

# A Norwegian Outlook

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**NATO is an essential instrument in the defence of Norwegian territory. Norwegian defence planning therefore takes as its point of departure the need to ensure assistance from NATO in the event of a military attack. To enable such guarantees, Norwegian defence planning must balance Norway's national needs with those of NATO. Norway therefore tailors its defence capabilities in such a way that will assist NATO and defend its own territory. Any strategic defence prioritization, from the acquisition of material systems to the stationing of Norwegian armed forces, should be seen in this light.**

## THE ALPHA OF NORWEGIAN DEFENCE POLICY

The main task of the Norwegian Armed Forces is to secure Norwegian sovereignty and political freedom of action. Since Norway signed the North Atlantic Treaty in 1949, NATO has been the cornerstone of Norwegian defence and security policy. Throughout the Cold War, Norway's strategy as a small state was premised on the availability of NATO military reinforcements, and that remains the case today. NATO has developed since the end of the Cold War. The increase in the number of member states, combined with a threat that many members now perceive as more about political influence than resisting conquest, has led to an increase in the range of strategic perspectives and priorities within the Alliance. Consequently, the number of situations that are unambiguously guaranteed to trigger article 5 has been reduced. NATO has gradually changed in character from a traditional defence alliance to a consultative security organization with a military capability. Exactly where it is located on that spectrum is contested and will vary according to circumstances. For the purposes of this chapter, the point is that current Norwegian defence planning must include as an important element a strategy aimed at securing NATO help should Norway face a situation that is too demanding for its national forces.

After the Cold War, NATO prioritized expeditionary operations ("out of area or out of business"). Norway

participated in these operations, most notably in Afghanistan, to help to ensure the continued relevance of NATO. Unlike Denmark, however, Norway never abandoned the defence of its own territory as the primary task of the Norwegian Armed Forces. NATO's refocus on the territories of its members ("coming home") after 2014 was therefore a welcome development, especially as it was triggered in response to a more capable and assertive Russia. The threat Norway now faces has also evolved from the existential threat that was posed by the Soviet Union. Today, Russia is perceived as the only country with the capability and, potentially, the will to use armed force against Norway. Russia's capability, however, is significantly smaller than that of the Soviet Union. In addition, if a conflict were to take place between the two nations, Russia's objective would be political influence rather than the territorial conquest that was its aim during the Cold War and that Norway's defence planning was then intended to avert. Thus, the challenges to Norwegian security would appear to have two sources: military force being used against Norway or Norwegian interests in a locally rooted bilateral conflict; or military force being used in a horizontal escalation of a conflict originating outside Norway.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF DETERRENCE

The concept of deterrence is currently central to defence planning. The concept was explicitly used in official government documents only recently, but has its roots in deterrence theory from at least as far back as the 1960s (deterrence by punishment), and has implicitly been part of Norwegian thinking about defence since then. Today, when threats and guarantees are perceived as fuzzier, the concept is subject to explicit discussion. Deterrence belongs partly in the cognitive domain and partly in the physical domain. In the cognitive domain, the objective is to impress on potential aggressors that pressure or an attack on Norway will not pay off. In the physical domain, the task is to have sufficient military means, and the up-to-date and sufficiently exercised plans to employ them effectively, should deterrence fail.



Exercises such as Trident Juncture 18 have contributed in this respect. NATO is the most important deterrent against a military attack on Norway. Norwegian deterrence has therefore recently involved measures to ensure that the Norwegian Armed Forces operate in ways that would unambiguously trigger military reinforcement from NATO.

The most important defence measures for Norwegian security are thus to have the national military means that can help *trigger* assistance from NATO, as well as have the ability to *secure* and *receive* those reinforcements. Force structures and defence concepts are part of this, as well as weapon systems, and up-to-date plans for how help would be received. Finally, Norwegian defence planning also prioritizes contributions to enhance NATO's ability and willingness to act. For example, Norway must have the military forces to contribute to NATO's rapid reaction forces, such as the NATO Response Force and its standing maritime and air forces.

### **NORWEGIAN LONG-TERM DEFENCE PLANNING**

A major challenge for long-term defence planning since the end of the Cold War has been to establish a clear link between security challenges and political ambitions, on the one hand, and recommended force structures, on the other. What specifically should Norway's forces be able to do and which platforms and units are needed to do it?

A main element of Norwegian defence planning has been the Defence Studies initiated by the Chief of Defence (CHoD). The methodological approaches of these studies have varied, but together they have been the main driver of a demanding but necessary transformation of Norwegian defence.

