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CASE STUDY

NEW PERSPECTIVES ON NATO'S NORTHERN FLANK:

A 1967 APPRAISAL OF SCANDINAVIAN CONCEPTS OF SECURITY

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

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NEW PERSPECTIVES ON NATO'S NORTHERN FLANK:

A 1967 APPRAISAL OF SCANDINAVIAN
CONCEPTS OF SECURITY

A Case Study



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April 1967

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Foreword

Amidst the crises of the mid-'60s, no one pays much attention to the Scandinavian area. Governments and their publics are preoccupied by the war in Vietnam, turmoil in Communist China, the disaffection of France from the Western Alliance, and the dilemmas of the underdeveloped world. The Scandinavian area, stable, secure, and slightly stodgy, simply is not very high on anyone's agenda.

One major issue, however, that does capture attention is the future of the NATO Alliance. Although in this country when we think of NATO we tend to focus primarily on France, Germany, and the UK, it is a fact that the Scandinavian countries comprise one-fifth of the membership of the Alliance, and they occupy NATO's strategic northern flank which we may have been taking too much for granted. Since, under the terms of the North Atlantic Treaty, members may withdraw from the Alliance after 1969 with one year's advance notice--a date that is fast approaching--it is important to know what our northern partners are thinking, and what they will do. How do the Scandinavians, from their rather remote northern perspective out of the mainstream of events, look at what is happening to NATO and at their own security in a changing world?

With these questions in mind, I visited Denmark, Norway, and Iceland--the NATO members, as well as Sweden--the traditional neutral in the area. I spoke with officials in each country in the foreign and defense ministries, with parliamentarians who represented various political points of view, and with persons not in government from the academic communities. While in Sweden I talked with members of the Finnish Embassy. Out of these discussions (bolstered by some preliminary research for background purposes) I have tried to distill a number of the most prevalent attitudes today in the countries visited on matters of their national security. While a wide range of opinion quite naturally was expressed, certain subjects invariably arose, and on these a basic consensus was apparent. The discussion that follows attempts to summarize this consensus.

I am only too well aware of the dangers of making generalizations of this nature based on such a limited exposure. But granting all the reservations that must surround such an approach, I simply present here a summary of the most prevalent points of view of the people I talked to about current trends on the world scene and the implications of such trends for the security of the Scandinavian countries. As the United States charts its future course in the Western Alliance, it is important, among other things, to know how the wind blows from the north.

I am greatly indebted to a number of officials in the Departments of State and Defense for giving me initial suggestions and guidance, and to many individuals in the US Embassies in the countries I visited. They were without exception most patient and helpful in arranging contacts with local nationals upon whom I drew for the substance of this paper, and from whom I gained an intensely interesting and educational experience.

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NEW PERSPECTIVES ON NATO'S NORTHERN FLANK:
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CONCEPTS OF SECURITY

As the title suggests, there are new perspectives on NATO's northern flank. The outlook of the Scandinavian countries* today has changed from that of 1949, the year NATO was formed and when each country made the hard choice whether or not to join. This changing outlook is a combination of old and new elements; the old being each country's fixed geographic location on the globe and its historical past, and the new being each country's interpretation of events taking place beyond its borders and the manner in which these events impinge on its own interests.

The old geography, of course, remains. Scandinavia is set apart from the central land mass of Europe, Denmark alone being attached but as a small appendage. Yet, although remote and with relatively modest resources, Scandinavian geography is important. Norway shares a 122-mile border with the Soviet Union close to the important Soviet naval bases at Petsamo and Murmansk, and her ice-free coastline confronts the access routes to and from the North Atlantic in the far north and extends south along the flank of that strategic area; Denmark stands astride the routes connecting the Baltic Sea and the Atlantic; Sweden flanks the Baltic approaches to the east, and, especially in the north, separates areas of traditional eastern and western influence; Iceland occupies a strategic position athwart the sea routes into and out of the North Atlantic. These old geographic realities are perhaps even more important today in the era of wide-ranging missiles and naval craft than before, not only for the strategic warning and surveillance they afford, but also because use of these areas must be denied to a possible enemy. From a rather cold-blooded strategic point of view one could make the case that geography alone is what makes the Scandinavian countries really important in the Western Alliance rather than their human and material resources, which on the broad stage are relatively modest.

