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The Nordic Region: Can Russia ‘Divide and Rule’? Four Russo-Nordic Relations After Crimea and Trump

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Abstract: The Nordic countries interact with Russia not only in the Baltic Sea region but also in the Barents region and the Polar Arctic. In order to get a full picture of the underlying dynamics, individual Nordic Russia-relations should be studied in a comprehensive framework. The framework applied here is one of great power wedging in regional dynamics. With geopolitical differences and mutual idiosyncracies, the Nordic soil has traditionally been fertile for great powers seeking to ‘divide and rule’, and Russia has apparently succeeded since about 2000. However, in the wake of Russia’s involvement in the Ukraine conflict and the election of Donald Trump as US president, geopolitical interests seem to be converging with fairly even threat perceptions being found in Nordic capitals. This will strengthen security and defence cooperation, although a common Nordic Russia-policy is unlikely. All four countries, in particular Sweden, face difficult dilemmas in this new situation.

Keywords: bilateral relations, Nordic cooperation, Russia, small states, wedging.

Introduction

In the wake of serious unrest in Kiev and the coup against the pro-Russian government in February 2014, Swedish foreign minister Carl Bildt planned a Nordic manifestation in the city. The idea was that the five Nordic foreign ministers should walk through central Kiev to mourn the victims of the Maidan shootings a couple of weeks earlier and meet with the new Ukrainian officials. As near-neighbours and with excellent human rights reputations as Nordic leaders, such a manifestation could have provided valuable support to the Maidan revolution. However, only Martin Lidegaard, the Danish foreign minister, joined Bildt for the walk on 5 March.¹ It does not seem far-fetched to interpret this as an expression of national sensitivities *vis à vis* the Russian great power.

The episode should demonstrate not only the persistently high level of ambition for Nordic foreign and security policy cooperation but also the difficulties of living up to it when the going gets tough. Nonetheless, Nordic representatives have all described the annexation of Crimea as a violation of international law, and Norway and Iceland (non-members of the EU) have joined the EU sanctions against Russia. On 10 April 2015, a common op-ed by the five Nordic defence ministers was printed in selected Nordic newspapers.² The Nordic regional security situation had allegedly worsened since the Ukraine conflict, and it was no longer 'business as usual'. It was also said that the Russian military 'behaves provocatively along our borders' and that 'Russian propaganda and political manoeuvring sows discord between countries, as well as in organizations like NATO and the EU'. However, the Nordic countries 'are meeting this situation with solidarity and deepened cooperation', the solidarity that was even extended to the Baltic states.

Great Power Wedging as a Theoretical Perspective

Nordic security policy cooperation is much about Russia these days since the Nordic countries (*pace* Iceland)³ perceive this great power as (more or less) threatening. We shall, therefore, compare the Russia-relations of individual Nordic countries and see if they are interrelated and leave room for significant mutual cooperation. How does the US, the most significant extra-regional power, play into this picture?

Nordic foreign and security policy cooperation does not live a 'nordistic' life of its own at regular foreign minister meetings or in the context of NORDEFSCO;⁴ it can only be understood as the lowest common denominator between the geopolitical agendas and id-

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1 Berlingske 2014.

2 Originally a Swedish initiative. See: Aftenposten 2015.

3 Iceland will be excluded from the analysis since its security situation obviously differs from that of the four other Nordic countries.

4 E.g. Iso-Markku *et al.* 2018.

iosyncrasies prevailing in each of the Nordic capitals. On the other hand, though, it is not enough to focus on *one* Nordic country at a time and how it positions itself in the great power game. Such analysis often reflects national (small state) parochialism among practitioners and experts alike. In order to get the full and satisfactory picture of the dynamics involved, we must be alert towards intended and unintended interaction effects *among* the Nordic Russia policies. A few of them may actually be instigated outside the region, although this is seldom obvious to the naked eye. This analytic ambition makes it imperative to study all four Nordic Russia-relations within one framework, also taking account of any major fluctuations in the policy of the US great power, not least.

As opposed to long-term rearmament processes, for instance, day-to-day geopolitics is to a large extent about two interrelated things: (1) to exploit (or even create) wedges between states in an opposed alliance/group of states,⁵ and correspondingly (2) to pre-empt or camouflage any such wedges in one's own camp. The latter is done through statements of unity, mutual solidarity, etc., possibly combined with actual deeds to enhance the statements' credibility. The same 'wedge game' can be found at all levels of politics, presumably, for instance as a government seeks to split its parliamentary opposition or vice versa. So, there is nothing unique about the phenomenon, also known as 'divide-and-rule',⁶ in the present context. Nonetheless, it is obviously part of the Nordic blame game against Russia in the above op-ed that its 'propaganda' allegedly 'sows discord between countries.'

Given this perspective, events that represent wedges in the Nordic rhetorical facade must necessarily be emphasized, as well as their presumed underlying causes. The broad ambition encompassing four Nordic countries also means that we need to paint with a bigger paintbrush than is normal in single-country studies; details that would be important from other perspectives may have to be sacrificed.

We shall first analyse the barriers to Nordic security policy cooperation, as they have been displayed in key situations of the past. Then follows investigations of longitudinal trends for each of the four Russo-Nordic relations during the 2000s and their mutual comparison (until Crimea). After that, we turn to the emerging Nordic security and defence policy cooperation after the Georgia war, and then we return to the national Russia-relations post-Crimea. The subsequent section then asks, how the 'Trump factor' plays into this, already complicated, geopolitical picture. It will be argued that all Nordic countries, but in particular Sweden, face difficult dilemmas in this new situation. As previously, the Nordic countries provide Russia with opportunities for 'divide and rule'. Nonetheless, it will be argued that the prospects for Nordic security and defence policy cooperation are better today than ever, although a common Russia policy will not materialize.

5 Crawford 2011.

6 See e.g.: Nexon 2009; Posner *et al.* 2009; or Wigell and Vihma 2016.

Barriers to Nordic Security Policy Cooperation: Geopolitical and Idiosyncratic

The historic curse of Nordic security and defence policy cooperation is that enthusiasm for it has never encompassed all countries at the same time; typically, one or a maximum of two countries have been eager, whereas the rest have been more or less reluctant. In other words, Nordic cooperation has never been vital to all countries simultaneously. The basic reason for this is obviously geopolitical: the sparsely populated Nordic region has traditionally bordered one or more power houses, affecting each of the Nordic capitals in very different ways and thus hindering a united response. In addition, some less rationalistic barriers to cooperation have occasionally played a role.

In the late 1930s, in the absence of substantial Nordic defence cooperation, emphasizing Nordic identity was essential for Denmark in relation to its big southern neighbour and for Finland in relation to the Soviet Union.⁷ However, the popular discourse that 'Denmark's southern border is also Norden's southern border' was rejected by Oslo. Norwegian bitterness over its loss of East Greenland to Denmark in 1933, as decided by the International Court of Justice, made Norway unwilling to support Denmark diplomatically *vis à vis* Germany.

