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NATO's Northern Enlargement: How Did It Happen, Where Will It Lead?

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Introduction by Sven G. Holtsmark, Norwegian Defence University College

Since Russia launched its threat diplomacy towards Ukraine and the West, most clearly in December 2021 with the presentation of an ultimatum in the form of “draft agreements” between Russia on the one hand and NATO and the United States respectively on the other, this author was far from the only one to have predicted that this was the beginning of a process that would unavoidably end with Sweden and Finland applying for membership of NATO. There is a simple reason for this. Even before Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022 (one needs to remember that Russia had by then been at war with Ukraine since its invasions of Crimea and Eastern Ukraine in 2014), the realisation that Russia was applying the threat of using military force to pressure a neighbouring state into political and territorial concessions meant that the two countries’ status as non-aligned was no longer sustainable. From that point on things happened exceedingly fast; both countries submitted their applications in May 2022, Finland joined the alliance 4 April this year, and most observers expect that it is only a matter of time before both Turkey and Hungary, possibly induced by both sticks and carrots by strong NATO members, also ratify Sweden’s accession to the alliance.

The three essays that follow explore some implications of this development—for the two new NATO members, for Norway as neighbour to both, and for NATO as a whole. There is no doubt that with both Sweden and Finland in NATO, the military-strategic situation in the European North will be changed, both geopolitically and in terms of military capabilities. Taken together and operating in cooperation, the Nordic countries possess significant military strength, particularly in terms of air power (all countries), but they can also field land forces (Finland in particular) and necessarily of limited size but far from negligible navies.

The essays focus on the three Nordic countries most substantially affected by this latest NATO enlargement—Sweden, Finland, and Norway. In the Baltic area the consequences will certainly be felt by Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, but also by Germany as the dominant NATO naval power in the area and by Denmark as the custodian of the Danish Straits. Russia’s only access to the sea will be via the Kaliningrad enclave and through the narrow Gulf of Finland, thus further strengthening the naval balance of power in the Baltic Sea in NATO’s favour.

Then there is Denmark and Iceland, and with Denmark follows, significantly, Greenland with its huge landmass and key role as a gatekeeper in the North Atlantic. Another gatekeeper is Iceland. This nation of approximately 388,000 inhabitants, with no military of its own, nevertheless plays a key role as an outpost for the alliance’s monitoring of Russia’s military presence in the north-eastern Atlantic. Add to this the extended coastline of mainland Norway and the Svalbard archipelago (which is as much Norwegian territory as any other part of the country)¹ far to the North and, when both Finland and Sweden become members, the entire Fenno-Scandinavian landmass, and it becomes clear that NATO’s new European North indeed forms a substantial part of NATO’s area of responsibility and operations. In the case of war in Europe, much will depend on NATO’s ability to also keep control of the vast expanses of the North Atlantic east of the so-called GIUK (Greenland-Iceland-United Kingdom) Gap and, closer to Fenno-Scandinavia, Allied supply lines in the Norwegian Sea.

The first essay that follows, by Magnus Petersson of Stockholm University, discusses the journey taken by Finland and Sweden to NATO membership—from “neutrality to solidarity.” As emphasised by Petersson, Finland’s and Sweden’s applications for NATO membership, although presenting a break with strongly

¹ The Svalbard Treaty of 1920 prohibits the use of the archipelago “for warlike purposes” and the construction of “naval bases,” but contrary to the Åland Islands, Svalbard is not demilitarized. For a brief introduction to the treaty, see Sven G. Holtsmark, “10 Questions and Answers about the Svalbard Treaty,” [Security-Brief-2-2020](#) (Oslo: The Norwegian Atlantic Committee). The author would like to thank Paal Hilde for comments on a draft of this introduction.

embedded traditions of non-alignment, must also be seen as the outcome of a process that, in the case of Sweden in particular, started decades ago. Both countries have long been integrated in NATO political and military structures to a high degree. In Sweden's case this process started more or less clandestinely in the 1950s (the Soviets were not entirely wrong when they doubted the validity of Sweden's non-aligned status), while Finland's rapprochement with NATO had to wait for the dissolution of the Soviet Union and then the formal abrogation of treaties that limited Finland's freedom of manoeuvre in its foreign, security, and defence policies.

Thus, the significance of Finland and, most likely, Sweden joining NATO is all about the alliance's core element, which is enshrined in the Washington Treaty's Article 5: the commitment to collective defence if a member state comes under attack. There may be reasons to believe that NATO would hardly have been indifferent if Russia, or before that the Soviet Union, had attacked Sweden or Finland, as the alliance was not indifferent when Russia attacked Ukraine with full force on 24 February 2022. But would NATO have intervened militarily, thus risking large-scale war with Russia/the Soviet Union? We simply don't know. What we have strong reason to believe, and what is the most important point, is that Russia considers it highly likely that Article 5 *will be* activated if the country launches an attack on NATO territory.

Petersson's essay is followed by an in-depth discussion by Ingeborg Bjur of the Norwegian Institute of Defence Studies/Norwegian Defence University College of the concepts *deterrence* and *reassurance* as they have been applied as core elements in Norway's policy towards the Soviet Union and later Russia. Russia's current aggressive behaviour and the latest NATO enlargement have raised the question of the continued relevance of the reassurance element in this "dual policy." Bjur argues that the reassurance concept cannot be assessed as one singular security policy element and identifies three different functions of reassurance and their respective relations to deterrence. The question now is which principles and practices of this policy are still relevant but need to be reconfigured in light of the current strategic environment, and which elements can be continued more or less unchanged. At times during the Cold War and in the post-Cold War era, Norwegian policymakers were somewhat worried that Norway was turning into NATO's "forgotten flank," and they did their best to maintain the interest and the military presence in the area of NATO and the United States. This has all changed as a consequence of Russia's aggression against Ukraine. Seen from the European continent and in military terms, Norway may still be a flank. But Norway's security will now be strengthened by its own flanks—the new NATO fellow members Sweden and Finland.

In the final text, Lt. Colonel (ret.) Palle Ydstebø first presents an overview of the geographic and climatic characteristics of the Fenno-Scandinavian peninsula as a theatre of military operations, linked to a discussion of operations in Norway and Finland during the Second World War. From there he moves to a highly informed analysis of current Nordic defence issues as related to Russia's Bastion Defence concept centred on the Northern Fleet base complex in Murmansk and how Russia's posture will be among the factors that will inform the discussion about how to integrate the two (given Sweden will become a member) new member states and their land and sea territories in NATO's command structure.

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Magnus Petersson is Professor of International Relations at Stockholm University. Among his latest publications is Nevra Biltekin, Leos Müller, and Magnus Petersson, *200 Years of Peace: New Perspectives on Modern Swedish Foreign Policy* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn, 2022), and *NATO and the Crisis in the International Order: The Atlantic Alliance and Its Enemies* (London: Routledge, 2019).

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“Finland and Sweden: From Neutrality to Solidarity”
by Magnus Petersson, Stockholm University

While Finland and Sweden’s applications for NATO membership in May 2022 may have surprised some observers, it can be argued that these moves should be viewed as a final destination on a long journey that started 30 years ago, and that they represent continuity rather than change. Indeed, Finnish and Swedish security policy doctrines have slowly but steadily moved from neutrality to solidarity since the end of the Cold War, and that the countries have gradually integrated themselves into the Western economic and security structures during this period.

A Long History of Defence Cooperation

Finland and Sweden have a long history of defence cooperation directed towards Russian aggression. Finland was a part of Sweden for 600 years until 1809, when it was forced into the Russian Empire after the Finnish War between Russia and Sweden. That meant that Sweden lost a third of its territory, and a fourth of its population.

Following the October Revolution in Russia in 1917, Finland succeeded in gaining its independence from Russia, and it started to orient itself towards the West. During the interwar years Finland and Sweden established a comprehensive military cooperation that was aimed at common defence against a Russian attack. There were, for example, plans to jointly defend the Åland Islands and to move parts of the Swedish Army to Finland in case of war with the Soviet Union. However, when Finland was attacked by the Red Army in November 1939, the plans were not executed. But Sweden did not declare itself neutral in the so-called Winter War, and it strongly supported Finland militarily, including almost 9,000 voluntary troops, fighter planes, and bombers.¹ Norway, by contrast, maintained formally neutrality, while clandestinely providing some limited support to Finland.

