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# POLITICAL-MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS IN NATO'S NORTHERN REGION

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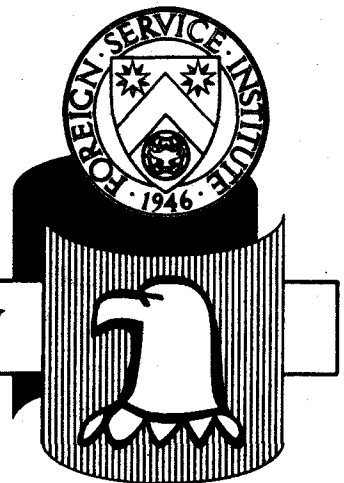
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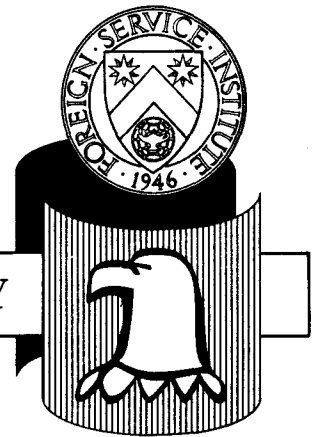
# POLITICAL-MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS IN NATO'S NORTHERN REGION

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The current political-military developments in NATO's northern region are under scrutiny from many quarters. This study will address North Norway as its central theme, and consider the geographic environment, demography and changes in political-military perceptions that pertain. Increased Soviet activity in the proximity, détente, the "era of negotiation," economic development, economic alignment and imputed "national will" all provide impetus to upset the established Nordic Balance. The future status of the area is subject to the perceptions and actions of the elected leadership of the Kingdom of Norway.

North Norway is defined, for the purpose of this study, as the counties of Finmark, Troms, Nordland and Nord-trondelag. Its environs include the Kola Peninsula of the Soviet Union to the East, Finland to the south of Finmark and Troms, and Sweden to the east of Troms, Nordland and Nord-trondelag. The Barents and Norwegian Seas bound the northern and western coastal areas and extend to the Svalbard Islands to the northwest. This irregular coast line, cut by many deep water fjords and sheltered by numerous small islands, provides excellent quiet water harbors of value to merchant and military vessels.

For the major portion of the last two decades there has been a very delicate balance in the politics and economics of the area known as the "Nordic Balance." This balance is a concept that represents an ex post facto rationalization of past political decisions rather than the result of a conscious line of policy in pursuit of a predetermined objective. Each nation and alliance, for reasons of their own self-interest, has sought to maintain the status-quo of this balance.

The Norwegians have imposed limitations on their own military activities in the areas to the East of the 24th meridian, about 160 miles from the border with the Soviet Union, to avoid any misconceptions or miscalculations of intent. She has also repeatedly restricted alliance maneuvers in this area. She has not, however, restricted the use of this area by Norwegians for the purpose of surveillance of other countries' activities. Norway, and her southern Nordic neighbor Denmark, joined NATO with the caveat that no national troops of the Alliance countries would be stationed on their soil. This restriction has been meticulously followed, for example, the NATO Allied Forces North headquarters compound at Kolsaas, Norway, has been declared extra-territorial and all allied force dependent personnel residing in the surrounding area are registered with the Norwegian government as aliens. Also, Norway continues to foster the international concept of freedom of navigation in non-territorial waters adjacent to her country and freedom of aerial flight over non-territorial waters. She therefore makes daily reconnaissance flights over the Norwegian and Barents Seas and monitors similar flights made by the Soviet Union. The Norwegians encourage the use of the same seas and air spaces by the members of the Alliance, but for political reasons do not permit the staging of aircraft and ships

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from her territories for this purpose. Norway expresses concern over the diminishing fishing industry in these seas which lead to only Norwegian and Soviet fishing in the area and the growing size of the Soviet fishing fleet. Also, with Soviet missile range restrictions on navigation in the Barents Sea there is a growing tendency for the area to be considered a Soviet domain.

