



FFI-RAPPORT

19/00447

Three Future Scenarios for Nordic Military Operations

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Norwegian Defence Research Establishment (FFI)

2 May 2019

Keywords

Scenarioer
Militære operasjoner
Sverige
Danmark
Finland

FFI-rapport

19/00447

Prosjektnummer

1421

ISBN

P:978-82-464-3180-2

E:978-82-464-3181-9

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Summary

This report is published in parallel with FFI-report 2019//00046 *A Future Nordic Alliance? Prerequisites and Possible Operations*. That report argues against the conventional wisdom that Nordic security and defense cooperation is destined to fail, demonstrating that Nordic security and defense cooperation, including joint Nordic military operations, is both feasible and desirable.

This report supplements by presenting the scope for future Nordic operations in three different scenarios: a situation in which Russia exercises coercive diplomacy towards Norway; a situation involving a limited *fait accompli*; and, finally, a large Russian attack on three Nordic countries, albeit for limited objectives. The scenarios show ways in which Nordic operations may be useful, in situations involving varying degrees of force and of cooperation with countries outside the Nordic region. The report demonstrates how Nordic operations are particularly relevant for the present politico-military challenges, where a short response time, the political effects of military support and possessing military instruments tailored to the situation become ever more important.

Sammendrag

Denne rapporten utgis sammen med FFI-rapport 2019//00046 *A Future Nordic Alliance? Prerequisites and Possible Operations*. Den rapporten tar til motmæle mot den gjengse oppfatning at nordisk sikkerhetspolitisk- og forsvarssamarbeid er dømt til å mislykkes. Den viser hvordan samarbeid på disse saksfeltene i dag og i fremtiden vil være både mulig og ønskelig.

Rapporten presenterer tre scenarioer for å vise bredden i mulige nordiske operasjoner. Det er en situasjon hvor Russland over tid utøver tvangsmakt mot Norge, en situasjon med et begrenset *fait accompli*, og til slutt et storskala russisk angrep mot tre nordiske land, riktignok også det med begrensede mål. Scenarioene viser noen måter nordiske operasjoner kan være nyttige på, med varierende bruk av makt og samarbeidsordninger med andre land utenfor Norden. De viser hvordan nordiske operasjoner er særlig relevante for dagens politisk-militære utfordringer hvor kort militær responstid, den politiske effekten av militær støtte, og det å inneha et militær virkemiddel tilpasset den konkrete situasjonen, blir stadig viktigere.

Contents

Sammendrag	3
Summary	3
Preface	7
1 Introduction	9
2 The external and internal developments of the Nordic security complex	12
2.1 Russia as an external parameter to the Nordic Security Complex	12
2.2 The US as an external parameter to the Nordic Security Complex	13
2.3 NATO as an external parameter to the Nordic Security Complex	13
3 Internal developments of the Nordic security complex	14
3.1 Internal political developments	14
3.2 Military political developments	14
4 Scenario 1: Steady pressure and coercive diplomacy	15
4.1 Scenario features and global trends	16
4.2 Nordic responses	18
4.3 Analysis of outcome	20
5 Scenario 2: A Russian fait accompli in Gotland	21
5.1 Key characteristics and global trends	21
5.2 Specific scenario background	22
5.3 Fait accompli	24
5.4 Swedish and Nordic Response	25
5.5 Nordic analysis of courses of action	26
5.6 The Nordic military response	27
5.7 Analysis	28
6 Scenario 3: Russian operation to establish Bastion Nordkalotten	29
6.1 Key characteristics of the scenario	29
6.2 The Russian attack	30
6.3 Characteristics and novelties	31

6.4	The build-up	32
6.5	The Nordic response	33
7	Conclusions	34
	References	36

Preface

This report constitutes one of two parallel publications on future Nordic military operations published by the Norwegian Defence Research Establishment (FFI) in 2019. The first report demonstrates that Nordic security and defense cooperation, including joint Nordic military operations, is both feasible and desirable. It does so in two steps. First, by using social science theories about the relevant general categories, the report concludes that far-reaching Nordic cooperation is the norm rather than the exception. This is the outside perspective. Second, the report moves on to ask whether there are any special Nordic features, historical or cultural, that modify that baseline. Based on all the evidence, the report is able to conclude that future defense cooperation, including future joint military operations, is both possible and indeed likely.

This report describes the scope for future Nordic operations by presenting three scenarios: a situation in which Russia exercises coercive diplomacy towards Norway; a situation involving a limited *fait accompli*; and, finally, a large Russian attack on three Nordic countries, albeit for limited objectives. The scenarios show ways in which Nordic operations may be useful, in situations involving varying degrees of force and of cooperation with countries outside the Nordic region. The report demonstrates how Nordic operations are particularly relevant for the present politico-military challenges, where a short response time, the political effects of military support and possessing military instruments tailored to the situation become ever more important.

Both reports are part of the project on Global Trends and Military Operations II (2016–2019) at FFI, the Norwegian Research Establishment. The project is a continuation of Global Trends and Military operations I (2013–2016) and studies how global trends might affect the Norwegian Armed Forces within the next 15–25 years. It identified a number of different classes of operations that the armed forces might have to undertake (see Sverre Diesen (2016), *The Future Operations of the Armed Forces* [Forsvarets fremtidige operasjoner – en morfologisk analyse av operasjonsspekteret], *FFI-rapport 16/02096*, Kjeller: Forsvarets forskningsinstitutt). Classes 5 and 6 were Nordic Operations, in Norway and elsewhere respectively. This report attempts to study these two classes of operations in more detail.

This report is aimed at political and military decision-makers in the Defense Ministries, Joint Staffs and Joint Operational Headquarters in all Nordic countries, and, it is hoped, may also find some readers among political scientists and the general public. To reach all potential readers in the Nordic countries, it has been written in English.

Alexander W. Beadle and Sverre Diesen have read the manuscript in full, several times, and have provided many suggestions to improve the report. Thanks also to Robert Dalsjö, Magnus Petersson and Håkon Lunde Saxi for their valuable comments on parts of it. Thank you all for removing many errors and sharpening the arguments. Any remaining errors are my responsibility.

Kjeller, 27.3.2019

Tore Nyhamar



1 Introduction

This report constitutes one of two parallel publications on future Nordic military operations published by the Norwegian Defence Research Establishment (FFI) in 2019. The first report demonstrates that Nordic security and defense cooperation, including joint Nordic military operations, is both feasible and desirable.¹ There is a potential for Nordic defense and security cooperation – an alliance – that may enable the Nordic countries to conduct military operations together in Norway or elsewhere in Scandinavia. The discussion of alliances is not an end in itself, but necessary for the discussion the research question: *What is the future potential for joint Nordic military operations?*

This second report attempts to answer that question. To illustrate the scope for future Nordic operations, three scenarios for future Nordic operations have been developed. This report thus describes what three future Nordic operations may look like in 20–25 years from now. The scenarios have emerged by combining three parameters: conflict intensity, area of operations and whether one Nordic state or all Nordic states jointly are attacked. The first is a situation in which Russia exercises coercive diplomacy towards Norway. The second is a situation involving a limited *fait accompli*. The third is a large Russian attack on three Nordic countries, albeit for limited objectives. The scenarios show ways in which Nordic operations may be useful, in situations involving varying degrees of force and of cooperation with countries outside the Nordic region.

Let us first consider conflict intensity. In the report *Forsvarets fremtidige operasjoner* [Future Operations of the Armed Forces] that inspired this report, conflict intensity is a dichotomy. In high-intensity operations, the operational tempo is high and a broad spectrum of arms is used in combined or joint operations. Conversely, in low-intensity conflicts the operational tempo is low and only light arms such as hand guns and machine guns are employed.² However, Russian objectives may be obtained by coercive diplomacy or some form of limited military action. This is the main future threat faced by the Nordic states. In exercising coercive diplomacy, Russia may avoid actually *using* force and instead use its military forces to engage in activities designed to intimidate a Nordic country, to remind it what the Russians *could* do. Such activity could be an incursion into or toward the sovereign air space of one of the states to trigger scramblings and interceptions, in order to determine readiness and will. Similarly, in the land and maritime domains, the Russian Armed Forces could test the credibility, capability and determination of a Nordic state. Over time, the Armed Forces of a Nordic state may become too exhausted to respond, giving Russia a psychological and political edge through a high-operational tempo.

It is desirable for Russia to demonstrate that it is able to challenge the sovereignty of a small neighbor state successfully. Conversely, all Nordic states have an interest in any attempt at a

¹ Tore Nyhamar (2019), 'FFI-rapport 19/00046 A Future Nordic Alliance? Prerequisites and possible operations'.