The negotiations for a Nordic Defence League in 1948–49, involving only Sweden, Norway and Denmark, were conducted on the basis of fairly even perceptions of a threat from the Soviet Union. The prospects for an agreement should, therefore, have been optimal. However, they ultimately failed due to Swedish-Norwegian disagreement: Sweden wanted a neutral league, whereas Norway preferred it to be Western-oriented and, in any case, saw it as inferior to the emerging idea of an Atlantic Treaty. Explanations for this have emphasized the fact that Norwegian leaders were in exile in London during World War II, bitterness in Norway over Sweden's alleged 'betrayal' in the same war, and even lingering resentment over the unpopular pre-1905 Union with Sweden.⁸

Meetings of both foreign and defence ministers were held during the Cold War in spite of the countries' different security policy axioms (Denmark and Norway as NATO members, Sweden as neutral, and Finland as 'striving towards neutrality'). Nordic identity was still essential for Finland *vis à vis* the Soviet Union (it waned as soon as the Soviet Union had collapsed). For Denmark during the Cold War, Nordic identity became important in less existential ways: having become the only Nordic country in the EC in 1973, Denmark could frame itself as the 'bridge-builder between Norden and the EC'. In NATO, the con-

7 Thus, the Danish prime minister Thorvald Stauning characterized Denmark as an 'old Nordic Nation that has honestly pursued an impartial policy of neutrality in the expectation thereby to preserve its national life in peaceful development' (speech on the eve of 9 April 1940), See: http://historieportalen.gyldendal.dk/forloeb/besaettelsestiden/kapitel-2/kapitler/det_storpolitiske_spil_den_9_april_1940.aspx

8 See: Lereaaand 2014.

cept of maintaining a 'Nordic balance'⁹ could be exploited by both Denmark and Norway to avoid foreign bases or nuclear weapons on their territories: it was essential, so the argument went, to maintain Norden as an area of low tension, not least to avoid Finland coming under further pressure from the Soviet Union. These self-imposed restrictions were also, for both Denmark and Norway, a way of reassuring the Soviet Union bilaterally.

With the abolition of the fixed Cold-War axioms after the fall of the Berlin Wall, one might expect favourable times ahead for Nordic foreign and security political cooperation. Also, given its position outside the EC and later the EU, Norway had a vested interest in furthering Nordic foreign policy cooperation. However, as EU members from 1995, Sweden and Finland now did all in their power to display themselves as 'true Europeans' and therefore became quite unenthusiastic about Nordic cooperation.

The room for manoeuvre for all four countries had widened dramatically, which was, however, not necessarily an advantage for mutual cooperation. Nordic security and defence dilemmas were now about participation in UN or US-led interventions rather than about mutual solidarity in the face of threats to individual Nordic countries. Denmark's 'superatlanticism'¹⁰ during the 2000s – especially the Iraq intervention in March 2003 despite the lack of a UN mandate – was difficult to grasp for the other Nordic states, even for Denmark's Norwegian NATO ally.

Barriers to Cooperation in Nordic 'Near Abroads'

With the melting down of the Soviet power pole and the literal melting of Polar ice, two new spaces opened up for Nordic cooperation: the Arctic and the eastern shore of the South Baltic Sea. The Nordic countries interact with Russia in both of these arenas, directly or indirectly.

Cooperation and Jealousies at the Baltic Arena

Policies *vis à vis* Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania are also Russia policy in a very straightforward manner: the greater the security and defence policy cooperation with the Baltic states, the more relations with Moscow will be burdened. Denmark's, ultimately successful, efforts to bring the Baltic countries into NATO raised eyebrows in Moscow, to say the least. Since then, Denmark has also, encouraged by Washington, attempted to connect or enlarge Nordic security policy cooperation to the Baltic states. Since about 2008 this effort has been supported wholeheartedly by Stockholm, whereas Oslo and Helsinki have

9 Brundtland, 1966.

10 Mouritzen 2006.

remained more reserved.¹¹ The Balts have been seen as not only too exposed, but also as too anti-Russian in their general profiles.

Less concerning as seen from Moscow, Nordic cooperation has also been involved in assisting the Baltic countries regarding EU membership and many matters of low politics. But the more neighbouring states cooperate towards similar goals in a given task environment, the more they will also compete; this is the general rule of parallel action,¹² and the Nordics have not been exempted from that. Which country, for instance, has done the most for the Baltic countries? Who should really be seen as the dominant player in the Baltic Sea region? Denmark and Sweden were involved in friendly but jealous competition for this title in the 1990s. Denmark's asset was its NATO membership, whereas Sweden's strength was its historic ties with the Balts, including its Baltic diaspora. With the waning of the Baltic focus in the new millennium, parallel action by Denmark and Sweden has also waned.

Cooperation and Competition in the Arctic?

Arctic policy is also to some extent Russia policy. But we have not seen the same pattern of Nordic parallel action during the Arctic hype (from about 2007) as in the Baltic Sea region. The explanation, paradoxically, is that the Arctic agendas of the Nordic countries have been somewhat different. Rather than treading on each other's toes, there have been substantial nuances: Norway and the Danish Kingdom (Denmark, Greenland and the Faroe Islands) have primarily stressed the living conditions of Arctic inhabitants, whereas Sweden and Finland have been more concerned with marine ecology and environmental issues. There is no Nordic 'pre-cooking' within the Arctic Council (which includes Russia, Canada and the US apart from the five Nordic states). Lines of cooperation and conflict within this body criss-cross one another.

Denmark has repeatedly stressed the constructive contribution of Russia to Arctic cooperation. Moreover, at Ilulissat (Greenland) the Danish Kingdom took the initiative in May 2008 of setting up an additional Arctic gathering, the Arctic-5, consisting of the Polar Sea coastal states: Russia, Norway, the Danish Kingdom (in respect of Greenland), Canada and the US.¹³ The purpose was to signal to the world that these countries, faced with melting ice, would divide the Polar Sea between them and that this could be done in a responsible way by following UNCLOS, the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. This Kingdom initiative was subject to much consternation among the other Nordic countries because it was taken outside the Arctic Council, but it was appreciated

11 According to Sweden's unilateral 'declaration of solidarity' of 2009, Sweden 'will not remain passive' in the case of a catastrophe or military attack on any EU member state or Nordic country. And it 'expects the same from them.' See: Kempf 2012. This was coined, essentially, at the Baltic countries.

12 On the concept of parallel action, see: Mouritzen 1997, 37–42.

13 Rahbek-Clemmensen and Thomasen 2018.

not least by Russia. There was actually a trace of parallel action for a few months between Denmark and Norway, since Norway nurtured the same Ilulissat-like ambition as Denmark. But Copenhagen proved to be quicker to send out invitations, which created some Norwegian irritation.¹⁴

A territorial 'battle for the North Pole' can be foreseen between Russia and the Danish Kingdom, and possibly also Canada. If two countries both have legitimate claims according to UN geological expertise, as is likely in this case, the territorial division can only be made through bilateral negotiations. Denmark therefore sees it as essential to safeguard reasonable relations with Russia prior to such negotiations. In fact, Russia was already pushing for bilateral negotiations to start in 2016, but that was rejected by Denmark.