The Svalbard Islands, astride the 20th meridian at 80 degrees north latitude, are Norwegian sovereign territory subject to the provisions of the Paris Treaty of 1920. The treaty permits various national cooperative development and mineral extraction but expressly prohibits the development of military installations. There are current bi-lateral negotiations with the Soviet Union concerning the development of an airfield on the islands.

The control of the seabeds off the coast of Northern Norway will be prominent in negotiations in the immediate future. They are gaining economic importance with the development of oil fields and seabed mineral exploitation and are conceived to be politically divided under different concepts by the Norwegian and Soviet governments. The Norwegians adhere to the more conventional definitions of the continental shelf while the Soviets postulate a polar division theory in this area that causes an overlap of territories to the west of a line drawn from the pole directly south to the Norwegian-Soviet border. The Norwegians contest this theory but have been cautious in opening negotiations, preferring to wait until the definitions are announced and agreed within the "Law of the Sea Conference" thereby hoping to avoid what they see as an undesirable bi-lateral confrontation with the Soviets. The future of seabeds also are known to hold significant strategic value for collection of data on ship movements. These particular seabeds underlie the Soviet warm, ice free strategic shipping lane utilized by her Northern Fleet to transit to and from the Norwegian Sea and hence the North Atlantic and North Seas.

The Finns have maintained their northern area, primarily inhabited by Lapps, at a low-key and exercise their position of sovereignty of territories with both the Soviet Union and Norway. The Finns are, however, tied to the Soviets by the Peace of Moscow (1940) that permits Soviet use of their territory if there is a threat by an outside power. The fact that the Soviets do not use Finnish bases is seen as a counter-balance to Norway's not permitting alliance units to be based on her territories. There are numerous diplomatic references to this issue that lead to the "shaded theory" involving Scandinavia, that is; the U.S., a NATO aligned Norway and Denmark without Alliance troop units, a neutral non-aligned Sweden, an aligned Finland without Soviet troops units, and the Soviet Union. Although this theory fits well in the Southern area of Scandinavia it overlooks the North Cape that in fact extends the territory of Norway over the top of Sweden and Finland and terminates in the east with about one hundred miles of common border between Finmark and the Kola Peninsula.

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The Norwegians have restricted their build-up in the northern area, in fact there has been a considerable effort by the government to arrest out-migration, while the Soviet build-up in the Murmansk-Kola area has been continuing at a rapid pace. The Soviet area population grew from 10,000 to 1,200,000 in the last 50 years and now contains the bases for the Soviet Northern Fleet of 400 ships and 160 submarines. This fleet is heavily weighted in the SSBN's which presently transit the Norwegian Sea to target the U.S. but the Soviets have developed the capability to target the U.S. while operating in the Norwegian Sea. It is also the home of two Soviet divisions and the base for the majority of their naval infantry (Marine Corps Brigades). In addition, backing-up these forces are approximately 500 planes of the Soviet Tactical Air Force. The peninsula also contains numerous medium range ballistic missile installations and is the test area for the submarine launched ballistic missiles. The area has become a concentration of Soviet military power and also has been highly developed in manufacturing and mineral extraction. The warm water ports of the area which are not constrained as the Baltic and Black Seas ports by foreign dominated straits are of significant strategic value. This type of impetus leaves open the question to Norway and the Western Alliance as to when this area will cross the strategic balance that may lead the Soviets to consider westward expansion as a requirement to protect the interest of the Soviet State.

A similar expansion was justified by the Soviets in their 1939 invasion of Finland to gain territories adjacent to Leningrad and the Baltic approaches. Although the topic does not enter day to day discussions in the various military staffs of the Nordic countries the implications are not lost on their politicians, state and defense ministries. It is in fact an underlying reason for Norway's continued stress on the thesis that all of the territories of the Alliance are equally important and a territorial move against one is a move against all (sometimes referred to as the "NATO mystique"). Certainly the strategic value of the sea lanes in this area are recognized by both the East and West. This significant strategic value was accepted in all sources, staffs and persons consulted.

