

AIR COMMAND AND STAFF COLLEGE

AIR UNIVERSITY

NORWAY'S IMPACT ON THE NEW STRATEGIC CONCEPT

by

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1. INTRODUCTION

As NATO is in the process of developing a new Strategic Concept (SC), Norway is one of the small European countries trying to make an important contribution to the future of NATO. During the Cold War the Norway-Russia border along with Arctic military considerations meant that Norway was important to the security of NATO, but afterwards the focus of NATO shifted to other regions of Europe, particularly the Balkans.¹ With the start of the international efforts to fight terrorism, NATO's focus has been drawn even farther afield to places like Afghanistan. These developments make it impossible for Norway to continue to wield influence in NATO disproportionate to its size based solely on classic defense considerations, so it is likely to appeal to other issues. The Norwegian contribution to the ongoing transatlantic security and defense dialogue and ultimately to the new Strategic Concept can be estimated by an examination of Nordic cooperation and the High North as key drivers of Norwegian security and defense policy.

2. NORDIC BALANCE AND NORDIC COOPERATION

The Norwegian relationship to NATO has been greatly influenced by its history as a Nordic country. Norway and the other Nordics (Denmark, Sweden, Finland, and Iceland) have a great deal in common. They are democracies that emphasize human rights and social equity, and they have related histories, cultures, and languages.² The similarities can be seen in the non-binding but formal Nordic cooperation established in the Nordic Council. The Nordic Council was created in 1952 to promote "Nordic Cooperation", particularly in national social, cultural, economic, and educational realms, and it has been very successful in creating a sense of common identity among Nordic citizens.³

On the other hand, the differences between the Nordics in strategic outlook, history, and geography have prevented the sort of strategic unity that would result in a collective defense

community.⁴ These differences are exemplified by the development of what came to be known as the “Nordic Balance” during the Cold War, and an examination of the Nordic Balance can provide some clues as to how Norway will view a new NATO Strategic Concept.

After World War II, Norway understandably no longer felt like it could rely on neutrality for its security, and was joined by Denmark and Iceland in 1949 as part of the first members of NATO. Sweden, on the other hand, felt that neutrality had and would continue to work for it, so it maintained a neutral status. Finland was compelled by geography into the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance with the Soviet Union.⁵ An alternative explanation of these arrangements from the Soviet point of view was that “At the Soviet public level, one hears that Finland has a policy of positive neutrality, that Sweden’s neutrality is commendable, although it could be improved in some respects, and that Norway and Denmark are basically decent nations who have regrettably fallen into dubious company because they did not understand what was best for them.”⁶ Regardless of which side of the Warsaw Pact the Nordics were viewed from, these differing alignments created a stable buffer between the superpowers that became known as the “Nordic balance”.

The Nordic balance had a significant role to play in international relations during the Cold War, but its relevance is less certain today. In a 1979 article in the *Washington Quarterly* the author theorized about what would happen to the Nordic balance if the Warsaw Pact dissolved or if the Common Market became a unitary actor. His anticipated worst case for the Nordic balance was that Denmark and Norway would then gravitate to the west and make it difficult for Sweden and Finland to maintain their neutrality and independence.⁷ Judging by that standard, the entrance of Finland and Sweden into the EU would seem to sound the death knell of the Cold War Nordic balance. Instead, in the post-Cold War era, the stable Nordic balance

could be viewed as having been replaced by a much more fluid “Northern balance” composed primarily of the Nordic NATO countries and the Baltics.⁸ The Nordics and the Baltics do desire good relations with today’s resurgent and more aggressive Russia. However, the eastward expansion of NATO that Russia sees as a continuation of the Cold War, combined with the continuing integration of the Nordics into the EU and its European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP), indicates that there is not much of an east-west balance left in northern Europe. The end of Cold War Nordic balance means that the Nordics are freer than ever to pursue tighter integration with Europe and NATO. In this environment Nordic cooperation could give the Nordic countries more influence on both EU and NATO security and defense policy in spite of their differing institutional memberships.⁹

