

Mary Craig Lindgren

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External Challenges Facing Norway

Norway's foreign policy covers the many typical areas of a developed democracy in the 21st century--economics and trade, defense initiatives, international efforts against terrorism and climate change, as well as countless other focuses. By far the most pressing of these for Norway is their current foreign security situation, which over the past few years has become a greater challenge, in many ways due to increasing Russian aggression internationally. Through an examination of the situation up to present day, the potential threats posed to Norway in 2018, and their strategies to respond to these threats, I will present a comprehensive overview of Norway's greatest external challenge--securing their foreign security for the future.

Since World War II, Norway has been an active member of the international community, such as serving as a founding member of both the Nordic Council in 1952 and the European Free Trade Association in 1960, as well as a key member of NATO.¹ In the post-war 20th century, Norway's primary foreign security concerns included control of fishing and mineral rights in the northern seas, such as the Barents Sea. Although most of the disputes Norway had with its neighbors over declarations of exclusive economic zones along coastlines were resolved easily, in 1988 Denmark called for Norway to address a disputed fishery zone in the International Court of Justice at The Hague.² Norway continues to emphasize its support for multilateral institutions

¹ *Regional Relations (Norway)* (Europa World).

² Ibid.

such as the International Criminal Courts, evident in this example. Today Norway's fishing challenges are primarily Russian fishing vessels that stray into Norwegian waters.³

From 1974-2010 there was a notable dispute between the two nations regarding the Barents sea and the allocation of rights for that area. In particular, the period following the end of the Soviet Union, and Russia's struggle for economic successes in that time, emphasized the importance of this maritime region, both for its possibilities for military strategy and the chance that there was natural gas below the seabed. In April 2010 Russia and Norway reached an agreed upon border that allocated an equally sized half of the area of the sea to each country. When Norway's state hydrocarbon company, known as Statoil, discovered two large reserves of natural gas in April 2011 and January 2012 in the Norwegian area of the Barents Sea, Norway feared tensions with Russia over the waters would rise again. However, in May 2012, Statoil signed an agreement with Rosneft, a Russian petroleum company, to jointly explore the hydrocarbon possibilities in the Barents Sea, a significant movement in the steps of the early 21st century towards improved Russian-Norway relations following the end of the Cold War.⁴

Russia presented itself as a major threat to Norway in 2014 upon the annexation of Ukraine's Crimean peninsula, an incident described in Norway's 2017 Foreign Policy White Paper as one that "changed the security landscape in Europe,"⁵ and by Prime Minister Erna Solberg as an act "that shook the foundation of international architecture."⁶ Norway joined the broad European response to the incident by imposing trade sanctions on Russia, which prompted

³ *Regional Relations (Norway)*.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Report to the Storting (white paper)* (Norway: Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2017), 6.

⁶ Erna Solberg and Bruce Jones, *"Sustainable Security: The Transatlantic Community and Global Challenges"* (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution, 2018), 4.

Russia to retaliate by banning certain Norwegian seafood imports, as Russia was one of Norway's biggest seafood markets.⁷ Additionally, Russian military activity along the 196 kilometer border shared by the two states has increased to the point that Norway's Chief of Military Intelligence stated there was a "considerable risk."⁸ The period since 2014 has seen an increase in Norway's attention to matters of foreign policy and foreign security, with the understanding that Russia is ready and able to act aggressively towards its neighbors. This has become an even more salient issue following the nerve agent attack in the United Kingdom carried out by the Kremlin. As a result of Russia's actions, it has experienced more tension not only with Norway, but with NATO as a whole. This distance prompted the Norwegian government to implement significant new defense spending strategies in 2016, including new troops near the Russian border to strengthen Arctic Circle defenses. International coordination is a hallmark of Norway's foreign security efforts, as a small but wealthy country dependent on major imports such as food. In January 2017, Norway allowed 600 United States troops to deploy to the northern region, which was the first time that foreign troops were granted permission to station in the country since World War II. The Arctic Council also announced in May 2011 an agreement to move towards a permanent secretariat placement in Tromsø, Norway, in the north.⁹ All of these changes support the understanding that since Crimea in 2014, Norway has shifted from a continuation of its friendly foreign security strategy maintained throughout the post-war period, to one that is actively asserting its coordination with a variety of multilateral organizations and cooperation efforts with allies, and that is prepared for the possibility of Russian aggression.