The historical past also remains. Although tending for many years toward neutrality in conflicts among the larger European powers, Norway and Denmark were invaded and occupied by Germany in World War II. Iceland was involuntarily used as a base of operations by British and then American forces. All three opted for NATO in 1949, having experienced the results of going it alone. Sweden, not a participant in World War II, continued to remain unaligned not wishing to reject a policy that had kept it out of war for 150 years.

Together with these geographical and historical realities, Scandinavian attitudes are also affected by new elements on the world scene. Each country is in the process of assessing the recent course of events beyond its borders in terms of its own interests.

The discussion that follows considers the subjects about which the Scandinavian countries appear most concerned today. In each case the discussion is introduced by a statement which, I believe, reflects the most prevalent current attitude throughout the area as expressed to me by a number of informed and responsible persons.

I

"The Cold War is over, and the threat of Soviet military action against Western Europe has been neutralized by the deterrent effect of United States strategic nuclear forces."

There appears to be broad agreement that the Soviet Union has ceased to be a threat to European security. Frequently I heard the opinion that this is a different and less dangerous world from that of Stalin's or even Khrushchev's day. A senior official cited a number of points to support this view: a. Europe has recovered from the military, economic, and political weakness of the post-war period when it was no match for, and therefore a temptation to, Soviet military aggression. This fact, coupled with the US strategic deterrent, has made it far too risky for the Soviet Union to attempt to extend its influence in Europe by military means. At the time of the Cuban missile crisis the Soviet leadership was made brutally aware of the risks it would take by any military move in Europe. Since that time a stalemate has existed at the military level in East-West affairs. b. Fundamental changes have taken place within the Communist world. It is no longer monolithic and run from Moscow, but has fragmented among a number of centers of nationalistically oriented Communism. Divided within its own camp, Communism as a weapon in the Soviet arsenal is less dangerous. c. The Soviet Union is increasingly concerned over the future development of Chinese Communist power, and is less likely to take risks in the West with an

*For purposes of this study "Scandinavia" and "Scandinavian area" includes Denmark, Norway, Sweden, and Iceland, the countries visited. Finland, properly a Nordic rather than a Scandinavian country, has a significant influence on the security affairs of its northern neighbors; but with close ties to the Soviet Union, Finland looks at the security situation in the area in somewhat different terms from those reflected in the generalizations set forth here.

unfriendly China at its back. East and West are increasingly engaged with problems of North and South. Attention and resources devoted to these problems mitigate East-West tensions and dangers. It is an objective fact that both the Soviet Union and the United States are devoting more and more resources to Asia, particularly in connection with the Vietnam war. This tends to reduce the likelihood that Europe will be the scene of possible conflict. e. The Eastern European countries are anxious to seek new forms of accommodation with the West economically and culturally. These same practical and even emotional impulses also are affecting the Soviet Union.

In short, to Scandinavian eyes the facts of history confronting the Soviet Union have brought about a change in Soviet intentions toward Europe. The leaders no longer consider feasible the possibility of extending Soviet influence in Europe by military means. They are sincerely seeking further detente with the West to preserve hard-won domestic gains under the pragmatic leadership of a managerial class. These men are quite different from the tyrannical Stalin or the mercurial Khrushchev, and will subordinate Marxist doctrine to the practical needs of economic growth and more traditional Russian security interests.

During discussions along these lines I frequently raised the question of whether prudence did not dictate that the Western Allies base their military posture on Soviet capabilities rather than intentions. The typical response was that, naturally intentions must be considered along with capabilities, that to do otherwise would be arbitrarily to rule out intentions as a vital factor in the equation, and reduce an inherently complex situation to artificially simplistic terms. One well-informed observer said: "What if the British were to base their security policy on US capabilities and ignore US intentions? How ridiculous this would be. Of course, you have to take intentions into account, and it is clear that Soviet intentions have changed."