During the Cold War overt Finnish-Swedish defence cooperation was made impossible by the Finno-Soviet Agreement of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance (FMCA) that was forced upon Finland in 1948. But although both countries developed their own policies of non-alignment, their defence forces were solely directed towards a Soviet attack, and in that sense the Western orientation continued throughout the Cold War. Sweden even integrated its defence secretly into Western defence structures, especially regarding intelligence sharing and air power. Sweden had in the 1950s and 1960s one of the largest air forces in the world, which was seen as a significant asset from a Western point of view. Even if Sweden was not dragged into a Third World War, the Swedish Armed Forces were expected to facilitate the Western side, and impede the Soviet side.²

From Neutrality to Solidarity: The First Step

In 1992, shortly after the Soviet Union was dissolved, the FMCA came to an end, and new possibilities opened for Finnish-Swedish defence cooperation and increased integration for both countries into Western political, economic, and defence structures. Both countries became members of the European Union in 1995, a step which had been unthinkable during the Cold War. Before that, in 1994, both countries also subscribed

¹ Magnus Petersson, *Svensk-finskt försvarssamarbete då och nu* (Stockholm: FOI, 2021).

² Robert Dalsjö, *Life-Line Lost: The Rise and Fall of Neutral Sweden’s Secret Reserve Option of Wartime Help from the West* (Stockholm: Santérus, 2006); Mikael Holmström, *Den dolda alliansen: Sveriges hemliga Nato-förbindelser* (Stockholm: Atlantis, 2011).

to NATO's Partnership for Peace (PfP). At the time, their ambition was not to become members, but the long-term effect was that they slowly but steadily became progressively integrated into NATO through adapting to NATO standards, procedures, doctrines, and operational planning.³

During the 1990s, Finland and Sweden became, and were seen as, NATO's most active partners among the non-aligned states, and contributed heavily to the large UN-mandated and NATO-led ground operations in Bosnia, Kosovo, and Afghanistan—more than many NATO members did. Furthermore, in 2008, Finland and Sweden became the only non-NATO members to participate in the NATO-managed Strategic Airlift Capability (SAC) initiative. Sweden also took part in the UN-mandated and NATO-led operation in Libya in 2011, providing eight fighter jets. It was the first time that Sweden had participated in an international operation with fighter jets since the Congo operation in the 1960s.⁴

In order to strengthen their national military operative capacities, Sweden and Finland also increased defence cooperation with their Nordic NATO neighbours, Denmark and Norway. Although the primary driver for this was cost efficiency rather than security, the cooperation increased Nordic consultation and strategic thinking among the Nordic governments and defence establishments, which was perceived as beneficial when the security situation worsened from 2014—when Russia first attacked Ukraine.⁵

To sum up, in the two first decades after the end of the Cold War, Finland and Sweden became firmly integrated into Western defence structures. The two former “neutrals” threw their policy overboard, and to a large extent integrated into Western political, economic, and defence structures. And although they were still formally non-aligned, they had travelled a long way from the idea of neutrality in war towards solidarity with the West. In the Swedish case, the solidarity policy was even explicitly articulated in a unilateral declaration in 2009, when the Swedish government declared that “Sweden will not remain passive if another EU Member State or Nordic country suffers a disaster or an attack. We expect these countries to act in the same way if Sweden is affected.”⁶ Thus the journey from neutrality to solidarity continued, and became increasingly concrete.

From Neutrality to Solidarity: The Second Step

After Russia's first attack on Ukraine in 2014, Finland and Sweden again established a close bilateral military cooperation aimed at common defence against a Russian attack, as they had done in the interwar years, this time in close cooperation with their Nordic NATO neighbours and NATO, but still as formally non-aligned states.⁷ In particular, they started to create a web of bi- and trilateral defence agreements with other NATO members, including the United Kingdom and the United States.

First, the Finnish-Swedish defence cooperation intensified and deepened. The ambitious cooperation included the development of joint forces, joint operational planning, and integrated forces taking part in large-scale exercises together with NATO countries. It should be noted that the strategic thinking behind the cooperation was similar to the interwar years; joint defence of the Åland Islands and plans to move parts of

³ Joakim Erma Møller and Magnus Petersson, “Sweden, Finland, and the Defence of the Nordic-Baltic Region,” in Rob Johnson and Janne Haaland Matlary, eds., *The United Kingdom's Defence after Brexit: Britain's Alliances, Coalitions & Partnerships* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018): 73–96.

⁴ Ann-Sofie Dahl, *Partner Number One or NATO Ally Twenty-Nine? Sweden and NATO Post-Libya* (Rome: NATO Defence College, 2012).

⁵ Ann-Sofie Dahl, “Back to the Future: Nordefco's First Decade and Prospects for the Next,” *Scandinavian Journal of Military Studies* 4:1 (2021): 172–182.

⁶ Quote from Anna Wieslander, “‘The Hultqvist Doctrine’: Swedish Security and Defence Policy after the Russian Annexation of Crimea,” *Defence Studies* 22:1 (2022): 35–59, at 42.

⁷ Charly Salomius-Pasternak, *Ambiguity and Stability in the Baltic Sea Region: Defence Cooperation between Finland and Sweden Increases Both* (Helsinki: FIIA, 2018).

the Swedish Army to Finland were central. When the security situation in the Nordic-Baltic Region worsened from 2014, the leading powers in NATO also became increasingly interested in planning for territorial defence of the region, and Finland and Sweden progressively became more strategically important.⁸

In 2013, Finland and Sweden signed bilateral defence and security-related agreements with the United Kingdom. And at the NATO summit in Wales in September 2014, Finland and Sweden were granted access to deeper cooperation with NATO under the Enhanced Opportunities Programme (EOP). Finland and Sweden—together with Australia, Georgia, and Jordan—were considered by NATO to be the most able and willing partners, and were granted such status. During the summit, Finland and Sweden also signed so-called Host Nation Support Agreements with NATO, which clarified policy and procedures for operational and logistic support sites for NATO forces operating on Finnish and Swedish territory.⁹

In 2016–2017, Finland and Sweden strengthened their defence cooperation with the US, and formally joined the UK-led Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF). They also strengthened their bilateral defence cooperation with another key NATO member, Germany. In early May 2018, the two countries signed a trilateral defence agreement with the US, thus deepening their defence cooperation with core nations in NATO, despite formally remaining outside the Western alliance.¹⁰

In the Nordic region, Finland and Sweden signed a trilateral Statement of Intent with Norway in 2020 that allowed for not only coordinated but integrated operational planning, despite Norway's NATO membership. A joint statement of the ministries of foreign affairs of the three countries stated:

A possible outcome is operations planning for areas of common concern, for example the northern parts of Finland, Norway and Sweden (North Calotte and expand to other areas as required) and improved interoperability between our armed forces that enable common military action if decided.¹¹

Although the statement did not mention mutual security obligations, aiming for integrated operational planning was a significant step towards solidarity in practice. In 2021 Denmark, Norway, and Sweden signed a similar trilateral Statement of Intent that focused on the Baltic Straits and the surrounding areas.¹²

From Non-Alignment to Solidarity: The Final Step

In February 2022, when the Russian large-scale attack on Ukraine came, both Finland and Sweden were economically and militarily ready for NATO, and Russia's aggression provided the impetus for their decisive *political* change. The two countries had been slowly but steadily integrated in the military alliance through the adaption to standards, procedures, doctrines, and—not least—planning and conducting NATO-led military operations for almost 30 years. Furthermore, they had signed several defence agreements, and planned and exercised territorial defence of the Nordic-Baltic Region, with NATO allies.¹³

⁸ Magnus Petersson, *Svensk-finskt försvarssamarbete då och nu*.

⁹ Joakim Erma Møller and Magnus Petersson, "Sweden, Finland, and the Defence of the Nordic-Baltic Region."

¹⁰ Anna Wieslander, "'The Hultqvist Doctrine'."