² Sverre Diesen (2016). *Forsvarets fremtidige operasjoner. En morfologisk analyse av operasjonsspekteret FFI-rapport 16/02096*: FFI, p. 19 <https://www.ffi.no/no/Rapporter/16-02096.pdf>

political–military checkmate of any one of them being repelled, because failure to do so would set an unfortunate precedent. Therefore, they might come to the military assistance of each other, leading to the type of Nordic operation that is analyzed in scenario 1.³

This report will discuss two basic areas of operation: The High North and the Baltic Sea. Whether these two areas are viewed as strategically separate or as belonging to a single strategic space has profound implications for Nordic operations. If they are seen as separate strategic spaces, bilateral conflict between one of the Nordic states and Russia are viewed for their negative effects on the security of the remaining Nordic states.⁴ If it is seen as a single strategic space, any conflict between a Nordic state and Russia constitutes a security threat to all, allowing for deeper Nordic security cooperation to prepare for joint operations.⁵

The argument for a single strategic space is that geography and military strategies connects the strategic focal points.⁶ The High North is important as a staging area for Russia's nuclear deterrence, and strategic submarines and missiles are located there. It is also the home base of the Russian Northern Fleet, which potentially threatens the Sea Lanes of Communications (SLOCs) across the Atlantic. Military reinforcement to the Baltic States is premised on sea control in the Baltic Sea, which in turn is premised on sea control in the North Atlantic Ocean. It is entirely possible that the tension between a focus on the Baltic and a focus on the High North cannot be bridged by the single-strategic-space argument. However, the two dominating military powers in the region – Russia and the US – both view the region through a geographic prism, connecting the region. Note also that Rolf Tamnes argues for a deliberate strategy to make the Nordic states and the Baltic states into a single strategic space. His argument has two preconditions: A belief that a single strategic space does not come automatically but as a consequence of a deliberate political strategy; and a belief that such a political strategy is feasible.⁷

The single-strategic-space view necessarily includes the Nordic state of Denmark in the analysis, as the area of operations is no longer necessarily that of a “strategic island”. The operational conditions of Norway, Sweden and Finland mean that they cannot receive military reinforcements from the European mainland through an overland route except through

³ The scenarios have been modified from the Nordic operations suggested in the report *Forsvarets fremtidige operasjoner*, as the parameter is only partially high intensity, falling somewhere in the middle of the original sharp dichotomy.

⁴ Diesen 2016, p. 37–38.

⁵ Alexander William Beadle and Sverre Diesen (2015), *Globale trender mot 2040 – implikasjoner for Forsvarets rolle og relevans*. FFI-rapport 2015/01452 Chapter 5.2 <http://www.ffi.no/no/Rapporter/15-01452.pdf> Diesen 2016, p. 17.

⁶ «En strategisk øy uten landverts forbindelse til det europeiske fastland.» [A strategic island without land connection to the European continent], Diesen 2016, p. 17, 24. «Northern Europe is a single military theater encompassing the North Atlantic, North, Barents, and Baltic Seas. While it is tempting to segment this region and try to analyze its challenges in isolation, the security situation in this space is interlinked and requires a comprehensive view.”, Heather A. Conley, Jeffrey Rathke and Matthew Melino (2018), *Enhanced Deterrence in the North. A 21st Century European Engagement Strategy*: Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), p. 18 https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/180119_Conley_EnhancedDeterrenceNorth_Web.pdf?uIa_1usRa2.PdrR4pnJvjLKFPN3tFDYQ

⁷ Rolf Tamnes (2018), 'The High North: A Call for a Competitive Strategy'. In *Security in Northern Europe. Deterrence, Defence and Dialogue*, ed. Olsen. Whitehall Routledge (2018).

Denmark. In addition, the single-strategic-space assumption brings a bilateral Danish–Russian conflict into the possible scenarios.⁸ Thus, instead of scenarios with one Nordic state locked in bilateral conflict and the others motivated by self-interest to help, the single strategic space allows us to add scenarios where all Nordic states share the *same* motivation to avoid negative indirect effects on their security. In addition to the narrowest and most myopic type of self-interest, it creates scope for analysis based on a somewhat wider and more far-sighted type of self-interest typical of alliances. This wider set of interests, including both mutual interests in assisting each other and the joint strategic interest in keeping the Baltic Straits open provide a better foundation for analyzing economically motivated cooperation about capacity building.⁹ The Baltic scenario may also serve as the first phase in a scenario of conflict in the Baltics involving other NATO countries.

This chapter describes what three potential Nordic military operations might look like 15–25 years from now. It will begin by briefly sketching the common background for all the scenarios, based on the trends discussed in this report as well as those discussed in *Globale trender* [Global Trends].¹⁰ This will also serve as the backdrop for the next step, which is to explain why I have singled out these three scenarios for further study. The discussion will include a description of the premises that each scenario is based upon, serving as an introduction to each. Finally, the report will discuss each of the chosen scenarios.

	High North	Baltic Sea
One attacked	1. Coercive diplomacy against Norway	2. Russian assault on Gotland/Bornholm
All attacked	3. Bastion <i>Nordkalotten</i>	Coercive diplomacy against the <i>Nordics</i> or Bastion <i>Baltic Sea</i>

Table 1.1 Nordic scenarios.

The report will explore the three scenarios in red. The first is military pressure against one country in the North. The second is a limited attempt at a *fait accompli* against one country. The final scenario is an operation against all countries in the North. All scenarios are examples of situations where the internal security effects – the pattern of enmities and amities – are markedly stronger within the Nordic Region than outside it, making it a security complex.

⁸ Ann-Sofie Dahl (2008), *US policy in the Nordic-Baltic region: during the cold war and after*. Santérus Academic Press.

⁹ Diesen 2016, p. 37.

¹⁰ Beadle and Diesen 2015.

Before moving on to the scenarios, I will briefly sketch some assumptions common to the scenarios about the future up to 2040 inside and outside the Nordic security complex.

2 The external and internal developments of the Nordic security complex

Note that what follow are assumptions in the scenarios, and not predictions about Russia or the Nordic security complex.

2.1 Russia as an external parameter to the Nordic Security Complex

In all scenarios, the economic stagnation in Russia that was already evident during Vladimir Putin's presidency has continued up to 2040. Lower oil and gas prices and continued economic sanctions have hurt state finances. Corruption and various abuses of power have prevented a restructuring of the Russian economy and led to a cash-strapped state and lowered living standards for the population. In spite of this, the Russian leadership has tried to maintain Russian prestige and control by prioritizing its armed forces, as it believes that military and economic power are the most useful instruments of state power. Russia has continued to see itself locked in an antagonistic relationship with the West, the "new normal".¹¹ There is a continued rejection of Western values and a desire to weaken and if possible destroy NATO.

Internally, there is increasing disenchantment with the regime, as it fails to deliver either economic benefits to the population internally or prestige internationally. There is no direct link between Russia's increasingly authoritarian regime and external aggression, and Russia has been content to pressure the European states for influence for more than a decade, without any major undertakings. Its reliance on disinformation has become less effective over time, and the Russian leadership, to its chagrin, has realized that the new strongmen in Hungary, Slovakia and Bulgaria that they had such high hopes for in the early 2020s have nationalist agendas of their own, differing from Russian interests. An antagonistic normal in Russian-European relations has been established, with Russia trying to dominate its smaller neighboring countries, with varying degrees of success. Unable to reform the economy, the Russian leadership is increasingly looking for ways to compensate by scoring an easy foreign policy success.

Russia has tried to play the role of one of the centers of world power, with a responsibility for international security. However, Russia is finding it increasingly difficult to pretend that it is a global power. Its economic base is too narrow to compete effectively with China and the US

¹¹ Jens Ringsmose and Sten Rynning (2017), 'Now for the Hard Part: NATO's Strategic Adaptation to Russia', *Survival* 59: 3, p. 139.

globally, and, as a social and economic model, the country has no appeal. It has maintained cordial relations with China, even though the Russian leadership reluctantly has had to accept an increasingly subordinate role bilaterally. To compensate, Russia has tried to carve out a sphere of interest along its western border. It believes that the small states in Europe ought to defer to Russia regionally, as Russia itself has had to defer to China and the US globally. Russia sees an opportunity to play a large regional role, as both the US and China have become increasingly preoccupied with their global rivalry in the Pacific, Africa and the Americas, and believe that Europe ought to be able to take care of its own affairs and security. In 2025, Russia and its close ally Serbia scored a foreign policy success by bringing down the government of Montenegro and replacing it with a regime much more inclined to follow Moscow's and Belgrade's view.

2.2 The US as an external parameter to the Nordic Security Complex

The USA has maintained its security guarantee through NATO to defend Europe, but competition from China in an increasingly unstable Africa and parts of Asia has led to strategic priorities changing for the American armed forces. The continued American endorsement of NATO therefore primarily reflects the desire to avoid a strategic retreat that might encourage China to believe in a US retreat from global geopolitical competition. US domestic politics remain as divisive as ever, and the extent to which the US should try to compete with China for influence has become a contentious issue domestically. The credibility of the US will to mobilize the capability to intervene effectively in Europe is therefore in doubt, unless US national interests are directly challenged in a way that jeopardizes its credibility as a global superpower. Containing a weakened Russia is no longer a top priority for the US.

