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# Norwegian Security Policy A Time for Change?

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Captain Torstein Seim, Royal Norwegian Navy

**T**HE OBJECTIVE OF NORWEGIAN SECURITY POLICY is to prevent or, if necessary, repel aggression on Norwegian territory. In addition, our Norwegian security policy is intended to enable us to resist any attempted political or military coercion so that we may remain free to determine ourselves the structure of our society.

Membership in Nato has been and still is the cornerstone of Norwegian security policy. It protects Norway against both external threats and political pressure. From the start of the Cold War in 1948-49 until very recently, the Soviet Union has been regarded as the only military threat against Norwegian territory. The political changes within the Soviet Union and in East Europe have quite naturally raised the question of whether this threat still exists. Further, the member nations of the European Community (E.C.) to a certain extent coordinate and discuss foreign and security policy, and the Western European Union (W.E.U.) has been used to address military actions outside the Nato area. All this has suggested the possibility that Nato has fulfilled its role and should be replaced by a more flexible defense mechanism within the E.C.

Facing both a change in the threat and an uncertain future for Nato, Norway must reconsider at least parts of the security policy and military strategy that will take it well into the next century. Not being a member of the European Community makes this even more pressing.

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This paper was written in spring 1991 when Captain Seim was a student at the Naval Command College of the U.S. Naval War College, from which he graduated in June of that year.

The views expressed in this article are the author's and are not necessarily shared by the Royal Norwegian Navy.

This paper considers what options Norway has that will substitute for its present membership in Nato. It looks in particular into future possible alliances and, in general terms, describes the national military strategy required.

### Norwegian National Interests and Security Objectives

Norwegian national interests have not been clearly stated by the politicians. In general they can, however, be defined as defense of the homeland, economic well-being, a favorable world order, and promotion of values.<sup>1</sup>

*Defense of the homeland* is the most vital national interest. Our security policy is aimed toward this goal, and there has long been broad agreement about the fundamental objectives. These are stated, for example, in Report 54 (1987-88) to the Storting (Norwegian parliament). The objectives are preventing war in our area, safeguarding our sovereignty and freedom of action as well as our right to shape our own society, and contributing to peaceful development in the rest of the world. The first two objectives are related directly to the defense of the homeland, while the third, of a more general character, will in the longer term contribute to achieving the others.

Instruments of security policy include both defensive military action and political reassurance initiatives. The latter involves arms control, arms reduction, and Norwegian prohibitions on foreign bases and nuclear weapons in peacetime.

Norway has heretofore relied on a strong national defense and membership within Nato to provide protection against the threat represented by the Soviet Union. At present there is no reason to believe that the security policy objectives stated here will be changed in the foreseeable future. As to means, however, in particular the Nato alliance, there is reason to believe that Norway should look for, or at least consider, other alternatives in the future.

*Economic well-being* is fundamental to providing the means necessary to achieve our basic security goals. The Norwegian economy has since the end of World War II enjoyed an almost continuous rise in prosperity. In the 1949-1985 period the gross national product rose 4.2 percent per annum in fixed kroner, a rise of 440 percent in thirty-five years.<sup>2</sup> Since 1985, however, the economy has undergone a severe setback that has forced the government to implement strict measures to get it back onto an even keel. This also affects defense spending; in 1990 the defense budget ceased to have any real growth. From 1990 until 2000 the armed forces will probably get thirty to forty billion Norwegian kroner (five to seven billion U.S. dollars) less than is needed to maintain present force structure and activity. This will be a major factor in force planning.

One of the most crucial questions concerning the economy is what sort of relationship Norway will establish with the European Community in the years to come. Around seventy percent of Norway's exports go to the twelve member countries of the E.C., but Norway is also a member of the European Free Trade

Association (EFTA).<sup>3</sup> Negotiations between the EFTA and E.C. over internal market adjustment issues are now in progress. The outcome will to a large extent determine if Norway will apply for membership in the E.C. or remain outside. Besides its economic implications, this decision will also be of the greatest importance for our security policy in the years to come.

