

May 1, 1979.

NATO'S NORTHERN FLANK: THE GROWING SOVIET THREAT

INTRODUCTION

In recent months, Denmark and Norway--two of the countries comprising NATO's Northern Flank--have become greatly alarmed by the increased Soviet presence in the Nordic region. This presence has been gradually but steadily building over the past decade, until it now represents a constant reminder of Soviet military power. Current agitation among the Scandinavian leadership can be traced to recent, overt Soviet military activity in North Europe, apparently designed as much for demonstrating the U.S.S.R.'s expanding dominance of the region as for improving military preparedness.

Serious interest in the increased activity of the Soviet Union arose in early 1978, as, one by one, the countries along the northern tier of Europe felt both subtle and overt Soviet pressures. In mid-April, preliminary Soviet naval exercises commenced in the Baltic. Soviet naval exercises have been held annually in the Baltic Sea for some years. It has not escaped Scandinavian notice, however, that each year the maneuvers seem to take place closer to Western European territory than the year before. At the end of June 1978, the Soviets staged a large-scale marine landing on the island of Osel (100 miles east of Gotland) that was later declared to be the largest amphibious landing ever held in the Baltic by the U.S.S.R.

During mid-1978, Soviet air activity also increased. Sweden, a non-aligned Scandinavian power, began complaining about Soviet violations of Swedish air space. And NATO-member Denmark reported that U.S.S.R. military aircraft were violating Danish air space at

least once a month. One senior Danish military official commented at the time: "We are constantly scrambling fighters."¹

Meanwhile, in July 1978, the Soviet Defense Minister, Marshal Dmitri Ustinov, visited Finland for talks with Finnish leaders. Finland, though ostensibly a neutral country, has assumed an accommodating position toward the Soviet Union ever since its signing of a friendship and mutual assistance treaty with the U.S.S.R. in the 1940s. Nevertheless, few Nordic officials were prepared when, in September, stories began leaking out that during his visit Marshal Ustinov had twice proposed that Finland and the Soviet Union hold joint military maneuvers. If true (the Finnish government quickly denied the stories), it portended the most serious threat to Finland's neutrality since the 1961 Fenno-Soviet Note Crisis--when the Soviet Union had strongly proposed "consultations, in accordance with the Finnish-Soviet Treaty on Friendship, Co-operation and Mutual Assistance, on measures for the defense of the borders of the two countries against the threat of armed aggression on the part of West Germany and states allied with it."² Officials were also not soothed by the news in November that Finland had reportedly agreed to purchase Soviet-produced surface-to-air missiles in the coming year.

Norway felt the Soviet Union's pressure starting in mid-summer, when Soviet commercial ships, in transit through Norwegian waters, began breaking the international rules of "innocent passage" by making prolonged halts in Norwegian territory. Further straining Norwegian-Soviet relations, in late August a Soviet navy TU-16 BADGER bomber crashed on the Norwegian island of Hopen (located south-east of Spitsbergen) in the Norwegian Sea. The Norwegian government refused to turn over the plane's flight recorder to the Soviets without first inspecting it.

The upshot of all this Soviet activity has been a heightened sense of alarm on the part of NATO's Northern Flank members. Norway and Denmark have long sought to tread the thin line between their NATO commitments and their low-key relationship with the Soviet

1. Quoted in Eugene Kozicharov, "Soviet Buildup in Baltic Troubles Danes," Aviation Week & Space Technology, November 13, 1978, p. 49. See also Drew Middleton, "East Block Activity Alarming Denmark," The New York Times, December 6, 1978, p. 10. (Defense & Foreign Affairs Daily is extremely useful for supplying on-going information on Soviet activity in the Nordic region.)

2. Quoted in Max Jakobson, Finnish Neutrality (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1968), p. 70. The announced reason for the submission of the October 1961 note was the military threat from a revanchist Germany operating under the cloak of NATO. Under Article II of the Treaty, Finland is obligated to consult with the U.S.S.R. "in the event of a threat of military attack" from Germany.

Union. Now, however, they find themselves worried that perhaps this low profile won't be enough to guarantee their security. Norway, for example, has always banned the full participation of West German troops in NATO military exercises held on Norwegian territory. However, in November 1978, the Norwegian Defense Association--a group of citizens concerned about defense matters--suddenly began calling for allowing German troops to take part in NATO maneuvers on Norwegian soil. This in itself suggests the seriousness with which some elements of the population take recent Soviet activities.

