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The Northern Flank and High North Scenarios of the Cold War

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The northern region of Europe was important throughout the Cold War, which is well known. However, the region was important for several different reasons – for different periods of time, and for different people and nations. This chapter will contest the contemporary myth of the Cold War as simplistic and static period of time, by laying out the many scenarios contemporaries of the Cold war individually often were ignorant or unfamiliar to. The many had often enough with their own focus.

In security studies and research we experience a great different understanding of terminology for the description of Europe's northern countries and area. The region include all from northern continental Europe with the southern coasts of the Baltic Sea, to Denmark and its Straits, the North Sea, northern Norway and the Barents Sea – and all the way up to the polar region. For some the “northern flank” meant the Baltic Sea and its southern borders, for some it meant southern Scandinavia, and then for some periods most people associated the “northern flank” with the Soviet Northern Fleet and the Barents Sea. For parts of the Cold War, the Barents Sea and northern Scandinavia was labelled a “front”, or a “sea battlefront”. The most northern areas have also for great parts of the Cold War been labelled the “High North”, and for the later decades also been called the “European High North”. All this different terminology is linked to and can best be understood by the state of the NATO and US versus the Soviet military strategies and technological developments in geopolitical terms. According to Øyvind Østenrud, the Cold War strategies were modelled on classical geopolitical thought.¹ This article uses this geopolitical perspective to discuss and explain how and why the European High North region, or parts of it, were important throughout the

¹ Østenrud, Øyvind, “The Reemergence of Geopolitics”, downloaded from:
http://www.geopoliticsnorth.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=45%3Aarticle2&showall=1

Cold War, and by that also contributing to clarifying the disperse use of terminology and the position of the region in the greater Cold War history. Basically, geopolitics was first introduced by the Swede Rudolph Kjellen more than a hundred years ago. It was originally a theory focusing on the Great Power struggle between the land powers, especially the “Russian Heartland”, versus the maritime nations, primarily the British Empire. But have later come to include the greater perspective on geographical variables, including military strategies and concepts of especially conventional military forces.

There exists a tremendous body of literature on the Cold War, which may be hard to approach for general studies. Methodologically I will review the existing literature on western perceptions chronologically, searching for the position of the greater region in the Cold War strategies of the time. By this structuring and approach, it becomes apparent how the region was important, and to whom, and make a more defined understanding of the different meanings of the terminology. Additionally, structured literature review will make a good starting-point for future research on detailed parts of the regions Cold War history. This is a second, but also important ambition with this chapter.

The greater understanding of the Cold War

Over the last two decades, several over-arching reviews of the greater and political aspects of the Cold War have come about, challenging the largely politicised literature of the Cold War: Be it the “orthodox” who dominated the 1950s and 1960s and who largely argued that the West was pushed to defend itself, or the “revisionists” of the Vietnam generation who largely believed that Americas hegemony and imperialism pushed the Soviet Union to defend its areas of influence, or the later academics and strategic thinkers of the 1970s and 1980s who more focused on geo-politics and the complexity of economics and military balance in a more realism perspective. Contemporary analysis, with younger academics distancing themselves more from the Cold War, or the last generation of Cold War academics and analysts who have revisited their perspectives gives today a balanced perspective, including post-revisionists and realists. Recommended reading on the overall and political Cold War dynamics includes especially Dockrill and Hughes’ “Cold War History”, Friedmans “The Fifty Year War”, Gaddis’ “The Cold War” and “We Now Know, Rethinking Cold War

History”, and some great overarching recent works by Hanhimäki, Westad, Leffler and Lundestad.²

Several over-arching later research on alliance and military strategy, especially regarding naval and nuclear issues, are also important for the greater understanding of the Cold War in the northern regions. Especially Freedman, Herrick and Podvig, as well as the official NATO history edited by Schmidt makes a good starting point.³ Still, some very important studies and publications of the Cold War, and research completed in just the aftermath of the fall of the Soviet Union, are still to be regarded as important documentation, and must not be overlooked: especially the writings of Gorshkovs “The sea power of the State”, Sokolovskiys “Soviet Military Strategy”, MccGwires “Soviet Naval Developments” and Ranft and Tills “The Sea in Soviet Strategy”. The recommended reading on general military strategy of the Cold War, with relevance to the High North and Northern Flank question further includes: Sokolskys “Seapower in the Nuclear Age, The United States Navy and NATO 1949-80” and Wardak and Turbivilles collection of “The Voroshilov Lectures”, as well as works by Spencer, Stromseth and Tunander.⁴

Recent research in regards the military strategies and operations of the Cold War have not really challenged the greater developments described by the literature of the Cold War period, but greater insights on details on how things came about have been developed, based on research from original and declassified sources. The most important contemporary research

² See bibliography for full references.