As to our national interests in a *favorable world order* and *promotion of values*, Norway as a small nation does not have the means to achieve any such major goals on her own; this can only be done through cooperation with other nations. Since World War II Norway has regarded the United Nations as a cornerstone of the country's foreign policy. Other means are, of course, Norway's Nato membership and its work toward arms control and mutual disarmament.

Looking into the future, the U.N. will probably be of even greater importance than today. The recent war in the Persian Gulf, where an aggressive nation was forced to comply with the resolutions of the Security Council, gives good reason to believe this.

### The Threat

The strategic importance of Norway is linked to its geographic position. The country stretches from fifty-eight to seventy-one degrees north latitude, with a coastline of 2,650 kilometers facing the Skagerrak and the North, Norwegian, and Barents Seas (see map). Due to the effect of the Gulf Stream the whole coastline, with its numerous fjords and harbours, is ice-free throughout the year.

As a consequence, in the last century it was two dominant European land powers that have represented the greatest threats against our territory—first Germany and then the Soviet Union. Both were trying to achieve world dominance, and both faced sea powers (Great Britain and the United States, respectively) as their main adversaries.

Norway managed to stay out of World War I due to a relatively strong national defense and the ability of the British Royal Navy to control the North and Norwegian Seas. In World War II German forces occupied Norway for five years; the German navy, which required bases with access to the open sea, was the main advocate of the strategy that led to the attack. Faced after World War II with a threat from another major land power, Norway joined the Nato alliance, which included two major sea powers, the United States and Great Britain. This has so far served us well.

Looking into the future, it is not likely that the direct military threat will be linked to anything else than our geographical position. Even though Norway possesses some natural resources, most importantly crude oil, this hardly represents a big enough "reward" to induce any nation to attack it. Rather, the potential threat in the future will be represented by a major land power striving to achieve sea power.

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Europe today is moving toward a new political reality. German unification has taken place, Germany remaining a Nato member; the Warsaw Pact has fallen apart, leaving the Soviet Union without any military allies in Europe; and inside the Soviet Union enormous domestic problems have to be solved if the nation is to survive in any form. However, there is no reason to believe that even if the union falls entirely apart Russia will not play a major role in a future Europe and remain itself a major military power.

It is most unlikely that a reunified Germany will present any form of military threat to its neighbors in the foreseeable future. The lessons Germany learned from the last war and its close cooperation with other nations within both Nato and the European Community during the last few decades have changed Germany's previous destructive nationalism. To Norway the implication is that the only nation left in Europe that could represent any *real* threat in the future is either the Soviet Union, or if the union collapses, Russia.