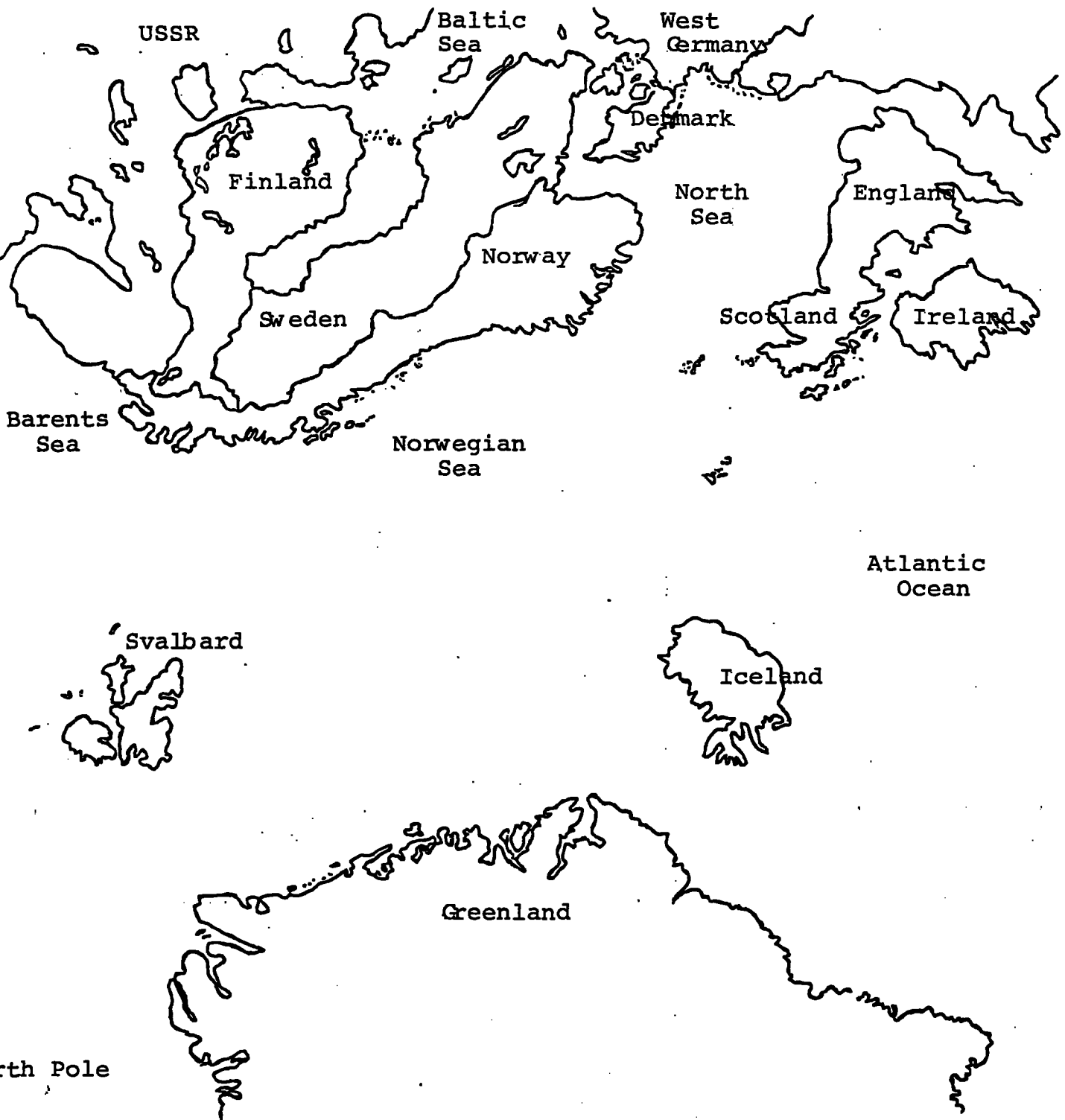
A GEOSTRATEGIC OVERVIEW OF THE NORTHERN FLANK³

The land area comprising NATO's Northern Flank runs some 1680 miles--from the North Cape of Norway down to the lower border of the West German province of Schleswig-Holstein. The sea area of the Northern Flank is even more extensive, encompassing the Norwegian Sea, the North Sea, the Baltic Approaches, the Baltic Sea, and a major portion of the North Atlantic.

The northernmost area of Norway--Finnmark--is the only NATO territory directly abutting the Soviet Union. Finnmark's border with the U.S.S.R. is some 120 miles long. Finnmark is an extremely isolated region with a very small population, located well within the Arctic Circle. Norway's only rail line running north from Oslo terminates at Bodo, 720 miles short of the Soviet frontier. The major road that connects North with South Norway can be kept open in winter only through extensive and continuous snow-clearing operations. The region's strategically exposed position undoubtedly contributes to the Norwegian decision to maintain only a nominal military presence there. Only one regular battalion of Norwegian soldiers is stationed at the border in Finnmark, and this is backed up by a single brigade group at Bardufoss.

Just to the east of Finnmark lies Soviet territory--the Kola Peninsula. On this peninsula is located the city of Murmansk, home-port for the Soviet Northern Fleet. The Murmansk naval complex (also comprising the bases at Severomorsk and Polynarnii) is the largest naval base in the world. From here the 60 major surface

3. On the geographical and military aspects of the Northern Flank, see John Erickson, "The Northern Theater: Soviet Capabilities and Concepts," Strategic Review, Vol. 4 (Summer 1976), pp. 67-82; and General Sir John Sharp, Commander-in-Chief, Allied Forces Northern Europe, "The Northern Flank," lecture delivered to the Royal United Services Institute, 24 March 1976, subsequently published in the RUSI Journal, December 1976.



THE NORTHERN FLANK

combatants, 171 submarines, and 400-plus other naval vessels of the Northern Fleet regularly sortie.⁴ Protection for the strategically-important Murmansk complex is furnished by a network of some sixteen military airfields. Two Soviet motorized rifle divisions are deployed at full readiness in the northern part of the peninsula. One is emplaced only a short distance from the Norwegian border. The other is somewhat further south, being aligned with the Finnish border in such a way that its axis of advance in wartime would take it through Finnish Lapland into northern Norway. Six lower-readiness divisions are situated on the Kola Peninsula as well. In addition to all of these forces, an amphibious-trained regiment of naval infantry is based only seven miles from the Norwegian border, at Pechenga (the former Finnish port of Petsamo).