One of the most significant recent developments in Nordic cooperation was the commissioning of former Norwegian foreign minister Thorvald Stoltenberg to compile proposals for closer Nordic cooperation. This resulted in the 2009 “Nordic Cooperation on Foreign and Security Policy”. This document identified the importance of increased Nordic cooperation to supplement Nordic cooperation with the EU, NATO, and the UN on foreign and security policy, particularly in the Arctic.¹⁰ After presentation of the report’s thirteen proposals, all five Nordic foreign ministers signed a statement saying “A common value system in the Nordic countries, and our tradition of mutual understanding and informal contacts, form the basis for our possibilities to make an impact in the world around us together. An essential pre-requisite is that the Nordic foreign and security policies continue to evolve as we face the challenges in the coming decade. This is our common goal”.¹¹ While Cold War Nordic balance is less relevant, Nordic cooperation will be an important factor in Norwegian interaction with NATO and other security regimes. This is especially important for Norway’s role in the High North.

3. THE HIGH NORTH

There are several reasons to expect that issues related to the High North will play a large role in determining the Norwegian concept of how the Strategic Concept should be formulated, starting with the High North emphasis of the Norwegian government. The Norwegian government has stated since 2005 in its policy platform that the High North is Norway's most important strategic priority area.¹² The reasons for this emphasis are many, but Norwegian foreign minister Jonas Støre narrowed them down to three main drivers in a February 2010 speech: The visibility of climate change in the High North, the potential for new sailing routes opened up by melting ice, and the potential for petroleum resources.¹³

When examining the significance of the High North to Norway and to NATO, it first helps to know what the High North is. The Norwegian government defines the High North as "...the sea and land, including islands and archipelagos, stretching northwards from the southern boundary of Nordland county in Norway and eastwards from the Greenland sea to the Barents Sea and the Pechora Sea."¹⁴ Although the Arctic Ocean and North Pole are not mentioned in this definition, they will figure prominently in the debate, not the least because of climate change.

The attention given to climate change in the media is finding its way into international studies and official policy documents, and Norway is helping to lead the way. Climate change is at the top of the Norwegian environmental policy agenda, as indicated by the Norwegian compliance with the Kyoto Protocol and attempts to strengthen its provisions.¹⁵ A 2008 EU Commission paper on climate change identified rapid melting of the polar ice caps as a threat to stability and to European security interests. The UN has is also examining the impact of climate change on a variety of issues such as fishing.¹⁶ The impact of global warming on sparsely populated Arctic regions is especially noteworthy because of its pace. An Arctic Climate Impact

Assessment (ACIA) showed that the Arctic is warming twice as fast as the global average.

Multiple models show this trend will continue as the loss of ice cover increases the absorption of radiation and accelerates further melting.¹⁷

Some of the main impacts of climate change and reduced ice are the potential for new shipping routes and sources of energy. These are the main areas that Norway is using to draw international attention to the High North. In 2004, the ACIA estimated regular trans-arctic shipping would be going on by around the year 2090. In 2007 that estimate had moved up to around 2050, and in 2009 the estimate was closer to 2020.¹⁸ Shipping across the Northwest or Northeast passages, or directly across the Arctic, has the potential to significantly shorten some shipping routes between Europe, Asia, and North America.¹⁹ However, the scale of Arctic shipping is likely to be limited for a long time by a number of complicating factors. The cold of each Arctic winter and the uncertainty about when it will end could play havoc with shipping schedules.²⁰ Icebergs could require slower shipping speeds, and specialized Arctic equipment and higher insurance premiums could make Arctic shipping more expensive.²¹ Nonetheless, in the past few years Arctic shipping has increased due to petroleum and metal exports from the north coast of Russia.²² This current and potentially increased Arctic shipping causes concern for the environment, such as the risk of an oil tanker sinking. There are also concerns that terrorists could infiltrate through sparsely populated and poorly monitored areas, or that passenger ships could hit ice and sink, as happened to the MS Explorer in Antarctica in 2007. Most directly related to shipping are concerns about who owns and controls the sea lines of communication, especially in Canadian claimed parts of the Northwest Passage and Russian claimed parts of the Northeast Passage.²³ As it looks at the impact of climate change, Norway's High North strategy

addresses shipping related concerns such as these already mentioned as part of environmental and human security, and perhaps most significantly, the issue of Arctic petroleum.