As might be expected, I found the military relatively more concerned than the civilians with Soviet capabilities, doubtless because it is their business to cope with the immediate consequences of situations in which presumed benign intentions turn out to have been misjudged. On the whole, however, a broad consensus exists on the point that real progress is being made toward East-West detente, and that the Western Powers should not continue to cling to outdated habits of thought which visualize the military threat in the same terms as in 1949. This attitude naturally has had consequences for the security policies--and the budgets--of the Scandinavian countries.

II

"The NATO alliance in its present form is outdated, and should be modified to fit the new circumstances."

All with whom I talked agreed that NATO has been essential to the defense and stability of Europe. Only the extreme left wing parties have consistently opposed it. NATO is credited with having provided the essential shield behind which Europe recovered from the war and reassumed its role on the world scene. But having accepted this, Scandinavians generally believe that NATO as a strictly military alliance has outlived its usefulness. A parliamentary member of an opposition party went so far as to contend that the mere existence of NATO constituted a bar to further detente with the East, and argued that it should be disbanded. This, however, was a minority view.

The predominant trend in Scandinavian thinking about NATO appears to be that the Alliance should be maintained, but that its functions should be expanded to make it more than the vehicle for a hostile military confrontation with the Warsaw Pact powers. As one official put it, NATO could serve the Allies as a forum for the discussion of political and economic matters, and thereby facilitate coordination of actions that the members would take individually in their relations with the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. The thought here seems to be that, with the diminished military threat, some further justification is needed for NATO if public support is to be maintained for a political commitment that, after all, runs counter to long-standing neutralist tendencies in the area.

No one in a government position had any doubt that the three Scandinavian members of NATO would remain in the Alliance. They foresaw nothing dramatic happening in 1969. There was some discussion about what form the commitment would take after the 20-year obligation expired. Some visualized simply unilateral declarations of intent to remain committed to the Alliance. Few thought that the text of the Treaty would be opened up for negotiation of another 20-year commitment, although there was some speculation about this in Iceland. In Norway there was talk of submitting further NATO membership to a plebescite.

It was outside government circles, however, that I found informed opinion not so sanguine. For example, a private view was expressed to the effect that if the forthcoming elections in Norway

cause realignments in the governing coalition, a wider range of choice will be opened in the matter of security policy with results that are more unpredictable than government sources seem to accept. In Iceland, although all major parties support the NATO commitment, one of the issues in this summer's election will be the future status of the Keflavik base and its NATO Defense Force manned by the US. Icelanders expect that the issue of the future of the base will be linked to the NATO commitment, which could mean that anti-base sentiment would tend to extend into anti-NATO feeling. The prevailing view, however, is that Iceland needs the protection of the Alliance, and that the base is the price it must pay.

The great unknown factor in the question of continued Scandinavian adherence to NATO is the youth in each country. Without exception in the countries I visited, the attitudes of the growing youthful element in the electorate are being felt. This is the segment of society that did not experience World War II--one third of the population generally. Old attitudes, emotional biases, traditional patterns are being questioned. As a member of parliament put it, the older generation and the less sophisticated elements of society still see the world as a fairly dangerous place, the history of the past 50 years being what they were--a world in which small Scandinavian countries need allies. It is the youth and the intellectual classes, however, who are questioning the validity of policies that have existed during the post-war years, including the NATO commitment.

Among these groups various points are made. In the global contest among the Great Powers, would not the Scandinavian countries be as well (or as doubtfully) protected by the United States whether or not members of the Alliance? In other words, could the United States afford not to protect even a neutral Scandinavia, perhaps banded together in a Nordic Pact, armed, and resolved to stay out of a war between the larger powers? Why should even the present levels of defense expenditures be supported since, as the British and some Americans say, there would be a period of political warning preceding any Soviet military move in Europe which would give the West adequate time to prepare?