⁷ *Regional Relations (Norway)*.

⁸ *Country Report Norway* (London: The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2017).

⁹ *Regional Relations (Norway)*.

The many changes described thus far have paved the way for Norway's foreign security strategies for 2018 and beyond. There has been a drastic shift in attitudes since the 2009 white paper, evident in the first lines of the report, which ominously states that "unpredictability has become the new normal."¹⁰ As a country that relies heavily on the tools of international coordination, the Government plans on strengthening its already strong cooperation with the Atlantic and European Nordic communities in particular.¹¹

The modern situation facing Norway has forced it to address the policies it has adopted and maintained for decades, while upholding the fundamental principles it has promoted throughout its history, including "democracy, human rights, and respect for international law,"¹² as well as "the cornerstones of Norway's security and defense policy... the overall framework of international law, the UN, NATO and transatlantic security cooperation."¹³ In order to maintain these values with a practical and forward thinking approach to Norway's changing reality in terms of foreign policy, the government has strategies which encompass a variety of implications for the reality of the modern challenges they face. First, they will work towards "maintaining and building on the well-established principles of Norwegian security policy," essentially keep doing what has worked while upholding their values regarding democracy, human rights, and international law and coordination, and adapt it to the modern context.¹⁴ Mechanisms to follow this strategy include continued international cooperation with allies such as the US, aiding in the growth of Norwegian and NATO defence initiatives, and focusing on areas in which they can

¹⁰ Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 5.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid., 6.

¹³ Tone Skogen, *A Norwegian Perspective on the Threat and the Role of NATO and the EU in Dealing with the Threat* (Brussels: EU Parliamentary Subcommittee on Security and Defence, 2018).

¹⁴ Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 6.

improve Norway's relationship with Russia.¹⁵ Additionally, they will “[strengthen] the European and Nordic dimension in security policy,” through aligning security policies with allies dedicated to cooperation and increasing the interoperability and connection between the European Union and NATO.¹⁶

Prime Minister Erna Solberg, a former parliamentarian in the Standing Committee on Foreign & Defense Affairs and head of the Parliament Delegation to NATO, deeply understands the necessity for a foreign security policy that has adapted to the modern threats Norway faces.¹⁷ At a speech at the Brookings Institution in Washington D.C., she reminded her audience that “international institutions and organizations are only as strong as we make them,” while offering reminders about the possible security offered by a stronger NATO and the European Union.¹⁸ She goes on to say that “in the long run, the only viable and cost-effective solution is to address the underlying causes so that we can prevent crises from happening in the first place.”¹⁹ This belief explains Norway's adaptability to its newly necessary foreign security strategies. As a country that values international coordination, institutions, and laws, it sees the best response to the possible threats of Russian aggression today as identifying what might not only stop an act of aggression tomorrow, but what might prompt Russia to forget such a possibility exists the next day.²⁰ Essentially, Norway's foreign security policies today, calling for strengthened defense, increased security spending, and increasing the presence of international military, are all tactics adopted by a government that recognizes the immediate threat they could face from their large

¹⁵ Ibid., 7

¹⁶ Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 7.

¹⁷ Erna Solberg, *Sustainable Security*, 3.

¹⁸ Ibid., 6.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

neighbor to the north, while also acknowledging the possible power of the international community it has long advocated for. While Russia poses no direct threat, the implications of the Crimea annexation have prompted Norway to practice continuity in preparation for the possibility that they might need to call on collective defense.²¹ In conjunction with the concrete preparations described above, Norway's simultaneous efforts to promote an improved NATO, strengthened NATO and EU coordination, improved transatlantic bond, and adherence to its principles, signify that Norway's two fold strategy towards the possibility of Russian aggression, and any other of the many foreign security threats that are prevalent in the world today, is not only prepared for action but is also preparing for a foundation that will make action unnecessary.

²¹ Tone Skogen, *A Norwegian Perspective*

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