In addressing the issue of "Nordic Security," Egil Ulstein states in an International Institute for Strategic Studies Adelphi Paper Number 81:

"In the face of this situation (Soviet naval presence) the Nordic area appears to be heavily dependent on American naval power for its security. British naval strength, even if reinforced by support from the continental European powers, would not be strong enough to create a balanced situation in the Norwegian Sea and at the same time cover other European naval requirements. So, although some measure of control over the northern approaches to the Atlantic might be crucial for Europe as a whole in order to maintain the transatlantic lifelines, this would not appear possible in the absence of

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American naval power. And it probably remains true that the strategic position of the extreme north of the area should be considered mainly as dominated by the super-powers. Western (essentially American) naval and (from Thule in Greenland and Keflavik in Iceland) air activity, coupled with the possibilities for warning and surveillance which the extreme north might provide, would appear to indicate conflicting superpower interests. In this situation the countries of the area may be reduced to onlookers rather than actors."

It is also recognized that any diminution in Iceland's present commitment to the Alliance would upset the balance and cause political pressures for a "rethinking" of the Norwegian policies on stationing of alliance units. This, of course, is seen as opening the Soviet troops in Finland question. Such an action would also make a qualitative and quantitative change on the need for the North Cape as an intelligence collection base.

The military assessment of the defense of the area by various agencies is unanimous in recognizing that Norway depends on assistance from the United States with or without the Alliance. The continued reliance on NATO is an accepted political fact in Norway with over 90% of the parliament voting affirmative commitment on the issue in 1969 when the twentieth year participation required each country to make an evaluation and re-commitment. Also, a recent Gallup Poll in Norway shows that 64% of the people believe that NATO enhances Norway's security while only 6% believed it increased danger of attack with the remainder divided as those who didn't know or felt that it made no difference.

Norway's defense budget, although inadequate to provide the necessary force modernization, and her defense structure continue to recognize the value of the northern area. A recent reorganization of her active forces placed the preponderance of her ground forces in the region of North Norway. Also, her commitments to NATO's infra-structure funded projects are to increase the capability of her northern installations and enhance their ability to survive attack. The present government is publically committed to continue these efforts. The political platform of the party expected to carry the majority in elections this fall is explicit in its continuing support of Norway's present posture in NATO as a keystone to her defenses.

How viable is Norway and in particular her northern defenses? Estimates are not "all that good" in military terms. If faced in North Norway with a surprise attack without political warning (worst-case assessment - but a realistic Soviet capability demonstrated by prior Soviet training exercises in the area) the area might survive in a holding operation for 48 to 72 hours then resort

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to a destruction of facilities and reversion to guerrilla warfare. With adequate (a very illusory adjective) warning permitting reinforcement by the ACE mobile force air and ground elements the assessment becomes a bit cloudy but few hold the position that the area could survive until general reinforcements would be available at D+60 to D+90 days. A cogent appraisal of the military situation followed the large NATO exercise STRONG EXPRESS, the exercise whose primary purpose was in the words of the overall Commander, "to improve and test the alliance readiness on an exercise scale," was made in various press articles:

Chicago Daily News, 26 September 1972 -

"Tromsøe, Norway - Nothing but the American nuclear deterrent guarantees Norway against being overrun by the forces of the Soviet Union.

That basic fact still holds after an elaborate, complicated and expensive NATO exercise, labelled Strong Express, which has taken place here during the last week 14,000 combat troops and an impressive collection of naval units and aircraft. \*\*\*\*\* During the STRONG EXPRESS exercise it has been indicated that it would take at least one week for an American rescue force to make its appearance. By that time northern Norway probably would have been overrun and our force would have to face heavy opposition from Russian land air and naval forces."

