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NORWAY AND NATO AT 50*

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THE HERITAGE

Norway has been a member of the Atlantic Alliance since its inception. It has been a loyal member, often named 'best in the class.' There is no rule without exceptions, however, during President Reagan's rearmament drive in the 1980s, Norway entered the list of so-called footnote countries on the Strategic Defence Initiative (popularly referred to as 'Star Wars') issue, and the social democratic party joined its European sister parties in opposing the deployment of new intermediate-range missiles on European soil.

To forge a broad national consensus on the membership issue and soften Soviet reactions, the government won acceptance for one restraint from the very beginning: it did not allow the stationing of foreign troops on Norwegian soil. Neither did it allow the stationing of nuclear weapons when, some years later, the United States began to deploy such weapons in Europe. Since the restrictions were self-imposed—not in any way subject to international agreement—the government was free to lift them in times of crises and war. Other restrictions, on the pattern of military exercises, were instituted as well. None of them caused severe tension in relation to Alliance partners as the Allies had no specific plans for doing what the government prohibited. Also, the Allies judged the special Norwegian combination of deterrence and reassurance as reasonable and, over the years, ways were found to circumvent the restraints, eg. by training and substituting Norwegians for US citizens where skilled manpower was needed to operate military technology provided by the United States.

During the Cold War, Norway was a net importer of military assistance. By a combination of geography, technology and politics, its security environment was more demanding than it could handle on its own. Norway borders the Soviet Union/Russia, and the distance between Oslo and its northernmost town, Hammerfest, equals the distance between Oslo and Rome (more than 2000 kilometres). Being thinly populated, adjacent to the Soviet Northern Fleet, surrounded by strategic weapon systems from both sides of the East-West confrontation, and hosting a number of sensitive US-Norwegian military installations, Norway had a strategic importance that generated much military aid.

DISCONTINUITY AND INERTIA

As the Cold War ended and collective security operations became a growth business, the security requirements were totally changed. Today, Norway's security concerns in the high north derive from the socio-economic and military collapse on the Kola Peninsula, and not so much from the remaining military capabilities there. Among the specific manifestations—actual or potential—are

desertions, sabotage, nuclear theft, environmental hazards and black market transactions driven by criminal networks and Mafia-like groups. These are new problems of which the Norwegian government has little experience.

Strategically, there has been a geopolitical shift towards the East. The need for conflict management has moved from the Norwegian Sea—a major area of military build-up till the mid-1980s—to the Baltic region and from Central Europe to Eastern and Southeastern Europe. The Middle East remains a conflict-ridden area and so do the Caucasus and Central Asia. No doubt the United States will devote more attention and resources to Asia and the Pacific. In comparison with East Asia, post-Cold War Europe is a relatively calm and undemanding place on earth.

In the global realm, Norway was always a significant contributor to UN peacekeeping operations. Its contributions to the much more demanding peace operations of the 1990s have remained substantial—in economic terms of the order of NOK 1 billion a year (\$120 million). In the Alliance context, Norway must be prepared to contribute to NATO's rapid reaction force with a view to defending other parts of Alliance territory, including the three new members. At the same time, the need to bolster Norway's defences is much reduced. The days when Norway was a big net receiver of military assistance—pure and simple—are gone.

Still, Norway's involvement in collective security operations has the character of an appendix to the rest of its military defence. New involvements are based on ad hoc arrangements. The other side of this coin is that the government continues to underline the fundamental significance of the North Atlantic Treaty and the core function of collective defence of the NATO area. Norway does that more than others do, and its force structure has changed less than that of other NATO members. However, there is a growing body of opinion asking for further restructuring in order to extricate defence planning from the determinants of the Cold War, and to devote more resources to challenges that appear more pressing.

OUT-OF-AREA OPERATIONS

In this decade, big as well as small states have invariably gone to the UN Security Council to ask for authorisation and legitimisation of military actions they wanted to undertake in other parts of the world. This did much to strengthen the role of the United Nations in security affairs: indeed, it may have been the most important qualitative improvement in the organisation since the Cold War.

The threat of using air power against the Serbs to obtain a cease-fire in Kosovo in 1998 was the first breach of this rule. Later in the year, the bombing of Iraq was another exception. In this case, the Security Council did not get a chance to consider the latest UNSCOM report before action was taken.

The United States wants to formalise for the Alliance an out-of-area military role, ie. outside Alliance territory, without necessarily relying on Security Council authorisation. European countries, on the other hand, underline the responsibility of the United Nations for international peace and security. Article seven of the North Atlantic Treaty reiterates the wording of the UN Charter in this respect. Some European countries are, moreover, reluctant to accept a major NATO out-of-area role because they envisage a growing role for the European Union in this respect. The French-British agreement on European security and defence co-operation may turn out to be a breakthrough for EU involvement in peace operations.