The Barents cooperation, to be touched on below, is very much a Russo-Norwegian enterprise, although the other Nordic countries are members (more or less active) of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council initiated in 1992. One can hardly talk about Nordic jealousies here, since Norway is recognized so obviously as the Nordic no. 1 in this context.

Bilateral Relations with Russia: Longitudinal Analyses

Having seen the barriers to Nordic cooperation above, we shall now turn to longitudinal analyses for each of the four Nordic Russia relations. Traditionally, the Russia policies of individual Nordic countries have been different and uncoordinated. This is what should be expected among sovereign nations with no reciprocal alliance commitments, in spite of popular expectations of solidarity in the face of great power challenges. In the below analysis, the Nordic states will be divided in two pairs: Denmark and Sweden on the one hand, and Norway and Finland on the other.

Danish and Swedish Relations with Russia: Volatile and out of Sync

Denmark's and Sweden's Russia policies have fluctuated significantly since the change of the millennium. For both countries, relations with Russia have shifted from ice cold to pragmatic and at times even cordial. Remarkably, when Danish-Russian relations have been frozen, Swedish-Russian relations have been pragmatic and in good order. Conversely, when Sweden has been put in the Russian freezer, Danish-Russian relations have improved considerably.¹⁵

In the autumn of 2002, at a time of good relations between Russia and the West, the first Russian state visit to Denmark since 1964 was being planned. However, instead of being the beginning of a fruitful relationship, the worst crisis in Danish-Russian relations since the Cold War developed. The former Chechen vice-premier and general, Akhmed Zaka-

14 Interview with then Danish foreign minister Per Stig Møller (November 12, 2015).

15 Mellander and Mouritzen 2016.

jev, accused by the Russians of being behind the 23 October terrorist attack in a Moscow theatre, was due to be one of the speakers at the Chechen World Congress being held in Copenhagen shortly thereafter. He was briefly detained by the Danish authorities, but not extradited to Russia as requested by Moscow. The Danish prime minister, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, took the opportunity to emphasize Danish freedom of speech and the virtues of the Danish legal system (as distinct from the Russian system, supposedly). Moreover, in an op-ed he stressed the importance of saying no to great power pressure as he had just done, as distinct from Denmark's historic 'small state behaviour' allegedly consisting of acquiescence towards Nazi Germany or the Soviet Union.¹⁶

Not only did Russia cancel the planned state visit to Denmark, but Fogh Rasmussen's value statements and historical parallels led Russia to put Denmark in the sin bin for several years. Moreover, there were no Danish attempts to compensate by being 'nice' on other issues. Quite the contrary, Russia was asked to apologise for the Soviet occupation of the Baltic countries from 1944 to 1991 in connection with the sixtieth anniversary of the end of World War II in Europe (2005). Moreover, Denmark supported – in vain, as it turned out – Membership Action Plans for Ukraine and Georgia at the NATO summit in Bucharest in April 2008 in the face of strong Russian opposition.

In the same period, by contrast, Sweden's Russia policy was rather cautious and did not deviate significantly from its Cold War posture. For instance, Sweden maintained a low profile in connection with the Orange revolution in the Ukraine crisis of 2004–5. Unlike Denmark, Sweden did not criticize the election process when Yanukovich, Moscow's preferred candidate, was elected president of Ukraine (he had to step down shortly afterwards following public demonstrations).

By contrast, when Russia intervened in Georgia in response to the Georgian bombardment of Tskhinvali in early August 2008, the reaction of Carl Bildt, Swedish foreign minister since 2006, was among the sharpest in Europe. Like some commentators, but unlike other official representatives, he compared Russia's intervention, and especially the reasons given for it, with Nazi Germany's undermining of Czechoslovakia in 1938: the protection of a minority in a smaller neighbouring country, be it Sudeten-Germans or, in the case of Georgia, Ossetians with Russian passports. Russia, being understandably sensitive to any comparison with Nazi Germany, put Sweden and notably Carl Bildt into the freezer.

As in the Danish case, there were no serious Swedish attempts to compensate for this hostility in respect of other issues, let alone apologise for improper language. Also, Sweden had taken the lead, together with Poland, in the EU Eastern Neighbourhood Programme, which Russia increasingly perceived as hostile. Meanwhile, Sweden sharply criticized the 2011 parliamentary elections in Russia, the anti-gay Duma Law of 2013 and the conviction of the Russian opposition politician Aleksey Navalny.

16 Politiken 2002.

Swedish defence had been severely cut during the 2000s, and the task of the armed forces had officially been revised in 2004 from territorial defence to crisis management, one of the reasons being that 'Russia was approaching Western values'.¹⁷ However, against the new background of tense bilateral relations, including Russian exercises and some near-overflights, Russia was publicly identified as a threat to Sweden. In this alarmist atmosphere, it was all the more disturbing for the Swedish public and politicians to learn from the commander-in-chief (December 2012) that Sweden had a 'one-week defence' that would only be able to resist an enemy for about seven days.¹⁸

The Edward Snowden revelation the same year that the Swedish intelligence service, the FRA, had collaborated closely with US intelligence in spying on Russia hardly made relations any better. In the so-called 'Good Friday incident' the following year, Russian strategic (nuclear) aircraft, in a near-violation of Swedish air space, practiced air strikes against Swedish targets, allegedly including the FRA near Stockholm. Given that much of the Swedish air force was on an Easter break, there was not sufficient manpower to send up aircraft to intercept the Russian planes.

Remarkably, as Swedish–Russian relations deteriorated from 2008, Denmark and Russia started to mend their fences. Possibly, Denmark felt the need to improve bilateral relations with Russia, the Arctic superpower, in light of the emerging Arctic hype. In 2009, Denmark was quick to allow the Russo-German gas pipeline, Nord Stream, through Danish territorial waters (while Sweden was comparatively slow to allow it into its economic zone), and Putin declared his gratitude to the new Danish prime minister, Løkke Rasmussen. In the following years, Denmark retained its goodwill in Moscow by being remarkably cautious in making comments about the Russian Duma elections of 2011 and the anti-gay Duma law of 2013, as well as by ignoring the Navalny conviction. Official state visits, with royal participation, took place in both Copenhagen (2010) and Moscow (2011). It was not until the Ukraine conflict (2014) that the Russia policies of the two Nordic states began to converge, though Sweden was still being the more assertive. As already mentioned, it was Carl Bildt who took the initiative to arrange the Nordic Kiev manifestation.

Finnish and Norwegian Russia Policies: Continuity and Pragmatism

Russia's relations with Norway and Finland have not been subject to the kinds of fluctuations we noted in Denmark's and Sweden's relations with Russia. Continuity and pragmatism have prevailed, although naturally subject to different parameters for each of the two countries.