At the other end of NATO's Northern Flank lie Denmark and the West German province of Schleswig-Holstein. Denmark sits astride the Baltic Approaches, its major islands of Fyn (Funen) and Sjaelland (Zealand) separating the navigable waters of the Kattegat Strait into two major passageways--Store Baelt (Great Belt) and Oresund (The Sound). Deployment of Danish forces is determined by the diversity of Denmark's territorial responsibilities. Three of Denmark's five armored infantry brigades are stationed on the Jutland Peninsula, for support of the West German 6th Armored Infantry Division in its defense of Schleswig-Holstein. The other two are based on Zealand, on which the Danish capital, Copenhagen, is located. A final battalion group is stationed on the Danish island of Bornholm in the Baltic, some ninety miles to the east.

The Baltic Sea extends from the Gulf of Bothnia in the north and Gulf of Finland in the east, to the Jutland Peninsula in the west. It is a relatively shallow sea, the water depths in its western part seldom exceeding 100 feet. Warsaw Pact forces rim the Baltic in strength on the south. The headquarters for the Soviet Red Banner fleet is not a part of the forces of the Northern "theater of operations" but rather a part of the forces of the Western "theater of operations.") This Soviet Baltic fleet, though smaller than its Northern counter part, is still formidable, with an average strength of some 55 major surface combatants and 30 submarines. Other Soviet naval bases in the Baltic Sea include

4. The figures on Northern Fleet naval strength are taken from Intelligence Digest, 1 December 1978, p. 5. It should be noted that figures vary from source to source. The 1978-1979 Military Balance (London: IISS), for example, gives average strength figures of 55 and 120 respectively, for the first two categories cited above.

Baltysk (the fleet's largest operating base), Kronstadt, and Leningrad. The Red Banner Fleet is supported in the Baltic by the Polish and East German navies. Warsaw Pact ground forces in northern East Germany and Poland include fourteen army divisions (one airborne) and substantial amphibious forces--a Soviet naval infantry regiment, a Polish sea-landing division, and elements of an East German rifle division trained for amphibious warfare.

West of the Jutland Peninsula sits the North Sea, a shallow body of water whose main basin has sides roughly 400 miles long. On the west it is bounded by the United Kingdom. On the south and east, Belgium, the Netherlands, West Germany, Denmark, and Norway mark its edge. It is this sea that ships carrying supplies for NATO would have to last traverse in order to reach the major Western European ports.

Above the North Sea lies the Norwegian Sea, known for the frequency of its storms. Its boundaries are marked by Norway on the east, Iceland and Greenland on the west, and the Norwegian archipelago of Svalbard on the north. The western entrance to the Norwegian Sea is called the Greenland-Iceland-United Kingdom Gap. One of its two direct passages from the Atlantic--the Denmark Strait--is situated above the Arctic Circle. The other, shallower, direct passage is dotted in its central and southern parts by the Faeroes, Shetland, and Orkney Island chains. The Greenland-Iceland-United Kingdom Gap possesses a major strategic value for both NATO and the Warsaw Pact, since its passages are the normal approaches to and exits from the Murman Coast and, specifically, the Soviet naval complex at Murmansk. Soviet naval forces from the Northern Fleet readily traverse the waters of the Norwegian Sea. NATO forces fronting on the Norwegian Sea in northern Scotland and Norway are augmented by aircraft operating out of the United States air base at Keflavik, Iceland and by ships from the U.S. Second Fleet cruising in northern waters.

SOVIET POLITICAL STRATEGY IN THE NORDIC AREA

There are political, military, and economic components to the Soviet Union's strategy in the Nordic area. The first two components are, however, of paramount importance in explaining recent Soviet maneuvering in the North. The U.S.S.R.'s political strategy behind her heightened military maneuvering is entirely comprehensible at first glance: to unhinge Norway, Denmark, and Iceland from the Atlantic Alliance. The Soviet Union hopes to accomplish this by so demonstrating Soviet military dominance of the region that these countries will seek accommodation with it. Despite what one might think, this could well occur.

Since 1945, the Scandinavian region, because of its proximity to the Soviet Union, has been extremely careful of its relationship with the superpower to the east. For example, Finland maintains its existence as a neutral country by generally tilting toward the U.S.S.R. in its government policies. Sweden, on the other hand, guards her neutral status through the maintenance of a strong armed forces and with the hope that if a Soviet attack comes, NATO will come to her aid. And Norway and Denmark go out of their way to avoid unnecessarily antagonizing the Soviet Union, despite their membership in NATO. The Norwegian (and to a large extent, the Scandinavian) position was accurately portrayed three years ago by Norwegian Foreign Minister Knut Frydenlund. He commented:

Norway's security position is, to a large degree, a function of the global balance and of developments in the general relationship between the superpowers....

