity during the autumn 2014.²⁹ Impacts were registered in the easternmost parts of Russia. Consequently, naval activity in the High North will probably continue to center on tests and training with both vessels and submarines.

Norwegian Defense Policy Focus Shifts North

In turn, the Russian build-up of military forces makes Norway more vulnerable. Improved Russian responsiveness and higher readiness reduces the warning time and increases the need for early detection. This build-up underscores the asymmetry of Norwegian-Russian power relations. In fact, experts assigned by the Norwegian Minister of Defense suggest, "Russia will still be the most important factor in the Norwegian defense planning in foreseeable future. Russia's military reconstruction marks the asymmetry in Norwegian-Russian power structure becomes clearer."³⁰ Based upon the changes within Russia, the restructuring of the Norwegian Armed Forces tends to gravitate north. In 2009, the Norwegian Joint Operational Headquarter moved northward from Stavanger to Bodo. In 2014, National Air Operation Center (NAOC)

was established, also in Bodø, collocated with the Norwegian Joint Operational Headquarter. Additionally, maritime patrol aircraft and the Coast Guard operate in the area on a daily basis to claim sovereignty.

In March 2015, 5000 soldiers gathered in Finnmark for the largest joint military exercise in that particular area since 1967. Three months later, Norway's Minister of Finance revealed the Government will provide money to increase the number of future exercises in Finnmark: "Today Norway does not face a direct threat, however, we see a development in the horizon we have to take seriously."³¹ On 1 October 2015 the Norwegian Chief of Defense put forward his advice on the structure of the future Norwegian defense. His proposal implies a marked shift. The ability to defend Norway and its allies within the framework of NATO is strengthened considerably. His recommendation specifically emphasized improved responsiveness, elevated preparedness, and strengthened staffing in several departments. This structure will give Norway a national, independent ability to handle the most demanding challenges of armed attack for a limited period. Besides giving the armed forces increased responsiveness, it also addresses the need for modernizing key areas capacities. In addition, it provides a military response to coercive diplomacy, questions sovereignty and exercise of authority, reacts to terror, and integrates with international operations. Combined, the measures propose a modest, prioritized defense set to solve multi-dimensional tasks. In addition, future defense budgets will add to these capacities through further initiatives and prioritization.³² He further states, although Russia is not considered a direct threat to Norway today, it cannot be excluded because Norway might be drawn into a conflict because of its geographical location. Thus, the High North will still be of great importance for Norway and presence in the area will continue to be essential. Of course, as in all democracies, the decision lies with the politicians. In her annual address to the Oslo

Military Society, the Norwegian Minister of Defense stated it may be necessary to create a different defense strategy than the one recommended by the military chief.³³ While focusing primarily on a wide range of arguments suggesting the defense strategy must contain priorities in future budget battles, the reality of dropping oil prices and other national priorities may mean a new defense strategy is required. Despite this, The High North will still be of high significance for Norway.

Conclusion

Norway will preserve stability and security in the High North in the future by ensuring its strategic interests. To achieve this, the Norwegian security policy should be based on collective defense, bi-lateral relationships, and a sustaining presence in the High North. NATO is the foundation of Norwegian security policy and collective defense its cornerstone. During the Cold War the High North was of critically importance; the Soviet Union on one side and NATO on the other side. During this period, Norwegian security policy was based on “deterrence” and “reassurance”. “Deterrence” made an attack from the east so costly it would risk bringing in NATO. “Reassurance” balanced deterrence, by guaranteeing Norway would not be a springboard for allied operations against the Soviet Union in peacetime. The end of the Cold War led to a more peripheral importance for the High North. In September 2008, Norway, together with Poland and the Baltic states, became the driving force in promoting the Core Area Initiative, calling for a renewed focus on security challenges within NATO’s more traditionally area of responsibility.

Norway considers the management and protection of the High North’s vulnerable arctic areas and resources as its responsibility. Oil and fish are strategically important resources for the

Norwegian economy. Therefore, control over these resources is vital. The High North is also of great economic importance to Russia. Russian authorities aim to develop the region into the country's foremost strategic base for natural resources by 2020. Consequently, the Arctic Ocean seabed will receive a great deal more attention in the coming years. As the ice melts, opportunities for more oil fields and increased production in the High North will open, as other fields dry up and because the world wants more oil. Should these climatic conditions occur, a profitable trade route between Europe and Asia along the Norwegian-Russian coast lines will open, further necessitating a bi-lateral relationship.

The High North has come to play an increasingly larger role in Russia's domestic, foreign and defense policy. During Putin's time, Russia has increased its military presence in the region. The Russian build-up of military forces makes Norway more vulnerable; consequently, Norwegian defense policy focus has shifted north. Indeed, Russia will remain the defining factor of Norwegian defense planning in the foreseeable future. On 1 October 2015, the Norwegian Chief of Defense provided his advice as an input to the Norwegian long term plan for the defense of Norway, stating, in the future, Norway might be drawn into a conflict with Russia because of its geographical location. Thus, this area will still be of great importance for Norway and sustaining a presence in the High North continues to be essential.

Notes

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- ⁴ Tormod Heier and Anders Kjoelberg, *Norge og Russland: Sikkerhetspolitiske utfordringer I Nordomraadene* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 2015), 13
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- ²² Reidun J Samuelsen, Gunnar Kagge, “Russland gjentar krav paa Nordpolen”, aftenposten.no, 4 August 2015
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