17 According to the Swedish commander-in-chief as quoted in Pyykönen 2016, 78.

18 This statement also signals that Sweden reckons on receiving external assistance. This appeared already from its unilateral Declaration of Solidarity of 2009.

Finland's big eastern neighbour has been crucial to its foreign policy ever since independence. Its historical lesson has taught it not to trust military assistance from abroad; during the Winter War no help arrived except for volunteers and equipment, mainly from Sweden. Finland has learnt that it can manage on its own, both politically (as in its 'good neighbourly relations' with the Soviet Union during the Cold War) and even militarily (as in the Winter War). Against this background, Finland did not throw itself in the arms of NATO when the membership option presented itself in the mid-1990s. It has merely kept this option as a card in its Russia policy ever since, while adding that it is 'currently not on the agenda', as the official formulation has it. Cooperation with NATO under the Partnership for Peace programme has been important, but less visible than in the case of Sweden,¹⁹ since Finland has generally preferred to keep its armed forces at home. In line with its location and its historical lesson, Finland retained its territorial defence and conscription when others reoriented themselves towards expeditionary forces based on professional personnel.²⁰ Unlike Sweden, Finland does not currently count on foreign assistance in the case of war.²¹

Therefore, the Georgia intervention or Russian exercises close to Finland have not given rise to the discontinuities in the Finnish defence posture that we saw in the case of Sweden. Continuity has also prevailed in foreign policy, although foreign minister Alexander Stubb expressed unprecedented criticism of the Georgia intervention. Pragmatism has continued to be strong in Finnish domestic and foreign policy, although Cold War Finlandization – the special relationship eastwards – has not returned. In the absence of NATO membership, Finland has been a strong advocate of EU integration (adopting the euro as its currency) as well as EU security and defence cooperation, trying (in vain) to push the latter towards territorial defence. Taking responsibility for the EU Northern Dimension,²² meaning in practice cooperation with North-West Russia, Finland has framed itself as a bridge-builder between the EU and Russia. This reached its height in the late 1990s and early 2000s, when the *Einbindung* (binding) of Russia was still seen as realistic.

Russia is also axiomatic in Norwegian foreign policy. Norway's membership of NATO provides a basic deterrence. However, the second leg in Norway's Russia policy is cross-border cooperation in the High North (the Barents cooperation). This takes place bilaterally and through the Barents Euro-Arctic Council, established on the initiative of Norway and Russia just after the Cold War. For instance, Norwegians and Russians living less than thirty kilometres from the common border are allowed visa-free cross-border travel. As with the Finnish endeavours, this is about binding and good neighbourly relations in general. In addition, as a much more concrete national interest, Norway must pre-empt the nightmare of Soviet nuclear waste polluting the world's richest fishing grounds in the

19 For instance, Finland did not, unlike Sweden, participate in the air campaign in Libya in 2011. See: Pyykönen 2016, 76, 121.

20 Saxi 2011, 54–5.

21 Pyykönen 2016, 84.

22 Gebhard 2013.

Barents Sea and the Norwegian Sea. This is part of the explanation for the emphasis on environmental protection in the two countries' cross-border cooperation.

Pre-Ukraine, Norwegian-Russian relations were stable, pragmatic and at times even benign. When Denmark supported Membership Action Plans and ultimately NATO membership for Ukraine and Georgia at the NATO Bucharest meeting in April 2008, Norway was against.²³ Also, Norway was cautious in its comments on the Russian intervention in Georgia a few months later. This was in line with Norway's general Russia policy, but more specifically it may also have been an attempt to make the soil fertile for a Barents Sea border agreement.²⁴ After forty years of frozen negotiations, such an agreement actually materialized in 2010.

Post-Georgia: A New Beginning for Nordic Defence Cooperation

After the Georgia war of 2008, Nordic security and defence policy cooperation was revived. The main driver for this, however, was rather financial: static or shrinking budgets combined with rising costs of defence equipment.²⁵ Thus, the Stoltenberg Report of 2009,²⁶ which set the framework for renewed cooperation, was initiated *before* the August war in Georgia. Nonetheless, as the report was published in February 2009, its ambition regarding a 'Nordic foreign and security policy union' catapulted debate about Nordic cooperation into the realm of high politics.²⁷ The debate was clearly inflamed by the Russian intervention in Georgia, which almost shaded the crucial incentive to save money through common weapons acquisitions.

Nordic Defence Cooperation (NORDEFECO), one of the outcomes of the report, builds on pre-existing elements of defence cooperation between Sweden, Finland and Norway in the High North. Iceland and Denmark have also joined, the latter with some hesitation, initially fearing that NORDEFECO would, at best, be a waste of time and, at worst, become a competitor to NATO.²⁸ NORDEFECO's brief includes the Arctic, that is, the High North ('Scandinavian Arctic') and Iceland. In the former, there are regular 'cross-border training' (CBT) aerial exercises. In 2014, Iceland hosted the so-called 'Iceland Air Meet'²⁹ of Nordic

23 See: Mouritzen and Wivel 2012, 118–9, 126–27.

24 Interview with Per Stig Møller, Danish foreign minister at the time, on December 10, 2013, by Maria Mellander.

25 Saxi 2011, 15–23.

26 Republic of Iceland 2009. In order to mark the 10-year anniversary of the report, the five Nordic foreign policy institutes published an evaluation in May 2019 of the status of Nordic foreign policy and defence cooperation. See *Ten Years On. Reassessing the Stoltenberg Report on Nordic Cooperation*, 2019. See: Haugevik and Sverdrup 2019.

27 Saxi 2011, 18.

28 Bailes 2016.

29 Dahl 2014.

fighter planes, a prestige event accompanied by the presence of all the Nordic foreign and defence ministers.³⁰

NORDEFECO could make high politics sense to Norway since NATO had shown little interest in the High North, Norway's number one foreign policy priority. NORDEFECO could be a useful supplement here and also less provocative than allied NATO forces in Russian eyes. However, NORDEFECO was even more essential to Swedish and Finnish security policies. Whereas NATO membership for these countries is a sensitive matter both domestically and in relation to Russia, to put it mildly, NORDEFECO is acceptable in both respects, as is bilateral Swedish-Finnish military cooperation. As already mentioned, Denmark was less enthusiastic, at least initially.³¹ However, a positive American perception of NORDEFECO, as an instrument to prepare Sweden and Finland for NATO membership, influenced the Danes.

Still, in the midst of this positive development, bilateral idiosyncrasy could strike like a thunderbolt (2013). Apart from not buying Swedish Jas Gripen fighter planes and even criticizing them in public, Norway withdrew far too late, in the Swedish view, from the common Swedish–Norwegian 'Archer artillery' project.³² A heated disagreement led the countries to withdraw their defence attachés from Oslo and Stockholm respectively, and they did not return until 2017.

In the big picture, however, the main tendency after the Stoltenberg initiative was a surge in Nordic security and defence policy cooperation. But what happened after Crimea and the Ukrainian conflict? Let us first see how the Russia policies of the individual countries were affected.