Since 2014, the defence planning process in the Ministry of Defence (MoD) has been continuous. This has meant that the necessary analyses can be conducted and decisions taken in the periods between traditional defence white papers, which are produced every four years. Prior to the writing of a white paper, the CHoD presents military advice (*fagmiliterare råd* or FMR) on how the Norwegian armed forces should develop. The FMR has traditionally had a great impact on the political white paper and often sets the stage for the political debate. However, the FMR is only CHoD advice to the minister. The MoD itself is responsible

for the formulation of the white paper, which is then approved or amended by parliament. A *strategic analysis* is conducted as part of the writing of the white paper. The method is in principle based on capabilities and uses high-level capabilities to structure the analysis. The most recent white paper, *Capable and Sustainable*, emphasised the need to balance tasks, force structure and costs. The top priorities were to strengthen Norwegian national defence by:

- maintaining situational awareness and crisis management;
- increasing readiness, combat power and survivability;
- improving the ability to receive NATO reinforcements;
- increasing the military presence; and
- more frequent exercises and training.

The decision to improve the capability to receive NATO reinforcements matters greatly because the Norwegian host nation support system had fallen into disuse and not been updated since the end of the Cold War. The host nation systems are still in place, but the plans and procedures need to be adjusted to the changed realities of the 2020s.

In the research phase of the defence planning process, the analysis effort is focused on the fighting units and how these should be developed. There are good reasons for this: the fighting units are the ones that perform the defence tasks and an analysis of these units is somewhat simpler to conduct than analyses of support units and infrastructure. The purpose or mission of the fighting units is usually clear and levels of ambition can be clearly stated. Support units, on the other hand, often have complex relationships with other defence elements, and the impact of changing these units is therefore more difficult to assess.

Norwegian long-term defence planning has struggled with the cost escalation specifically associated with military materiel. Traditionally, this has not been taken into account when new budgets are negotiated. The result is a force structure that is too large compared to its funding and that fails to produce the military fighting power expected. The difficulties in analysing



the ratio between fighting and support units compound the problem. This problem, which is not unique to Norway, has finally been addressed in the most recent white paper. If paper is implemented, the result should be a force structure that is properly funded and sustainable over time.

### **PRIORITISING BETWEEN NORWAY'S AND NATO'S NEEDS**

The long-term planning process has focused mainly on national requirements. The NATO defence planning process (NDPP) has received some attention, as it should, but Norwegian national scenarios and force structure legacy dominate the defence planning process. Dependence on NATO is neither forgotten nor neglected, but concern about NATO influences long-term defence planning in more ways than just the aim of closing NATO capability gaps. As one of the smaller NATO member states, Norway cannot make much of an impact on those gaps on its own.

Furthermore, Norway emphasises investment in defence capabilities that can contribute to NATO while remaining relevant to its own defence. A strategic priority is the strengthening of Norway's ground-based air defences. The medium-range Norwegian Advanced Surface-to-Air Missile II system (NASAMS II) will be upgraded and enhanced through the addition of missiles with an extended range. In addition, new air defence systems with long-range missiles and sensors will be introduced. Air defence is obviously a national capability for national needs, but the priority given to NATO is demonstrated in the planned deployment of the systems. Both NASAMS II and the new long-range systems will be concentrated around the two airbases at Ørland and Evenes, which are critical for Norway's own forces but also serve as potential staging area for NATO reinforcements. The acquisition of the F-35 Lightning and the planned acquisition of new submarines are further examples of capabilities that enable Norway to maintain a presence and, if necessary, to act on its own behalf as well as for NATO.

In the High North, Norway is the only NATO country to share a land and sea border with Russia. This makes Norway's territory vital for a surveillance, intelligence and defence presence in the Arctic. Norway's acquisition of new maritime patrol aircraft

– five P-8 Poseidon aircraft to replace the aging P-3 Orion – is a prime example of a capability that serves the needs of NATO. The prioritisation of all these capabilities is an example of the efforts made to create a credible Norwegian defence posture by contributing situational awareness and intelligence to both Norway and NATO. While advanced capabilities such as these might be perceived as a threat by Russia, it is less problematic for Russia for these tasks – inherent to any sovereign state – to be undertaken by Norway rather than by NATO or the USA. Together, these capabilities give Norway the ability to undertake crisis management either alone or as part of NATO.

The legacy host nation support systems are still in place, but continuous training in them is needed and they need to be updated to respond to current threats, after the hiatus in which NATO's attention was on out-of-area operations. Therefore, Norway aims to host exercises with participation by relevant member states, focused on quick response and territorial defence. Today, when a more limited and political threat is being planned for, readiness and response times are prioritised for both Norway's own military forces and in NATO exercises. The increased activity of the US Marines Corps, which is training more or less continuously in Norway, is a prime example of the new emphasis on smaller but quicker NATO responses.

### **A BALANCED DEFENCE PLANNING**

Norwegian long-term defence planning must balance national and NATO needs. Contributing to NATO capabilities is one way to do this. More important, however, is the way in which Norway's own capabilities are tailored to undertake tasks that will benefit NATO as a whole while also defending its own territory. The priority given to the High North should be viewed in this light. That said, Norway's strategic challenge remains that it is more demanding to operate military forces in the North, far away from its population centres. The Norwegian Armed Forces face a lesser challenge in operating in the rest of the country. Norwegian planning is not confined to defence structures. Appropriate funding for relevant NATO exercises and to update doctrines are also strategic priorities. Finally, the key priorities of national defence are geared to being able to receive NATO reinforcements and to operate with them.