¹¹ Ministry of Defence of Finland, Sweden and Norway, *Statement of Intent on Enhanced Operational Cooperation* (Oslo: Norwegian Ministry of Defence, 23 September 2020).

¹² Ministry of Defence of Denmark, Norway and Sweden, *Statement of Intent on Enhanced Operational Cooperation* (Stockholm: Swedish Ministry of Defence, 24 September 2021).

¹³ Håkon Lunde Saxi, "Alignment but not Alliance: Nordic Operational Military Cooperation," *Arctic Review on Law and Politics* 13 (2022): 53–71.

This is probably why NATO's Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg talked about a "fast-track" for Finland and Sweden to membership.¹⁴ Finland and Sweden did meet all the political (democracy), economic (market economy), and military criteria. This was in contrast to the Central and Eastern European former Warsaw Pact states that first signalled their ambition to become NATO members in the mid-1990s, but then had to conduct major reforms of their political, economic, and military systems over several years before they could join the alliance.

Finland and Sweden had also demonstrated, through the 30-year period of increased political, economic, and military integration into the West, that they were politically prepared to leave their neutrality policy behind, and that they were ready for binding solidarity with the West, including the mutual security guarantee that is at the core of NATO. With their long common historical background, and deep defence integration, they wanted to join NATO, if possible, at the same time. For political reasons, however, this was not possible. Finland became a NATO member alone on 4 April 2023.

Sweden will, in all likelihood, become a NATO member as well, but it is still waiting for ratification from the Hungarian and Turkish parliaments. There are issues waiting to be solved, especially between Sweden and Turkey. Turkey claims that Sweden is harbouring Kurdish terrorists, which Sweden denies, and has *inter alia* presented demands for extradition of named individuals that Sweden cannot comply with without compromising its core political values. Hungarian politicians are angry with Swedish criticism about Hungary's democratic standards, but it is believed that they will follow Ankara's lead should the Swedish-Turkish issues be solved.¹⁵

With both Finland and Sweden in NATO, it will be easier to further integrate the defence of the Nordic-Baltic Region, and for the Nordic countries to develop their defence and security policy based on full mutual trust and solidarity. As long as Finland and Sweden remained outside NATO, military integration was limited. Even when all five Nordic states (Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Norway, and Iceland) become members of NATO, there will still be national interests that limit integration. For example, Finland and Sweden have never focused their attention on the Norwegian Sea, and Norway has never focused its strategy on the Baltic Sea. Such differences of orientation and priorities have the potential to create tensions between the Nordic states within NATO regarding priorities in defence planning and spending. But on the whole, including Finland and Sweden in NATO will lead to a stronger and more efficient defence of NATO's Northern Flank, and complete the journey towards full solidarity between Finland, Sweden, the other Nordic countries, and the West.

¹⁴ Ann-Sofie Dahl, "Inga snabbspår in i Nato, vare sig nu eller då," *Dagens industri*, 19 June 2022.

¹⁵ Reuters, "Why are Turkey and Hungary against Sweden Joining Nato?" 5 April 2023.

“Enduring Principles, Changing Practices? Norway’s Reassurance Policy towards Russia in the Face of NATO’s Nordic Enlargement”

by Ingeborg Nortvedt Bjur, Norwegian Institute for Defence Studies, and the University of Oslo

Introduction¹

On 30 May 2023, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg and Norwegian Foreign Minister Anniken Huitfeldt met for a public conversation in Oslo, Norway’s capital, on the occasion of the upcoming meeting of NATO’s foreign ministers the next day. Stoltenberg looked forward to gathering the alliance in the town of his birth, but noted in a severe tone: “Oslo is a beautiful city, and this time of year is beautiful. But we are gathering in a time more dangerous and unpredictable than what we have experienced in decades.”²

Russia’s war of aggression in Ukraine was at the top of the agenda. Several factors in and about the NATO meeting clearly pointed to the direct relevance of Russia’s warfare to the Northern region; this was Finland’s first major meeting after entering into the alliance as result of Russian aggression. And while Stoltenberg and Huitfeldt talked on stage, the hitherto largest warship in the world, the 333-metre-long USS *Gerald R. Ford*, sailed along the Norwegian coast. It had made its first international port call in Oslo only a few days prior, being the first US aircraft carrier visit to Norway in sixty-five years.³ It was certainly no coincidence that Norway, NATO’s historic northern frontline with Russia, was chosen for such a historic visit.

After the conversation between Stoltenberg and Huitfeldt had covered subjects such as the need for increased deterrence and defence to meet the severe international security environment, an audience member asked about the prospect of the historically traditional Norwegian line of balancing deterrence with reassurance towards Russia, wondering what was left of dialogue, what the possibilities were for it and whether it remains important, and, if so, what channels could eventually be utilized for such purposes.⁴ In their replies, both Huitfeldt and Stoltenberg noted that any answer must be based on a distinguishing between different aspects of reassurance. They referred to both dialogue and the need for avoiding misunderstandings, and how the prospects for both are different in today’s environment. Interestingly enough, neither of them mentioned what *traditionally* has been viewed as a core line of Norwegian reassurance: Norway’s reservations about Allied activity on Norwegian territory. With the Nordic NATO enlargement, this aspect will be of particular importance to review and assess, as Norway will find itself in a fundamentally changed military-strategic environment.⁵

As such, Stoltenberg and Huitfeldt’s remarks made visible a need to distinguish between the various functions of Norwegian reassurance policy in order to assess their relevance in today’s security environment.

Traditionally there have been few attempts in the scholarly literature to do so. The terms *deterrence* and *reassurance* on the surface sound like an easy pair of mutually balancing policy lines: A little bit of this is

¹ For helpful comments and suggestions, I would like to thank Sven G. Holtmark, Johannes Gullestad Rø, and Gjermund Forfang Rongved.

² Transcription and translation of Stoltenberg’s speech by the author. The full session can be viewed here: “Møte med Natos generalsekretær Jens Stoltenberg og utenriksminister Anniken Huitfeldt”, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JwSTwBkx09g>.

³ U.S. Naval Forces Europe and Africa/U.S. Sixth Fleet, “First U.S. Aircraft Carrier to Visit Norway in 65 Years”, 24 May 2023, <https://www.c6f.navy.mil/Press-Room/News/News-Display/Article/3405356/first-us-aircraft-carrier-to-visit-norway-in-65-years/>.

⁴ The questions are here slightly rephrased, see full session in the second footnote for the exact wording.

⁵ See Palle Ydstebø’s essay in this forum. When Finland joined the alliance on 4 April 2023 (the anniversary of the signing in 1949 of the Washington Treaty, which is hardly a coincidence), Norway was no longer the only ally neighbouring Russia in the High North, as it had been since 1949. The expression High North is used in this article to distinguish from expressions such as “the Nordics” or “Northern countries,” which are now often used to comprise not only the Scandinavian countries, Finland and Iceland, but also Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania.

balanced by a little bit of that, and the prominence of one as measured against the other can, one would imagine, be easily adjusted depending on the state of the security environment Norway is part of at any given time. The two words may evoke the image of separate, even potentially conflicting, policy lines.

In this text, I will rather argue that the “reassurance policy,” as it has been deployed as part of the Norwegian security policy toolbox, has held various functions, which each relate differently to deterrence policies.⁶ As such, the idea of deterrence versus reassurance as a dichotomy in Norway’s policy towards Russia is an undue simplification. The question is not whether the established idea of combining deterrence with reassurance needs to be abandoned, but rather which principles and practices of the policy are still relevant but need to be reconfigured, and which elements can be continued more or less unchanged under the new circumstances.

Here I first revisit the origin and renewed relevance of the Norwegian “deterrence and reassurance” approach. Then, I name and discuss three functions of Norwegian reassurance towards its great power neighbour in the East in face of NATO’s Nordic enlargement: *crisis management*, *deterrence calibration*, and *conciliation*. I argue that while all three categories will remain relevant as part of a strategically sound security policy in the years ahead, even after both Sweden and Finland become NATO members it is of crucial importance to identify and assess the various reassurance functions separately, and then adapt the practices in light of the current strategic environment. Also, in the assessment of the relevance of what has been seen as reassurance measures one would have to include the complex role they have played in the forming of Norwegian security policy *beyond* a signalling tool towards Moscow. Mapping out and communicating a future policy that builds on a renewed and potentially more subtle understanding of what constitutes these two elements in Norway’s Russia and overall security policy represents a pedagogical challenge for the Norwegian government regarding all of its audiences: Russia, Norway’s allies, and the Norwegian public.