In the ongoing discussions of NATO's new strategic concept, Norway is a strong supporter of the role of the United Nations. It sticks to the rule of Security Council authorisation. At the same time, it would allow for exceptions, eg. in situations where crimes against humanity are about to take place while the Security Council is unable to reach a decision. To let rigid adherence to the principle of UN authorisation block action to stop genocide would not only be unwise, it would be untenable, for it would leave an impression of impotence and cynicism that governments can ill afford to live with in an age of transparency and media pressure.

In simplified terms, there is an Alliance debate on what should be the rule and what should be the exception. There is little doubt where the big majority of governments would go. As a rule, they would go to the UN. Yet this is no simple matter. For if the Security Council is circumvented several times in a row, the exceptions would sooner or later make up a new practice and become the rule. However, NATO can act only if there is consensus about it in the NATO organs. Major members of the European Union have enough clout to block Alliance action if significant interests are at stake, especially if they stand together. Should that be the case, the United States can still use NATO equipment in actions together with alliance partners that are willing to participate. The Combined Joint Task Force concept makes it possible for member states to use NATO equipment in a flexible manner.

For Norway, support for the United Nations is in its best national interest. The country has benefited greatly from the evolution of international law, and the international legal order is in large measure centred on the United Nations. Generally, small countries have a stronger interest in international rules, norms and standards than do big ones. In the case of Norway, there is also the particular reason that, to a large extent, its wealth is based on resources in and beneath an enormous sea area over which it has sovereign rights thanks to the development of international law. Since it benefits so much from the legal order, it is only logical that it acts consistently to maintain its viability. It is not self-sustained.

If one big power increasingly conducts military actions outside the framework of the United Nations, others may follow suit. Then, military might and national interests may prevail at the expense of international law.

NUCLEAR STRATEGY

Norway keeps a relatively low profile in Alliance considerations of nuclear strategy. Being covered by the nuclear umbrella without allowing any stationing of nuclear weapons on its own territory, it is not in a good position to influence the policies of those who possess them or accept them on their territories. Generally, however, the government encourages measures that reduce the role of nuclear weapons in international affairs.

In NATO discussions of the strategic concept, little attention has been paid to the global non-proliferation regime. In a world characterised by an impasse in nuclear disarmament and pressures on the non-proliferation regime, the new strategic concept should provide an incentive to overcome some of the problems and strengthen the regime. There is concern, however, that it may shape up in such a way that it will add to the problems.

The list of worrisome signals is numerous. Start II remains unratified by the Russian Duma. US-Russian efforts to improve and expedite the management and disposition of fissile material

stocks have slowed down. The Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty (ABM) is under siege by those in the US who prefer quick deployment of new technologies to the continuation of nuclear arms control. The Comprehensive Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) has been signed by more than 150 states, but ratified by less than 30. The Treaty will enter into force when the 44 states named in article XIV as possessing nuclear power and research reactors have ratified it. So far, India, Pakistan, Israel, North Korea, the United States, Russia and China are among the ones that have not done so, and the prospect of getting them all on board is bleak. In the Middle East, no progress is being made towards the establishment of a zone free of weapons of mass destruction. In Iraq, the efforts to ensure that the country is free of weapons of mass destruction and will remain so are in grave difficulty. India and Pakistan have tested nuclear weapons and have become overt de facto nuclear weapon states. The dispute over North Korea's nuclear programme has not yet been resolved. The second preparatory meeting for the upcoming Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conference was a failure.

It was in this situation that the new German government proposed an Alliance policy of no-first-use of nuclear weapons. The position was written into the coalition platform. The rationale for the existing option of first use—to stop superior Soviet conventional forces in Europe—is long gone. Maintenance of it hardly squares with the universal objectives of nuclear non-proliferation and nuclear disarmament (re. article six of the NPT). If the United States, the United Kingdom and France argue that their security depends so much on nuclear weapons, what may the governments of countries that really face severe threats to their national security claim following the same logic?

Still, at this stage there is nothing to indicate a breakthrough for a policy of no-first-use. In the face of stiff opposition from the three nuclear weapon states, many governments probably refrain from supporting the German initiative even if in reality they would prefer a policy of no-first-use. The existing strategic concept says, furthermore, that nuclear weapons constitute the “supreme guarantee” of Alliance security: this is another element that is ripe for change. Finally, there is the question of remaining US weapons in Europe (currently of the order of 140-280). Suggestions to remove them may trigger a new round of the de-coupling debate: European ‘experts’ are voicing concerns that this would cut US security ties to Europe, while likeminded US ‘experts’ point to their European counterparts to justify continued deployments. During the Cold War, there was fertile ground for this kind of interplay. Today, however, such arguments are alien to most Europeans.