³ Freedman, Lawrence, *The Evolution of Nuclear Strategy* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); Herrick, Robert Waring, *Soviet Naval Doctrine and Policy* (New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2003); Mastny, Vojtech, Holtsmark, Sven and Wenger, Andreas, *War Plans and Alliances in the Cold War. Threat Perceptions in the East and West* (London: Routledge, 2006); Podvig, Pavel (ed.), *Russian Strategic Nuclear Forces* (London: The MIT Press, 2004); Polmar, Norman and Moore, K.J., *Cold War Submarines* (Washington DC: Brassey's, 2004); Polmar, Norman, *Chronology of the Cold War at Sea 1945-1991* (Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 1998); Schmidt, Gustav ed., *A History of NATO, Vol.1-3* (Hampshire, UK: Palgrave, 2001); Sokolskiy, Henry ed., *Getting MAD: Nuclear Mutual Assured Destruction, its Origins and Practice* (Carisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2004); Walsh, David, *The Military Balance in the Cold War* (London: Routledge, 2008); Winkler, David F., *Cold War at Sea* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2000).

⁴ Fairhall, David, *Russia looks to the Sea* (London: The Trinity Press, 1971); Glantz, David M., *The Military Strategy of the Soviet Union, A History* (London: Frank Cass, 1992); Gorshkov, Sergei, *The sea power of the State* (Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 1979); MccGwire, Michael ed., *Soviet Naval Developments* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1973); Ranft, Bryan and Till, Geoffrey, *The Sea in Soviet Strategy* (Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 1989 (Second edition)); Sokolovskiy, Marshall, *Soviet Military Strategy* (New York: Crane, Russak & Company, 1968); Sokolsky, Joel J., *Seapower in the Nuclear Age, The United States Navy and NATO 1949-80* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1991); Spencer, Robert, “Alliance perceptions of the Soviet threat, 1950-1988” in Carl-Christopher Schweitzer ed., *The Changing Western Analysis of the Soviet Threat* (London: Pinter Publisher, 1990); Stromseth, Jane E, *The Origins of Flexible Response* (Hampshire: Macmillan, 1988); Tunander, Ola, *Cold War Politics. The Maritime Strategy and Geopolitics of the Northern Front* (London: SAGE Publications, 1989); Wardak, Ghulam and Graham Turbiville, *The Voroshilov Lectures, Vol.1-3* (Washington, National Defence University Press, 1989).

include the works by Chernyavskii, “The Era of Gorshkov: Triumph and Contradictions”; Dyndal, “How the High North became Central in NATO Strategy: Revelations from the NATO Archives”; Juntunen “The Baltic Sea in Russian Strategy”; Ketov, “The Cuban missile Crisis as Seen Through a Periscope”; Kokoshin, *Soviet Strategic Thought, 1917-91*; Kolnogorov, “To Be or Not To Be: The Development of Soviet Deck Aviation”; Kurth, “Gorshkov’s Gambit”; Mawdsley, “The Russian Navy in the Gorshkov Era”; Rohwer and Monakov, “Stalin’s Ocean-Going Fleet”; Yegorova, “Stalin’s Conception of maritime Power: Revelations from the Russian Archives”. These, and other, concrete studies and research on the “northern flank” and “High North” challenges will be referred to, discussed and contextualised within the framework of the strategic scenarios laid out later in the chapter.

The Northern Flank and High North Cold War Scenarios

Based on a geopolitical perspective and on the above over-arching literature on the Cold War and the strategies of NATO and the USA, it is possible to broadly define seven scenarios for how and to whom the northern region of Europe has been important in the greater Cold War play.⁵

- *The American Strategic Air Power Offensive against Northern Russia*
- *The Central Fronts "Tactical North Flank"*
- *The Fight for the Norwegian Sea*
- *The Soviet and U.S. Strategic Missile Interchange*
- *The Barents Sea Bastion, an Independent Theatre of War*
- *NATO Flexible Response, and the Flank as a Peripheral Theatre of War*
- *Soviet Fighting for Access to the Atlantic Ocean*

By this sorting of scenarios, it is better possible to dive into and sort the tremendous body of literature there exist on the question of the “Northern Flank” and “High North” perceptions of NATO.