Norwegian “Deterrence and Reassurance”: Origin and Renewed Relevance

As a small state, with a geostrategic important position due to its extended Atlantic coastline, Norway was traditionally both exposed to the interests of greater powers and sheltered under great power protection. Even in times of formal non-alliance, prior to World War Two, the young state relied on what scholars have labelled an “implicit guarantee” since it acquired its independence from Sweden in 1905; the assumption that Great Britain, out of its own interest, would come to Norway’s rescue in times of emergency.⁷ The two world wars offered fundamentally different lessons: During World War One, Norway managed to avoid being dragged directly into the conflict by stretching its status as neutral to the degree that it has been characterised by one leading historian as a “neutral Ally” of the Entente powers.⁸ In World War Two Norway was attacked and occupied by Germany (as was Denmark; Sweden remained neutral). The idea of an effective implicit guarantee proved futile. This led Norwegian policymakers to the conclusion that in any future great power war in Europe, Norwegian neutrality—possibly again in contrast to that of Sweden—would not be respected. Moreover, Norway was unable to defend itself on its own, meaning that a security guarantee had to be formalised, and military assistance had to be prepared in peacetime.

⁶ See for example: Norwegian Ministry of Defence, St.prp. nr. 1 (1976-77), 3, <https://www.stortinget.no/no/Saker-og-publikasjoner/Stortingsforhandlinger/Lesevisning/?p=1976-77&paid=1&wid=b&psid=DIVL1958>; Norwegian Ministry of Defence, “Vilje til beredskap—evne til forsvar: Langtidsplan for forsvarssektoren”, St.prp. 62 S (2019–2020), <https://www.regjeringen.no/no/dokumenter/prop.-62-s-20192020/id2697623/>.

⁷ John Sannes in Halle Jørn Hanssen and Eilert Struknes, eds., *NATO og et nytt EUROPA. 11 innlegg om Atlantpaktens problemer i en verden i forandring* (Oslo: Norsk Utenrikspolitisk Institutt: 1966): 20–21; Olav Riste, *Norway’s Foreign Relations—A History* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 2001): 71.

⁸ Riste, *The Neutral Ally: Norway’s Relations with Belligerent Powers in the First World War* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget: 1965).

At the dawn of the Cold War, Norway eventually chose the Atlantic Treaty as the solution facing what was perceived to be the mounting security challenge from its neighbour in the East.⁹ When Norway signed the Washington Treaty on 4 April 1949, it was alone among the original 12 signatory states in having a common border with the Soviet Union. Within the Atlantic Alliance, Norway was not only an “island” (it nearest NATO neighbour, Denmark, has no land border with Norway), it was also a flank. From the start this geopolitical factor has been a decisive premise in the shaping of Norwegian security policy.

This was evident even prior to the signing of the Treaty: in an exchange of notes with the Soviet government in January-February 1949, the Norwegian government declared that Norway would never be part of a policy of “aggressive intent,” and would never allow Norwegian territory to be used “in the service of such a policy.” This was followed by the declaration of what has been labelled Norway’s “base policy”—the first of Norway’s so-called “self-imposed restrictions” within NATO:

Norway will not enter into any agreement with other states that contain obligations for Norway to open bases for the armed forces of foreign states on Norwegian territory as long as Norway is not attacked or subject to threats of attack.¹⁰

This way of being an ally, with self-imposed restrictions on Allied military activity on Norwegian territory, came to serve as a mode of operation for Norwegian NATO policy throughout the Cold War and at the same time a key feature of the policy towards the Soviet Union.¹¹ The ability to control the level and geographical scope of NATO military activity on Norwegian territory, in a region of obvious strategic importance to Soviet/Russia,¹² was one of the instruments in the small state’s efforts to calibrate its signalling of deterrence towards Moscow.

The self-imposed restrictions have been divided in several categories: First is the base policy, which has been clarified and refined a number of times, while still being grounded on the wording of 1949; a ban on nuclear weapons on Norwegian territory in peacetime; intelligence and surveillance activity in the High North to be under Norwegian control (which was hard to implement—as demonstrated by the U2 affair in 1960); initial restrictions on German participation in the defence of Norway; the 1975 declaration that naval vessels were not allowed to call at Norwegian ports if they were carrying nuclear weapons—a policy which was necessarily based on trust; and, finally, restrictions on Allied activities in northern Norway, such as banning ground troops from exercising in Finnmark, while Allied aircraft and vessels were not allowed east of the 24th parallel.¹³ The Svalbard archipelago is a separate case—here military activity is restricted according to Article 9 of the 1920 Svalbard Treaty.¹⁴

These features would later be labelled as elements in the “balancing act” between “deterrence and reassurance.” In the words of then researcher and later statesman Johan Jørgen Holst in 1966, Norwegian post-war security policy had been a question of finding a “stable position” (*stabilt leie*) between deterrence

⁹ Riste, *Norway’s Foreign Relations*.

¹⁰ Sven G. Holtsmark, ed., *Norge og Sovjetunionen 1917–1955: en utenrikspolitiske dokumentasjon* (J.W. Cappelen Forlag A/S, 1995), p. 425. Translation from Norwegian by the author.

¹¹ In scholarly literature labelled “integration” versus “screening,” see: Rolf Tamnes, *Integration and Screening: the Two Faces of Norwegian Alliance Policy*, (Oslo: Forsvarets høyskole, 1986).

¹² Tamnes and Holtsmark, “The geopolitics of the Arctic in historical perspective,” in Tamnes and Kristine Offerdal, eds., *Geopolitics and Security in the Arctic* (London: Routledge, 2014): 12–48.

¹³ Listed in Kjell Inge Bjerga and Kjetil Skogrand, “Securing small-state interests,” in Vojtech Mastny, Sven G. Holtsmark and Andreas Wenger, eds. *War Plans and Alliances in the Cold War* (London: Routledge, 2006): 238. Some of the so-called Finnmark restrictions were lifted in the mid-1990s.

¹⁴ “Treaty Concerning the Archipelago of Spitsbergen, Signed at Paris, February 9, 1920,” *League of Nations Treaty Series*, Vol. 2, 8–19, <https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/UNTS/LON/Volume%202/v2.pdf>

(*anskerkning*) and provocation (*provokasjon*).¹⁵ “Reassuring” Moscow about the defensive nature of Norwegian defence efforts, in terms of both rhetoric and practice, served as the balancing vehicle. The way in which Norway conducted its alliance membership with self-imposed restrictions was a prominent example of such a “calibration” of the deterrent posture. From the 1970s, the concept pair of deterrence and reassurance was also included in official strategic policy documents.¹⁶

Since then, the content of reassurance, and the relative emphasis on its elements in relation to deterrence, have evolved as analytical categories as well as policy imperatives.¹⁷ In the 1990s deterrence receded into the background both rhetorically and, judging by available evidence, in the thinking of foreign policymakers and at least parts of the security sector bureaucracy. It reappeared with the evermore forward-leaning posture of Russia’s foreign policy and military policies under Vladimir Putin—most markedly since his return to the presidency in 2012. In 2019 “deterrence and reassurance” was designated by the government in the Long Term Plan for the Defence Sector as “Norway’s main strategic line” (*Norges strategiske hovedlinje*).¹⁸

With Norway losing its sole status as “NATO in the High North” and Russia conducting a full-scale war of aggression towards a neighbour, the reassurance aspect of Norwegian policy necessarily comes up for questioning.¹⁹ Given the close link between these terms, as they were first formulated in the 1960s, to Norway’s alliance policy and to geography, one would expect that the expansion of NATO to include Norway’s two Nordic neighbours would almost by default result in a re-evaluation of these key tenets of Norwegian policy. One of them, Finland, has a common border with Russia that is several times the length of Norway’s. What is interesting to note, however, is that as occurred in Stoltenberg and Huitfeldt’s conversation referred to above, in the current discussion on deterrence and reassurance the latter term includes measures and functions beyond the self-imposed restrictions and “screening” from Allied activity.²⁰

Given the fact that reassurance has been used to designate varying functions in Norwegian thinking and policymaking, an assessment of the policy thus needs to include more subtle references to its various constituent elements than simply referring to the term reassurance.