THE ENLARGEMENT ISSUE

Time is needed to absorb the three newcomers. While in principle the door remains open for more members, in practice NATO may be heading for a pause in its enlargement process. If so, this is a welcome development for a country which borders on Russia and which may be more sensitive to Russian concerns than those who live at a certain distance, especially if the pause is actively used to repair the strained relationship that has developed between Russia and, in particular, the United States.

However, the political processes in Washington create uncertainties in this respect. Each for their own reasons, the White House and the Republican-controlled Congress may wish to extend new invitations. If in his speech to the April Summit the US President announces his determination to do so, prior reservations may be brushed aside.

THE RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER INSTITUTIONS

Since Norway has the chairmanship of the OSCE this year, the government naturally wants to underline the role of this organisation in European security affairs. The OSCE is the only regional security organisation in which Russia participates on a par with the Western big powers.

The OSCE plays a significant role in conflict prevention. The Norwegian chairmanship naturally wants to strengthen that role. Being a collective security organisation with reference to chapter eight of the UN Charter, the OSCE may also be used to issue mandates for collective security actions. The Security Council can not delegate its authority under chapter seven to launch enforcement actions, but there is nothing preventing the use of the OSCE for chapter six missions. Should China block a Security Council decision on a peace operation in, say, Central Asia, the OSCE may be used instead.

Of greater significance is the European integration process. On the heels of the euro, and in preparation for EU enlargement (re. the upcoming negotiations with the six candidate countries), the integration process proceeds into the sectors of security and defence. The French-British agreement states, inter alia, that the EU Heads of States must take the lead in developing a European security and defence identity, and that the EU must acquire its own capabilities for out-of-area operations (strategic analysis, intelligence and logistics, though the military 'teeth' might be European forces integrated in NATO but earmarked for European use, national contingents or multilateral forces outside NATO). The Western European Union (WEU) may be subordinated to the decisions of the EU already during the current German chairmanship. In due course, its treaty basis will be merged with that of the EU.

This means that a European caucus is taking shape within NATO. Put differently, NATO will—little by little—become an organisational link between two decision-making centres: Washington and Brussels. Consequently, as long as Norway is not a member of the EU, it will not be able to fully participate in the preparations of NATO meetings and decisions, neither here nor there. The risk of being marginalised is increasingly real.

Given that membership is not on the cards for the coming few years, is there another way by which Norway could be allowed into EU considerations on defence issues?

Last year, the Swiss government issued a declaration supporting the objective of a larger and more integrated Europe, and stating that it is its government's objective to become a member of the EU when the time is ripe. Subsequently, Switzerland became a member of the European Conference of members and applicant countries, and is now in a position to participate in discussions on matters of fundamental political importance for the Union, such as issues of security and defence.

The Norwegian government is not ready to make a similar strategic decision. Having turned the membership option down in two referendums (in 1972 and 1994), is there any possibility of getting into the European Conference short of doing what the Swiss government did? Politics is commonly recognised to be the art of the possible, but there seems to be no affirmative answer to this question.

'ATLANTICISM' EUROPEAN STYLE

To finish where we began: Norwegian support for NATO is unwavering, but NATO is no longer enough. The government would have wished that NATO could remain the exclusive framework for issues of security and defence, but NATO is not able to impose itself on the EU. It cannot draw a line

in front of military defence saying, in effect, to the movers of EU integration “this far, but not further.” For many Norwegians, the British-French agreement was an eye-opener in this respect. To stay outside the EU therefore has a price in security terms. So far, there is nothing dramatic about it, but it is increasingly felt.

Should Norway become an EU member some years hence, its policy will most probably resemble that of the UK. The British government joined its continental partners on security and defence inter alia to make Atlantic relations as co-operative and harmonious as possible. This is in Norwegian interests as well. The United States will now play on the UK in this role. In its conflicts of interest with the EU, it will sometimes play on Norway as well, both in the European domain and beyond. For to the extent that the government of a small and rich country can be an ‘innocent’ and attractive third party, it may help cut an expanding EU foreign and security policy in the margins—as is already the case in the Middle East. For Norway, this is a delicate matter presenting problems as well as opportunities.

**The views expressed in this article are those of the author. They do not necessarily represent those of the Norwegian government.*