The waning US interest in Europe has affected the "alliance within the alliance" relationship with Norway. Reduced American interest in containing Russia in Europe has reduced the interest in information-gathering in the North, although an interest in tracking strategic Russian (and Chinese) submarines remains.

2.3 NATO as an external parameter to the Nordic Security Complex

NATO has continued its development from a firm military alliance into more of a consultative security organization and an institutional arena for forming coalitions of the willing from conflict to conflict. After an increase in defense spending in the early 2020s, a new normal has been established. Russia has refrained from using military force, and an informal compromise has been reached with Europe in Ukraine. Ukraine does not join European institutions but is slowly gravitating towards them economically, except for Donbass, which remains a frozen conflict. NATO has maintained its forward presence in the Baltic States, but is doing so with increasingly hollowed-out forces with limited combat power. Many of the European NATO members have not prioritized defense, and NATO's institutional capabilities, such as the rapid deployment forces, fail to meet their target. Instead, informal, interest-based regional alliances are formed, sometimes including states outside NATO, deepening cooperation about security policy, training, exercises and logistics. One such cluster is the Nordic security complex,

motivated by a shared concern about Russia. From a Nordic perspective, it is surrounded by the wider regional network of the *Northern Group*. Within the Northern Group, the UK is the lead nation but Germany has slowly evolved as the main military force, without exercising effective leadership.

3 Internal developments of the Nordic security complex

3.1 Internal political developments

In a situation where the two most powerful states globally do not have European security at the top of their agendas, believing that Europe can take care of its own security, the Nordic states have realized that they have joint interests that are not necessarily shared by others. Most European states have tried to limit Russian influence, albeit for different reasons. Therefore, the Nordic states recognized the need to be prepared to act together without support from others, and signed a mutual Nordic defense agreement, modelled on the Finnish–Swedish agreement of 2015. The agreement assumes that challenges to the region will be addressed together. The Nordic states deal with everyday activities together and may, if they decide to, handle contingencies *up to and including war*. The agreement does not oblige the states to help each other, but they will develop the necessary plans to do so, to complement national plans, for at least some contingencies. Through close and frequent security consultations, it is commonly understood that the agreement aims to prevent two main types of contingencies. The first is handling the first phase in a conflict, before help from other allies arrives, be it from NATO's Northern Group or bilaterally from the US. The second is acting alone, in response to an incursion that may now be considered too small to trigger outside assistance. In a situation where support from other than Nordic allies has become conditional due to diverging interests, there is always the possibility that the Nordic states may be left to fend for themselves.

3.2 Military political developments

The defense budgets of the Nordic states have by and large followed the trajectory set in the late 2010s, enabling them to develop the planned modest increase in their armed forces. The Nordic states are among the European states that have maintained armed forces in relatively good order. After an increase towards 2025, defense spending increased to and then was maintained at 1.7% of GDP in Norway, 1.4% of GDP in Finland and Sweden, and 1.3% of GDP in Denmark.

Practical military activity has kept up with political developments, at times even preceding them. Cross-border training among the Air Forces of the Nordic states has become more frequent, is carried out with more planes, and allows more complex operations with fewer

restrictions. The Nordic states have moved towards recognizing a common airspace. From 2021, cross-border training was extended to the other services, with the intention of developing the ability to conduct joint operations.¹² All cross-border training agreements have always been open for other countries to join, and Germany and Poland have been the most frequent participants. By 2030, an increased level of interoperability had developed between the Nordic Air Forces with the capacity for joint operations, common base operations and common command and control capability. A standing Nordic Naval Task Group (N2TG) with full operational capability had similarly been developed. Finally, concerning the armies of the four Nordic states, a combined Nordic Brigade Framework had been developed.¹³ This is part of a wider Framework Nations Concept, under German leadership.¹⁴ There is no alliance obligating the participants; the purpose is solely to provide political decision-makers with more militarily viable options. Finally, the force structures of the Nordic states have evolved approximately as planned. Bearing the above context in mind, let us move on to the first of the three scenarios.

4 Scenario 1: Steady pressure and coercive diplomacy

In this scenario, Russia applies steadily increasing politico-military pressure against Norway, without spectacular events or dramatic incidents, until a sense of urgency is created on the Norwegian side.

¹² Torbjørn Løvland (2017), 'Enklere grensekryssing'. *Forsvarets forum*.

¹³ Swedish Ministry of Defence (2015), *Final reports on deepened defence cooperation between Finland and Sweden*. ed. Defence. Stockholm

<http://www.government.se/49baf3/globalassets/government/dokument/forsvarsdepartementet/final-reports-on-deepened-defence-cooperation-between-finland-och-sweden.pdf> Accessed 16.11.2017.

¹⁴ Elisabeth Braw (May 2017), *Report: Germany Is Quietly Building a European Army Under Its Command* <http://foreignpolicy.com/2017/05/22/germany-is-quietly-building-a-european-army-under-its-command/>; Framework Nations Concept: Zusammenarbeit intensiviert <https://www.bmvg.de/de/aktuelles/framework-nations-concept-zusammenarbeit-intensiviert-11200> Published 29.06.2017, accessed 16.11.2017. Eva Hagström Frisell and Emma Sjökvist (2019), *Military Cooperation around Framework Nations*: FOI, [file:///C:/Users/tny/Downloads/FOIR4672SE%20\(1\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/tny/Downloads/FOIR4672SE%20(1).pdf) <file:///C:/Users/tny/Downloads/FOIR4672SE.pdf>

4.1 Scenario features and global trends

The scenario is built around four relatively novel aspects inspired by future global trends. First, long-drawn-out Russian military pressure rather than a short imminent crisis. The crisis is extended, with no clear events triggering crisis. Usually scenarios start off with an event creating a crisis that has to be handled immediately, but in this scenario it is rather that the situation slowly becomes untenable. Second, this slowly evolving crisis eventually becomes too big for Norway to handle alone, yet its slowness presents an obstacle to gaining the interest of NATO, leaving the Nordic countries alone to deal with it. Their proximity to the challenge prevents them from ignoring it, and the Nordic alliance share an interest in curbing Russian influence, motivating to add military resources to deal effectively with it. Third, the intentions of the aggressor are unclear to the defender, and, possibly, to the aggressor also. The undeclared Russian objectives and the Russian abstention from overt threats makes it particularly difficult to gain the attention of allies and make them act. Fourth, it involves a small power using military power as an instrument of national policy – “security policy body language”, currently unusual for small states. It is, however, suggested that, in international operations, changes in the environment will increasingly propel small states to use military force as an instrument of national security policy.¹⁵ The courses of action, particularly escalation in coercive diplomacy, described in the scenario are informed by empirically grounded studies of how states actually behave.¹⁶ Before discussing different settings with these features, I will provide more detail on these aspects.

Russian Coercive Diplomacy

- Russia applies steady pressure, gradually creating urgency
- Mutual interest in resisting Russian influence
- The challenge becomes too large for each individual state but too small to involve other allies
- Nordic states gain initiative by carefully orchestrated politico-military escalation
- No use of military force, but politically and operationally ready to do so

Mounting Coercive Pressure

Exactly what Russia wants to achieve in the scenario is unclear, arguably because Russia herself does not know. Presumably Moscow wants to demonstrate that it is able to maintain military pressure longer than Norway can respond to it symmetrically and thereby gain a small advantage to be exploited later. Another aim might be to install an awareness of Russia’s might in the minds of Norwegian decision-makers, leading to preemptive concessions to Russia in all kinds of minor issues. Russia states no specific demands. There have been peaks in Russia’s

¹⁵ Beadle and Diesen 2015, p. 17.

¹⁶ Richard Smoke (1977), *War. Controlling Escalation*. Cambridge, Mass Alexander L. George, William E. Simons and David K. Hall (1994), *The Limits of coercive diplomacy*. Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press Alexander L. George and Yaacov Bar-Siman-Tov (1991), *Avoiding war: problems of crisis management*. Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press.

pressure against Norway before, but in this scenario the pressure does not subside. In short, for Russia, increasing the pressure is a goal in itself, intended to increase its influence.

There are concrete issues. Russia has expressed increasing concern over Norwegian military exercises. Norway is labelled as an aggressive little puppy on USA's lap. During the last two years, when Norwegian forces conducted an exercise, the Russian military has responded by increasing its military activity in ways that force Norway to respond militarily as well. During and particularly after exercises, there has been a sharp increase in incidents where the Norwegian Air Force has had to intercept Russian planes flying in the direction of Norwegian airspace, with the occasional violation, particularly when Norwegian planes have arrived late on the scene. There have been a number of incidents involving close contact with Norwegian vessels, particularly after the exercise is over and they are on their way to their home port. The 61st Naval Infantry Brigade habitually stages a landing exercise close to the Norwegian border. The exercise is never announced and usually starts out heading for Norwegian territory, breaking off to the Russian side of the border at the last minute. This pattern of allied exercises in Norway followed by increased Russian pressure has slowly evolved over many years, but two years ago the landing force was increased from a company to a battalion. Russia has maintained a forceful information campaign directed towards the population in Finnmark, reiterating that the Norwegian government has abandoned the defense of the country. The public statements are reinforced by covertly altering postings in social media and trolling every public discussion of military measures in Finnmark.