The American Strategic Air Power Offensive against Northern Russia

As regards the first period of the Cold War from 1945 to the end of the 1950s, also called the “formative years”, American superior air power and their ability to deliver nuclear bombs

⁵ This structuring of scenarios will be supported by/in the individual chapters.

dominated the strategic outlook of both the entire Scandinavian area and the greater polar region. The American detonation of the nuclear bombs over Japan marked their superiority, not least to Stalin and the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union lagged behind and detonated their first nuclear bomb, the RDS-1 29 August 1949, and did not have any effective capacity until 3-4 years later.⁶ This scenario included both American strategic bomber aircraft and Anglo-American carrier task forces.

The clearly most important focus was on American strategic bomber aircraft with nuclear bombs, which would be crossing the North Pole and the northern parts of Norway for deep strikes towards the Soviet Union. Additionally, Anglo-American aircraft carrier task forces trained for and were planned to strike from the Norwegian Sea and towards Soviet naval and air defence bases in the northern areas of the Barents Sea and White Sea for paving way for the strategic bomber fleet, as well as bases in the southern Scandinavian Peninsula and the Baltic Sea in the late 1940s and early 1950s. From the mid-1950s till the early 1960s, these naval carrier based strike forces also became part of the strategic air strike capability.

Recommended reading on the scenario of “the American Strategic Air Power Offensive against northern Russia” includes first most: Berdals “The United States, Norway and the Cold War, 1954-60”, Groves “The Superpowers and Secondary Navies in Northern Waters during the Cold War” and Tamness “The United States and the Cold War in the High North”.⁷ Additionally, other works of Berdal, as well as Allard, Amundsen, Grove, and Kadyshev are recommended reading.⁸

This same scenario, which first was part of the early Cold War years, was later repeated with large carrier task forces of the 1980s, within the framework of the American "Maritime Strategy".⁹ In conclusion, the strategic air power offensive against northern Russia scenario was primarily a military strategic independent “front” of the US Air Force bomber era of the 1950s.

⁶ Podvig., *Russian Strategic Nuclear Forces*, p. 72.

⁷ Berdal, Mats, *The United States, Norway and the Cold War, 1954-60* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1997), pp. 3-23; Grove, Eric J., “The Superpowers and Secondary Navies in Northern Waters during the Cold War”, in Hobson, Rolf and Kristiansen, Tom eds., *Navies in Northern Waters, 1721-2000* (London: Frank Cass, 2004), pp. 211-215; Tamnes, Rolf, *The United States and the Cold War in the High North* (Cambridge: University Press, 1991), pp. 44-49, 52-57, 69.

⁸ See bibliography for full references.

⁹ Børresen, Jacob, “US carrier operations in the North Atlantic and the Norwegian Sea”, in Skogan, John and Brundtland, Arne eds., *Soviet Sea Power in Northern Waters* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1990), pp. 107-120; Friedman, Norman, *The US Maritime Strategy* (London: Jane’s Publishing, 1988; Ellingsen, Ellmann, *NATO and U.S. Maritime Strategy* (Oslo: The Norwegian Atlantic Committee, 1987).

The Central Fronts "Tactical North Flank"

Both American and British politicians and strategic thinkers kept both the perspectives of a “continental” and “maritime strategy” open and alive from the beginning of the Cold War. Even though they were both fundamentally maritime global powers; they were also pinned down to protect continental Europe.¹⁰ However, in the 1950s and the 1960s the “continental strategy” and SACEUR clearly dominated NATO strategic outlook and priorities. In this setting southern Scandinavia and the Baltic Sea southern borders became an important “tactical north flank” to the Central Front and the envisaged great land battle of Europe. This scenario: “the Central Fronts ‘Tactical North Flank’”, is well covered in the recent partly official history by DIIS: “Denmark during the Cold War”, the partly official “Norwegian Defence History” by Skogrand and the Swedish official history “Peace and Security”.¹¹ Additionally, Hallerbachs “Baltic Strategy Past and Present”, Juntunens “The Baltic Sea in Russian Strategy” and Groves “The Superpowers and Secondary Navies in Northern Waters during the Cold War” offers great insights. Further, a good review of the political perspectives of the Scandinavian countries can be found in Olesens “The Cold War – and the Nordic Countries, Historiography at a Crossroads”.¹²

In fact, the Baltic Sea Fleet was the most potent of all the Soviet Fleets around 1950.¹³ This included both amphibious forces and larger surface combatants. However, the capacity largely eroded by the late 1950s, as the Soviet focus switched to a strong submarine and nuclear force build-up in general, and the main surface combatants were transferred to the Northern Fleet. About the rationale for this strong naval force, as well as the impressive air-to-ground air forces in the Baltic Sea region in this early period of the Cold War, assessments are that they were probably both intended for defensive operations and flank support of the

¹⁰ Tamnes, *The United States and the Cold War in the High North*, pp. 24-25.