Due to the exposed strategic position--at the cross-roads of the superpowers' strategic interests--Norway has consistently been an advocate of arms control, reduced tensions and reciprocal restraint. Norwegian security interests are such as to demand top priority for East-West negotiations and a policy of negotiated restraint.... In the nuclear age we see no alternative to a policy of negotiation.⁵

A good example of Norwegian and Danish restraint is the "base policy" that each maintains. Both countries refuse to allow the permanent stationing of foreign military forces or nuclear warheads on their territories during peacetime. The Norwegian base policy (declared in a February 1949 note to the Soviet Government), the more carefully-wrought of the two, is conditional in nature, since it applies only as long as Norway is not "attacked or subject to threats of attack."⁶ The Danish base policy, though less-officially declared, has so far been just as effective in avoiding Soviet displeasure. In addition to its base policy, Norway enforces a low military profile in North Norway, refusing to permit allied training exercises in Finnmark or to permit allied military aircraft to fly further east over its territory than 24 degrees East, some 130 miles from the Soviet frontier.

5. Knut Frydenlund, "The Security of Norway and the Atlantic Alliance," Atlantic Community Quarterly (Summer 1976), p. 207.

6. "The Danish base policy, compared to that of Norway, appears less well-reasoned and less clearly conceived as a security policy instrument; it seems to be more an incidental outcome of a domestic political game. Before Denmark joined NATO, the Danish foreign minister stated in the parliament that NATO membership would not be followed by the stationing of allied forces in Denmark in peacetime. However, the policy as stated was not clearly conditional, as was Norway's and it was not part of an official note sent to the Soviet Government." Erik Beukel, Norway's Base Policy: Historical Interplay Between International Security Policy and Domestic Political Needs (Washington D.C.: Center for Strategic & International Studies, Georgetown University, 1977), p. 3.

In Iceland, the presence of a strong Communist party plays to the Soviets' advantage. During Iceland's "Cod War" with Great Britain over fishing rights, the Icelandic Communists encouraged national anger in an attempt to pull the country out of NATO. At the present time, the Communists continue to advocate the closing down of the United States' air base at Keflavik as the first step in withdrawing from the Alliance.

NATO's chief political worry about recent Soviet military maneuvering is that it will so successfully demonstrate Soviet control of the Nordic region that the Alliance's northern member-states will find it necessary to loosen their present ties. Given the region's long interest in neutrality and the relative strength of pacifist sentiment among the population, such a reaction is not entirely improbable.

SOVIET MILITARY STRATEGY IN THE NORDIC AREA

The area of North Europe is of immense military importance to the Soviet Union. The Soviets do not consider the area a "flank" of the more important Central Front, as do the United States and its NATO allies. Instead, the Soviet Union considers the area a "theater of operations" significant enough to be one of the six operational branches of the Soviet Armed Forces General Staff's Operations Directorate.⁷ The massive expenditure of money and material on the Murmansk naval complex is a demonstration of the Soviet Union's understanding of the region's strategic importance.

There are a number of factors that explain the U.S.S.R.'s increasing interest in North Europe. First, the Murman Coast is one of the Soviet Union's most vulnerable coastlines. Unlike other parts of the Soviet coast, the Murman Coast has no practical buffer, the Barents Sea being easily accessible from the Atlantic. American submarines can approach this coastline with much less chance of detection. Second, Murmansk is the only major Soviet port with ready access in wartime to open water.

Egress from Baltic ports . . . is restricted, since ships must move through Denmark's Skagerrak and Kattegat straits. Similarly, the only exit for Black Sea ports is via the Dardanelles.

In the Pacific, Soviet ships homeported in the vicinity of Vladivostok, on the Sea of Japan, are hemmed in by the Japanese island chain.⁸

7. Erickson, "The Northern Theater: Soviet Capabilities and Concepts," pp. 67-68.

8. Captain Gerald E. Synhorst, U.S. Navy, "Soviet Strategic Interest in the Maritime Arctic," United States Naval Institute Proceedings, Vol. 99 (May 1973), p. 90.

Third, Murmansk is a port well-suited for the basing of submarines, since it is situated within easy operating distance of NATO lines of communication. And fourth, the Barents Sea and the Norwegian Sea have become useful operating areas for Soviet ballistic missile submarines since the SS-N-8 with its 4800 mile range was introduced into the fleet in 1973.

For all of these reasons, the Soviet Union sees the entire Northern European area as a vital part of its defensive perimeter. Just as in its land strategy for postwar Europe, the U.S.S.R. first sought to provide a buffer zone along its western boundary by occupying and controlling the Eastern European states, so in its maritime strategy for North Europe, as its naval capability has grown, it has sought to erect a sea-based buffer zone that stretches from the Murman Coast north into the Barents Sea and far west into the Norwegian Sea. The Soviets understand the advantages of a defense in depth. Therefore, they have endeavored to extend their operational control over northern waters, while preventing intrusion by foreign naval vessels into waters which they consider vital to their own security. Thus, in the Arctic, the Soviets continue to consider the Siberian Seas (Kara, Laptev, East Siberian, and Chukchi) territorial waters. As a result, they have not only denied American icebreakers permission to pass through straits considered to be within their territorial waters, but they have also issued instructions to defense forces to destroy any submerged submarines found violating U.S.S.R. boundaries.