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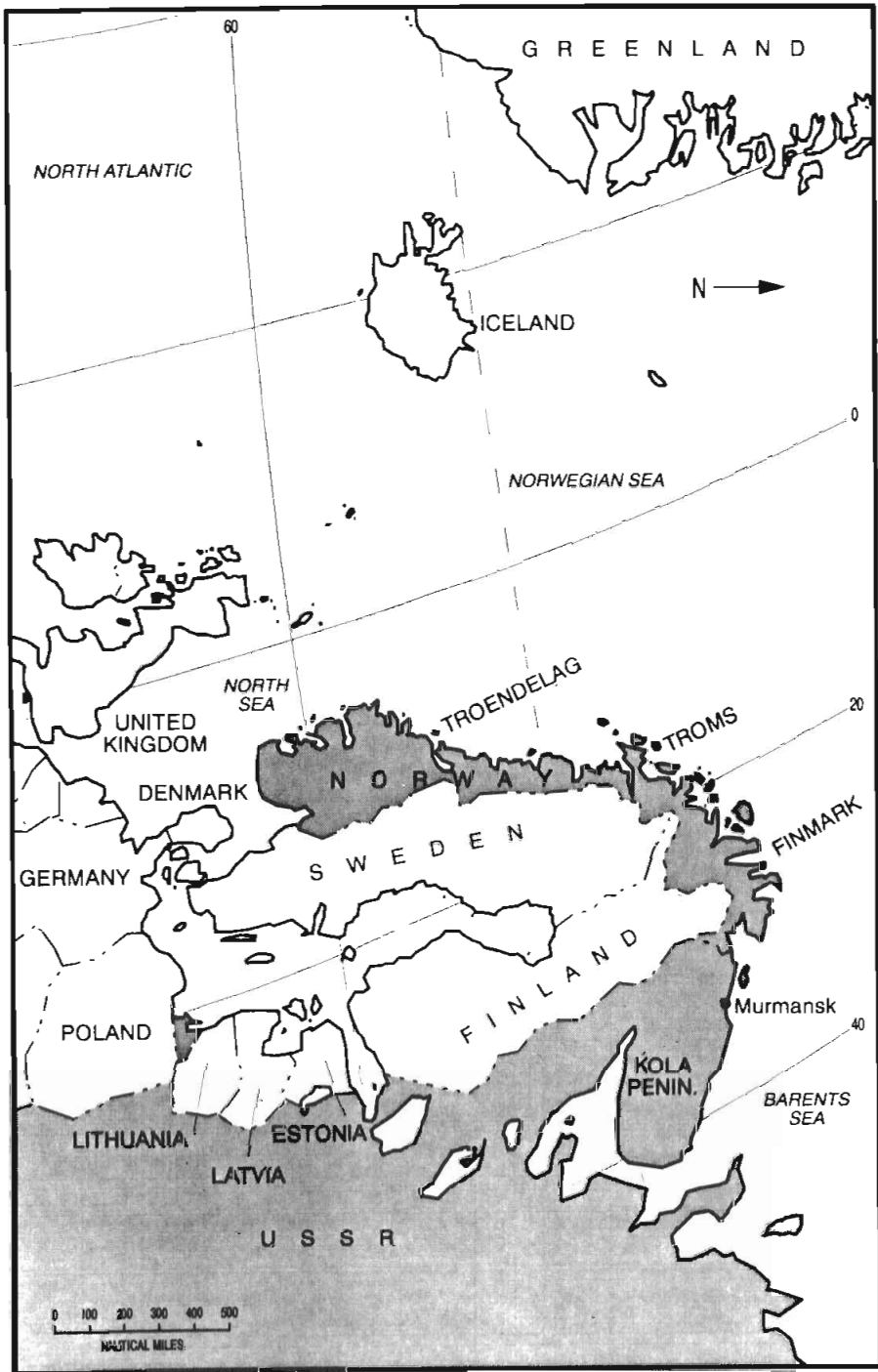
*"The strategic importance of Norway is linked to its geographic position. . . . Looking into the future, it is not likely that the direct military threat will be linked to anything else. . . ."*

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Historically one of the main goals of Russian or Soviet foreign and security policy has been to secure naval bases with access to the open sea. Norway's geographical position is such that two of the Soviet Union's most important naval base areas can be threatened from Norwegian soil. To the south, the Baltic approaches are close to the Norwegian coast and airfields; to the north, Norway borders the Kola Peninsula, which contains the world's highest concentration of offensive maritime power. The large Soviet Northern Fleet base complex, from the Zapadnaya to the Kola Fjords, is situated only about forty to seventy kilometers from the Norwegian border. Within this area we find the home bases for the Typhoon and Delta IV strategic submarines, as well as such major surface forces as the cruiser *Kirov* and the aircraft carrier *Kuznetsov*.

To demonstrate how important Kola is to the Soviet Union/Russia, it is enough to remember that fifty-six percent of the total fleet of SSBN-SSGNs is located in the Northern Fleet. In addition to the fleet, naval infantry and aircraft as well as units from the air force and army have to be included. In case of crisis or war, it is obvious that, from a military point of view, adding parts of North Norway to Soviet/Russian territory would greatly improve the defence of this vital area. Another and less costly option would be to prevent any other "hostile" power (i.e., Nato or the United States) from using Norwegian territory by denying it access to North Norway.