Whether such reasoning is sincere or merely a rationale for declining defense budgets is open to debate. The fact remains that these points of view are being expressed, and they contribute to the uncertainties that lie ahead for the northern members of NATO.

III

"Concern about the future course of German nationalism constitutes the single strongest reason for preserving NATO."

In all the countries except Iceland I noted definite anxiety about the course Germany would take in the future. Perhaps this underlying attitude was brought closer to the surface by recent statements and positions taken by the new Bonn government on such subjects as the non-proliferation treaty. Yet the reasons for the anxiety were often admitted to be more emotional than based on any objective evidence of a change in Germany's political direction. As one official said: "After all, we have had some rather dramatic experiences with the Germans in this generation, and, well, one just can't be sure." Irrespective of the reasons, there was a broad agreement that the integration of Germany's armed forces into the NATO military structure and into a European security system generally is highly desirable.

I was left with the definite impression that the continuation of NATO needed no other justification than this, and in fact that this means of keeping Germany in hand might be, for the Scandinavians, the principal reason for perpetuating the Alliance.

IV

"The Scandinavian contribution to world stability and peace consists chiefly of maintaining a balance of power in the Nordic area between the Soviet Union and the Western Allies."

Scandinavians seem to assume as an article of faith that they are the guardians of a delicate equilibrium in the balance of power in northern Europe. According to this concept, referred to as the "Nordic Balance", stability and peace have prevailed in the area because Finland's treaty arrangements with the USSR in the east balance those of Norway and Denmark with NATO in the west, and Sweden is in between aligned with neither side. The concept further holds that greater Soviet influence over Finland is held in check by the prospect that Norway and Denmark might reverse



their self-imposed limitations on the stationing of NATO forces or nuclear weapons on their soil, the so-called "base-and-ban" limitation, and that Sweden might develop closer relations with the West.

Although a number of knowledgeable persons, especially those in government, doubt that this concept of a "Nordic Balance" has any practical value as a political instrument in specific policy situations, a segment of the academic community believes it did operate as a check on the USSR in 1961 when, at the time of the Berlin crisis, Khrushchev asked Finland for "consultations" under the terms of the Finno-Russian Treaty. President Kekkonen demurred, strengthened in his stand by a timely statement from the Norwegian Foreign Minister to the effect that Norway might have to reconsider its "base-and-ban" policy.

I tend to join with the skeptics in the view that, in order to "save" Finland, Norway and Denmark are unlikely to urge that NATO forces and nuclear weapons be rushed to their soil, or that Sweden would reverse its 150-year neutrality. Nevertheless, the "base-and-ban" policy and Swedish non-alignment seem to be generally accepted as responsible for and essential to the preservation of Finnish independence and to general stability in the area.

I suspect, however, that an even deeper underlying attitude is that in the last analysis the Scandinavian countries can do little to control their own destinies, and that in the course of the contest between the Great Powers what happens in Europe as a whole will determine their fate no matter what they do. Therefore,--and I heard this most explicitly in Sweden--the Scandinavian states must at least try to stabilize their portion of the world and remove one additional area as a point of hostile confrontation between East and West. It is with this goal in mind, say the Swedes, that Sweden declined to join NATO in 1949, a move that would have brought the Soviets into Finland, and that Sweden for one has contributed enthusiastically to various UN peace-keeping efforts around the world. For similar reasons Norway does not permit NATO military exercises in the Finnmark area adjacent to the USSR.

I have concluded that the idea of a "Nordic Balance", however questionable may be its utility as an instrument of government policy in the international arena, nonetheless does influence the way Scandinavians think about their own security. It tends to provide a logical basis for taking no actions that would upset the status quo, and in addition serves as a rationale for further reductions in military activities that could be construed as provocative to the Soviet Union.

V

"Reductions in national resources devoted to military security are acceptable in view of the diminished threat and the importance of encouraging further East-West detente."