For Norway, to continue the present response policy no longer seems feasible. To intercept each and every Russian plane has become an unbearable burden for the Norwegian Air Force. To send a battalion to Western Finnmark during the 61st exercise to signal resolve puts a strain on the Army, particularly since it is also a priority to take part in the Joint Allies 30 exercise. This has led the Norwegian authorities to debate what to do. On the one hand, abandoning matching of Russian actions and leaving them to dominate militarily unopposed is disadvantageous. It may be the first step toward making further concessions. On the other hand, attempts to carry out some military action not directly in response to Russian actions or to engage in horizontal political escalation, i.e. seeking allied reinforcement to respond may not be feasible. NATO has challenges in responding to similar Russian tactics in the Baltics and not very many NATO countries seem interested in committing to an open-ended potentially dangerous operation near geopolitically sensitive Russian areas. The US have their hands full with a crisis in the Taiwan Straits and makes it clear that the country does not want to engage in military posturing in Norway. However, the US also makes it clear that it and its allies are committed to the defense of Norwegian territory.

The exception to the reluctance to respond is Denmark, who shares the Norwegian concern over Russian tactics proving effective. Among other things, the Norwegian submarines that occasionally patrol the waters around Bornholm may then no longer be available. Denmark procured 29 F-35s in the early 2020s and has often exercised in the large training areas in Northern Norway. The Danes and the Norwegians take the matter to joint Nordic consultations at the highest political level. It is decided that, if the Russians escalate air incidents in the

aftermath of Joint Allies 2030, Denmark and Sweden will declare that they will temporarily assist the Norwegian Air Force in controlling Norwegian airspace. It is also decided to send two Danish battalions to Northern Sweden towards the end of the Joint Allies 2030 exercise. This Nordic shift to a proactive and carefully controlled escalation grows out of a longstanding disaffection with the current approach. Although the strategy based on reactive, symmetrical national response has successfully avoided a loss of political autonomy, there is concern over what will happen on the day when one of the Nordic states is simply unable to respond effectively. Sweden, in particular, has been under similar pressure over Gotland, and in 2025 Russia suddenly switched attention to the Danish island of Bornholm. This was widely interpreted as a surprise move to test the resolve of a country that hitherto had not been exposed to Russian politico-military pressure. In both situations, the other Nordic countries expressed political support for Sweden and Denmark, and both countries were able to respond effectively through national means. In the case of Bornholm, NATO also issued a strong warning followed by military measures. However, there was general consensus among the Nordic states that the present course was risky, because the point at which any one state would be unable to respond effectively on its own was approaching. Were that to occur, all Nordic states would be in uncharted territory, with potentially undesirable consequences.

4.2 Nordic responses

Thus Norway decided to try the Nordic option. The time had come to exercise some of the military options that had been developed. The interoperability between the Nordic Air Forces with the capacity for joint operations, common base operations and common command and control capability allowed other Nordic states to integrate with the Norwegian Air Force in joint operations. The combined Nordic Brigade Framework could be used to respond in the land domain.¹⁷ Augmenting Norwegian capability in this way is considered but is deemed insufficient. Russia has sufficient air power to escalate, for example by employing similar tactics, in particular, against Sweden and Finland. The Nordic countries want to end Russia's bullying attrition strategy, not to match it reactively in the short term.

The Nordic states now clearly need a common robust narrative. The main criteria are that it is cogent and compelling, and resonates with the target group. The challenge of finding a cogent, compelling and resonating narrative is compounded by the proliferation of target groups through having three states involved. Target groups in each arena will often differ in norms, values and traditions, requiring that the narrative be tailored to different arenas with differing resonances. At the same time, the narrative must retain coherence. If the same narrative is presented in different ways – possibly even in mutually exclusive ways – credibility might be compromised. Arenas are nested and messages and actions in one arena will often spill over to the others. The narrative offered is “the little guy (and his friends) standing up to the big bully”. It has an emotional appeal suited to creating national unity, it is shared by each Nordic state but also applies to the region as a whole, and it has an appeal to attract allies. Taking the subtle

¹⁷ Fredrik Preiholt (2018), *En världsordning att försvara. Sveriges og Norges strategiske kommunikation för en liberal världsordning*. Forsvarets høgskole. Oslo, pp. 60–61 argues for an international division with possible troop contributions from the Nordic states as well as the US.

differences between the Nordic countries into account, the exact formulation is best left to the individual countries. Each country will fill in the additional criteria for a robust narrative: A convincing purpose; criteria for success; finding congruence between words and deeds; and the development of countermeasures against competing narratives (from Russia). If one or more of these criteria is not met, the narrative is vulnerable.¹⁸

As part of the narrative, some dramatic military gesture is required. It is of course important that this gesture does not escalate the conflict militarily or unnecessarily provoke Russia. The effect the strategy is aiming for is primarily political. The plan rests on two assumptions. The first is that action to present Russia with a novel situation has value in itself. The game Russia is playing, it is believed, is to try to erode the confidence and political will of the Nordic countries to act on their own. Carrying out the measures of an autonomous plan will send a powerful message that Russia's strategy of wearing down the Nordic states is not working. The strategy has military measures both in the air and in the land domain. The Norwegian Air Force receives support from Denmark and Sweden. Politically, it constitutes horizontal escalation. Militarily, the activity is the same, but the number of planes is increased and increased beyond what is necessary to carry on as before. In addition, a follow-on force is designated in the land domain, sufficiently far away from Russian forces to avoid provocation. However, the Brigade reinforces the political message that Norway is not alone in military language, and it does constitute a proactive response in the land domain.

Minor political parties both on the left and right voiced concern and suggested postponing Joint Allies 30, the large triennial joint allied field exercise, but a clear majority of parties wanted to go ahead as planned, saying that cancelling the largest exercise with allies would send a most unfortunate message to Moscow. After exercise Joint Allies 2030, this new normal pattern of increased Russian military activity is repeated. Once again there is an increase in Russian planes heading towards Norwegian territory, particularly eastern Finnmark. As expected, the resources of the Norwegian Air Force are now severely stretched. Had it not scaled down its usual role during the exercise, anticipating Russian military pressure rising, it would have had to let some of the incursion go unanswered.

Under cover of the exercise, 12 Danish F-35 and 30 Saab 39 Swedish planes have quietly been moved to Kiruna. Although Joint Allies 30 was an exercise on Norwegian territory, Swedish air bases were used during the exercise as staging areas, as they habitually are. It was practical also to follow everyday procedures during the exercise. However, these planes had a very limited role during Joint Allies 30. As the exercise is winding down, as expected, Russian pressure increases. The number of incidents in the air increases, and the Russians deploy a small surface action group to stage a landing operation with the entire 61st Naval Infantry Brigade seemingly heading 10km west of Kirkenes.

In this situation, the Nordic countries issue a joint, prepared declaration that the northern part of Norway and Sweden will be joint Nordic airspace for an unspecified period of time, and that

¹⁸ Vårinn Alme (2019), *Det norske narrative om Afghanistan: mål, prioriteringer og sårbarheter FFI-Rapport 2019*: FFI, (forthcoming).

Sweden joined by Denmark will guard Norwegian as well as Swedish sovereignty. Finland does not participate directly militarily but states that it will join the other Nordic countries later, if necessary. Sweden has also deployed Patriot air defense missiles around Kiruna. A Nordic Brigade, consisting of two Danish and one Swedish battalion, deploys to western Finnmark protected by most of the Norwegian air defenses. The Danish battalions have used items of USMC prepositioned materiel, with very public American consent.

After two weeks of the highest number of incidents ever recorded in Norwegian–Russian relations, the Russian activity quietly subsides. Faced with this political show of force backed with real military measures that would enable Norway to continue to respond indefinitely to challenges to its exercise of sovereignty, even in the case of further escalation, Moscow seems to have decided that the effort is going nowhere and the number of incidents goes down dramatically. One month after, Denmark withdraws its planes and its remaining battalion. Sweden redirects its planes mainly to its own territory. However, Norway, Sweden and Finland continue to fly missions in the joint airspace of all three countries, although for practical reasons the majority of flights again became national flights.