A 2000 US Geological Survey estimate that the Arctic could hold 25% of the world's undiscovered oil and gas resources helped to spark international focus on the Arctic.²⁴ Although these numbers were revised slightly downwards, a 2008 US Geological survey estimated that 13% of the world's undiscovered oil and 30% of the world's undiscovered natural gas is located north of the Arctic Circle.²⁵ This has translated into Norwegian government optimism that the Norwegian High North could replace the declining oil production of southern Norway.²⁶ Russian estimates that their Arctic continental shelf could contain 90% of their hydrocarbon reserves means that the Arctic could replace declining Siberian production and secure Russian wealth and international status.²⁷ This reality has led Russian President Medvedev to declare that "The use of these energy reserves is a safeguard for Russian energy security... We have to ensure the long-term national interests of Russia in the Arctic."²⁸ The other Arctic countries are also concerned with enhancing their own energy security, and this increases the potential for conflict. These concerns are tempered, however, by the fact that most of the potential Arctic petroleum is located within the undisputed coastal jurisdiction of the Arctic countries. In addition, just as the future scale of Arctic shipping is uncertain, the ability of the Arctic countries to access their northern energy resources is uncertain. Much Arctic petroleum is located in harsh, deep, isolated, environmentally vulnerable locations, and transportation to and from those areas is complicated by the same concerns of floating ice, polar storms, etc. that can plague any Arctic shipping.²⁹ This means that Arctic petroleum will be much more expensive than that from the Middle East or Africa, and that it will require a sustained higher oil price to make much Arctic petroleum extraction worthwhile.³⁰ The urgency put into extraction and the associated political friction is

hard to predict because of uncertainties about issues like the pace of climate change and the development of petroleum extraction technology, but Norway wants to address this issue.

One other key factor that needs to be addressed for its effect on all of the drivers of Norway's High North policy is the role of Russia. The other Arctic bordering countries (USA, Canada, Denmark/Greenland, and Norway) are all modern, liberal democracies that are part of NATO and faced off against the Soviet Union/Russia during the Cold War. Although the Arctic is a stable area, there are indications that Russia still approaches relations with NATO in the Arctic from a Cold War, zero-sum game mindset.³¹ This attitude has been hardened by Russian resentment of NATO military technological supremacy and the expansion of NATO into former Soviet countries. Russia views many High North issues, such as the enforcement of fishing regulations and the establishment of environmental rules on the Svalbard archipelago, as part of a Norwegian strategy to push Russia out of the area.³² This tension plays into the ongoing dispute between Russia and Norway over the delimitation of the Barents Sea in an area thought to contain significant petroleum deposits.³³ Perhaps in response to these perceived affronts, and in keeping with Russian President Medvedev's declaration on the importance of protecting Russian interests in the Arctic, Russia has established a more aggressive verbal and military stance in the Arctic.³⁴ One especially high profile incident highlighted by the EU as indicative of polar tensions is the 2007 planting of a Russian flag under the North Pole, accompanied by Russian Prime Minister Putin's declaration that the North Pole is part of the Russian continental shelf.^{35, 36} While legally insignificant, this was followed in 2009 with a declaration of the Russian National Security Council that the Arctic would become its "main resource base" by 2020, and that Russia plans for troops "capable of ensuring military security in the region".³⁷