Post-Crimea: The Swedish Island of Gotland at the Centre of a War Scenario

In view of Carl Bildt's bad standing in Moscow, it was generally expected that Swedish-Russian relations would improve after he resigned with the centre-right election defeat of September 2014. This did not happen, however. For one thing, the Ukraine conflict was still unresolved. Secondly, during the weeks when the new government was moving into the office, alleged incidents involving mini-submarines took place in the Stockholm archipelago. As they, rightly or wrongly, were believed to be real and instigated by Moscow, there was no mood in Stockholm to start on a blank page with Russia, to put it mildly. The new foreign minister, Margot Wallström, was no more cautious than her predecessor; in

30 Not to be mistaken for the rotating NATO surveillance over Iceland since the closing of the Keflavik air base.

31 Saxi 2011, 55–59.

32 Defense-Aerospace 2013.

the wake of the murder of opposition politician Boris Nemtsov in February 2015, Wallström talked about 'Putin's reign of terror'.³³

Russia's near-violations of Swedish air space continued (as they did in relation to other countries). Specifically, a poisonous Gotland scenario gained traction: as the Baltic countries' rightly or wrongly, were seen as threatened by Russia, the Swedish island of Gotland in the middle of the Baltic Sea became strategically vital. If Russia acquired military control of Gotland, it would be able, according to this reasoning, to prevent NATO forces from coming to the rescue of their Baltic allies. Evidently, this Gotland focus was extremely unpleasant from a Swedish security perspective. Paradoxically, the buffer of independent Baltic states that Sweden had gained after the Cold War – which from a common-sense point of view should be an advantage – now had turned into a liability due to politico-strategic developments. Together with alleged Russian cyber-attacks (so-called 'active measures'³⁴), this created a near-war psychosis in Sweden. Inexplicable events of different kinds, like sabotaged radio and TV towers, were ascribed to Russian agents by the Swedish media.³⁵ According to Wallström, 'Swedes are, for the first time, really scared – scared of Russia, of what they are up to, think they are unpredictable...and do things in violation of international law'.³⁶

Apart from a general but necessarily slow return to territorial defence (including conscription and reserve formations), Sweden has responded by refortifying Gotland. Anti-cyber warfare has been strengthened. Significant increases in defence spending have been budgeted for, and opposition parties compete in overbidding. NORDEFCO cooperation, and especially bilateral Swedish-Finnish military cooperation, has been intensified. In relation to NATO, an 'Enhanced Opportunities Program' was agreed at the Wales summit (2014), which implies that Sweden and Finland are NATO's closest partners, members in all but name. Also, 'Host Nation Support' memoranda were signed with the two countries, enabling joint training exercises and assistance from NATO forces on their territories upon invitation. In May 2015, the 'Arctic challenge exercise' – the 'biggest air force exercise in the world' that year – took place in northern Sweden (Sweden's vast and thinly inhabited areas to the north are unrivalled in Europe for this purpose). In June the same year, the large-scale 'Baltops' landing exercise took place on the south coast of Sweden with the participation of forces from several NATO countries, including the US. In September 2017, the two largest post-Cold War exercises in the region were carried out by Russia/Belarus (Zapad) and by Sweden with the participation of several NATO-countries (Aurora).

33 The murder 'reinforces the picture of Putin's reign of terror when it comes to security, human rights and democracy. It is also one more name [Nemtsov] that is added to the already long list of not least journalists who have lost their lives'. See DagensNyheter 2015.

34 Kragh and Åsberg 2017.

35 Svenska Dagbladet 2016.

36 Svenska Dagbladet 2014.

Still, the Social Democrat-led government has indicated that NATO membership is not on the agenda for the present term of office (lasting presumably until 2022). All bourgeois parties have joined forces with the Liberals, long-term supporters of NATO membership. However, this does not imply that a membership application will be forthcoming, should there be a change of government after the next election. The informal rule is that the nationally vital issue of alliance status can only be changed by consensus between the two 'responsible' parties, the Social Democrats and the Moderates.³⁷ In this situation, the Swedish defence minister Peter Hultqvist has stressed in an op-ed that bilateral security and defence policy cooperation with the US should be strengthened, not least regarding interoperability, common exercises and international operations.

A special difficulty for Sweden in relation to Russia is that it lacks 'neutral' conversation topics, like Norway's or Finland's border cooperation or Denmark's Arctic-5 cooperation regarding the Polar Sea. Sweden's idealist domestic political climate sees cooperation on human rights, including the rights of LGBT persons, as natural, but that will undoubtedly be seen as subversive by Moscow.

Post-Crimea: The Other Nordics

The division made here between the pragmatic Russia policies of Norway and Finland and the – occasionally – more value-based policies of Denmark and Sweden was reflected in the semi-failed Kiev manifestation described initially. Subsequently, however, it seems that the division between the two sets of Russia policies has become blurred.

Norwegian-Russian Relations Turning Sour

Sweden is not the only country experiencing tensions with Russia. As the EU decided on sanctions against Russia after Crimea and the hybrid war in the eastern Ukraine, Norway followed suit and applied the same sanctions, which involved trade and a travel ban to the EU on selected Russian officials. Together with Russian countersanctions, this to some extent hampered border cooperation in the High North, much to the dismay of regional politicians in northern Norway. Unsurprisingly, it also angered Russia.

Dmitrij Rogozin, Russian vice-premier at the time and a well-known hawk, was included in the travel ban. Due to the Svalbard Treaty, in force from 1925, Norway has 'full sovereignty' over the island group, but inhabitants from the treaty signatories, including Russia, may travel freely to Svalbard (not subject to Schengen-rules) and engage in the peaceful

37 Even if the Sweden Democrats (SD) should replace the Moderates and become the second largest party after the next election, they are not seen as part of the 'good company' and would hardly be allotted a role in this question (the party is, by the way, rather reluctant regarding NATO membership).

industry.³⁸ However, the Norwegian government informed the Russian embassy that Russians subject to the travel ban were also unwelcome in Svalbard. The Russian response to this step was to send Rogozin to Svalbard (April 2015), from where he sent several tweets in English with accompanying selfies, so his visit would not go unnoticed. This infuriated the Norwegian government, which followed up with legislation that is controversial in relation to the existing treaty. The Russian embassy in Oslo responded that this could not be seen in isolation, but would hurt mutual relations more broadly.

Just as Russia has responded with a travel ban on selected EU citizens, a special 'stop list' has also been drawn up of Norwegians. When the parliamentary Foreign and Defence Committee was planning its visit to the Russian Duma (February 2017), two of its five members found themselves on the list. Against this background, the committee decided to cancel its visit.

The Russian Foreign Ministry protested forcefully, as Norway hosted a meeting of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly on Svalbard in May 2017. According to the Russian protest, the meeting violated the 'spirit' of the Svalbard Treaty, according to which Norway must ensure that the archipelago is utilized in a peaceful manner.³⁹ A similar seminar was held in 2004, which caused no Russian protest, but obviously in a more benign bilateral climate. Generally, Russia opposes a role for NATO in the Arctic.