4.3 Analysis of outcome

The Nordic success in this scenario was attributed to several factors. First, Norway regained a credible military option to continue to respond to the Russian military pressure. Previously, Russian decision-makers could hope that, at some point, Norway's ability to respond would be exhausted, meaning the Norway no longer would be able to respond to every challenge of its sovereignty. Russia would then have obtained a psychological advantage, and could in addition potentially use force unchallenged. Now, Russian decision-makers may have to look into a future of indefinite stalemate. Second, playing the Nordic card enabled Norway to escalate politically but not militarily. Seizing the initiative by presenting Russia with a united Nordic front constituted an escalation, as it crossed two political saliences: A purely reactive national Norwegian response was replaced by a proactive Nordic response.¹⁹ In addition, the increased military capability signaled resolve to the domestic audience in Finnmark. Third, the Nordic countries also escalated militarily by, for the first time, responding with land forces, in a non-threatening manner but nevertheless closer to the Russian military exercise than before. The escalation was carried out unobtrusively, under cover of Joint Allied 30. The idea was that, to Russia, the brigade was suddenly just *there*. In a situation where Russia was probing Norwegian ability and determination more than planning for an invasion leading to war, the loss of initiative it thus experienced had an impact beyond the effect of the military actions. It worked because it demonstrated Norwegian resolve by seizing the initiative militarily. At the same time, Norway was careful not to make public statements beyond the declaration of the joint operational

¹⁹ This draws on Thomas Schelling definition of escalation as the crossing of limits short of all-out war where the limits are saliences, i.e. objective in the sense that all parties in the situation are aware of them, see Thomas C. Schelling (1980 [1960]), *The strategy of conflict*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press. Smoke, 1977. p. 32–35.

area and the size of the forces deployed. The escalation did not escalate Norwegian objectives, as is often the case.²⁰ Russia would be allowed to climb down without public humiliation.

5 Scenario 2: A Russian *fait accompli* in Gotland

In this scenario, Russia unexpectedly deploys an S-400 ground-to-air system to Gotland. Russian vessels have for some time been active beyond the east coast of the island, but there have been no indications or threats prior to the action. In fact, Russia denies both that the troops are Russian and that they are operating an air defense system.

5.1 Key characteristics and global trends

The novel or unusual features of the scenario, compared with today's scenarios, are inspired by global trends. The first feature is that the use of force is limited in the scenario. On the one hand, limited operations are in line with future trends.²¹ On the other hand, instead of a variety of hybrid warfare often emphasized in the context of limited war, the scenario describes an attempt at a limited *fait accompli* by conventional military means. Russia tries to exploit one of its advantages over Western states: It has military forces that are ready to act, and a centralized leadership unconstrained when it comes to the use of military force.²² The Russian willingness to *use* force as a policy if there is an exit strategy gives Russia a short-term local military advantage that the country might want to exploit at some point.

There are elements of unconventional warfare: The attack is carried out by soldiers with no insignia and Russia denies any role in the operations, but these are blatant and transparent lies that do not deceive anyone, as the only conceivable actor operating an S-400 is Russia. Interestingly, the refusal to acknowledge responsibility nevertheless raises the bar for Western countermeasures. The main element in Russia's plan, however, is a conventional *fait accompli*. The hope is that Sweden has a limited commitment to defending Gotland, and that grabbing the northern end of the island alters the status quo, presenting Sweden with unpalatable military options and the additional burden of escalating by being forced to challenge what has become a new status quo. Prior to the incursion in Gotland, the scenario draws attention to a novel fact. It is often pointed out that Russia's maneuvering of its military forces serves the direct purpose of

²⁰ Smoke, 1977. p. 275.

²¹ Beadle and Diesen 2015, p. 153.

²² Michael Kofman (2017), 'A Comparative Guide to Russia's Use of Force: Measure Twice, Invade Once'. *War on the Rocks* 16.

intimidating its small neighbors politically, but the scenario emphasizes that this may also *shape* the environment for unexpected *use* of military force in the way described.²³

The second feature is obviously the Nordic dimension. The scenario shows the Nordic security complex at work. While the interests of other states may be insufficient to act decisively and fraught with collective actions problems, the Nordic states' strong shared interest in curbing Russian influence and proximity to the challenge prevent them from ignoring the threat to Gotland in the scenario. The third feature of the scenario is to provide a concrete example of how Nordic defense cooperation may provide more military options in a crisis. Since the Nordic states are small, they have by 2030 found it impossible to maintain all capacities nationally. They have faced a choice between maintaining structural breadth/scope by preserving most capabilities through international cooperation, producing the necessary economies of scale, or structural depth, by maintaining meaningful numbers of fewer capabilities.²⁴ The Norwegian F-35 is an example of the latter strategy. If the Nordic states specialize in different niche capabilities and cooperate closely, they will all have a broader spectrum of capabilities available than they would have on their own. Scenario 2 demonstrates the potential benefits. It is a crisis that is too big for Sweden, too quick for NATO (and concerns a non-member) but where a joint Nordic alliance is nimble enough to deal with it effectively.

Having a wider palette of military options is particularly pertinent in light of the final novel feature: Changes in the environment will result in more limited conflicts, propelling small states to use military force as an instrument of national security policy.²⁵ The Russian course of action – an attempt to challenge deterrence by a *fait accompli* – is informed by empirically grounded studies of how states actually behave. The scenario goes beyond measures to make deterrence work, and addresses what military action to take if deterrence fails. The limited wars of the future, *armed politics* to use Emilie Simpson's phrase, are often described as conventional acts of war combined with extensive information operations, cyber-warfare and so on.²⁶ Although information operations and the fight for the strategic narrative are given the role they will have in future conflicts of this type, the scenario nevertheless is mainly about a conventional limited military conflict. The defining characteristics are limited military means employed in an attempt to reach limited objectives.

5.2 Specific scenario background

In 2030, Russian–Western relations have long been strained, but no significant incidents constituting a crisis have occurred since 2014. Russia habitually stages exercises practicing military attacks on Western targets. Russian military activity and military actions that require a Western response wax and wane irregularly. They tend to target Finland and Sweden more than NATO member countries. This has been the new normal for so long that it has become the

²³ Beadle and Diesen 2015, p. 156. Alexander L. George and Richard Smoke (1974), *Deterrence in American Foreign Policy: Theory and Practice*. New York: Columbia University Press. 537. Daniel Altman (2014), *Red Lines, Gray Areas, and Faits Accomplis in Interstate Crises*.

²⁴ Beadle and Diesen 2015, 153.

²⁵ Beadle and Diesen 2015, p.17, 156.

²⁶ Emilie Simpson (2012), *War from the Ground up: The twenty-first-century combat as politics*. London: Hurst

normal. In spite of a troubled political–military relationship, many lower-level functional relations work quite well. The Norwegian coast guard and border patrol cooperate cordially with their Russian counterparts about daily tasks, and also in search and rescue missions when necessary. From time to time, there have been Western attempts to improve relations, but they always become bogged down on the same issues: Russia will not discuss Donbass or Crimea. The former conflict has nothing to do with Russia, and the Crimea is and will remain a part of Russia.

Germany has been the most active country in these endeavors to improve Western relations with Russia. Germany has pursued a two-pronged strategy towards Russia. Militarily, Germany has informally taken the lead in North-East NATO. In particular, Germany's Framework Nations Concept has been successful. Many countries contribute at least one battalion and the concept has enabled NATO to maintain a much stronger deterrent in the Baltic States than would otherwise have been possible. Germany's increased military role, combined with its traditional economic strength, has given the country a strong informal leadership role within NATO. Politically, Germany has tried to engage Russia, and the German long-term strategy is to cooperate economically with Russia in spite of the strained political relationship. The Germans believe that, over time, economic cooperation is a way to reassure Russian fears of Western intentions, and they also hope that economic necessities will eventually make Russia more accommodating. This strategy has been evident in the German position on Nord Stream II. The first two lines were opened in 2011 and 2012, respectively. The capacity was doubled in 2019, and increased by another 50% again in 2023. After that, the demand for gas has flattened out as Europe has gone green, and further enlargement no longer makes any economic sense. Germany has insisted that Nord Stream II should be shielded from the ups and downs in the relationship with the West. The revenue from the gas line constitutes an important part of Russian exports, and is the only important outlet of Russian exports that does not cross the territory of either Belarus or Ukraine.

Russia frequently deploys naval vessels along Nord Stream II. They are usually accompanied by research vessels, merchant vessels and other civilian ships. In particular, an area north-west of Gotland has been frequently visited over the years. Sweden usually responds by sending a naval ship to the area. After the N2TG (Nordic Naval Task Group) became fully operational in 2025, Finnish, Danish and Norwegian ships assist or relieve the Swedish Navy in responding to the Russians. In late May 2030, a group of ships from the Russian Baltic Sea fleet leave port in St. Petersburg and head west, following a northern route, before they finally head towards Gotland, arriving in early June. This is a small variation of a pattern that has been repeated many times over the last decade. It is accompanied by the usual Russian statements about the economic importance of Nord Stream II, emphasizing that Russia has a legitimate duty to protect its economic interests. On the same note, the Russian media never fails to point out that Russia's *economic interests* were under attack from NATO's *military* force, usually in collusion with Sweden and Finland.