The Soviet navy has an important role in the present situation. Its general missions are:<sup>4</sup>



jerry lamoth

- Operating and protecting the Northern and Pacific Ocean Fleets' strategic nuclear ballistic force;
- Protecting the seaward approaches of the Soviet Union from air, sea, or amphibious attacks (especially from nuclear-capable forces such as attack submarines, aircraft carrier battle groups, air and sea-launched cruise missiles; and,
- Supporting Soviet ground forces by securing contiguous maritime flanks (by naval fire and logistical support, amphibious assault, and disrupting enemy sea lines of communication).

In view of the nature of the Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) negotiations, there are no signs that reduced force levels in Central Europe will have any effect on the naval side; arms control at sea is not a topic of formal discussion between East and West. This has traditionally been an area where the United States has shown particular reluctance. Taking into account the country's dependence on sea-borne trade and the need for sea power to protect her national interests, this is not surprising. Being a traditional land power, the Soviet Union/Russia has not the same need for maritime freedom of action as the U.S. It has, however, clearly seen the need for a strong navy to support both her military and political goals. The Soviet Union is at present carrying out a program of scrapping obsolescent naval ships and building up a smaller but qualitatively better, and probably more capable, force. Looking at the operational pattern, it is apparent that the Soviets are now concentrating more on their home waters. In view of the mission of their navy, economic constraints, and reduced superpower ambitions, this is not surprising.

When implemented, the Start (Strategic Arms Reduction Talks) agreement will result in a reduction of strategic submarines (SSBNs) and sea-based intercontinental ballistic missiles. The relative number compared to land-based intercontinental missiles and long-range bombers will, however, increase. On the Soviet/Russian side this could result in the scrapping of older strategic submarines in favour of the modern Typhoon and Delta classes. This would increase the relative importance of these weapon platforms, and of the Kola base.

Looking at the military threat in general, it has been reduced considerably. In the north, however, the military capacity at Kola is still very high. This, combined with the unstable political situation in the Soviet Union/Russia, results in a potential threat Norway can not disregard.

### Possible Alliances

As long as the Nato alliance remains a credible defense organization, Norway will have no need to look for other security arrangements. However, as has been pointed out, this situation can very well change within the next five to ten years. In choosing a new defense alliance, Norway would need to address the following basic security requirements:

- The alliance, or alliance partner, should have armed forces powerful enough to deter an attack on Norway from the Soviet Union or Russia. If deterrence fails, it must be able to send reinforcements by sea or air.

- The alliance, or partner, should possess substantial sea power. In principle it should be able to deny the Soviet Union (Russia) any prospect of invading Norway by sea or exercising sea control or sea denial in the Norwegian and North Seas.

As to potential future alliances, there are three alternatives of interest: a Nordic defense cooperation arrangement between Norway, Sweden, Denmark, and Finland; a defense union with the European Community; and a defense alliance with the United States.

**Nordic Defense Cooperation.** In 1948-49, Nordic countries tried to solve their security problems through cooperation on defense. Negotiations between Norway, Sweden, and Denmark were started, but broke down in 1949. Eventually Norway and Denmark joined the NATO alliance, and Sweden continued her policy of nonalignment in peace and neutrality in war. Finland's military forces were limited by the 1945 Paris Peace Treaty; in 1948 the Finns formalized their country's strategic position in an agreement with the Soviet Union on "Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance."

Since 1949 Norway has probably slightly improved her combat power. Sweden, on the other hand, has to a great extent reduced her forces, in particular the navy but also the air force and army. Denmark has also seen a rather drastic reduction of forces, especially during the last ten years. Finland, however, has probably increased her military capability. As previously mentioned, Finland has had certain restrictions on weaponry and the numbers of its standing forces. After the reunification of the two German states, Finland declared that she no longer regarded these restrictions as valid. Consequently there are now no formal limitations on the structure and size of future Finnish armed forces. The army has traditionally had the highest priority. In the years to come, it is planned to carry out a comprehensive renewal of equipment that will result in a general strengthening of the armed forces. At present the total mobilization force numbers approximately 700,000 men.<sup>5</sup>

Common to all four countries is military service based on conscription. Accordingly, standing forces are relatively small, and the armies in particular have a high number of personnel in basic training. In general, all these forces are structured to fight a defensive war within their respective countries and have only a limited capability to operate outside them. An important factor here is logistics, which to a great extent would be provided from civilian resources.