New York Times, 23 September 1972 -

"NATO War Games End in 'Victory', But Norway Defense Problem Stays

\*\*\*\*\*Yet the exercise left unanswered the basic question:

In event of a conflict could NATO reinforce northern Norway enough and in sufficient strength to prevent its seizure and occupation by the Russians?

\*\*\*\*\*But despite the effort at realism the over-all impression was one of artificiality. Norway knows now that it is not forgotten, that her allies could come to her rescue. But no one can say whether they would come in time or save her when they arrived."

Most sources consulted relied heavily on the political polemics of the NATO commitment but were reluctant to assess the military reality. There appears to be a willingness to rely on the Soviet inability to judge the NATO and U.S. response to the violation of an alliance country's territory. It is held that since the Soviets cannot foretell the NATO and U.S. reaction to a territorial move on their part and cannot fully assess the level at which the nuclear "threshold" would be crossed that deterrence is in fact operable.

The following appraisal of the military threat reported in

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the Atlantic Treaty Association was made by the AFNorth Commander and calls to question the matter of timing and reinforcement:

"\*\*\*\*\*Soviet forces have the capability to overrun Finmark quickly, thus presenting NATO with a fait accompli, unless the Alliance reacted with equal speed and resolution."

This capability is not denied the Soviets in any of the sources. It is in fact reinforced in the International Institute for Strategic Studies Annual publication "Military Balance 1972-1973:"

"In Norway there are only Norwegian forces in peacetime, a brigade group being located in the north. The Soviet forces facing them, or which could be brought against them from North-Western Russia, probably amount to at least four divisions. This wide disparity highlights the problem of the defence of North Norway against surprise attack. To meet this difficulty a system of self defense, based on a powerful Home Guard and rapid mobilization, has been designed to take maximum advantage of the ruggedness of the country and the poor road and rail communications, but it is clear that defence against attack of any size depends on timely external assistance. \*\*\*\*\*Implicit in Western defence plans is the concept of political warning time, that there will be sufficient warning of a possible attack to enable NATO forces to be brought to a higher state of readiness and for reinforcement and mobilization to take place.\*\*\*\*\*"

In the same Institutes' "Strategic Survey 1972" the sources of doubt (concerning NATO's ability to respond) are enumerated:

"\*\*\*\*\*Four main sources of doubt always exist.  
-the relation of 'M-day' to 'D-day'  
-the length of war  
-definition of the territorial area within which a balance between reinforced strength is to be struck  
-scope of the war itself and the state of international relationships when it breaks out."

For those who call for a sense of political history I hasten to mention the Japanese admitted miscalculation of the American will at the time of Pearl Harbor.

Just how long these assessments and perceptions will survive in the "era of negotiation," the term applied by the International Institute for Strategic Studies in London to the present period of negotiations, CSCE, MBFR, various monetary and economic

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conferences, SALT II, Paris talks, etc., is more than a rhetorical question. The "political will" of peoples and nations are considered to be at the very heart of the issue.

However, the gradual shift in balance caused by the actions of the Soviets and the "era of negotiation" may foreshadow a complete rethinking of Norwegian national policy, NATO policy, and the super-power bilateral policies. Norwegians, basing their survival on a NATO keystone follow closely the attitudes of the other members of the alliance, and particularly of the United States. She sees herself outside of the EEC forum for reasons of her own public referendum, the issue rightly or wrongly perceived by them. Already bilateral arrangements are being sought with Denmark to overcome this perceived deficiency. Internal support for military service has been affected by the growing propensity of her Scandinavian neighbors to shorten conscript service obligations and it is too early to assess the impact of the U.S. move to an "all volunteer force."

MBFR and CSCE pose some peculiar problems to Norway. They see the negotiations as impacting on the central area of NATO and not particularly germane to a flank country that bilaterally faces an overwhelming force to the East. Will reductions in the center in fact increase pressures on the flank? Also, they correctly assess that reductions in the center will change the reinforcement and mobilization posture of the entire alliance and could cause a diminution of an already precarious posture.