5.3 Fait accompli!

Suddenly on June 25 at 4:15 am, 2030 about 600 men in green uniforms with no insignia landed at Kappelshamn, moving southwest along route 149. They have an S-400 system with them, and take up a defensive position, just north of Lärbro and the intersection between routes 147 and 148. They deploy without contact with the Swedish Gotland regiment, who have about 300 troops stationed on Gotland, currently around their base at Tofta in the east, seemingly avoiding it. Since Russia categorically denies all knowledge of the group, in spite of massive Swedish evidence that they emerged from one of the Russian ships, no intentions or demands are known. The Russian media continues to deny any Russian involvement and to reiterate that Russia has only economic interests around Gotland.

Despite the Russian narrative, the deployment of the S-400 enhances Russian A2/AD capability in the Baltic Sea and will be a challenge to NATO's deployment of military force to reinforce its three Baltic member states. A Russian operation against Gotland would prevent NATO from using the island, in addition to making large parts of the Baltic Sea more difficult to use for NATO.²⁷ As the system has not actually been used against a near-peer opponent, the capability is not clear.²⁸ It is clear that Russia has attempted a *fait accompli* against the Swedish island of Gotland. Russian intentions are not stated, but the military operation comes after a long-standing deployment of a surface action group over the gas pipe Nord Stream II.

Russian *fait accompli* on Gotland

- Nordic states gain initiative by quick joint military response
- Military force used before Russian reinforcements arrive and while it can undermine the Russian narrative
- Based on mutual Nordic interest in resisting Russian influence
- The challenge is too large for any individual country but too small for other allies
- The Nordics become the core within a NATO alliance consisting of Germany, Poland and the Baltic States

²⁷ Karlis Neretnieks (2016), ed.ed.s., *Angrepp mot Sverige*. Stockholm: Kungliga Krigsvetenskapsakademien (2016), p.69–70, 116.

²⁸ In addition to the uncertainty taking Russian data at face value, three unknowns remain: (1) The difference between nominal range of missiles and their effective range; (2) how will seeing and hitting a moving target impact range, especially targets below the horizon; (3) the effect of countermeasures. See Robert Dalsjö, Christofer Berglund and Michael Jonsson (2019), *Bursting the Bubble? Russia's A2AD-Capabilities in the Baltic Sea Region*. Stockholm: FOI For some future measures against A2/AD, Alexander Lanozka and Michael A. Hunzeker (2019), *Conventional Deterrence and Landpower in Northeastern Europe*. US Army War College: Strategic Studies Institute p. 112-113.



Figure 5.1 “The Alarmist A2/AD S-400 bubble” from Kaliningrad (blue) and Gotland (red.).

5.4 Swedish and Nordic Response

Sweden approaches the EU, UN and NATO as well as the surrounding states bilaterally in order to establish that there are Russian troops with an effective ground-to-air system on their territory that impact the military balance in the area. Sweden points out that Russia now has a much more effective A2/AD capacity in the Baltic Sea, with an S-400 on Gotland. Sweden also tries to find

support to do something about it. The Gotland regiment (P 18) established in 2018, consists of two companies, one mechanized and one armor, with about 300 troops on the island. The Russian force has taken up a strong defensive position north of Lärbro, and neutralizing them is not a trivial matter. A unilateral airstrike is considered, but is rejected as the Swedish Air Force has limited air-to-ground capacity and the S-400 system would pose an unacceptable risk to the attacking planes.

During the night, the surrounding states react to Sweden's probing for help to reverse what has happened. Germany says that NATO is the relevant organization to deal with the incursion. The EU lacks a military arm, and the US is not a member. Germany is not prepared for unilateral military action without having tried negotiations first. The German government maintains that Germany cannot be lead country in an operation where it will be the first to fire. Unfortunately, the matter is complicated further by the fact that Sweden is not a NATO member, and that any military action will be motivated by abstract concerns about the balance of power in the Baltic Sea and the possibility of military reinforcements to the Baltic States.

Germany needs a clear case of naked military aggression to move. In that event, Sweden and any other state will receive Germany's full support. To have Russian air-to-ground missiles deployed to Gotland is of course totally unacceptable and will not be allowed to stand. Having said that, talking to the Russians first will do no harm and may be beneficial in several ways. If negotiations have been tried first, NATO will retain the moral high ground. And, after all, negotiations may succeed if only Russia's security concerns over the security of its export line to Germany are satisfied. Moreover, Germany also has an interest in the gas from Nord Stream II. For Germany, the use of force will always have to be the last resort. One also needed to consider that this action, if it was confirmed that it was Russian troops, came after a long period without any serious incidents with Russia. Bearing in mind the long period since Russia directly challenged the European order, the German view remained that the prudent course of action was to try negotiations first. Poland and the three Baltic states all found that Russia's hollowing out of Swedish sovereignty set a most unfortunate precedent that urgently needed to be reversed. Moreover, the implications of Russian S-400 ground-to-air system are unacceptable for their own security. They all offered Sweden support, including military support, to deal with the aftermath of Swedish military action to neutralize the group on Gotland. However, without German support for the operation to deal with the group, and without military means that differ from what Sweden possesses, these countries will wait until the negotiations path has been exhausted. The N2TG had been deployed to the Gotland area in early June, as a response to Russian naval presence around Gotland.

5.5 Nordic analysis of courses of action

During the early hours of the day, Swedish decision-makers consulted with their Nordic counterparts on augmenting the air defense around Gotland, including as a show of strength. As soon as it had been established that a Russian incursion had occurred on June 25, the Danish frigate Iver Huitfeldt was sent to reinforce the N2TG.

How to respond to a Russian attempt to take advantage of its short-term local military superiority had been discussed frequently during the regular Nordic security consultations and war games. It had been agreed that this type of Russian action had to be met with an immediate, and firm military response, for three important reasons. The first was that incursions by foreign troops were obviously unacceptable, and that the blatant Russian untruth that the country was not behind it only made matters worse, because it eroded any trust between countries. The second was that deterrence usually fails in stages, making it preferable to act swiftly while the military challenge still remained relatively small. The very limited military means employed and the obvious attempt to raise the bar for taking military action suggested that this attempt at a *fait accompli* was a limited probe, underpinned by a belief that there was no or a soft international commitment to defend Gotland.

To engage in negotiations could only reinforce this Russian misperception and make it more difficult to dislodge their troops. To disabuse the Russians of the idea that an attack on Gotland was different from an attack on the mainland because the island was separated by water was what mattered. If the line was not drawn in Gotland, an undisputed Swedish area since 1645, there was no commitment to defending anything. All the Nordic states are small, with a strong interest in avoiding any discussion with Russia about what they are permitted to do on their territory. The third was that striking sooner rather than later was advantageous, because it took advantage of the Russian narrative that the troops did not come from Russia. The Swedish narrative was that the incident was an unprovoked attack on a small country's sovereignty that lacked any justification. Attacking the foreign force on Gotland needed no further justification. Russia also usually argued that the sovereignty of countries was the founding principle of the international system. If Russia protested or doubled down militarily, their narrative would be undermined and their position compromised as lying about the origins of the troops.

The fourth advantage was military. Striking before the current troops received reinforcements both makes the operation easier and removes the perception of the strategic advantage Russia would enjoy by having the S-400 on Gotland (see Figure 5.1). The final advantages are political. Consultations had revealed that there were barriers to Germany's support: Germany would not fire first, would go to war to defend the tactical status quo rather than to change it, and would rather act on behalf of an institution (NATO) than as a country. If the Nordic states could dislodge the troops on Gotland on their own, these conditions would be met and a continued conflict with Russia would have NATO's support. At that moment, there was unity on the western side, and, as Russia may be targeting the coherence of NATO, it was important to pin down Germany in its present position. A successful Nordic strike on Gotland would close the gap to the crisis that was not big enough for NATO. Moreover, if negotiations to end the crisis were possible, they would not take place from the much more acceptable baseline that there were no Russian troops on Gotland.

5.6 The Nordic military response

In the early hours of the morning, for all these reasons, the prime ministers of the Nordic states decided on military action to remove the troops on Gotland as soon as possible, drawing on any

Nordic military capabilities. The political guidance emphasized speed and to involve as many states as possible. The joint Nordic military command group was tasked with producing a plan to annihilate the Russian presence around Lärbro as quickly as possible. They came back with a plan for an airstrike, followed by an assault by the two companies of the P 18. The Swedish air force had limited air-to-ground capacity and the risk posed by the S-400 was significant. The Norwegian and Danish F-35, on the other hand, were both capable against ground targets and had a significantly lower signature, allowing them to bomb troops close to Lärbro with relatively little risk. The attack was decided on, the planes were prepared to fly and the two companies from the P 18 moved towards Lärbro. Reconnaissance revealed that the Russian troops were concentrated in a forested area outside the little village of 400 inhabitants. They had taken up a defensive position along the R148, and had created a roadblock on the intersection between R148 and R682. The Russian troops seem to have relied on their air defenses and to consider an attack from the air unlikely, so they presented an easy target.