It is quite clear that the combined forces of the Nordic countries do not, as Norwegian alliance needs require, dispose a military force great enough to prevent an attack against Norway from the Soviet Union. As demonstrated in



sea-denial exercises off the coast of North Norway, the navies of the Nordic countries, being primarily coastal forces, do not have the capability to achieve more than local control in limited areas along their own coasts.

Of greater importance than present military capabilities, of course, is the political will to form an alliance. Without going into detail, there is good reason to believe that Sweden, Finland, and Denmark will consider their security interests best served by maintaining their present policies. If the dissolution of Nato should happen within the next year, it will not have any immediate impact on Sweden or Finland. Denmark, a member nation, would, like Norway, have to consider other possible alliances. Being a member of the European Community, it is most likely that Denmark would look to that body for her basic security needs. In this connection it is also of interest that Sweden has stated that she will apply for membership within the E.C.; there is reason to believe that Finland is also moving in that direction. What this would mean for the future security and defense policies of these two nations has not been debated in any great depth; however, any change in the present situation could be of great importance to Norway.

***Defense Union within the European Community.*** At present the European Community as such is not able to deal with military matters; up to now the Nato structure has been considered sufficient for basic security and military coordination within Europe. However, since the collapse of communism and the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, many regard the long-morbid Western European Union as a suitable body for coordinating the military strategy and activity of the future Community.<sup>6</sup> The inability of Nato to operate out of its area has of course made this a pressing matter.

Italy, which held the rotating presidency of the E.C. in the second half of 1990, went so far as to suggest that the W.E.U. be absorbed by the Community, although three E.C. members—Denmark, Greece, and Ireland—are not members of the Union, and Ireland is neutral. Jacques Delors, the president of the European Community, has also strongly endorsed plans by Community governments to discuss integration of their foreign and military policies.

As possible defense partners for Norway in place of Nato, a potential European Community-based defense union is obviously of great interest. Considering only the military side, the force balance within Europe after CFE will be more favorable to the Europeans than previously. Therefore, if Nato should be succeeded by a European defense union (or more probably by a common European pillar within a future Nato), U.S. forces in Europe will be reduced—though President Bush has recently given assurances that they will not be pulled out altogether. Plans to reduce the existing troops to approximately 100,000 are already being worked out as a part of the overall U.S. reduction of its armed forces. An important factor here is of course nuclear deterrence; Europe would

still need assurance from the United States in this field. Both France and Great Britain do, however, have a nuclear capability that can not be disregarded by a potential aggressor.

Norway would be able, then, to get the necessary element of deterrence as a member of a European defense union. The matter of possible reinforcements to Norway requires more in-depth study; however, with the reduced threat from the Soviet Union toward Central Europe, forces from Great Britain, Germany, and France could be allocated to Norway. (Historically this is not a new situation; after the German attack on Norway in 1940, both British and French forces came to assist.) Within Nato, British and recently German forces as well have been earmarked to reinforce Norway in case of crisis or war.

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*"The naval aspect would probably be the most critical. . . . It is obvious that even with a separate European defense union, U.S. naval forces capable of rapid deployment to the Norwegian Sea will be of great importance."*

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The naval aspect would probably be the most critical. Even with French participation, the European countries would not be able to muster a naval force with enough offensive power to counter the Northern Fleet. This implies that North Norway, at least, runs the risk of being isolated in case of crisis or war. Being a member of an alliance would, of course, limit the overall possibility of this happening; however, it is obvious that even with a separate European defense union, U.S. naval forces capable of rapid deployment to the Norwegian Sea will be of great importance.

It is difficult to foresee whether joining a defense union with the European Community would require membership in the E.C. itself. At present Norway is not a member, and the subject is still a rather tense one within Norwegian society. So far the security policy and military implications of Norway's remaining outside the organization have been given little notice. This has its background in the fact that Nato is still regarded as a viable organization and the resulting perception that there is no need to discuss alternatives. Recent developments within the E.C. toward a monetary and political union have, however, changed this. It is a genuine fear that Norway, not being a member of the Community or the Western European Union, will be in a position where basic security needs will not be covered. These arguments are now being brought more and more strongly into the discussion on the future relationship between Norway and the E.C.