¹¹ DIIS, *Danmark under den kolde krig, vol. 2*, (Denmark: Dansk Institut for Internasjonal Studier publication, 2005), pp.524-528; Skogrand, Kjetil, *Norsk forsvarshistorie, 1940-1970. Alliert i krig og fred* (Bergen: Eide forlag, 2004); Statens Offentliga Utredningar [Sweden] 2002:108, *Fred och säkerhet, Svensk säkerhetspolitik 1969-89* (Stocholm: Edit Norsteds Tryckeri, 2002).

¹² See bibliography for full references.

¹³ Grove, Eric J., “The Superpowers and Secondary Navies in Northern Waters during the Cold War”, in Hobson, Rolf and Kristiansen, Tom eds., *Navies in Northern Waters, 1721-2000* (London: Frank Cass, 2004), p. 212.

land-forces of the continent. However, there was also strong fear in NATO in the 1950s of Soviet ambitions for the Baltic Sea Fleet to break out through the Danish Straits.¹⁴

The Baltic Sea Fleet, especially its amphibious forces was somewhat reactivated from the mid-1960s. The Baltic Sea Fleet then became primarily a regional or local naval force, comprised of and built around amphibious forces.¹⁵

The scenario “tactical north flank” of the Central Front developed in parallel to the American strategic air power strategy over the polar region and the Anglo-American naval strike strategy from the North Sea and the Norwegian Sea. In SACEURs NATO of the 1950s and 1960s, the perspective of the northern areas was restricted to southern Scandinavia and the Baltic Sea, and this area had the status of a “tactical north flank” to the Central Front. As part of this outlook, NATO established the sub-ordinate headquarter AFNORTH at Kolsaas in Oslo in the early 1950s.

This strategic outlook and assessment dominated in the 1950s and early 1960s, but it became less the focus of NATO as its main northern focus soon shifted to the High North. The Baltic Sea remained a tactical north flank, and the southern Scandinavian areas remained in the plans for low-level bomber aircraft from the North Sea. The region remained in the Cold War play – though in a lesser scale throughout the Cold War.¹⁶

The Fight for the North Norwegian Sea

The Soviet Navy Northern Fleet under leadership of Admiral Gorshkov developed a defensive naval strategy based on attack submarines and air forces with missiles in the late 1950s. It was an unconventional, but balanced navy, built for denying the Anglo-American

¹⁴ Olesen, Thorsten B., and Poul Villaume, *I Blokpedelingens tegn, 1945-1972, Dansk Udenrikspolitisk Historie vol. 5* (København: Gyldendal Leksikon, 2005), pp. 288-295; Tamnes, Rolf, «Samspillet mellom Norge og Danmark i NATO i 1950-årene», i Due-Nielsen, Carsten, Johan Noack og Nikolaj Petersen eds., *Danmark, Norden og NATO 1948-1962* (Danmark: Jurist- og Økonomiforbundets Forlag, 1991), pp. 59-72.

¹⁵ Leighton, Marian K., *The Soviet Threat to NATO's Northern Flank* (New York: National Strategy Information Centre Inc., 1979), pp. 20-21; Ranft and Till, *The Sea in Soviet Strategy*, pp. 199-206; Dyndal, Gjert Lage, ”The rise of the Soviet Navy, a re-visited Western view”, in *Kungl Krigsvetenskapsakademiens Handlingar och Tidsskrift*, Nr 3: 2013; DIIS, *Danmark under den kolde krig, vol. 1*, pp.520-522.