Reassurance Policy Functions: Crisis Management, Deterrence Calibration, Conciliation

Grossly simplified, the functions of reassurance can be summarised by using three terms: crisis management, deterrence calibration, and conciliation. There is no clear line of division between these functions, they overlap, and they are supplementary rather than mutually exclusive. In the following section I may depart from the standard usage in literature. More importantly, an erosion of reassurance versus deterrence as a dichotomy is implicit to my approach.

The term *crisis management* includes efforts at risk reduction, avoiding misunderstandings, and unintended incidents, as well as handling them if they occur, all in order to avoid unwanted escalation to a security-policy

¹⁵ Johan Jørgen Holst, “Norsk sikkerhetspolitikk i strategisk perspektiv,” *Internasjonal politikk* 5 (1966): 463–490.

¹⁶ John Kristen Skogan, “Virkemidler, begrensninger og forutsetninger i norsk sikkerhetspolitikk,” NUPI notat, vol. 192 (Oslo: NUPI 1980).

¹⁷ It is important to note that in contrast to NATO’s “reassurance” of Allies, the policy of the Norwegian “reassurance” concept has been targeted at Moscow (almost) all along.

¹⁸ Norwegian Ministry of Defence, “Vilje til beredskap—evne til forsvar: Langtidsplan for forsvarssektoren”, St.prp. 62 S (2019–2020), <https://www.regeringen.no/no/dokumenter/prop.-62-s-20192020/id2697623/>.

¹⁹ Kristin ven Bruusgaard, “Bør Norge søke å berolige et ekspansjonistisk Russland?” *Dagens Næringsliv*, 25 February 2022, <https://www.dn.no/kronikk/russland/ukraina/jonas-gahr-store/kronikk-bor-norge-soke-a-berolige-et-ekspansjonistisk-russland/2-1-1174250>.

²⁰ For another prominent example, see the recent report from the Norwegian Defence Commission, handed over to the Government on 3 May 2023: Forsvarskommissjonen av 2021, *Forsvar for fred og frihet*, Norges offentlige utredninger 2023: 14. In particular see 257–259.

crisis. It may be seen as a way of handling unintended incidents that occur as an effect of measures to deter or defend. Crisis management requires a minimum of reciprocity with the adversary. It is in the nature of misunderstandings and unwanted incidents that they can neither occur nor be solved or clarified without both sides taking part in the effort. These functions are, for example, found in the established hotline between the Norwegian and Russian military headquarters, and the Norwegian-Russian INCSEA agreement of 1990, which was renewed and updated in 2021, on preventing incidents at sea outside territorial waters, as well as broader mechanisms in arms control agreements, such as the regimes of notification in the Vienna document.²¹

Deterrence calibration involves taming the deterrence posture in order to maintain a status quo of low tension—by avoiding, using Holst’s term, “provocation.” It is rooted in an understanding of the potentially destructive dynamics of what has been labelled the security dilemma.²² In the Norwegian context, this policy has been particularly connected to the above-mentioned self-imposed restrictions on Allied military presence and activity. The balancing act in this case is about how much and what kind of deterrence is deemed appropriate to keep the adversary at bay while avoiding the provoking of escalatory countermeasures.²³ Important in this policy is that it is not only self-imposed, but is also explicitly made conditional on Russian good behaviour; the base policy will be abandoned if Norway finds itself “under the threat of attack,” and the ban on nuclear weapons, whether on Allied naval vessels in Norwegian waters or on Norwegian land territory, says nothing about what will happen if war breaks out. Thus, these and other “screening” measures are not only about reassurance, they also contain a deterrent element. This highlights how, when it comes to this function of reassurance and its relation to deterrence, we are dealing with *one* strategy that is composed of two elements, one of which is used to calibrate the other.

Finally, there is a transformative element of the reassurance policy, which may be labelled acts of *conciliation*. In the words of historian Geir Lundestad, this included the “attempts to soften and, at its most ambitious level, even to transform the nature of the conflict with the Soviet Union.”²⁴ This notion is found in a whole gamut of measures, all the way from civilian people-to-people contact, military cooperation, and efforts to enhance disarmament and increase détente. During the Cold War, elements of this thinking were found in Norwegian attempts to engage with Warsaw Pact countries, notably Poland, in exploring the ideas of establishing of zones of de-nuclearisation to reduce East-West tension.²⁵ Reoccurring discussions of a “Nordic nuclear-free zone,” which were at times anchored in government circles but always doomed to fail,²⁶ can be viewed as part of the same ambition to effect real change to the nature of not only Norwegian-Soviet/Russian relations, but also between the Soviet Union/Russia and the West.

Thus, principles and measures that at some point have been labelled reassurance, may have various relevance, value, and scope of opportunity, depending on the evolving challenges and opportunities.

One of the three elements, crisis management, may increase in importance with the continued erosion of mutual trust between Russia and the West. Increased military activity in the High North may raise the

²¹ “Norway and Russia Sign Updated Agreement on Security at Sea”, *High North News*, 21 December 2021, <https://www.highnorthnews.com/en/norway-and-russia-sign-updated-agreement-security-sea>.

²² Robert Jervis, *Perception and misperception in international politics*, vol. 49, (Princeton, N. J: Princeton University Press, 1976); Ida Maria Oma, “Sikkerhetspolitikk på kjente stier”, in Helge Pharo et al. (eds.), *Historiker, strateg og brobygger: festskrift til Rolf Tammes, 70 år* (Oslo: Pax forlag A/S, 2021): 376–340.

²³ Johannes Gullestad Rø, “Den tause teoretiker”, in Helge Pharo et al. (eds.), *Historiker, strateg og brobygger: festskrift til Rolf Tammes, 70 år* (Oslo: Pax forlag A/S, 2021): 349–375, p. 363–364.

²⁴ Geir Lundestad, “The Evolution of Norwegian Security Policy”, *Scandinavian Journal of History* 17:3 (1992): 227–256, p. 228

²⁵ Riste, *Norway’s Foreign Relations—A History*, p. 228.

²⁶ For the simple reason, among others, that it would be somehow challenging to make it reciprocal, i.e. to persuade the Soviet government to effectively include Soviet territory in the deal.

likelihood of misunderstandings and episodes that could lead to unintended escalation. Moscow may come to view the upholding of this element of reassurance in relations with Norway as being in Russia's interest. Accordingly, some of these measures were maintained even when other elements of cooperation in the security policy sphere were halted after 2014, and even with additional ones since 2022. For Norway to take the initiative to renounce the crisis management aspects of reassurance today would obviously be premature.

As regards deterrence calibration, the fundamental idea will remain relevant. No party is interested in unleashing the forces of the security dilemma, but it may be carried about by partly different measures than in the past. When the framework for and measures of deterrence change, the efforts to calibrate them must adapt accordingly. Within the Nordic NATO posture, one might have to consider calibration of the joint NATO deterrent posture as a whole—what Norway does must somehow correspond or relate to what Sweden and Finland do. The fact that the totality of NATO measures needs to be taken into account, not only the Norwegian stance, is nothing new, it was very much present in Norwegian thinking during the Cold War.²⁷ However, some of the Norwegian self-imposed restrictions have a geographical aspect that will not be able to be maintained when NATO's border with Russia in the High North extends to the east mainland and the Baltic Sea area.