In response to Russian assertiveness, Norway has cancelled most of its defence cooperation with Russia in the High North. Moreover, its border controls have been improved and a number of defence acquisitions are planned, such as the expensive anti-submarine P8A Poseidon aircraft. Since late 2016, Norwegian defence has been reinforced by the presence of 330 US marines in Trøndelag in central Norway. They are ostensibly there on a so-called 'rotating basis', but this rhetorical formulation blurs the fact that Norway seems on the way to revising its self-imposed policy of having 'no foreign bases on Norwegian territory in peace time'.⁴⁰ As an important contribution to NATO, Norway has markedly increased its surveillance capabilities in relation to the Kola Peninsula and the Russian Northern Fleet through a modernized Marjata, an electronic intelligence vessel stationed in Kirkenes.

Danish-Russian Relations: Still Decent

In the EU, the Danish profile regarding sanctions on Russia fell roughly half-way between German pragmatism and Swedish – Polish hawkishness. As an outgrowth of the NATO Warsaw summit, Denmark has sent two hundred servicemen to be part of a British-led battalion in Estonia, in addition to its contribution to Baltic air-policing. In spite of this,

38 University of Oslo n.d.

39 High North News 2017.

40 Regjeringen n.d.

Danish-Russian relations have been maintained at a decent level. Unlike Norway, Denmark does not envisage a role for NATO in the Arctic, since this could increase tension with Russia.⁴¹

Two current issues are vital to the future of bilateral relations: 1) the decision whether or not to accept Nord Stream 2 through Danish territorial waters; and 2) Danish active naval participation in NATO's ballistic missile defence. Should Denmark decide against Russian preferences regarding *both* of these questions, relations will surely deteriorate.

The Russian ambassador in Copenhagen has already signalled the seriousness with which Russia views the latter. Danish vessels equipped with instruments serving this system would be subject to a nuclear attack in the case of war, the ambassador said in a newspaper interview.⁴² This statement caused some consternation in Danish public debate, although its logic can come as no big surprise to military experts.⁴³

Both Russia and Germany naturally wish Denmark to accept, and Denmark would surely gain the same appreciation from Russia as with Nord Stream 1 in the case of a positive decision. On the other hand, Ukraine, Poland and the Baltic countries are pushing in the opposite direction, allegedly fearing Russian energy blackmail in the future.⁴⁴ They are supported by the US, arguing also that Ukraine may lose its incomes from its existing transit pipelines as a result of Nord Stream 2.

In the light of this crossfire, Denmark has adopted a 'wait-and-see' approach and has also sought to pass the buck to the EU Commission, in the hope that the pipeline would violate the EU common energy policy (the 3rd Gas Directive).⁴⁵ As it now appears, Nord Stream 2 has lost patience with the Danish authorities and will locate the pipeline outside territorial waters (in Danish economic zone, where a veto does not apply).

Paradoxical as it may sound, the sombre security developments in Denmark's salient environment have in fact strengthened the country politically. At least until the election of Donald Trump, Denmark seemed to be back in the 'good old days' of the early 1990s, at the centre of a Washington-Copenhagen-Riga axis, in which Denmark, being in the middle, can make itself politically useful and can also offer a modest military contribution to Baltic defence.

41 Kunz 2018, 11–12.

42 Berlingske 2015.

43 The Russian ambassador in Oslo has likewise made strong statements against possible Norwegian participation in NATO's missile defence. See: Krog 2017.

44 Tim Boersma has argued, why this fear is probably misplaced. See: Boersma 2015.

45 By February 2019, the EU institutions have expanded the directive, so it also applies to pipelines linking the EU to the world around (like Nord Stream 2).

Finnish-Russian Relations: Continued Pragmatism

Finland has expressed its criticism of the Crimea annexation and Russian involvement in Ukraine just like the other Nordic countries. As an EU member, Finland, of course, participates in EU sanctions against Russia, although they have hurt the Finnish economy more than most other European economies.⁴⁶ NORDEFCO cooperation and bilateral Swedish-Finnish defence cooperation have both been intensified, with the mutual use of bases and airspace, combined anti-submarine warfare, intelligence sharing, joint surveillance operations, etc. The Finnish Border Guard, a special agency under the Ministry of the Interior, has been authorized to counter hybrid warfare, including 'little green men', as seen during the Crimean crisis.⁴⁷ The Foreign Ministry requested an expert report on the consequences of possible Finnish NATO membership.⁴⁸ One conclusion was that Finland and Sweden should join NATO 'hand in hand', if at all. Finland joining alone would hardly be meaningful for purely logistical reasons,⁴⁹ and Sweden joining alone would lead to Russia exerting compensatory pressure on Finland.

Finland, however, has avoided staying in the Russian sin bin in the way the three other countries have experienced for shorter or longer periods. This can surely be ascribed to its pragmatic political culture and approach to Russia. When exposed to thinly veiled Russian threats about the consequences of Finland's NATO membership, Finnish politicians have kept silent, as distinct from their Swedish colleagues when faced with corresponding threats. Finland has kept the lines of communication open to Moscow, and Putin visited Helsinki in the summer of 2016, for instance.

Donald Trump Enters the Stage

During the Cold War, the slightest sign of superpower détente would be applauded by the Nordics. The election of Donald Trump as US president promised better US-Russia relations. However, no Nordic countries applauded this. Trump's positive evaluation of Russian president Putin, combined with his critical views of US allies, in particular their alleged free-riding on US protection, has created a fear of US-Russian collusion among smaller states, including those in the Nordic-Baltic region ('fear of abandonment' as distinct from 'fear of entrapment' during the Cold War⁵⁰). 'Should we risk World War III for an ally not having offered its fair share of the defence burden,' Trump asked rhetorically.

46 Euractiv 2014.

47 See: The Barents Observer 2017.

48 Bedömning 2016.

49 Since transportation through northern Norway is not an option, NATO reinforcement of Finland would be as difficult as reinforcing the Baltic states is today.

50 Snyder 1984.

Generally, the strategic resources of the small states, valuable in case of great-power competition and conflict, are worthless in case of great-power cooperation or even collusion.⁵¹

Of course, US foreign and defence secretaries,⁵² coming and going, have tried to calm US allies, and the US Congress has done its best to keep US-Russian relations in a conflictual mode. In any case, a unified and stable US leadership of NATO is lacking, to use an understatement. The US's Nordic allies have faced the same dilemma as US allies all over the world, of the form: 'Should we appease Donald Trump and significantly increase our defence budgets, or should we look for alternative security policy solutions (or both)?' And the Nordic non-allies have asked themselves: 'Should we really join an alliance with questionable protection and an oscillating leadership? Would the price be worth paying?'