Throughout the Scandinavian area the trend in defense expenditures is down. The attitudes discussed above logically lead to this result. Domestic social programs, always competitors of defense for funds, appear to be winning this year. Defense budgets as percentages of the GNP in the Scandinavian countries range from approximately 3% (Denmark) to 4.5% (Sweden), and from 13% to 20% respectively as percentages of the national budgets. Norway falls in between. The prevailing mood is not one of optimism for a reversal of a downward trend.

Underlying this lack of enthusiasm for greater defense efforts seems to be the conviction that the security of the Scandinavian countries lies in hands other than their own. In Norway and Denmark one hears explicit reference to the fact that external forces, meaning primarily those from the US, are committed to come to their aid if they are attacked, and that the role of local national forces is to execute whatever delaying actions they can until such help arrives. In this context they are interested in the existence of the Allied Command Europe Mobile Force, since these small brigade-sized units, composed of other NATO forces, have been created for the express purpose of deployment to the flanks where in peacetime no other NATO forces are stationed. These special units are intended primarily to serve in a deterrent role by demonstrating allied solidarity and commitment in a time of tension. Norway and Denmark are also interested in the new concept of the Quick Reaction Mobile Force advanced at the Ministerial meeting in 1966, which envisions more sizable units drawn from resources outside NATO and dispatched to a threatened flank with the capability of substantial combat effectiveness.

Even Sweden, resolved to fight to defend its neutrality if attacked, does not rule out the option of appealing to the Western nations for help if that alternative seems necessary. Here again US strategic power is implicitly accepted as the foundation of Scandinavian security.

My impression was that the three countries concerned conceive of their own military defenses as at best marginal to their ultimate security needs, as if it were possible to put up enough of a fight if attacked to prevent a cheap enemy victory, and buy enough time for outside help to arrive. It must be noted, however, that underlying this concept is a gnawing uncertainty about what might be happening on more vital fronts, whether sufficient military resources from the outside would in fact be available, and whether those in charge would decide that such resources could be most profitably employed in coming to the Scandinavians' aid.

All this leads the Scandinavians finally to the conviction that their security can best be enhanced by avoiding hostilities in the first place. This translates into a primary concern with deterrence, meaning the US strategic posture, and the avoidance of destabilizing actions in the Nordic area. As far as the Scandinavians' own contribution to the military equation is concerned, it is hard for them to argue in their own domestic political arenas that a little more in the way of already inconclusive resources is important one way or the other. Since it is always easier to reduce defense budgets than to add to them, the current downward trend is not surprising.

Sweden has the additional problem of being able to develop a nuclear capability--a choice Norway and Denmark do not have. My impression is that the Swedish leadership currently deems it neither necessary nor desirable to take the nuclear route.

The atmosphere of detente, and the hopes that a continuation of this trend raise for the normalization of the political situation and hence the tensions of Europe, also plays its part in dampening enthusiasm for greater defense expenditures.

In short, the Scandinavians are very interested in deterrence, which is basically something their alliance partners provide; but they do not appear to be interested in making further contributions to defense, which involves facing up to what must be done if deterrence fails. This attitude is probably the consequence of an awareness of being small and relatively helpless, and of the assumption that war in Europe in the nuclear era is inconceivable and "simply won't happen".

VI

"The prospect of US troop withdrawals from Europe and current US policies toward Vietnam are unsettling factors that strengthen domestic political forces tending to question the future utility of NATO."

A final Scandinavian attitude about which a generalization can be made concerns two current US lines of policy: the prospect of US troop withdrawals from Europe and the Vietnam war. Scandinavian reactions to both of these issues contribute to a further questioning of the future need for or survivability of NATO.

