



Focusing on the rise of China will allow us to gauge the direction of US defence and security policy and provide a better understanding of how Norway can maintain strong ties with its most important ally.

Take aways

- **Studying the United States' two flanking regions enhances our understanding of the future US role in Europe's defence and security affairs.**
- **The US is facing similar security challenges in both of its flanking regions.**
- **There are linkages between the military modernisation taking place, and the capabilities developed in Europe and East Asia.**

The United States is Norway's most important ally and security guarantor, and the ties across the Atlantic remain the bedrock of Norwegian defence and security policy. However, the US has always been preoccupied with the power balance in its two flanking regions. In Europe, until World War I, it could rely on European powers to maintain an equilibrium. When that was no longer possible, the United States decided to throw in its weight across the Atlantic in 1917 to prevent Germany from dominating its European flank. Later, in Asia, it was Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor and developments on its Pacific flank that brought the United States into World War II. In the aftermath of the war, the US took over the traditional role that Britain had previously maintained of being what Hans J. Morgenthau described as "the holder of the balance" in Europe. Even to this day, the US holds the balance of power in Europe, making sure that no European power can dominate Europe. Similarly, the US has until now made sure that no power could emerge as a dominant regional power in East

Asia, but the contemporary rise of China suggests that the power balance on that flank is being challenged.

China's GDP and defence spending is roughly equal to the combined GDP and defence spending of all the East Asian states, including Russia and India. By way of contrast, the US' allies can maintain a balance of power in Europe. Because China is more powerful than all other states combined within its region, the US is likely to become more preoccupied with East Asia and increasingly shift more of its resources and capabilities towards this region.

GREATER NEED FOR THE US NAVY IN EAST ASIA THAN IN EUROPE

This geopolitical shift is likely to affect NATO's ambitions for collective defence in Europe and shape its new maritime strategy. The planning for a new NATO command structure, with potential regional commands and a maritime command, are likely to be viewed in a broader context of global power shifts and geopolitics. US-China rivalry will primarily be in the maritime domain. In 2016, the People's Liberation Army Navy commissioned 18 ships with a total displacement of 150,000 tons, roughly half of the overall displacement of the British Royal Navy. Balancing China's regional ambitions in maritime East Asia requires a strong forward US air and naval presence.

The primary challenge from Russia is on the ground in Europe. While its naval capabilities pose a potential threat, this remains secondary to the continental theatre. Thus, the US army might sustain a light footprint in Europe, but US naval and air forces are likely to be concentrated in the Asia-Pacific. Naval and air assets can move between regions, but ships and aeroplanes can only be in one place at one time. The US is unlikely to abandon Europe or NATO, but global power shifts suggest that a forward presence to counter future Russia's activities in the Northern Atlantic and the High North is likely to be, at best, a secondary priority for the US Navy.

Since contemporary Russia is not the mighty Soviet Union that once threatened

Western Europe and maritime lines of communications in the Atlantic, the northern region is less strategically vital to the US and NATO today. But since China has emerged as the only peer competitor to the US, and the US is shifting its naval capabilities towards the Asia-Pacific, a revitalised Russian Northern Fleet is provided with an opportunity to assert its interests in the High North and the Northern Atlantic. If Russia's military wishes to control the Barents Sea and develop strong anti-access and area denial capabilities in the North Atlantic, current technological developments – especially long-range, precision guided ballistic and cruise missiles – would provide Russia with a relatively safe zone in the High North from where it could target large parts of Western Europe and threaten maritime traffic in the Atlantic.

CONFLICT IN EAST ASIA CAN HAVE IMPLICATIONS FOR EUROPE

We know that the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950 had important implications for European security and NATO. And today we cannot rule out NATO involvement should a conflict erupt in East Asia, for example on the Korean Peninsula, in the East China Sea, in the Taiwan Strait, or in the South China Sea. Based on the assumption that North Korea can target continental United States with intercontinental ballistic missiles, the Trump administration contends that North Korea poses the greatest immediate threat to the US. While a North Korean missile strike against the US remains unlikely, such an attack would most likely trigger NATO's Article 5.

Russia might use a military conflict in East Asia as a pretext to intervene in NATO countries in the Baltics or Eastern and Southern Europe. Conflict between Russia and NATO could then spill over into the High North. Such a scenario would force the US to balance and prioritise between conflicts in two theatres and potentially prevent the US from enhancing its military presence in a third area, the High North. It remains to be seen whether the US-China rivalry in East Asia or the North Korean crisis will trigger a conflict, and whether Russia will take advantage of



any potential conflict in East Asia to advance its interests in Europe. Nevertheless, developments in East Asia are likely to shape the US' and NATO's defence planning and responses to any future conflicts.

SECURITY CHALLENGES IN EAST ASIA AND EUROPE AFFECT EACH OTHER

Managing and strengthening US alliances, while competing for the alignment of smaller states, are challenges the US faces in its two flanking regions. How the US manages its alliances, and how it supports its allies in East Asia, have important implications for the credibility of the US global alliance system. If the US will not stand up for South Korea when threatened by North Korea, or if the US does not support Japan, Australia, and the Philippines, then such a stance is likely to undermine belief in a collective defence and US security guarantee – even in Europe. Conversely, if the US launches a preventive strike against North Korea without the consent of South Korea, then such unilateral use of force would have major implications for US global alliances.

NATO has become more preoccupied with deterrence and collective defence. Such challenges are also a core concern for the states of East Asia, whether in relation to deterring China's assertiveness or the more pressing challenges posed by North Korea's nuclear and missile programme. Lessons learned from deterrence in East Asia might be useful for studying how deterrence can work in Europe. Since the US is the key security guarantor in both regions, the implementation of US coercive measures that seek to deter adversaries in East Asia will probably shape how deterrence measures are implemented and sustained in Europe.