There is a growing concern expressed within the alliance about the trend toward neo-isolationism on the part of the American Congress and Canadian Parliament. It is not the intention of this paper to attempt to define, support, deny or assess these trends, merely to report that as perceived they impact on the future decisions of the policy makers of Norway.

The particular question, "What if the perceptions of neo-isolationism are correct?" was posed during discussions with the POLADS at NATO and SHAPE, various Defense Attachés, and Norwegian staffs. The response was not unanimous but of significant consistency to be relevant. Essentially it encompassed the thoughts contained in this quotation from the International Institute for Strategic Studies paper on "Mutual Force Reductions in Europe: The Political Aspects," Adelphi Papers Number 84:

"\*\*\*\*\*the current situation in Europe is not so simple: military forces, particularly American military forces, are also an element of West European political confidence. The military balance is not synonymous with security in Europe. Whether to reduce forces, how

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to reduce and how many, can therefore not be determined solely by the requirements of military balance; these questions must be subjected to a political assessment as well. What may be right in terms of military balance may be wrong in terms of political security."

Outside of Norway there was a recognition that NATO without the U.S. commitment would not be credible to the East. Withdrawal of the American "will", is far more serious a threat than reductions in troop levels or monetary supports. In each case there is a major question as to whether troop levels and funding levels represent a barometer of Americans will to support NATO and the alliance of Europe or is it a manifestation on increasing social budgets at home. Joseph Godson, writing for the London Observer incorporated the following in his discussion of the "era of negotiation":

"\*\*\*\*\*Ideally, Europe should by now be able to mount its own autonomous defence. Politically, as everyone in Europe knows, this is inconceivable. No West European leader and no West European Government, especially in a time of detente, could easily propound the view that Europe must now develop its independent nuclear capability, or collectively take over the whole conventional task of defence so that the Americans could go home. Detente must take the form of a strategic balance with the Soviet Union which embraces America and Europe: which is psychologically sufficient to diminish risks of Soviet blackmail; and which is also credible from a military standpoint.

\*\*\*\*\*To Washington, the case must be made that what the Atlantic Alliance requires is a firm and credible foundation of commitments, a new bi-partisan resolve and will. The presence of 300,000 US troops in Europe in itself has no absolute value."

"Adelphi Paper Number 84" provides further reasoning for urgency in seeking solution to the problem:

"The American Administration's need to find a level of its European military presence that is more acceptable in the light of domestic pressures, financial burdens and the requirements of smaller all-volunteer army is the main reason for not postponing a reduction agreement for too long."

The American Administration's position was stated by President Nixon in his televised address to the nation on April 30:

"This is also a year in which we are seeking to negotiate a mutual and balanced reduction of armed forces in Europe, which will reduce our defense budget and allow us to have

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funds for other purposes at home so desperately needed."

Within Norway the focus is much sharper, if continued support cannot be readily perceived, then accommodation with the Soviet Union at the best possible position for Norway would become an imperative. Conceivably some sort of non-aligned posture of neutrality would be attempted. In essence, support of the alliance can only be continued for that period in which it is perceived to preserve the territorial integrity and political institutions of Norway.

It is interesting when entertaining this question in Sweden, Denmark, and the United Kingdom to learn of the unanimity that exists for the maintenance of the status-quo of the Nordic Balance. Each country saw need to continue the status-quo not only at home but in the region. There was, as has been reported by various sources, no interest in attempting to develop a politically unified Scandinavia (or Europe for that matter). The present diversity in political alignment or non-alignment is considered to be the best available solution for the area so long as the East-West dichotomy exists. In each country it was questionable if their oncoming generation realized, through a sense of history, that the absence of conflict for a quarter of a century was not an assurance that conflict would not occur in the future, but the absence of conflict was in fact a response to a political-military balance that made conflict undesirable. Much of the response to detente will rest on how well these historic facts can be communicated to the population. Again from "Adelphi Papers Numbers 84" is the admonition:

"\*\*\*\*\*It will be the task of all governments and politicians pursuing a policy of detente to impress on public opinion that detente is not peace, and can lead to peace only if the realities and the means of power are taken into account."