I found universal support for the continued maintenance of US forces in Europe at substantially their present levels. To the Scandinavians these forces represent an essential part of the overall deterrent to Soviet military action, since without them the Soviets could reasonably wonder whether the US would commit its strategic nuclear power to repel an attack on Europe. Symbolic US forces would not do. The general sentiment was that a reduction in the US military presence in Europe would weaken the positions of the domestic factions which support the NATO commitment and the maintenance of reasonable levels of defense expenditures, since it would demonstrate that even the US has accepted the fact of a lessening of the military threat to Europe. Such a development would give encouragement to anti-NATO elements and to the advocates of defense cuts.

Similarly, the increasing US involvement in Vietnam is read by the Scandinavians as representing greater US concern with Asia than Europe, and the commitment to Asia of resources not available for Europe, which to them implies that the US sees the dangers to Europe as less great. Even the Soviet Union, concerned with the problem of Communist China and also involved in Vietnam, is pushing detente in Europe--again lowering the risks of conflict there.

Beyond this, US conduct of the war in Vietnam is unpopular in Scandinavia, although more on moral and emotional grounds than on the basis of logical analysis. But the result is the growth of anti-American sentiment, all of which makes the relationship more difficult between the US and its alliance partners. If Scandinavian views are representative of a wider sentiment, I would say that the achievement of US objectives in our relations with many countries around the world on a wide range of issues will continue to be adversely affected to some extent as long as the Vietnam war continues.

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CONCLUSION

It would be presumptuous for me, after only a three-week visit to the Scandinavian area, to draw any over-all conclusions about what future US policies toward the countries of the area or toward NATO as a whole should be. I can only draw some conclusions about what may be the implications for the US of the Scandinavian attitudes discussed above.

These attitudes suggest to me that Scandinavians, and probably many other Europeans, are beginning to conclude that two basic lines of US policy are inconsistent and self-defeating: on the one hand, they contend, the US continues to insist that NATO must continue unchanged as a military alliance, thereby perpetuating the Cold War, and on the other the US is trying to bring about further detente with the Soviet Union, and move towards an easing of the hostile confrontation that has characterized East-West relations in the post-war years. The Scandinavians are clearly on the side of detente, and if they see NATO as a barrier to progress in this direction, it may be only a matter of time until the anti-NATO trend will be irresistible, and the linch pin in Western solidarity will be swept away.

The problem for the United States is how to keep Europe from perceiving the choice in "either-or" terms--NATO or detente.

My conviction is that the solidarity of the Western Powers, as represented by NATO, has created conditions in Europe which the Soviet Union has had to take into account in assessing the means it would adopt for pursuing its goals, and that, because of NATO, one of those means has not been the use of military force in Europe. Over time other realities on the world scene, to include the defection of Communist China, have confronted the Soviets with facts to which they have had to adjust and react in terms of their own self-interest. The current East-West relationship, characterized by the term detente, is a product of this confrontation with the realities of the world as it is. The US is encouraging the trend, I presume, on the premise that the Soviet Union and the Eastern European countries will ultimately find it to be in their own interests to work toward greater economic intercourse and a lessening of the dangers of wars over which they might have no control--witness the consular and non-proliferation treaties. I personally support US efforts in this direction.

But by accepting this analysis, one need not conclude that the disbandment of the Western Alliance must logically follow. The Soviet objective, one can assume, remains the fragmentation of Europe and the extension of Soviet influence, politically and economically, over the area. Military means having been determined to be impractical to date, other means will be tried. The black and white--NATO or detente--pattern of thought that can be detected in Europe ignores or discounts the fact that, while Soviet means have changed, no evidence suggests that their goals have changed.

The task ahead for the US is how to manage the Alliance so as to accommodate greater East-West contact in a way that will enhance European strength and independence rather than fragmenting it and rendering it more susceptible to Soviet influence. If we resist Allied suggestions to study how NATO might be adapted to the new environment, we will contribute to making the choice between NATO and detente appear to our allies to be even more stark.

My thought is that we should take the initiative in this direction, first within our own councils--and perhaps we already have done so. I do not presume to say what form any adaptation of the NATO Alliance should take; but I believe NATO as it is will be in for increasingly difficult times unless such an effort is made.

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