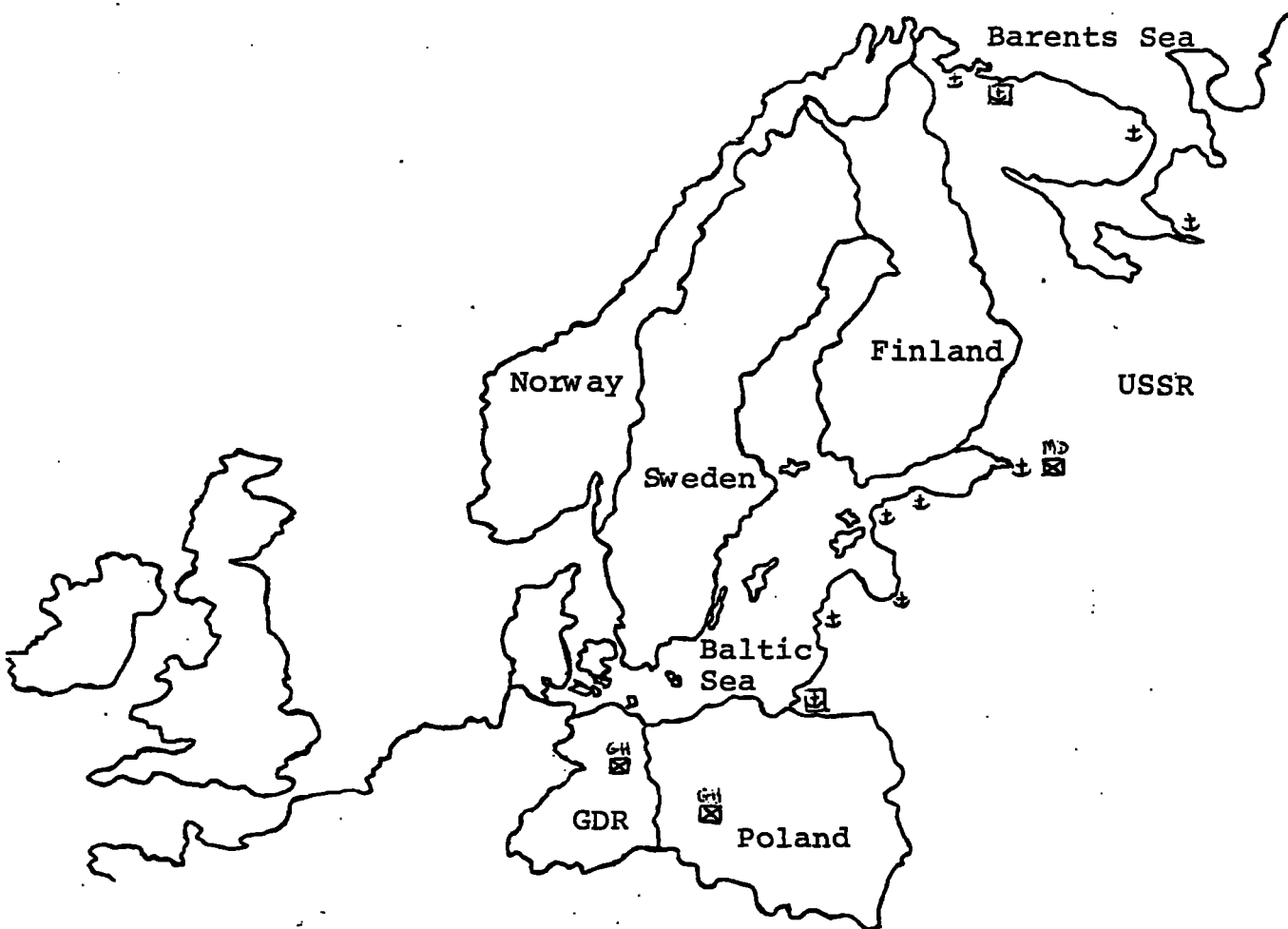
SVALBARD AND THE BARENTS SEA

In the Barents Sea area, the Soviets have attempted to keep outside forces from gaining a foothold by asserting their legal prerogatives. Norway's Svalbard archipelago is a case in point. Norway was granted sovereignty over Svalbard (then called Spitsbergen) in a 1920 treaty that was originally signed by nine powers, including the United States, France, and Great Britain.⁹ Under this treaty, all parties were allowed to "carry on there without impediment all maritime, industrial, mining and commercial operations on a footing of absolute equality."¹⁰ In the years following the adoption of that treaty, however, only Norway and the Soviet Union bothered to establish settlements on Svalbard. At the present time, the Soviet population on Spitsbergen (the main island of the Svalbard group) outnumbers the Norwegian population more than two to one.

9. The treaty did not go into effect until 1924, when it was ratified by the contracting parties. Treaty Between The United States And Other Powers Relating to Spitsbergen. Treaty Series, No. 686 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1924).

10. Article 3. Treaty, p. 5. Article 10 gave "Russian nationals and companies" the same rights as nationals of the contracting parties until the "Russian Government" could be recognized by the contracting parties. Treaty, p. 9. The Soviet government acceded to the treaty in 1935.