It is also important to bear in mind that from their inception, Norway's "screening measures" towards NATO served functions beyond reassuring Moscow. That pertains to two overall issues in particular. The first is the demonstration of Norway's own scope of independent action, which in the last resort is Norwegian sovereignty on its own territory and in its own waters. The other regards domestic variables, specifically the need to placate critical domestic voices and secure broad support for the main tenets of Norway's security policy not only among politicians, but from the public at large.²⁸ However, even such aspects that are not strategically motivated by how to best affect the threat perceptions in Moscow are nevertheless of great importance for a small state in the complex process of mapping out a comprehensive and domestically anchored security policy. How such considerations are to be weighed in relation to the need for credible deterrence and defence is not clear.

While elements of crisis management and deterrence calibration as part of reassurance remain relevant, the third part, conciliation, is presently nearly non-existent and will remain so at least in the short term. Most of the efforts, including measures that survived the 2014 sanctions, were no longer meaningful or even possible to keep in place in 2022. One example is the disintegration of the Barents cooperation, which comprised joint regional cooperative projects between Russia and the Nordic countries on a number of issue areas, such as the environment, industrial and commercial development, and student exchange. Since the Euro-Arctic Barents Region was established in 1993, it has been hailed as providing a multilateral political framework for cooperation with Russia in the High North.²⁹ At the same time, as a small state, Norway cannot lose sight in the long run of the ambition to re-establish levels of cooperation with its great power neighbour. The two countries will continue to face each other in the High North, and Finland's and Sweden's entry into NATO does little to change the basic military-strategic determinant between Norway and Russia, which is the presence—as seen from Oslo—of the massive Murmansk military complex in the immediate vicinity of Norway's land and sea territory, and—as seen from Moscow—the fact that some of Russia's most important strategic nuclear assets are based just opposite NATO's north-eastern border line.

²⁷ See for example Stian Bones, "Et forsvarsproblem og et mulig sikkerhetsdilemma. Allierte forsterkninger og sikkerhetspolitikk I nord, 1960-1980," in Njord Wegge, ed. *Sikkerhetspolitikk og militærmakt i Arktis* (Oslo: Cappelen Damm Akademisk, 2023).

²⁸ Rolf Tamnes, *Integration and Screening: The Two Faces of Norwegian Alliance Policy, 1945–1986*, FHFS notat, nr. 5 (Oslo: Forsvarets høgskole, 1986).

²⁹ The Norwegian Government, "The Barents cooperation," last updated 08 December 2021, <https://www.regjeringen.no/en/topics/high-north/barents-cooperation/id2008480/>

In this category, it should also be noted that even as Russia's brutal breach of international law now leads to rearmament in the West, it is not a given that the *only* answer is increased military might. For a small state, another impulse is also that of working even harder to strengthen international law, and making it even more costly for great powers to violate it. This, by the way, should have implications for Western powers' political calculations as well: Russian rhetoric excels in the propaganda opportunities provided by the United States and its allies by their, at times, clearly selective approach to some basic elements of the rules governing relations between states.

Conclusion: Principles and Practices of Deterrence and Reassurance in Norway's Russia Policy are Still Relevant if they Are Properly Understood and Adequately Adapted

Russia's aggressive behaviour and the NATO expansion to include Finland and in all likelihood Sweden have raised the question of the continued relevance of the proclaimed foundation of Norway's policy towards Russia, the posture of deterrence and reassurance. The Norwegian government is facing a situation where it is of particular importance to assess this policy complex and its various facets as precisely as possible.

The security policy elements that have been understood as part of the Norwegian reassurance concept have served various functions and must be assessed accordingly. Among the important lessons that should be drawn from the past is that in the framework of calibrated deterrence, the pair of deterrence and reassurance should be seen as part of one entity, with reassurance being in practice a part of deterrence. Accordingly, they need to be integrated into overall defence planning, not assessed as specific measures being affected in isolation from each other. In addition, what have traditionally been labelled "reassuring measures" have played roles in Norwegian security policy other than that of simply "reassuring" Moscow. Whether or not the self-imposed restrictions are maintained, these other roles also need to be attended to in future policy planning.

Some of the challenges facing Norwegian decision makers are pedagogical and communicative. The task of rearmament may turn out to be the lesser challenge. As of 2023, for instance, the party programme of the Socialist Left party (Sosialistisk venstreparti, SV), whose founding idea was based upon its opposition to NATO, no longer demands Norway's exit from the alliance. This exemplifies changes that have taken place that were almost unthinkable before Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022.

Moving forward, the first step will be to identify the right questions related to the different reassurance functions. Both the questions and the answers need to differentiate between principles and practises, and reflect the changed reality that prompted the latest NATO enlargement in the first place. The challenge may be to arrive at an analysis and understanding that builds on existing principles and experience, while accepting and then communicating the changes in practices that will follow Finland and Sweden joining NATO. Norwegian policymakers will then need to find the means to communicate the answers to their three audiences: Russia, Norway's allies, and the Norwegian public.

“A Nordic Joint Operations Area for NATO? Finland and Sweden as NATO Members and the Defence of NATO’s New Northern Flank”

by Lt Col (ret.) Palle Ydstebø, Norwegian Military Academy/Norwegian Defence University College

An unintended consequence of the Russian escalation of the Russo-Ukrainian War in 2022 is that the two longstanding neutral Nordic countries—Finland and Sweden—decided to apply for NATO membership. Both countries have been part of NATO’s Partnership for Peace Program (PfP) since 1994, and active participants in both NATO field exercises and operations. Officers from both nations have also manned staff positions in different NATO Headquarters, and are well integrated into NATO standards, interoperability,¹ and doctrine.²

Despite Finland and Sweden’s recent NATO applications, their alignment with NATO and individual NATO member states has both a clandestine and an open history. Their closeness to NATO has been developed for nearly 30 years. With Norway, Denmark, and Iceland, they have also been part of the Nordic Defence Cooperation (NORDEFECO).³ This essay will describe and analyse some strategic and operational implications for NATO’s northern defences as Finland and Sweden become full members of the alliance.

Geography and Climate

Finland, Norway, and Sweden are part of the Nordic Peninsula bordering Russia in the east, the North Sea and the Baltic Sea in the south, and the Atlantic and Arctic oceans in the west and north. Denmark is also a longstanding member of NATO but is separated from the Nordic Peninsula by the Danish Straits and the Skagerrak Sea and will therefore not be discussed in this study.

The Nordic climate and weather are influenced by latitude and proximity to the Arctic. Atlantic weather and the Gulf Stream keep the Norwegian coast ice-free and navigable all year round, while polar storms that bring heavy snowfall and wind can severely limit communications. The inland is cold and dry in winter and warm and stable in summer. Parts of the Baltic Sea freeze in cold winters, but icebreakers keep the shipping lanes open.

Terrain features vary from barren rocky shores in the high north to a long Norwegian coastline bordering the North Atlantic with fjords stretching up to 200 km inland and a well-developed maritime infrastructure. There are mountains over 2000 metres 200-300 km from the coast, which descend into hilly and rolling lowlands, most of which is part of the boreal forest belt. The lowlands are broken up by thousands of lakes, agricultural areas, and infrastructure.

Infrastructure in the high north is scarce, cities are few and underdeveloped. Railways reach the Norwegian city of Narvik north of the Arctic Circle, but are better developed further south, where rail and road cross-border connections are well established. The roads are also scarce in the high north, and subject to disruption by adverse weather during the winter. The ports are well developed and there are military and civilian airfields near all major cities, and a few short-field airports in the periphery. Parts of Finland and Sweden’s highway networks are also purposed as field runways that can accommodate modern combat jets.

¹ “The Ability to Act Together Coherently, Effectively and Efficiently to Achieve Allied Tactical, Operational and Strategic Objectives,” NATO, *AAP-06, NATO Glossary of Terms and Definitions* (Brussels: NATO Standardization Office, 2018), 68.

² “Relations with Finland”, North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 5 April 2023, DOI: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_49594.htm; “Relations with Sweden,” North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 26 September 2022, DOI: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_52535.htm.

³ “Frontpage–Nordefco,” DOI: <https://www.nordefco.org/default.aspx>.