The economic developments in the area are not parallel to the political-military. There is a considerable homogeneity within Scandinavia, Norway-Sweden-Denmark, and economic intercourse with their neighbors is not restricted to any great degree by political or historic antipathies. The homogeneity is reinforced by many common socialistic goals and attainments within the region. Within the Nordic countries frequent alliances develop on particular resources, product lines and issues. Although Norway failed to enter the EEC she has moved unilaterally to accommodate her trade policies to the Community of Nine and prepare herself for future entry. A second referendum (what is done by referendum cannot be undone any other way with political safety) is not considered to be politically sound for a period of 4 to 6 years, but this is not to be considered a bar to complete economic cooperation.

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# CONCLUSION

I am compelled to conclude that there are changes impacting on the Nordic Balance and that the role of Northern Norway as one of the flanks of NATO has assumed, and will continue to assume, greater importance in the future. In the Atlantic Treaty Association's publication "The Soviets and Northern Europe," the following statements appear:

"Norway and Denmark have frequently been subjected to Soviet propaganda urging them to leave NATO. "Pravda" often repeats this theme, reviving an old complaint that Norway is a threat to Soviet communications."

"With regard to control over Norwegian territory, Russian policy has concentrated on strategic denial rather than on strategic acquisition. Since 1944, the Soviets' chief aim with respect to both Norway and Denmark appears to have been to prevent their becoming American bases. Restrictions on foreign troops and on nuclear weapons, self-imposed by the two countries, largely reflect recognition of this Soviet denial policy."

"If our Northern Flank should be turned, America's access to Europe would be exposed, and thus her ability to aid us would be greatly curtailed. NATO's Northern Flank is an area growing in importance rather than diminishing. Its defence is vital to the very survival of the West as a whole."

Not to be overlooked is the evaluation made in the International Institute for Strategic Studies booklet "Strategic Survey, 1972:"

"In many ways, the shift from military confrontation to civilian processes in a framework of conferences, contractual arrangements and security controls made Europe the most hopeful exemplar of political possibilities in the nuclear era. But the emergence of a new system did not eliminate security problems so much as change their nature and focus. The problem of balanced relationships was becoming more civilized in its stakes and its style, but remained central."

The answer clearly cannot be a neutrality for Norway obtained by bargaining with the Soviet Union. The survival of a politically viable Europe is germane to the survival of Western political institutions. The problems that face the Norwegians, NATO and the United States are, as reported, under intense scrutiny from many sides.

The Norwegians are struggling against increasing internal competition for defense expenditures. There are also signs of continued pressures to reduce obligated time of service for conscripts. Sweden and Denmark are faced with similar problems

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and they are perhaps even more accentuated in Denmark. All of NATO is concerned with the mood of the American Congress as it opposes the Administration's efforts in the international arena. There are also signs of uneasiness as the U.S. deals bi-laterally with the Soviet Union fearing that the interest of one of the smaller nations may be preempted or overlooked.

NATO staffs appear to be struggling with their own largeness and express concern about the reputation of overcoming most problems by one of two solutions; acceptance of the lowest common denominator including several questionable assumptive responses to make even that credible, or the decision to put off a decision to a later date. Such procrastination is now considered to be an invitation to further strengthening of the Eastern position.

The U.S. military and U.S. advisors to USNATO and SHAPE are unanimous in their comments about the importance of the area. The Norwegians base their political-military survival on the "NATO mystique." The "era of negotiation" must not become an "era of procrastination" for the U.S. commitment, to do so would be to invite miscalculation and misconception. Whether this would first be perceived in Norway causing her to seek neutrality or in the Soviet Union causing her to risk a territorial expansion effort would not in the judgment of many change the outcome, the turning of the Northern Flank.

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INTERVIEWS

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