In spite of Russian aggressiveness, there are also indications that in the long-run Russia will avoid conflict with NATO in the High North. Russia was a fully cooperative part of the 2008 Ilulissat declaration. In this declaration Russia agreed to increase cooperation with the other Arctic countries and to comply with all of the current international regimes and organizations that regulate the Arctic. In spite of the flag-planting incident, Russia is following accepted procedures for establishing national and continental shelf boundaries.³⁸ With respect to environmental concerns, Russia is working on High North environmental issues within the policy framework of the EU's Northern Dimension and that of the Joint Norwegian-Russian Commission on Environmental Protection.³⁹ Russia is also not always adversarial toward Norway. Even when discussing energy concerns Russia has shown the ability to speak cooperatively, as indicated by a 2005 statement by Putin that "Russia and Norway are strategic partners in the development of hydrocarbons in the North."⁴⁰ Further evidence of a Russian shift from Arctic confrontation to cooperation can be seen in the 2008 Russian Arctic policy document, which expressed a much greater focus on soft security interests and less focus on hard security interests than the 2001 version.⁴¹ The greater emphasis on cooperation in the 2008 Russian Arctic policy resembles aspects of Norway's High North strategy. There Norway emphasizes the importance and the opportunities of working with Russia. Støre has repeatedly emphasized in connection with Russia the Norwegian credo of "High North equals Low Tension".^{42, 43} However, in spite of recent Norwegian and Russian focus on Arctic cooperation, Medvedev stated in March 2010 that "Regrettably, we have seen attempts to limit Russia's access to the exploration and development of the Arctic mineral resources."⁴⁴ It thus seems likely that relations in the High North and the Arctic will continue to be characterized on all sides by a desire for stability and cooperation but a lack of trust.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The first conclusion to draw from these issues is that Norway can be expected to work with fellow Nordic NATO members Denmark and Iceland to try and refocus NATO on Article 5 defense, with the High North as a justification for such a focus. Other issues, such as the role of nuclear weapons in NATO and NATO's role in combating nontraditional threats are important to Norway. Norway contributes forces to Afghanistan and publicly professes that success there is important to the security concerns of NATO members.⁴⁵ However, the Norwegian view on how NATO should craft a new Strategic Concept to assure continued alliance relevance was expressed in early 2010 by Defense Minister Grete Faremo, when she said that NATO must stop being sidetracked by international activities and refocus on core values of Article 5 defense and protection of basic security interests.⁴⁶ This focus can be supported by a long-term emphasis on the security challenges of the High North, which the Nordics see as a basic security interest for NATO. Evidence of this Nordic unity on the Arctic aspect of NATO defense could be seen at the 2009 Seminar on Security Prospects in the High North. The seminar was hosted by Iceland, the Danish Defense Minister gave a speech reiterating the views of Norway on the importance of the High North to NATO, and Norway agreed to host a similar conference in 2010.^{47, 48} While the new Strategic Concept is likely to refine the 1999 Strategic Concept's focus on nontraditional security threats, efforts to reemphasize Article 5 defense have been effective and are therefore likely to continue. This can be seen in the statements by US Secretary of Defense Robert Gates and US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton at the February 2010 Strategic Concept Seminar, in which both strongly advocated for a recommitment to Article 5 defense in the new Strategic Concept.^{49, 50}

The second conclusion to be drawn is that Norway will attempt to magnify its importance to NATO by continuing to promote its Nordic values and experience along with its emphasis on the High North as important factors to be incorporated in a Strategic Concept. Although Norway wants a NATO focused on homeland defense, all of the Nordics have joined the fight against terrorism while maintaining a simultaneous focus on modern peace operations.⁵¹ Suggestions for the new Strategic Concept often center on ideas that NATO should shift its focus from purely military considerations to how it can support broader security concerns. To accomplish this NATO could continue to reorganize its capabilities to make them more flexible, deployable, and able to work with non-military organizations and regimes.⁵² This is an area where the Nordics can make a contribution from both a civilian and a military standpoint. The Nordics have considerable experience going back to the Cold War in supporting UN operations, when 25 percent of the personnel for UN operations came from the Nordics.⁵³ They then responded to the end of the Cold War by heavily supporting the development of the civilian components of the European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP).⁵⁴ This expertise meshes well with the Norwegian view of the High North as a place where NATO can be part of a security solution that integrates the full range of NATO military capabilities with the efforts of other regimes to directly support transatlantic interests. Norway can therefore be counted on to work with the other Nordics to support the transformation of NATO to meet the challenges of the post-Cold War era, with an emphasis on the High North as the ideal place for a transformed NATO to get involved.

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