Geography and climate contribute to a demanding military operations area, especially in the winter. NATO's Doctrine for Land Operations describes several unique environments that may have "significant employment considerations for land forces." The Nordic countries as an operations environment include three of these: cold weather and mountainous and riverine environments, where "riverine" includes wide littoral waters with islands and deep fjords. Add urban areas, and any military forces set to deploy to Finland, Norway, and Sweden must be specially equipped and prepared to master any combination of these conditions.⁴

Military operations in the Arctic

Military operations in Finland, Norway, and Northern Russia during the Second World War were characterised by the region's geographical and climatic features. The Russo-Finnish war from 30 November 1939 to 12 March 1940 was to a large extent defined by the harsh winter conditions in the areas of operations. Large operations along the Atlantic and Arctic coastlines, such as the 1940 German invasion and the 1944 Soviet Petsamo-Kirkenes offensive, were joint three-service operations that had to adapt and adjust to adverse and changing weather and were also partly limited by scarce infrastructure. The terrain with its marshes, mountains, rocky hills, and dense forests limited mechanised formations to roads, but allowed for outflanking manoeuvres by light units operating off-road.⁵

The Germans developed the Norwegian coast into a strongpoint for German air and naval operations against Allied shipping in the North Atlantic and Arctic Ocean. They constructed massive fortifications along the entire coastline that were designed to withstand an Allied invasion. The British, on the other hand, conducted commando raids and air and naval attacks against German bases and shipping along the Norwegian coast. Finnish Lapland and north-eastern Norway became staging areas for the German invasion of the Soviet Union in the summer of 1941. The two German operational axes of operations against Murmansk on the Arctic coast and Kandalaksha on the White Sea were separated by 200 km of inhospitable terrain, far too wide to be within supporting distance, and both operations ultimately failed due to the lack of focus of effort, mounting resistance, and logistical problems. The front was then in flux until the Soviet counteroffensives in late 1944.⁶

When the Germans retreated from northern Finland and the Soviet Union in October 1944, they established a strong defence deep in the Norwegian mountains between the Finnish-Norwegian-Swedish border and the Arctic Ocean, known as the Lyngen Position. During the Cold War, the Norwegian defence of the core area in northern Norway was anchored on the Lyngen Position. It was reinforced well into the 1990s, before being closed with demolition commencing in 2013.⁷ Following the Russian invasion of eastern Ukraine, the Norwegian Armed Forces cancelled the demolition and began reassessing the role of the fortifications in new war plans.⁸ This example underlines some of the continuities that are conditioned by geography and climate, even if they can be modified by developments in infrastructure and technology.

When NATO was formed in 1949, its Northern Flank was an issue, and the stated aim in the 1950 NATO *Medium Term Plan* was defence along the Lyngen Position. NATO's Northern Command was activated on 2

⁴ NATO, *AJP-3.2E1 Allied Doctrine for Land Operations* (Brussels: NATO Standardization Office, 2022), A-5-A-35.

⁵ James F. Gebhardt, *The Petsamo-Kirkenes Operation: Soviet Breakthrough and Pursuit in the Arctic, October 1944*, Leavenworth Papers (Fort Leavenworth, Kan: Combat Studies Institute, 1990), 1-11; Earl F. Ziemke, *The German Northern Theater of Operations 1940-1945* (Washington, D.C.: United States Army, 1960), 137-156.

⁶ Ziemke, *The German Northern Theater of Operations 1940-1945*, 184-187, 235-241, 267-271.

⁷ Gullow Gjeseth, *Landforsvarets Krigsplaner under Den Kalde Krigen [War Plans during the Cold War for the Territorial Defence]*, (Bergen: Fagbokforlaget, 2011), 74-78, 268-274, 285-287.

⁸ Svein Arstad, "Skulle hugges opp [Should have been dismantled]," *Forsvarets Forum*, no. 3 (2015): 18-20.

April 1951, while the Supreme Allied Commander Atlantic (SACLANT) was established the following year.⁹ Norway withdrew its brigade from northern Germany in 1953 and stood up its brigade in northern Norway in 1954. That brigade has since been the backbone of the Norwegian defence in the north. Air and naval assets followed suit. The aim was to hold key terrain and deny or delay a Soviet advance to buy time for Allied reinforcements, the so-called “holding time doctrine.”¹⁰

Current Nordic Defence Issues

When Nazi Germany invaded Norway in 1940, the country was transformed by the war from a neutral small country on the continental northern periphery to an integrated member of the Allied forces. When Norway became a NATO member four years after the end of the Second World War, it appears in hindsight to have been a logical continuation of its role in the war. Since then, Norway has developed a self-image as “NATO in the North,” hosting a NATO Headquarters during the Cold War, which later developed into NATO’s Joint Warfare Centre. The Norwegian coast and waters played a central role in the Allies’ protection of the Sea Lines of Communications in the North Atlantic, especially in intelligence gathering of Soviet naval movements. Norway hosted several large Allied joint field exercises, and has supported Finland and Sweden’s alignment with NATO over the past decades.¹¹

An issue that needs to be resolved is which NATO Joint Force Command (JFC) a new NATO Nordic area of operations (AOO) would belong to, and where the boundary between the North Atlantic JFC Norfolk and the North European continent’s JFC Brunssum will be drawn. Norway is an Atlantic country, while Finland and Sweden border the Baltic Sea. It should also be mentioned that Finland lost its access to the Arctic Ocean in 1944, when the Soviet Union captured the Petsamo area (today’s Pechenga). Finland and Sweden’s NATO membership will cause the Baltic Sea to be surrounded by NATO members, with the exception of the Russian Kaliningrad enclave and the bottom of the Finnish Bay.

Where the boundary between NATO’s JFCs will be drawn will depend on several conflicting interests. It may be drawn at the outer line of Norway’s territorial waters, placing the entire Nordic AOO under JFC Brunssum, or in the Baltic Sea, placing the Nordic countries under the responsibility of JFC Norfolk. It may also be somewhere in-between, dividing one, two, or all three of the countries between these two JFCs. There will of course be a host of foreign and domestic, political, strategic, and operational issues to consider. These are all well-known aspects of NATO politics and were an important consideration during the Cold War.¹²

The Russian threat to NATO and Norway in the past decades has been related to Russia’s need to protect the nuclear second-strike capability of its strategic submarines in the Northern Fleet. It is the third element in the Russian nuclear triad, with land-based missiles and strategic bombers the two others. The main bases for the Northern Fleet are in the Kola fjord by Murmansk, barely 100 km from the Norwegian-Russian border. The likely course of Russian action is labelled the Bastion Defence. It consists of establishing sea and air control over Russian land and waters east of a line drawn roughly between the Svalbard archipelago through Bear Island to the Norwegian northern coast. In NATO jargon, the line is known as “the Bear Gap,” mirroring the

⁹ Rolf Tamnes, “Norway’s Struggle for the Northern Flank, 1950-1952,” in Olav Riste (ed.), *Western Security: The Formative Years. European and Atlantic Defence 1947-1953*, 215–243 (Oslo: Norwegian University Press, 1985).

¹⁰ Leif Lundesgaard, *Brigaden i Nord-Norge 1953-1995 [The Brigade in Northern Norway, 1953-1995]*, (Oslo: Elander, 1995), 35–42; Håvard Klevberg, “Request Tango”: 333 Skvadron på ubåtjakt. *Maritime luftoperasjoner i norsk sikkerhetspolitikk [“Request Tango”: 333 Squadron on Submarine Search. Maritime Air Operations as part of Norwegian Security Policy]*, (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 2012), 139–144; Halvor Johansen, *The Rise and Decline of the Operation Level of War in Norway*, vol. 2/2009, Defence and Security Studies (Oslo: Norwegian Institute for Defence Studies, 2009), 13–34.

¹¹ Rolf Tamnes, “The Strategic Importance of the High North during the Cold War,” in *A History of NATO: The First Fifty Years*, Vol. 3 (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001); Njord Wegge, “The Strategic Role of Land Power on NATO’s Northern Flank,” *Arctic Review on Law and Politics* 13, (2022), 94–113, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.23865/arctic.v13.3428>.