***Defense Alliance with the United States.*** Norway has several bilateral agreements within the Nato alliance for mutual support in case of crisis or war. At present the equipment for one American Marine Expeditionary Brigade is pre-stocked

in Troendelag. Use of Norwegian airfields by U.S. and other allied air forces is provided for and regulated by the Collocated Operating Bases Agreement. There are also several other agreements and contingency plans covering the potential use of U.S. forces in support of Norway or the Northern Flank as such. Norway, being a member of Nato, also benefits from the overall deterrence represented by the United States—its forces in Europe, its naval presence, its ability to project sea power in the Norwegian and Barents Seas, and its strategic nuclear forces.

As to a future alliance, it is of course a promising option for Norway to seek the United States as a defense partner. The necessary national security requirements could be met simply by maintaining today's situation. Being in an alliance with a superpower like the United States would also give considerable advantages with respect to a threat from the Soviet Union or Russia.

From the U.S. point of view, it will probably be of value to continue cooperation with Norway as long as the threat from the strategic submarine force at Kola is regarded as a vital interest of the United States. Should this threat disappear, however, it is quite uncertain if such an alliance would involve sufficiently vital American interests to justify the resources required. With a stable situation in Central Europe, and the European Community having established its own defense union, the United States would probably be primarily concerned with contingencies in other parts of the world. This is a process which in fact has already started; the U.S. is redefining its national interests and, in turn, the structure and future strategy of its armed forces. As a realistic goal, Norway should work to ensure that the United States maintains at least the necessary naval power in the North Atlantic and the Norwegian Sea to counter Soviet or Russian naval forces in the area.

### Strategy and Force Structure

It is not possible to predict if Nato will continue in its present form or be transformed into another type of organization. There are, however, good arguments for its continued relevance. They were stated by the Norwegian minister of defense, Johan Joergen Holst, in an address on "Future Tasks of the Atlantic Alliance" delivered on 23 February 1991 to the Security Policy Conference of the German Atlantic Association.

- It provides a framework for continued North American engagement in the security of Europe, on the basis of commitments to collective defense.
- It ensures essential military equivalence with the Soviet Union, providing against the danger of a future renaissance of imperial ambitions or spillover from domestic turmoil or breakdown.
- It maintains the coherence of the security order in Europe, from the Atlantic to the Urals and from the Barents Sea to the Mediterranean.

- It provides a framework for German participation in the management of security in Europe on the basis of equality with her partners.
- It provides a framework for containing the spread of nuclear weapons.
- It underwrites the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) process and the construction of a cooperative security order in the region.<sup>7</sup>

With regard to the Norwegian national armed forces, there is no military justification for a substantial reduction. The threat, as previously described, will in the future be mainly represented by the forces in the Kola. Unfortunately for Norway, there are basic strategic interests of the Soviet Union and Russia still remaining in this area; a potential threat results even if Norway is not a target in itself. However, the economic situation can lead, and actually has led, to increasing cuts in the Norwegian defense budget. The availability of resources may consequently reduce our ability to keep a balanced national force, and increase thereby the risks we have to accept.

The most serious of these risks is probably the impact a less competent Norwegian defense would have on the will of our allies to send reinforcements in case of crisis or war. If we reduce our own ability to fight an effective battle until allied reinforcements can arrive, will any of our partners commit their troops to assist us? In my view this is not very likely. When the threat from the Soviet Union was seen to be high, it was in the interest of the Nato alliance and in particular the United States to support the Northern Flank. However, with the lessening of this threat to the United States and the Nato alliance, the U.S.