Denmark and Norway Trying to Please Trump

In Danish governmental circles and elsewhere, the reaction to the Trump phenomenon was initially one of both denial and confusion. The wishful thinking was that Trump would gradually be 'normalised' by the Washington system. The government's 2017-18 foreign and security policy strategy, published in June 2017, was an exercise in downplaying.⁵³

In the 2019–20 foreign and security policy strategy,⁵⁴ however, Denmark criticizes Trump's withdrawals from several instances of multilateralism (climate change, Iran deal, trade deals) and thereby from the global leadership that Denmark benefits from. Denmark should seek to promote US understanding of the values of a multilateral order, also for its own good (again wishful thinking, as it seems). With the long list of Russian alleged 'sins' in the report, it is all the more important to 'reach out' (report's formulation) to the US in order to retain its engagement in NATO.

While Denmark has pleased the US by participating in almost every faraway intervention since the Cold War, the defence budget had slid to 1.14 % of GDP – far from the 2% contribution that all NATO member states promised at the Wales summit in 2014. Politicians hoped to soften American dissatisfaction through the defence agreement of January 2018, which meant that the Danish defence budget would amount to 1.3 % of GDP by 2023. However, with an extra-ordinary 'supplementary agreement' only 12 months later the figure will now be 1.5 % by 2023, based both on revised statistical principles and some extra money.⁵⁵ The government has not even tried to conceal that this supplement is due to American pressure rather than any sudden change in the challenges facing Danish

51 Mouritzen 1991.

52 Heisbourg 2017, 10.

53 Underrigspolitik 2017.

54 Udenrigspolitik 2019.

55 Krog 2019.

defence. Statistics, including its presentation, has seldom or never been more crucial in Danish defence policy.

A Plan B – involving the EU or Nordic defence – if Trump should more or less abandon NATO has not been formulated; NATO's demise could become a self-fulfilling prophecy with too much public speculation. Still, the Danish government's 2017–18 strategy mentions a need for 'strengthening Nordic cooperation and cooperation with the alliance partners in the Baltic Sea region'.⁵⁶ In the 2019–20 strategy, security policy cooperation with the other Baltic Sea countries is stressed again, with no mention of pure Nordic cooperation. Emerging tendencies in European defence cooperation are given considerable weight, but only as a contribution to Atlantic burden sharing. The Danish EU defence opt-out is regretted, but no referendum to get rid of it is planned.

With sour relations with the Russian great power (and until 2016 with China) an oscillating Trump presidency in Norway's major ally was rather unwelcome. Like the Danish government, however, the Norwegian government sought to establish the closest possible ties with the new US administration. Although Norway has promised to increase its defence budget – 1,62 % of GDP by 2017 – towards 2% of its GDP during the next decade, the Norwegian (like the Danish) government received a letter in the summer of 2018 requesting increased spending.

The government's foreign and security policy report of April 2017⁵⁷ was laconic regarding possible changes in US foreign policy. Apart from emphasizing NATO and the US as the cornerstones of its security policy, close bilateral security and defence ties with selected European allies (the UK, Germany, France and the Netherlands) and with two NATO partner countries (Sweden and Finland) were stressed. Norway will take the initiative, implying regular consultations between NATO and Sweden/Finland.⁵⁸ Generally, 'the security political dialogue and cooperation in Norden'...should be...'stepped up'.⁵⁹ As should be evident, Nordic cooperation is given a higher priority in the Norwegian report than in the Danish strategies.

Unaffected by any Trump effect, Russo-Norwegian relations have continued to sour. The two parties engaged in mutual 'spy catching' during 2017–18. Unrelated to this, the NATO exercise 'Trident Juncture' with an article 5 collective defence scenario was held in October–November 2018 in central and eastern parts of Norway, mainly. This was the largest of its kind in Norway since the 1980s.

56 *Ibid.*, 15.

57 Regjeringen n.d.

58 *Ibid.*, 31.

59 *Ibid.*, 7.

Sweden at a Dead End

Shortly before the election of Donald Trump, US vice president Joe Biden had visited Stockholm (August 2016) and formulated, in public, a virtual bilateral guarantee of US protection of Swedish territory.⁶⁰ With Trump's oscillating view of such commitments, even in relation to NATO allies, the value of Biden's statement is now questionable (although the countries' defence ministers met in the summer of 2018). Moreover, opinion polls in Sweden regarding NATO membership display a no majority: 35% in favour, 46% against.⁶¹ This is crucial since Swedish voters have been promised that possible membership must be confirmed in a popular referendum. Appreciating their age-old neutrality, Swedes have traditionally nurtured a solid no majority, but that gradually changed to a yes after Crimea.⁶² Now, however, with the great unpopularity of Donald Trump among the Swedes, the pendulum has swung back.⁶³ Moreover, in a Q & A session at a conference in Norway, defence minister Hultqvist argued that the *status quo* was preferable since a referendum would only divide the country and pave the way for hostile cyber intrusion and 'fake news'.⁶⁴

In addition, Sweden supported the adoption in the UN General Assembly of a comprehensive ban on nuclear weapons (as distinct from NATO-members and Finland, e.g.) This led to a warning from Pentagon to the Swedish Ministry of Defence (August 2017): should Sweden ratify the treaty, it would have 'negative consequences for Swedish-American political, military, and industrial cooperation'⁶⁵ (and rule out Swedish NATO membership, one can safely assume). The issue has been delayed by the appointment of a special commission. But it has, in any case, created a public wedge between Margot Wallström and Peter Hultqvist.

So, taken together, Sweden is now at a dead-end, trapped in a situation of frozen relations with Russia combined with status as non-aligned that it can hardly escape. Sweden has voluntarily tied itself to Baltic security and defence⁶⁶ without getting NATO's article 5 in return. The Baltic Sea is no longer an effective moat.

60 'No one should misunderstand, neither Mr. Putin or anybody else, that this [Sweden, presumably] is inviolable territory. Period. Period. Period.' See: Tronarp and Svensson 2016.

61 7–12 June 2017 (SIFO). See: Svenska Dagbladet 2017.

62 The only available SIFO poll with a yes majority – 41% yes and 39% no – was conducted in 2-8 September 2015. See: Svenska Dagbladet 2015.

63 This happened already in 2016, though, as seen from a poll in July that year.

64 The Leangkollen Security Conference, 13–14 February 2017. See: The Norwegian Atlantic Committee 2017.

65 Gotkowska 2017.

66 In the formulation of Mike Winnerstig: 'Every imaginable military conflict in the Baltic Sea area would lead to Sweden's territory being much coveted by the warring parties, especially for operations directed at the Baltics.' See: Wiklund *et al.* 2017.

Finland Less Vulnerable to the Trump Effect

A similar 'Trump effect' cannot be discerned in Finland, for the simple reason that Finnish public opinion has been against NATO membership all along (21% yes vs. 51% no, as of 15 February 2017).⁶⁷ Also, the fact that Finland is more self-reliant than Sweden in purely military terms makes it less vulnerable to fluctuations in US NATO-policy.