Major Soviet and Warsaw Pact Force Dispositions Along
NATO's Northern Flank



☒ : Soviet Fleet Headquarters (Northern Fleet-- Murmansk, Red Banner Fleet--Kaliningrad)

⊕ : Soviet Naval Bases

☒ : Leningrad Military District-- (Soviet Forces Kola Peninsula):
9 Divisions (2 in Category 1
Readiness, 1 Airborne)

☒ : Warsaw Pact Army Group Headquarters--Northern Group of Forces
(Legnica, Poland): 2-3 Soviet
Divisions, 9 Polish Divisions
(4 Tank, 1 Airborne,
1 Amphibious)

Group of Soviet Forces Germany
(Zossen-Wünsdorf, East Germany
near Berlin): presumably
designated for Baltic area
operations from this Group--
3 Soviet Divisions, 6 East
German Divisions (2 Tank)

Coal mining is the principal activity on Spitsbergen and the ostensible reason for the large Soviet presence there.¹¹ Yet it is apparent that military considerations play a part in the Soviet activities on the island. In recent years, the Soviets have established a helicopter base at their settlement of Barentsburg, equipped with five thirty-man "civilian" helicopters, and have erected a sophisticated radio and television tower for the transmission and interception of communications. And despite Norwegian sovereignty over Svalbard, the Soviet settlements at Barentsburg and Prymaiden regularly refuse to honor Norwegian regulations, particularly with regard to air traffic control and control of the use of radio transmissions. In one incident, after the Norwegian airport at Longyearbyen was completed in 1975, the Soviets demanded that they be allowed to station twenty Aeroflot personnel there in order to handle their once-monthly flights, while only five Norwegian personnel were needed to handle thrice-weekly SAS airline flights. Although Norway denied this excessive demand, it eventually acceded to a compromise that allows "five or six" men and equipment to remain at the airfield. Although none of the recent Soviet activities on Spitsbergen have any outright military character, they do seem to skirt legality. Article 9 of the Spitsbergen treaty directly forbade the establishment of military bases in the archipelago.¹²

To the east of Svalbard lies the Barents Sea. Here the Soviet Union has attempted to use its legal prerogatives to accomplish two things deemed strategically important: 1) to effect a Soviet-Norwegian condominium over the continental shelf in order to keep foreign oil companies from drilling for oil; and 2) to push their continental shelf boundary as far west as possible.

The reasons for attempting to keep foreign oil companies out of the Barents Sea are largely military in nature. First, the Soviet Union fears that foreign oil rigs would be used by NATO forces as platforms for the passive monitoring of Soviet naval activity. Second, it is concerned that the emplacement of such rigs would hamper the passage of their submarines from Murmansk to the Norwegian Sea by further canalizing the relatively shallow waters around the North Cape.

11. Interestingly enough, with twice the manpower (more than 2000 people), the Soviets only manage to mine about the same amount of coal each year as the Norwegians.

12. Article 9. Treaty Relating to Spitsbergen, p. 9.

To effect this Soviet-Norwegian condominium, the Soviets would like to model a Barents Sea agreement on the 1968 Declaration on the Continental Shelf of the Baltic Sea. Among other things, this Declaration provided that:

9. Parcels of the continental shelf of the Baltic Sea must not be given over for exploration, exploitation, and other used to non-Baltic states, their nationals or firms.

10. Participants of the Declaration will consult among themselves covering questions of mutual interest in connection with the use of the continental shelf of the Baltic Sea.¹³

Under such an agreement, Norway would be required to consult with the Soviet Union before proceeding with any oil drilling on the continental shelf, and foreign oil companies would be entirely excluded from the area. Negotiations on this matter have not yet progressed in this direction.

The reason for the Soviet Union's desire to push their continental shelf boundary as far west as possible is also primarily military in nature. Soviet YANKEE-class submarines stationed at Murmansk must traverse the Barents Sea to get into the Atlantic. In addition to this, Soviet DELTA-class submarines now use the Barents as an operating area. Thus, the U.S.S.R. has a need to control as large a part of the Barents Sea as possible.

Formal negotiations on continental shelf boundaries first began at Norwegian request, following the visit of the Norwegian Prime Minister to Moscow in 1974. Both sides initially agreed to use the 1968 Geneva Convention on the Continental Shelf as their point of departure.¹⁴ However, the two countries were soon at odds, since Norway insisted that the boundary line should be drawn equidistant between Norwegian and Soviet territory, while the Soviet Union argued for application of the "sector principle"--drawing the boundary line straight north from its easternmost extremity to the Pole.¹⁵

13. Quoted in John C. Ausland, "Spitsbergen: Who's in Control?" United States Naval Institute Proceedings, Vol. 104 (November 1978), p. 66. The Baltic Declaration was signed by the U.S.S.R., the German Democratic Republic, and Poland.

14. "Article 6 (2) of the Geneva Convention states, 'Where the same continental shelf is adjacent to the territories of two adjacent states, the boundary of the continental shelf shall be determined by agreement between them. In the absence of agreement, and unless another boundary line is justified by special circumstances, the boundary shall be determined by application of the principle of equidistance'" Ibid., footnote, p. 65.

15. For an excellent discussion of the "sector principle," see Synhorst, "Soviet Strategic Interest in the Maritime Arctic," pp. 99-100.

The result of this boundary disagreement was the de facto establishment of a 144,000 square mile "grey zone," comprising the area circumscribed by the differing Norwegian and Soviet boundary lines. Within this zone, the Soviet Union uses implied threats of force to keep Norwegian vessels excluded. For example, in June 1976, Norway announced that a survey ship would be conducting seismic surveys in the disputed area. The Soviets immediately proclaimed that they would be holding missile tests in the area and warned all ships to stay clear. The Norwegian vessel was withdrawn.¹⁶ And in 1977, officers from a Soviet patrol boat stopped and boarded a Norwegian fishing trawler operating in the "grey zone," in direct contravention of the agreement that each country's fishing vessels be inspected in the disputed area only by its own patrol boats. Such actions have made the Norwegians much more cautious about allowing their shipping to enter this disputed area.