¹² Tamnes, “The Strategic Importance of the High North during the Cold War,” 265–269.

term GIUK Gap (Greenland-Iceland-United Kingdom). West of that line, the Russian ambition is sea and air denial. The aim is to control access through these gaps to disrupt Allied sea and air forces operating between the GIUK Gap and the Bear Gap, and deny Allied forces access east of the Bear Gap. The purpose is to protect and secure safe departure for the nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarines (SSBNs) to their launch area under the polar ice.¹³

Russia's means for establishing the Bastion Defence is primarily anti-shipping and air defence missiles, based on land, sea, including submarines, and aircraft. Even if the Bastion Defence's strategic purpose is defensive, its operational conduct may be either defensive or offensive. An operationally defensive Bastion Defence will not include incursions into Norwegian territory, while an operational offensive Bastion Defence may well include the occupation of key islands along the northern coast of Norway, or a land invasion from the Kola Peninsula. Its purpose would be to strengthen an operational multi-layered anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) system to defend its SSBNs. For Norway, and likely also Finland, a Russian operationally defensive and offensive Bastion Defence will expose the countries to threats ranging from asymmetric coercion to invasion. If Russia decides to stretch Nordic defences, it also has the option of a similar power projection in the Baltic Sea.¹⁴

Despite the Russian losses in Ukraine, and in contrast to the land forces and naval infantry which have taken severe losses, the naval and air forces needed to establish the Bastion Defence in the north are little affected by the war.¹⁵ Russia might therefore prioritise using strategic air assault forces to secure land strongpoints or spearhead an invasion if an offensive Bastion Defence is decided upon. Selected air assault units are equipped and regularly train under Arctic conditions.¹⁶ Since Russia's border with Finland has become a border with NATO, Russia might have to extend the defences of its SSBNs. The announcement of a new Leningrad Military District and increased numbers of the Russian Armed Forces' peacetime establishment indicates Russia's initial measures to mitigate Finland's entrance to the alliance.¹⁷

¹³ E.V. Bey, "Obespecheniye Voennoi Bezopasnosti Rossii v Arktike: Istoriya Voprosa [Ensuring Russia's Military Security in the Arctic: Historical Background]," *Voennaya Mysl'* [Military Thought], no. 12 (2020): 14–25; Bradford Dismukes, "The Return of Great-Power Competition—Cold War Lessons about Strategic Antisubmarine Warfare and Defense of Sea Lines of Communication," *Naval War College Review*, 73:3 (14 July 2020), DOI: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol73/iss3/6>.

¹⁴ Robert Dalsjö, Christofer Berglund, Michael Jonsson, *Bursting the Bubble? Russian A2/AD in the Baltic Sea Region: Capabilities, Countermeasures, and Implications* (Stockholm: Totalförsvarets forskningsinstitut, 2019); Geir Arne Hestvik and Todd Bonnar, "CONFLICT 2020 and Beyond: A Look at the Russian Bastion Defence Strategy" NATO Combined Joint Operations from the Sea Centre of Excellence (29 August 2022), DOI: http://www.cjoscoe.org/infosite/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Conflict-2020-and-Beyond_A-Look-at-the-Russian-Bastion-Defence-Strategy.pdf; Levon Sevunts, "NATO's New Atlantic Command to Keep Watch over the European Arctic," *The Barents Observer*, 18 September 2020, DOI: <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/security/2020/09/natos-new-atlantic-command-keep-watch-over-european-arctic>.

¹⁵ "Hundreds of Arctic Troops Killed, Says Ukrainian Adviser," *The Independent Barents Observer*, DOI: <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/security/2022/03/several-hundred-arctic-troops-killed-says-ukrainian-adviser>; "Arctic Brigade Severely Weakened," *The Independent Barents Observer*, DOI: <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/security/2022/12/arctic-brigade-severely-weakened>; "Russia's Arctic Brigade in Alakurtti Is Counting Its Many Dead," *The Independent Barents Observer*, DOI: <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/2023/02/russias-arctic-brigade-alakurtti-counting-its-many-dead>.

¹⁶ Mathieu Boulègue, "Russia's Military Posture in the Arctic: Managing Hard Power in a 'Low Tension' Environment" (London: Chatham House, June 2019), 36–38, DOI: [2019-06-28-Russia-Military-Arctic_0.pdf](https://www.chathamhouse.org/2019/06/russia-military-arctic) (chathamhouse.org)

¹⁷ "Shoigu: Moscow and Leningrad Military Districts Will Be Created in Russia," *Apa.az*, DOI: <https://apa.az/en/cis-countries/shoigu-moscow-and-leningrad-military-districts-will-be-created-in-russia-393923>; "Press Review: Finland Officially Enters NATO and Belarus Ready to Host Russian Nukes," DOI: <https://tass.com/pressreview/1599589>; "Russia Strengthening Northwestern Air Defenses after Finland Joins NATO,"

Finland, Norway, and Sweden have for years developed close military relations within the limits of different security political directions, and the possibilities offered by Finland and Sweden's participation in NATO's PfP since 1994. The recent announcement of a plan to develop a Joint Nordic Air Defence is a typical bottom-up initiative that is closely aligned with an overarching strategy of harmonising their combat assets.¹⁸ Even if air forces are not limited by command boundaries in the same way as land forces, the Nordic countries may well initiate similar bottom-up initiatives of cooperation between other services. Such initiatives might have to be mitigated when NATO's operational boundaries in the region are established.

Different perceptions of the Russian threat, of both present and future developments, will also influence how the three countries might prefer NATO's command framework for the region to develop. Another issue is how NATO's Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE), will perceive the Fenno-Scandic peninsula, and its role in Allied strategy. Given its unique location—bordering Russia and both the Northern Fleet and St. Petersburg, in addition to the North Atlantic and the Baltic Sea and commanding the entrance to the Baltics from the west—the peninsula may serve several important functions within NATO's defence of Europe.

The Norwegian coastline can serve as an important base area for naval operations in the North Atlantic and the Arctic Ocean, while its harbours and well-developed maritime infrastructure will serve as points of entry for both forces and logistics for reinforcing the Nordic countries. Strategic military infrastructure dates back to the Cold War, include Norway's Joint Headquarters outside Bodø in the north and NATO's Joint Warfare Centre in Stavanger by the North Sea.¹⁹

Sweden's central position may serve an important role. Its large harbour complex at Gothenburg will be the main logistics hub for the Nordic countries, while Norwegian harbours around Oslo, but also on its southern and western coast, can both supplement and partly replace it in case of attacks. Swedish railroads and roads will also solve Norway's longstanding strategic supply challenge for northern Norway. The well-developed military infrastructure in central Norway will assist in the reception of Allied reinforcements and logistics, and forwarding them by rail into central Sweden. Narvik in Northern Norway may serve a similar role, with a railroad connecting to the Finnish rail system in the bottom of the Gulf of Bothnia.²⁰ Finland will thus be at the receiving end of reinforcements and supplies for the defence of its 1340 km-long border with Russia.

These different roles of the Nordic countries and the unique set of capabilities they bring to NATO will— together with NATO's own strategic and operational assessments—contribute to the multifaceted challenge of ironing out how they will fit into a revised NATO command structure.

DOI: <https://www.ukrinform.net/rubric-ato/3693857-russia-strengthening-northwestern-air-defenses-after-finland-joins-nato.html>.

¹⁸ “Plans For Joint Nordic Air Defense | High North News,” DOI: <https://www.highnorthnews.com/en/plans-joint-nordic-air-defense>; Gerard O'Dwyer, “Nordic Nations Move to Link Air Forces into 250-Strong Aircraft Fleet,” *Defense News*, 24 March 2023, DOI: <https://www.defensenews.com/global/europe/2023/03/24/nordic-countries-move-toward-linking-their-air-forces-250-planes/>.

¹⁹ “The Norwegian Joint Headquarters,” Norwegian Armed Forces, DOI: <https://www.forsvaret.no/en/organisation/norwegian-joint-headquarters>; “NATO Joint Warfare Centre”, DOI: <https://www.jwc.nato.int/>.

²⁰ Ragnar Bøifot, “Sender militært utstyr gjennom Narvik: USA tester jernbanen [Sending Military Equipment Through Narvik: USA Is Testing the Railroad],” *Fremover*, 21 April 2023.