Changes in interpreting the law of the sea in East Asian waters, brought about by the rise of China and its increased capabilities, challenge the status quo and have potential implications for Norwegian maritime interests. How the US responds to China's anti-access and area denial capabilities in East Asian waters is also important for understanding how the US might address a similar

challenge from Russia in the North Atlantic. The US Third Offset Strategy and the US Joint Doctrine, signed and approved in October 2016 and termed Joint Concept for Access and Maneuver in the Global Commons (JAMGC), will inform US operations in Europe and East Asia. Such strategies and doctrines seek to support and inform US and allied forces in countering rising threats to US access and manoeuvres, in sustaining conventional deterrence, and in maintaining US technological superiority in both of its flanking regions.

The development of military capabilities, new technologies and platforms in one region does not take place in isolation. Advances in missile technology, the development of missile defence and radar systems, and enhanced space and cyber capabilities, all demonstrate that the effects of military modernisation are global. How such capabilities are developed, implemented and used in one region can affect another region. US ambitions for a global missile defence system involve cooperation with allies in both Europe and East Asia. The price, upgrading and maintenance of the new F 35A fighter, and how these aircraft are deployed in military operations in the years to come, will be shaped by the experiences gained by the US and its allies in Europe and East Asia.

BALANCING DETERRENCE AND REASSURANCE IN ASIA AND EUROPE

States in both Europe and East Asia are adjusting to great power politics and increased rivalry. In the previous phase of superpower confrontation during the Cold War, Norway struck a balance between deterring and reassuring its adversary the Soviet Union through both integration and screening within the NATO alliance. Similar patterns of behaviour are recognisable in Europe and East Asia today. The terms deterrence and reassurance are very much at the core of a renewed debate, as NATO seeks to find the appropriate response to Russian aggression. Norway is just one of many NATO countries that seeks to balance its ties to the alliance with continued cooperation with Russia.



These predicaments mirror those facing South Korea and Australia as they seek to strengthen their alliance with the US, while simultaneously screening in order not to provoke China. Although South Korea and Australia seek more cooperation with China, they are also developing closer ties with the US to prevent becoming too dependent on, and to deter, China. Similar to contemporary developments in the relationship between NATO and Russia in Europe, East Asian states and the US are attentive to the balance between deterrence and reassurance in their relationship with China.

OVERLAPPING ADJUSTMENTS IN EUROPE AND EAST ASIA

Similar factors are driving the strategic adjustments and policy preferences of states in East Asia and Europe. Geography, history, military capabilities, domestic politics and economics explain not only the different balance between deterrence and reassurance

developed in states such as Norway, Poland, Germany and Turkey as they seek to strike a balance in their relationship with Russia, but also why Japan, South Korea, the Philippines and Australia pursue different balances between deterrence and reassurance in their policies towards China.

The future of the US' grand strategy, the credibility of its alliances, the role of deterrence, secondary states' adjustments to great power rivalry, military modernisation and the emergence of a new world order are issues shaping current strategic thinking in Europe and East Asia. In order to gain a better understanding of these core themes we need to examine how they overlap in the US' two flanking regions.



IFS INSIGHTS

IFS Insights aims to provide a flexible online forum for articles, comments and working papers within the fields of activity of the Norwegian Institute for Defence Studies. All views, assessments and conclusions are the author's own. The author's permission is required for any reproduction, wholly or in part, of the contents.

Editor: Anna Therese Klingstedt

INSTITUTT FOR FORSVARSSTUDIER

The Norwegian Institute for Defence Studies (IFS) is a part of the Norwegian Defence University College (FHS). As an independent university college, FHS conducts its professional activities in accordance with recognised scientific, pedagogical and ethical principles (pursuant to the Act pertaining to Universities and University Colleges, section 1-5).

Director: Kjell Inge Bjerga

Norwegian Institute for Defence Studies
Kongens gate 4
P.O. Box 890 Sentrum
N-0104 OSLO
Email: info@ifs.mil.no
ifs.forsvaret.no/en

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Øystein Tunsjø is professor at the Centre for Asian Security Studies at the Norwegian Institute for Defence Studies.

This IFS Insight draws on Øystein Tunsjø, *The Return of Bipolarity in World Politics: China, the United States and Geostuctural Realism* (Columbia University Press, 2018); Robert S. Ross and Øystein Tunsjø, eds. *Strategic Adjustment and the Rise of China: Power and Politics in East Asia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2017); Øystein Tunsjø, "Europe's Favourable Isolation," *Survival* (55) 6: 91-106; and Ross, Robert S., Øystein Tunsjø and Zhang Tuosheng eds. *US-China-EU Relations: Managing the New World Order* (London: Routledge, 2010).

CENTRE FOR ASIAN SECURITY STUDIES

Responding to the increased importance of Asia and Asian security issues in international affairs, the IFS formally established the Centre for Asian Security Studies in 2012.

The Centre has identified global power shift, geopolitical developments, military developments in Asia, naval power, and energy security as the priority fields of research, and the Centre also analyses what these developments could mean for Norway and Europe.

MORE ABOUT CENTRE FOR ASIAN SECURITY STUDIES

<https://forsvaret.no/ifs/en/Research/Asian-Security-Studies>

Top picture on the front page:

An illustration of US strategic allocation of 60 per cent of its fleet to the Pacific Ocean.

Graphic design: Anna Therese Klingstedt.