NORWEGIAN SEA AREA

The Norwegian Sea has been the site of intense Soviet naval activity ever since its first open-ocean exercises in 1961. In Okean 1970, one of the two largest naval exercises so far held by the Soviet Navy, the central focus of the maneuvers was an attack by a mixed task force on a simulated NATO strike force deploying into the Norwegian Sea.¹⁷ And in the massive Vesna (Okean) 1975 exercise, Soviet submarines set up a barrier between Iceland and the Norwegian Sea and the North Atlantic to block lines of communication between North America and Western Europe. This naval activity illustrates the Soviet Union's desire to both extend its wartime defense perimeter far enough out from the Murman Coast to keep U.S. carrier striking forces out of range of major Soviet military and industrial targets and to position its offensive forces across western shipping lanes so as to prevent early resupply of NATO's Central Front.

Norway is itself one of the important Soviet objectives in this area. At the beginning of any East-West hostilities, northern Norway, in particular, would be the object of Soviet attack.

16. Ausland, "Spitsbergen: Who's in Control?" p. 65. The Soviets had closed off a substantial portion of the zone to shipping for the same reason in 1975. Sharp, "The Northern Flank," p. 15.

17. Erickson, "The Northern Theater: Soviet Capabilities And Concepts," p. 75; Donald C. Daniel, "Trends and Patterns in Major Soviet Naval Exercises," in Paul J. Murphy, ed., Naval Power in Soviet Policy, Studies in Communist Affairs--Volume Two (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1978), pp. 225-226.

Because of its geographical position and its limited defensive capabilities, northern Norway would be almost indefensible in a conventional war. Seizure of Finnmark and Troms would provide both an additional land buffer for the Soviet base at Murmansk and a staging area for air and naval forces covering Northern Fleet operations against NATO shipping in the Norwegian and North Seas. And if the southern portion of Norway were taken, Belgium, Holland, Denmark, and Germany would be isolated. The desirability of Norwegian bases could even lead the U.S.S.R. to launch a pre-emptive attack in the event of a severe East-West crisis. As John Erickson pointed out: "It is worth observing that while pre-emption on the central front might not, indeed most probably would not, be countenanced by the political leadership in Moscow, pre-emption at sea and within the confines of the northern TVD may well be sanctioned, if only for reasons of an effective defense of the Soviet base complexes."¹⁸

NORTH SEA AREA

The Soviets understand the importance of the North Sea to NATO. All of the major continental Western European ports in the north (excepting those in France) front on the North Sea. "Except for Central and North Norway, accessible from the Norwegian Sea, overseas trade can reach other nations in the group /Belgium, the Netherlands, West Germany, and Denmark/ only through the North Sea or by transshipping overland."¹⁹ Thus, the wartime establishment of strong Soviet naval forces in the North Sea could seriously disrupt re-supply efforts for the Central Front.

Soviet intelligence gathering in recent years has included naval inspections of Western European oil drilling rigs and offshore gas pipelines in the North Sea. In the Soviet naval exercises of the 1970s, ships from the Baltic fleet have regularly joined for maneuvers in the North Sea with those from the Northern Fleet. This coordination between forces of two "theaters of operation" demonstrates the Soviet Union's expanding capability for operating in the North Sea.

BALTIC SEA AREA

Rapid seizure of the Baltic Approaches, particularly the major

18. Erickson, Op. Cit., p. 80. See also Major General J. L. Moulton, Royal Marines (Ret.), "The Defense of Northwest Europe and the North Sea," United States Naval Institute Proceedings, Vol. 97 (May 1971), p. 92.

19. Moulton, Op. Cit., p. 84.

Danish islands, is the key to Soviet strategy in the Baltic. Without control of the Skagerrak and the Kattegat and the channels separating Funen and Zealand from each other and from the mainland, the Soviets would find their Red Banner Fleet bottled up in the Baltic. In such a case, the fleet would be unable either to augment the Northern Fleet forces operating in the North Sea or to effectively outflank NATO's forward defenses on the Central Front.

The Soviet navy in the Baltic has recently been concentrating its efforts on thoroughly familiarizing its naval vessels with the waters of the western Baltic and the Baltic Approaches. Not only have Soviet vessels increased their maritime surveillance of the Approaches, but Warsaw Pact naval units have significantly increased their navigational training in Danish waters.

SHORING UP THE NORTHERN FLANK

In order to reverse the damage that recent Soviet activity in the Scandinavian region has done to Norwegian and Danish confidence in NATO's ability to protect them, the Alliance is going to have to undertake a series of changes in its Northern Flank policies. These changes are both political (involving measures to shore up confidence) and military in nature. The United States will be heavily involved in this process from the beginning. Not only does the United States provide a significant portion of the combat divisions deployed on NATO's Central Front and a major portion of the naval forces earmarked for NATO in the event of war, but it furnishes many of NATO's senior commanders, including both the Alliance's highest army officer--the Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR)--and one of its two highest naval officers--the Supreme Allied Commander Atlantic (SACLANT). As a major power in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, its influence on NATO policy is immense. Accordingly, the United States will have to be in the forefront on any changing of Northern Flank strategy.