The bombardment from the air seems to have taken the Russians by surprise, first destroying the S-400 systems and then creating havoc among the ground forces. The few remaining demoralized survivors were an easy match for the mechanized Swedish company that moved in. The Russian troops surrender and the fighting is over. The Nordic ability to respond effectively to the military challenge resolved the situation. The German position in the scenario is a reminder that future security policy will require more than political interest. Mental preparedness among key decision-makers is required to act; readily available military options and politically feasible plans are also necessary.²⁹ In this scenario, the Nordic states had a joint VTC hotline available. They had developed the necessary decision-making apparatus and had the advantage of having thought through similar situations before. Together, they had a wider range of military options than they would have had on their own. In this case scenario, the beneficiary was Sweden, but it could have been Denmark and Bornholm or Finland and the Åland islands. This fact also explains the joint Nordic interest in reversing the situation on Gotland. Joint interests remain a necessary condition for action, but may not be sufficient. The availability of an aircraft with a strong capability of penetrating air defenses and an ability to deliver effectively against targets on the ground reduced the operational risk for the Nordic states.

5.7 Analysis

Politically, reestablishing the status quo prior to the scenario lowers the threshold for wider allied support. The Nordic states were also effective in the scenario because they constitute a core group in a wider alliance. This core group was willing and able to act swiftly to prevent a partial deterrence failure that may have provided other allies with a way to opt out of the situation. Minimally, a failure to neutralize the S-400 on Gotland would have raised the bar further for any military measures to counter Russia in the Baltic Sea, because it would greatly increase the military costs of doing so.

²⁹ The German position is inspired by General Sir Richard Shirreff (2016), *War With Russia: An urgent warning from senior military command*. London: Quercus. The description is, however, not modelled on the description of the German position in the book, but on the much more detailed and realistic description of UK deliberations.

The threat would have been too big for an individual Nordic state but the combined efforts of all of them were sufficient. When the threat is too big for the Nordic states to handle alone, even when they act together, it needs to be so big that it will pose a threat to other regional or even global actors that may assist. Mirroring the Norwegian thinking that one of the tasks of the Norwegian Armed Forces is to handle threats that are too small to automatically trigger NATO's article 5, the purpose of Nordic cooperation is to handle a threat that is too big for any of the countries to handle on their own, but where their combined militaries are sufficient, but the threat is too small to trigger a response from regional or other powers. The purpose of the Nordic alliance is to close the gap between a threat that they can handle alone and the threat that inevitably will involve external powers, regional or global.

6 Scenario 3: Russian operation to establish Bastion Nordkalotten

6.1 Key characteristics of the scenario

A large-scale conventional Russian attack on the three countries – Finland, Norway and Sweden – is a dramatic break with today's situation, requiring changes and additions to the assumptions about how the future will evolve that were made in Chapter 5. The world has become more multipolar than previously assumed. For the Nordic states, it means that the US to a large extent has withdrawn from Europe. The Americans need to prioritize controlling the global commons and containing China. Europe can fend for itself against Russia, and is anyway not threatened by China, the main rival of the US. NATO has thus become European NATO, weaker and more strategically divided between the North (countering Russian influence in the High North and the Baltic Sea), East (countering Russian influence in Central Europe and the Black Sea region) and South (handling emigration across the Mediterranean). Russia has become firmly entrenched in its view that it is a great power with a legitimate, geopolitically founded demand that small states in its vicinity ought to take note of Russian interests, and that one such interest is to dominate them. Russian efforts to gain legitimacy for the Common Security Treaty Organization, an institution dominated by Russia, as an instrument to manage intervention, has met with tacit acquiescence in the UN and from China and the US.³⁰

In addition, the US, China and Russia have become more similar in that they view great power dominance of their respective vicinities as the norm. It is an additional reason for American withdrawal from Europe, and has also made the US more tolerant of Russian attempts to subdue

³⁰ Alexander Nikitin (2013), 'The Russian Federation'. In *Providing Peacekeepers: The Politics, Challenges and Future of Un Peacekeeping*, eds. Bellamy and Williams. Oxford: Oxford University Press (2013), p. 164–168, 177. Dace Winther (2014), *Regional Maintenance of Peace and Security under International Law. The distorted Mirrors*. London: Routledge 158–164 Beadle and Diesen 2015, p. 24.

small European states along the Russian perimeter. In sum, the dominant actors have become more geopolitically motivated. The international system has consequently become competitive, due to the relative decline of the US, the chief upholder of order. The Nordic states have tried to maintain a weakened NATO as a viable security guarantee and a deepening of Nordic security cooperation in an attempt to compensate for the disappearance of an American security guarantee. Unfortunately, Europe has continued its decline, relative to other regions. The fact that Russia is in relative decline even within Europe does not help. Instead, it has led to a general loss of interest in European affairs, giving Russia more leeway to dominate Europe.³¹ Among the European great powers, it has raised the bar to intervening outside its immediate areas of interest. The world and Europe has moved towards an *oligopolar* world order. Its characteristics include regional centers or fleeting alliances changing pragmatically depending on which interests are at stake.³² One undesirable effect, from a Nordic perspective, is the reduced political and normative distance between Russia and the European great powers. For example, they have cooperated effectively in combating terrorist groups. The international order that protects the small Nordic states is eroded, and possible allies of the Nordic states are less likely to risk military conflict over principles half-heartedly held.³³

6.2 The Russian attack

This is the situation when Russia launches a military operation to take control of Northern Finland, Sweden and Norway. The Russian operation is undoubtedly a joint high-intensity operation involving all services: Army, Air Force and Navy. Even though the operation also includes massive use of force, the operation's objective is limited to conquering the northern part of these three Nordic countries. Invading three neighboring countries, Russia runs the risk of widening the conflict beyond the Nordic region. If the Russian objectives had appeared to be rooted in global geopolitical concerns, that would have exacerbated the risk. However, the strategic sea-lanes across the Atlantic Ocean have lost strategic importance, as the US interest in reinforcing Europe has waned, and the US is no longer sufficiently motivated by marginal changes in Russian nuclear capability. Moreover, as Russian propaganda emphasizes the value of great power condominium with the US, Moscow initially offers the US that it may retain its listening and intelligence capabilities located in Norway.

Russian operation <i>Bastion Nordkalotten</i>	
•	Russian high-intensity operation to conquer all of Northern Norden
•	The Nordic states are united by geography into one operational theater
•	Unlimited Russian conventional military force but limited objectives
•	Based on mutual Nordic interest, thrust upon by the Russian attack
•	The Nordic states become the core within a NATO alliance consisting of Germany, Poland and the Baltic States

³¹ Beadle and Diesen 2015, p. 118–119.

³² Ibid., p. 22.

³³ Ibid., p. 74.

The official Russian explanation is to downplay the importance of these areas, both strategically and economically. The northern areas of Finland, Sweden and Norway are sparsely populated and of limited value. Economically and demographically, all three countries are still viable without these areas, but politically the Nordic states are now firmly controlled by Russia without the cost of occupation. Taking and possibly holding these areas gives Russia political domination of the three countries. The objective is to force a change – varying in duration and extent depending on events in the scenario – of the policies of the three Nordic states, a Nordic version of the Norwegian bastion defense scenario.³⁴ The action is obviously risky, but in line with Russian strategic beliefs that the risks of using military force may be acceptable as long there is an exit strategy. It appears that Russia has just such a strategy, because militarily they will be able to withdraw from these sparsely populated areas. As these areas have little intrinsic value, Moscow can argue that this was always a punitive expedition and, whatever the objective might have been, has now been achieved so that they can declare victory and go home.

6.3 Characteristics and novelties

The novel or unusual features of the scenario are the following. First, the scenario analyses the security implications of the geographical unity of the Nordic area. From a Russian perspective, the High North is *one* operational theatre, defined by geography. The scenario explores the implications, from a Nordic perspective, of Russia pursuing a course of action based on the High North as a single operational theatre. The second feature is that Russia grabs and holds an area, not because it is valuable, but because it argues that it has *little* value.³⁵ The costs vis-à-vis the US are minimized and the likelihood of involvement by European powers are minimized, in an attempt to keep them out of the conflict. The potential allies of the attacked states are less likely to assist. If they go to war, it would be over “a piece of frozen tundra” and some abstract principles that would only hamper their actions elsewhere. Most of the territory, nearly all the population and what matters economically in Finland, Norway and Sweden are still under the control of Helsinki, Oslo and Stockholm. All three are still viable states. The Russian narrative relentlessly iterates that the Scandinavian High North is unimportant territory not worth fighting for.

The fourth key feature of the scenario is that it highlights the political reasons for the Nordic states to fight such a war. The scenario makes clear the shared Nordic self-interest in preserving the autonomy of their political systems, and how connected their military fates are by geography. These three countries will remain utterly dependent on Russia politically if Russia is able to grab and hold on to their northern territories. From a Russian perspective, the idea of grabbing land of little value makes sense. The American experiences in Afghanistan and Iraq, and the Russian in Syria in the early 2020s, made it clear how costly it is for a great power to dominate areas with a politically mobilized population. Holding on to areas that are largely

³⁴ Beadle and Diesen 2015, p. 73.