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***“If we reduce our own ability to fight an effective battle until allied reinforcements can arrive, will any of our partners commit their troops to assist us?”***

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Navy is in the process of reducing its force to 450 ships with twelve carrier battle groups.<sup>8</sup> It will probably be much harder in the future to get on the priority list for the support of these ships. At present the U.S. Marine Expeditionary Brigade, the British-Dutch commando brigade earmarked for use in Norway, and the newly established “Nato Composite Force” (U.S., German, and Norwegian) are not meant to carry out opposed landings. They are to be brought to an area where they can be organized and then taken to the front line. If Norway limits its ability to resist an invasion long enough to allow reinforcements to arrive relatively safely, they may never show up at all.

Another important area which may suffer from defense cuts is our ability to control allied forces that do come to Norway. It has been a clear policy that Norwegian officers will control both Norwegian and allied forces operating within the country. However, with a possible reduction of Norway’s operational

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staffs and less money for exercises, the ability to do so might very well be reduced to a level not acceptable to our allies.

Possible means to reduce the impact of reduced resources include increased efficiency and better use of available resources, reduction of personnel not contributing to defense, restructuring the present defense organization, reducing the number of bases and standing forces in peacetime, prestocking equipment in North Norway, and implementing new concepts for training (with more use of simulators). These are only some general means which have to be considered in the future if national objectives are to be met. It is, however, beyond the aim of this paper to go into more detail about planning of forces.

With regard to the future policy to keep tensions low, in our area in particular and within Europe in general, we look to the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe as a vehicle to create such conditions. This will probably take time; at present we are waiting for the first part of the CFE treaty to be implemented. The next step in the negotiations ("CFE-1A") will deal with personnel reductions. Norway will work in particular for the reduction of forces in the Kola and close to its own borders.

**N**orwegian national interests in general are not likely to change in the near future. National security objectives as well will remain as they are today. As to the possible future threat, it will still be represented by the Soviet Union, or Russia. Limitations of conventional forces in Europe and land-based nuclear weapons could result in an increased importance of the Soviet (Russian) navy, in particular the Northern Fleet. This could in turn result in the long term in an increased threat against North Norway. It is important for Norway to maintain the present level of national forces and to be a member of an alliance that has the ability to counter the threat from, in particular, the naval forces of the Kola. At present, Nato membership covers our security requirements; in the event that Nato is dissolved, the best solution for Norway would be defense cooperation with the European Community. In addition, a U.S. naval presence in the Atlantic and the Norwegian Sea would be most important to counter the Northern Fleet and prevent Norway from being isolated in case of crisis or war.

In further defense planning it is important to find solutions which can limit the impact of the reduced resources allocated for defense spending. If this cannot be achieved, Norway will have to accept an increased risk.

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### Notes

1. Naval War College Force Planning Faculty, *Fundamentals of Force Planning* (Newport, R.I.: Naval War College Press), v. 2, p. 110.

2. Tom Dagne, "Change of Direction for Norway's Economy," *Norway Information* (Oslo: Norinforu, May 1989), p. 1.
3. Helge Loland, "Some Questions of Norwegian Foreign Policy," *Norway Information* (Oslo, Norinforu: 7 January 1990), p. 3.
4. *Soviet Military Power, 1990* (Washington: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1990), chap. 4.
5. International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 1990-1991* (London: Brassey's, 1990), p. 90.
6. The Western European Union (W.E.U.) was established 6 May 1955 in London to promote European cooperation on defense and security matters. Its members are Belgium, Great Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal, and Spain.
7. Johan Joergen Holst, "New Dimensions of Security," *Ministry of Defence Information*, no. 2 (Oslo: Royal Ministry of Defence, Press and Information Department, February 1991), pp. 39-40.
8. Information given in a brief at the Pentagon by the Chief of Naval Operations staff to students of the Naval War College's Naval Command College, April 1991.

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OSLO – A majority of the Norwegian voters is opposed to cutting defense costs below today's level. Furthermore, more women than men tend to be in favor of increasing the defense budget, according to an opinion poll performed by Opinion A/S. Sixty-six percent of the voters say they prefer to keep the defense expenses at today's level, or even increase the defense budget. However, the poll showed a vast difference in attitude between men and women, figures not registered in previous polls. Men seem to be more inclined to favor further defense expense cuts than women, while women outnumber men two to one among those in favor of increasing the defense expenditures, according to the Oslo daily *Aftenposten*.

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