Finnish president Niinistö openly aired the possibility in early 2017 of hosting a Trump-Putin summit in Helsinki. Political contacts with Russia have continued at all levels; for instance, Putin visited Helsinki again in June 2017 as part of the celebrations of the centenary of the Finnish state. In July 2018, a Trump-Putin summit was finally held in Helsinki. This in itself was a considerable victory for Finnish diplomacy. Substantially, however, Niinistö's attempt to direct his guests' attention to the Baltic Sea region did not seem to bear fruit as judged from their common press conference.⁶⁸

The Trump Paradox

There is an inherent paradox in Trump's approach to the Nordic countries and their Russia-relations. If Trump had adhered to an 'empire of evil' view of Russia, his 'spend, spend, spend' prescription for the defence budgets of US friends and allies would follow logically. However, there is a discrepancy between his undogmatic, even positive, view of Russia and Putin and his budget pressure (Trump's incentive seems to be mostly about alliance geo-economics, of the form: 'We, the US, do not want to be taken advantage of anymore').

The souring of Russo-Nordic relations cannot be blamed on Trump, thus, but is part of the purely regional dynamics analysed above. The only known substantial issues, where the US administration has tried to affect Nordic policies, have been the Danish decision about Nord Stream 2 and the Swedish ratification of the comprehensive ban on nuclear weapons. Only the former of these has to do with Russia policy, and it is probably (again) grounded more in US geo-economics (the export ambitions regarding liquid natural gas to Europe) than in fear of Russia.

For reasons of proximity, the Nordic territory is more vital to Russia than to the US. The US does not, like Russia, fear a common Nordic front against it. Thus, it has no incentive towards wedging in the region. By contrast, as recently as during the Obama presidency, the US encouraged Nordic security and defence cooperation. Trump, however, has been less interested in the region.

67 Even if Sweden is assumed to join, there is still a no majority, though smaller: 38% yes vs. 44% no. See: Yle 2017.

68 On 16 July 2018. See: The Guardian 2018.

However, the Trump phenomenon has its *unintended* consequences. Notably, Sweden's position has reached a dead end. A future unintended consequence might be that increased Danish and Norwegian defence spendings, appeasing Trump, will cause further tensions in their bilateral Russia-relations and in the region as a whole. This will depend mostly on which kind of weaponry, the spendings are used for.

Russian Divide-and-Rule?

As presented, 'divide and rule' (*divide et impera*) is a classic (geo)political strategy. By dividing (or wedging) the weaker parties by means of carrots and sticks, the stronger can rest assured that they will not form a united front against him. Thus, divide and rule is in no way a Russian speciality but is a typical instrument of great powers when dealing with a group of comparable countries, typically belonging to one and the same region.

Has Russia practiced divide and rule among the Nordics in order to prevent a united Nordic front? This is obviously difficult to prove, since this type of strategy is seldom or never publicly admitted, but is typically a strategy ascribed to others.⁶⁹ However, the timing of the deterioration in or improvement of individual Nordic Russia relations may provide a clue. Thus, we have seen that Swedish-Russian relations were favourable, as long as Denmark was in the Russian 'freezer' between 2002 and 2008. And then, as Swedish-Russian relations deteriorated from 2008, Danish-Russian relations improved drastically. At the same time, both Norway and Finland had fairly good relations with Russia. A bold hypothesis could be that there is only room for *one* Nordic country at a time in the Russian sin bin. So, now that Norwegian-Russian relations have soured since 2015, and deteriorated even further during the spring of 2017, it may be no coincidence that a surprise meeting was held between Sergei Lavrov and Margot Wallström (Moscow, February 2017), possibly signifying a defrosting of relations. At the following joint press conference, Lavrov declared that 'I hope that your visit today will help overcome not the best period in the relations of Russia and Sweden and will outline further steps for restoring...mutually beneficial relations.'⁷⁰ In October 2017, the Russian ambassador to Sweden, in a newspaper interview, called for the two countries 'to make peace in their heads.'⁷¹

It would be an overstatement to say that this aspiration has been fulfilled, but contacts between the two foreign ministers were maintained during the Swedish membership of the UN Security Council during 2017-18, where agenda items were an available conversation topic. In April 2019, prime minister Stefan Löfven met with Putin on the sideline of an international Arctic forum in St. Petersburg. Of course, also the Swedes may have

69 Neither is divide-and-rule likely to be admitted in interviews. 'Even if we have the divide and rule principle on our mind, we are not so naïve as to develop any schemes on that basis...if our partners feel that Russia is really after this, it would do nothing but unite them' (Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Ryabkov). See: Russia Beyond 2008.

70 Tass 2017.

71 Kunz 2018, 6.

been interested in some form of reconciliation after the election of Donald Trump and the uncertain prospects of borrowing US deterrence.

What Degree of Nordic Cohesion Can Be Expected?

The historical analysis of Nordic cooperation and its barriers should indicate that bilateral relations with a great power have often been too important for Nordic cooperation, let alone a common Nordic policy. In spite of an amorphous popular Nordicity, self-interest in each capital has always prevailed. Profound interest in Nordic foreign and security policy cooperation has mostly been limited to one government at a time – typically the geopolitically exposed one – whereas the rest have been lukewarm. This has either been due to different geopolitical interests or, in a few cases, idiosyncrasies based on specific interpretations of common history.

This background should provide ideal conditions for Russian wedging. However, the Ukraine conflict has led to converging perceptions of geopolitical interests among the four governments (a modest beginning could be discerned already post-Georgia). In the absence of significant contemporary idiosyncrasies, this will strengthen cohesion and cooperation. This is historically unique. Whether objectively justified or not, all four Nordic states, with the partial exception of Denmark, perceive Russia as threatening. They are subject to near-overflights and, more or less, alleged attacks in cyber space. Finland has a long border with Russia, and Sweden is concerned about the Gotland scenario. Norway borders the Kola peninsula, the home of the Russian Northern Fleet, and is currently subject to deteriorating relations with Russia. Therefore, foreign and security policy cooperation between these three countries, along with defence cooperation, will continue to intensify. Denmark may join in, if Russia should be perceived as a threat in relation to the Baltic Sea island of Bornholm, notably (e.g. from the Iskander missile system being moved to Kaliningrad). If so, NATO would still be trusted, but Nordic cooperation would emerge as a significant supplement.

Cooperation and coordination are not tantamount to a common policy, though. The common op-ed by Nordic defence ministers, in itself a diplomatic accomplishment, is probably as far as the capitals can go, as judged from historical experience. And after all, the op-ed was more about Russian 'sins' than what should be done in common about them.

The Trump phenomenon has not led the two Nordic NATO-members to flee into the arms of their Nordic brethren or European partners; they have done their best to accommodate Trump's budgetary prescriptions as part of a 'fear of abandonment'. Moreover, the deterioration in Russo-Nordic relations has nothing to do with Trump. The only known US pressure related to substantive Russia policies has been about the Danish Nord Stream 2 decision. There are unintended consequences of the 'Trump factor', nonetheless. Sweden's position has reached a dead end. More broadly, there may be future unintended effects of increased defence spendings on Russo-Nordic relations that are difficult to predict.

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