³⁵ Altman (2014). Daniel William Altman (2015), *Red lines and faits accomplis in interstate coercion and crisis*. Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Van Jackson (2017), 'Tactics of strategic competition: gray zones, redlines, and conflicts before war'. *Naval War College Review* 70: 3.

empty of population avoids the potential costly undertaking of fighting an insurgency from a large population. But it may yield political dominance of these countries.

The fifth unusual feature in the scenario is that it combines maximum use of force from the Russian side with limited objectives. Usually, it is assumed that the amount of force used goes hand in hand with the salience of the objectives. Traditional thinking says that Russia will be willing to use more force the more important the objective is, but it is contrary both to Russian *modus operandi* and the *fait accompli* category of deterrence failure. The former emphasizes that Russian behavior is more influenced by controllability of risk, resulting in a viable exit strategy should the challenge fail. The latter emphasizes that controllability and calculability are important factors in the initiator's calculation.³⁶

The sixth feature is that the scenario addresses the political use of military force in the new context of a scenario where part of the territory is already occupied. Instead of the conventional view of tactical combat by land forces over a boundary to prevent occupations, the scenario poses the question of what military forces of the Nordic states may contribute when the Northern part of their territory is already occupied by Russia.

6.4 The build-up

In May 2035, Russia begins another unannounced joint military exercise featuring, among other things, significant activity at the Kola Peninsula. These exercises have become routine by now, including the ending which usually features an attack on Finnish territory aborted at the last minute.

³⁶ George and Smoke, 1974, p. 537.



Figure 6.1 Map of Northern Finland, Sweden and Norway.

The difference is that this time the Russian advance on the Ivalo-Lakselv axis and the Kellosekä-Tornio axis does not stop at the border, but simply continues into Finland, with one mechanized division on each axis. Simultaneously, all military targets in their way are targeted from the air. The token forces on the border have no chance, and the Russian forces continue towards Lakselv and Tornio. When the two-pronged attack reaches Lakselv and Tornio, respectively, the southern division continues over Muonio–Kautokeino towards Alta, whereas the northern division advances along the Ivalo–Karasjok–Lakselv axis, approaching Alta from the east. After 10 days, the forces from the south and north meet outside Alta. The Russian forces have used every weapon system in their inventory robustly to ensure a rapid advance towards Alta, but have not targeted military objectives that are not in their way nor civilian targets. After 12 days, the Russian forces have control over the territory from Northern Finland and Norway, including a small bit of Sweden.

6.5 The Nordic response

The states in the Northern group are understandably concerned about the Russian attack. Germany, Poland and the Baltic states all issue strong political and token military support. However, the defenses in Northern Finland and Sweden are quickly overrun, and the situation

evolves into a military standoff in the High North. In this situation, Germany, Poland and others are reluctant to commit forces to attack and expel the Russian forces in the High North, favoring defensive measures instead. They point out that the independence of the three countries does not seem threatened, as Russia has stopped the advance, and the areas occupied are sparsely populated and of little other value. They are of course willing to contribute to a new defensive line, but would rather rely on negotiations to get the Russians out. Another important factor is the defense of the Baltics. This might just be a large distraction to enable an invasion of the Baltics, a much more important area both to Russia and to the West. They will offer air support, munitions but not ground troops.

The Nordic states now need to find a military plan to deal with the situation. In the first phase, they need to inflict damage and, if possible, to stop the Russian military advance. In the second phase, they need to pool their military resources into an operation that prevents continued Russian occupation. The Nordic states have two main force components at their disposal. The first is conventional ground forces. The second is unmanned land-based long-distance precision weapons to strike the Russian forces or support systems in their rear areas.³⁷ Now the generals need to do their job and come up with a military plan that either dispels the Russians or makes continued occupation too costly to Russia, given the military capabilities at their disposal. Since the willingness to spend money on defense has increased in all three states, a 3–5 year plan for increased military spending is also necessary. Thus, the Nordic politicians demand the following to be developed: (1) Outline of short-term plan to fight the invasion with conventional equipped forces; (2) outline of short-term plan to fight the invasion with unmanned long-distance precision weapons.

This scenario poses questions rather than providing answers. Its main purposes were set out in section 6.4 above. Briefly stated analyses the security implications for the Nordic area as a geographical unity, emphasizing Russian political considerations that might alter the conventional way to think about interests. The Nordic states need to start developing answers also to these kinds of contingencies.

7 Conclusions

The three scenarios describe a number of possible events where a Nordic response is possible or indeed necessary. As will be recalled, in the first scenario, Russian coercive diplomacy employed for political gains was the challenge. The second scenario was a *fait accompli*, yielding local Russian military gain in the form of increased Anti-Access/Area Denial (A2/AD). In the final scenario, Russia carried out a large-scale military attack on three Nordic countries, in order to bolster its strategic military position. These three scenarios by no means exhaust

³⁷ Beadle and Diesen 2015, p. 42–43.

situations where Nordic joint military action would be helpful. Yet they constitute sufficient basis to conclude that there are many plausible situations in which future Nordic operations could be useful to enhance the security of the Nordic countries. Moreover, joint Nordic operations can do so in many different ways. Let us nevertheless briefly consider what we can learn from these scenarios about when and how Nordic military operations would be particularly helpful.

The Nordic countries are each other's best first responders. To state the obvious, their armed forces are in the region. In a situation where Russia's main military advantage is the ability to quickly assemble and create a local military superiority, the Nordic alternative nearly always has a logistical advantage. The three scenarios vary in the degree of military force involved, from limited political posturing, via a limited *fait accompli*, to a conventional war. Nordic operations were relevant at all force levels. First responders are particularly relevant for most likely future threats faced by the Nordic states. It is limited and political rather than existential, rendering military readiness and political support by military means important. That is, of course, the strong point of Nordic military cooperation.

Nordic operations may be both an alternative to other allies, as in the coercive diplomacy scenario, or a supplement to them, as in the final conventional war scenario. As an alternative, the Nordic countries enjoy a commonality of interests closer than other countries. In the first scenario – coercive diplomacy – the Russian military activity is too low to motivate anyone but the closest neighbors to act. In the third scenario, the conventional attack on three Nordic countries, demonstrates how useful a Nordic alliance is in attracting outside support.

The most important change in the Nordic region has already taken place. It is that the security interests of the Nordic states are now compatible – not in perfect alignment, because that is never the case between sovereign states, but they have the same fundamental interest in resisting Russian politico-military pressure. The ideas that previously blocked Nordic cooperation – that you either chose NATO or you did not – are now gone. That said, mutual interests are necessary but not sufficient for security and defense cooperation.

In addition to common interests, effective combined operations demands that those interests are shared among the relevant decision-makers. The military forces must be interoperable, and that is both a technical and an operational issue. Using NATO standards is helpful technically and operationally, but training is also necessary. In turn, effective training requires a legal basis. Cross-border training in the air and land domain is an example of this demand already being met.

Ultimately, operating military forces together demands political trust. This is particularly important today when military force is used to respond to politico-military pressure. The Nordic states are presently challenged to use their military forces, alone and together with others, as a political means. It is not a traditional task for small states, and it is a novel undertaking added after the end of the Cold War. Building the necessary political trust takes time and involves all the activities mentioned in this paragraph. Using the scenarios in the report, it is hoped, may contribute to bridging the gap from the potential to reality in Nordic defense cooperation.

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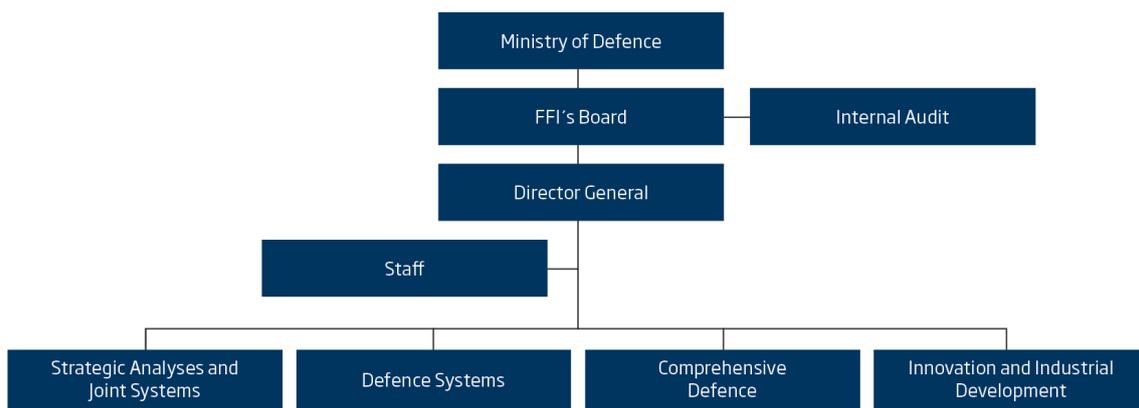
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