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Norwegian security and defence policy – strategy in the time of crisis

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The Russian-Ukrainian crisis coincided with a new Norwegian government coming to power - it being formed in autumn 2013 by the Conservative Party and the Progress Party. The Norwegian conservatives made corrections to Norwegian security and defence policy which has been to a large extent focused on the High North. They particularly stress the need for a balanced approach within NATO to be taken on collective defence, crisis management and the need to rekindle transatlantic relations by supporting the US in Asia-Pacific. Oslo's policy is aimed at restoring NATO's cohesion during a time of ongoing crisis which is linked not only with growing uncertainty about Russia's policy but also with deepening divisions within NATO and the US withdrawing from Europe. Norway has the potential to shape the discussion about NATO's future, particularly under the new NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg who until autumn 2013 was Norway's Prime Minister.

Norway's security policy and the Russian-Ukrainian crisis

Norway is analysing the crisis in Ukraine in the context of security in Norway's High North – the Arctic areas which form part of Norwegian territory or remain under its jurisdiction. The High North is strategically important for Norway because of its importance to the country's main economy sectors (energy, fishing and maritime transport). As a consequence of climate change the Arctic region is becoming accessible to extraction of oil and gas, fishing and maritime transport. However, certain unregulated legal issues remain, which may lead to crises and conflicts in this area that Norway could be dragged into. Norway sees the fact that it is Russia's direct neighbour (Norway's maritime and land border with Russia is the longest of the NATO countries) as a source of both challenges and threats; this has been confirmed by the Russian incursion into Ukraine.

Under the Social Democratic government of Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg (2005–2013) Norway pursued a security and defence policy based on co-operation and deterrence. The deterrence policy included strengthening NATO's reliability as a collective defence alliance, developing bilateral military co-operation with the US, investing in Norway's own defence capabilities and enhancing political and military co-operation in Northern Europe. The co-operation policy consisted of developing contacts with Russia with regard to energy, military issues and in border areas. The priority has been to maintain the security and stability of the High North region. The crisis in Ukraine coincided with the beginning of the rule of the new coalition of the Conservative Party (H) and the Progress Party (FrP) in autumn 2013. The

conservatives with Ine Eriksen Søreide (H) as Defence Minister have begun to make corrections to Norway's security and defence policy. These changes have been made in the context of mounting uncertainty with regard to Russia's policy, divisions within NATO (which have been deepening for several years) and the reorientation of US security policy to Asia-Pacific.

Norway's initiatives in NATO and in relations with the US

The conservative government is currently opting for a balanced approach to NATO's three core tasks – collective defence, crisis management and cooperative security in the global dimension. It is worth noting that Jens Stoltenberg, Norway's Social Democratic Prime Minister until 2013 and a future NATO Secretary General may have a similar point of view on NATO's future and the development of transatlantic relations.

Norway is seeking to strengthen NATO's collective defence (with the *de facto* objective of enhancing the security and stability of the High North). It deems it necessary to improve the situational awareness with regard to NATO border areas; it wishes to restore regional responsibilities for collective defence to different NATO commands and it is demanding better communication and linkages between national and NATO commands be introduced. NATO should also check the actual operational readiness level of its member states' forces and, in the case of NATO Response Forces, decrease their reaction time. Furthermore, Norway continues to demand that contingency plans be updated. After the completion of the NATO ISAF operation in Afghanistan, Norway attaches great significance to joint exercises within NATO that take into account all possible scenarios of conducting a NATO operation.

Despite the fact that it is collective defence that is Oslo's priority, it supports NATO's engagement in crisis management. Not only does it opt for NATO's capability to run military operations outside NATO's territory to be maintained, it will also actively participate in such operations. One example of this in the recent years was the involvement of the Norwegian Air Force in the operation in Libya (in 2011) or the Navy frigates in NATO's anti-piracy operation in the Horn of Africa (in 2013). Norway treats its participation in external operations as its contribution to NATO's cohesion and as a way to build its own political position within the organisation. In the regional perspective, Norway's external involvement is meant to contribute to an improvement of the interoperability of the Norwegian Armed Forces with its main allies and to demonstrate the political will and military capabilities to respond to potential adversaries in the High North. Therefore Norway finds the current UK Joint Expeditionary Force concept interesting and is willing to take part in it.

Support for US actions in Asia-Pacific as well as the strengthening of relations with partners from outside NATO is becoming a new element of Norway's security policy. It has realised that in order to maintain US engagement in ensuring Europe's security (including in the High North) more is needed than merely enhancing the US presence in Norway and European NATO members making larger military and financial commitments. A minimal involvement in the regions which the US considers strategic is also necessary (in the case of smaller countries this involvement may even be symbolic). In fact the Norwegian frigate participated in one of the world's greatest maritime military exercises, RIMPAC 2014, organised by the US Pacific Fleet near Hawaii for the first time at the end of June this year precisely for this

reason. Norway's participation in military exercises in this region is also motivated in terms of business – it is an opportunity to demonstrate Norwegian arms products (including its Naval Strike Missile, Sea Protector system for close-area ship protection).

The implications for the Norwegian Armed Forces

The Conservative government will continue the course of reforms and the modernisation of the Norwegian Armed Forces introduced by its predecessor. Under the Long-term defence plan for 2012-2016 adopted under the previous parliament the priority is to modernise and restructure the Air Force (supplies of F-35 multirole fighter aircraft equipped with air-to-surface and air-to-sea Joint Strike Missiles will be launched in 2017; the fleet of helicopters is being replaced; the Air Force structure is being reformed). The restructuring and modernisation of the Army has also begun, including strengthening its capability to operate in arctic conditions. Furthermore, the Norwegian Cyber Defence Force has been formed and the establishment of the Special Forces as a separate branch of the armed forces with its own command in underway. Under the previous modernisation plan Norway has completed the modernisation of the Navy and also partly of the Coast Guard, with them receiving modern units in recent years.

However, with the change of government the discussion about the problems and challenges which the armed forces are faced with has become more open. These problems stem mainly from the fact that the Norwegian military has undergone too extensive a reduction in the previous years and that some posts in the professional military service remain vacant (the Norwegian Armed Forces *de iure* comprise approximately 17,000 professional soldiers and civilian personnel and a further 8,000 conscripts). This may result in increasingly serious problems with the formation of a contingent designed for external operations, a decreased readiness level of the units operating in the country and the inability to make full use of the modern armament and military equipment. It may therefore be expected that more efforts will be made to recruit qualified professional soldiers and to increase the number of troops as well as its funding. The problems also concern the fact that the Norwegian Armed Forces has insufficient capacity to patrol maritime areas – both from the air (this task is performed by six P-3 Orion maritime surveillance aircraft) and from the sea (performed by the Norwegian Coast Guard - from its 15 units, a number have been in operation for more than 30 years). It may be expected that the Defence Ministry will seek to deal with shortages also in this area.