First, NATO will have to demonstrate its renewed interest in the security problems of the Nordic area. Over the past decade, more than one Northern European Commander has wondered aloud if NATO's leaders were not so distracted by their concentration on the problems of the Central Front that they missed seeing the problems on their northern flank. The leadership of the Alliance would have to not only convince Norway and Denmark that they realize the growing Soviet threat exists in the North, but also that they have the will to effectively counter it. The most effective way of demonstrating NATO's renewed interest in the area would be the establishment of a high-visibility naval presence in those waters currently experiencing heightened Soviet naval activity (the western Baltic and the Baltic Approaches). NATO's current interest in conducting major training exercises in North Norway should be continued and even expanded.

Second, the Alliance should strive to establish better coordination in the military command set-up for the Nordic area. At the present time, command responsibility for the Northern Flank region is split among several commanders: CINCHAN, who exercises control over the English Channel and the southern North Sea; SACLANT, who is responsible, among other things, for naval operations in northern European waters (the North Atlantic, the Norwegian Sea, the North Sea, etc.); CINCENT, who exercises control over air defenses for Schleswig-Holstein, despite his primary responsibility for the Central Front; and CINCNORTH, the designated Northern European Commander. This fragmentation of command responsibility in the region makes good coordination absolutely essential.

Improvements in coordination should include the thorough staffing-out of war plans for the employment of joint command task forces in areas where command responsibilities overlap (*i.e.*, the North Sea). In addition to joint planning, increased participation of forces from the various commands in joint training maneuvers should be carried out. This would insure that units of one command designated for operation in the region would become familiar with working together with counterpart units from other commands assigned regional responsibilities.

Third, NATO should strengthen the military posture in the Nordic region. This can be accomplished in several ways.

1) SACEUR should increase the number of military units currently assigned to the Northern European Command. It should be noted that in peacetime, CINCNORTH has operational control over only the Norwegian air defense forces. All other AFNORTH forces, including the Danish air defense forces, remain under national control. Yet apart from this situation, the actual number of units specifically dedicated to the Command is too small. As just one example, the British commando group that trains in North Norway each winter is not dedicated to AFNORTH. CINCNORTH must compete with CINCENT and CINCSOUTH for the greater part of the forces that would be needed to effectively defend the Northern Flank, since the allocation of available reinforcements is dependent upon SACEUR's determination of priorities. This situation should be remedied by the designation of additional forces to AFNORTH, particularly since the successful defense of the Northern Flank is utterly dependent upon the timely arrival of outside reinforcements.

At sea, SACLANT should increase the number of "on call" naval units operating in northern waters. The establishment of a permanent U.S. Second Fleet carrier task force in the Greenland-Iceland-United Kingdom Gap area, although currently impossible due to carrier force constraints, would furnish needed protection to NATO's lines of communication and would provide strong additional air power in the event of hostilities.

2) NATO should upgrade the logistics/support facilities in the Nordic region. The rapidity of reinforcement is largely a function of the volume of men and material that must be transported. If reinforcements for the Northern Flank could be flown or trucked into the combat zone with only minimal equipment, they could arrive more quickly and in greater numbers than if their heavy equipment had to be transported with them. With this point in mind, SACEUR should argue for an increase in the prepositioning of the reinforcing units' heavy equipment, particularly in North Norway.²⁰ In addition, new airfields should be built to handle the volume of supplies that would be needed in the event of a conflict.

3) NATO should improve the level of training for all forces likely to be called upon to operate in the Northern Flank during wartime. Training is particularly critical in regard to North Norway. Naturally enough, Norwegian forces operating in the area north of Bodo exhibit a high state of winter warfare training. So do the British Marines of the 45 Commando Group, in large part because they train in Norway some seven weeks a year. The same cannot be said about the U.S. Marine Corps units designated for probable deployment to Norway in time of war. Although U.S. Marine units have been in North Norway for training five times since late 1976, the amount of time spent in each training exercise (several weeks) has proved insufficient to accustom them to the severe Norwegian winter weather. The U.S. Marines' lack of experience and their antiquated and poorly-designed winter gear continue to hobble their effectiveness during Norwegian maneuvers. These deficiencies can and should be corrected by more extensive on-site training.

CONCLUSION

It is readily apparent that the situation in NATO's Northern Flank is deteriorating, both politically and militarily. As Soviet pressure continues to increase in the Nordic region, the states in that region are going to be forced to reevaluate their existing political relationships with the U.S. and the U.S.S.R., unless NATO acts quickly to counter this pressure. With Finland already accommodating itself to many Soviet policies and Sweden warning that the balance of power as it affects the security of Scandinavian is changing, Norway and Denmark will not long be able to maintain their ties to an Alliance that they see as unresponsive to the situation.

It is therefore necessary for NATO to take actions which will enhance the region's security. Because if Norway and Denmark are forced to disengage from the Alliance, those NATO forces emplaced on

20. For a recent study on prepositioning in Europe, see U.S. Military Equipment Prepositioned in Europe--Significant Improvements Made But Some Problems Remain (Washington, D.C.: U.S. General Accounting Office, December 5, 1978).

the Central Front could easily find themselves outflanked at the start of some future showdown with the Warsaw Pact. Strengthening the Northern Flank might well prove difficult in the context of the continuing emphasis by the NATO countries on East-West co-operation, but it is central to the political cohesion of the Alliance and vital to the military effectiveness of NATO that it be done.

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