¹⁶ Agrell, Wilhelm, “The impact of ‘alien underwater activity’: Swedish security policy and Soviet war planning in the Baltic area, 1972-88, in Skogan, John and Arne Bruntland eds., *Soviet Sea Power in Northern Waters* (New York: St.Martin’s Press, 1990), pp.37-53; Petersson, Magnus, “The Scandinavian Triangle: Danish-Norwegian-Swedish military intelligence cooperation and Swedish security policy during the first part of the Cold War” in *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 29:4, 2007, pp. 620-621; Nilsson, Mikael, “Aligning the non-aligned, A re-interpretation of why and how Sweden was granted access to US military material in the early Cold War, 1948-1952, in *Scandinavian Journal of History*, Vol.35, No.3, September 2010, p.292.

forces its dominance in the North Sea, Norwegian Sea and Barents Sea. After the emergence of the strategic strike submarines (SSBNs) in the late 1960s, a capability truly developed and central to the Cold War play throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the Barents Seas became important for the Soviet Navy in a tactical defensive strategy to protect these strategic "bastions" of SSBN submarines. At the same time the Norwegian Sea became important for offensive tactical operations with the growing naval infantry.

In regards an overview of this exact era and scenario, there exists a tremendous body of literature. The most authoritative literature includes: Jonathan Alford's statements in Tills "Britain and NATO's Northern Flank", Børresen, Gjeseth and Tamnes "official" Norwegian Defence History, Dyndals "How the High North became Central in NATO Strategy: Revelations from the NATO Archives", Grove and Thomsons "Battle for the Fjords", Jervell and Nybloms "The Military Buildup in the High North. American and Nordic Perspectives", Kokoshins "Soviet Strategic Thought, 1917-91", Podvigs "Russian Strategic Nuclear Forces", Tamness "The United States and the Cold War in the High North" and Winklers "Cold War at Sea".¹⁷

The High North in the 1970s and 1980s, here understood as the Barents Sea, Northern Norway and the North Norwegian Sea, became a battle ground in its own right.

Well-balanced and capable land-based air power of the Soviet Union, operating from north Norwegian airfields would have seriously displaced the power balance of Britain and northern Europe. As stated by Jonathan Alford, former Director of the International Institute for Strategic Studies, and a great debater on these strategic issues in the 1980s:

In part this is about the Soviet interdiction of the trans-Atlantic routes; in part this is about the Soviet need to keep NATO naval forces well away from important Soviet assets; and in part it is about the reinforcement by the sea of the NATO north – and all are interconnected...

I will assert that it is the Norwegian airfields which are – or ought to be – of greatest concern. I suggest the following syllogism: who controls the Norwegian Sea depends on who controls the North Norwegian airfields: who controls those airfields depends

¹⁷ See bibliography for full references.

*on who gets there first: and who gets there first depends on who controls the Norwegian Sea.*¹⁸

The Soviet and U.S. Strategic Missile Interchange

The launch of the Sputnik in 1957, and the subsequent emergence of intercontinental ballistic missiles had huge consequences for the Cold War developments, and especially the northern region. The U.S. air force had been superior with their long-range strategic air power capability, but the balance changed in the strategic nuclear missile era' from 1960. The Soviet Rocket Forces (the RVSN) was established and capable of launching the first intercontinental missile, the ICBM, R-7 (SS-6), 17 December 1959.¹⁹ In the West there was perceived a Missile Gap, in favour of the Soviet Union in the 1960s, and the stalemate of Mutual Assured Destruction – MAD – came to influence the rest of the Cold War. There came a shift from the “Age of the bomb” to the “Age of the missile”.²⁰

The long-range early warning systems and an enormous build-up of strategic missiles became a new central part of the Cold War from the early 1960s, and the High North, here meaning the polar region and northern Scandinavia became military strategic important of another reason; the over-flight route for the land based strategic intercontinental ballistic missiles.

Recommended reading on the scenario of “the Soviet and U.S. Strategic Missile Interchange”: Berdals “The United States, Norway and the Cold War”, Bluths “The Soviet Union and the Cold War: Assessing the Technological Dimension”, Dyndals “How the High North became Central in NATO Strategy: Revelations from the NATO Archives”, Miasnikov “Naval Strategic Nuclear Focus”, Pedlows “The Evolution of NATO Strategy 1949-1969”, Sokolovskiys “Soviet Military Strategy”, Tamness “The United States and the Cold War in the High North” and Tunanders “Cold Water Politics. The Maritime Strategy and Geopolitics of the Northern Front”.²¹

¹⁸ Alford, Jonathan in G.Till, ed., *Britain and NATO's Northern Flank* (New York: ST.Martins Press, 1988), p.77.

¹⁹ P. Podvig, *Russian Strategic Nuclear Forces*, p.121.

²⁰ Barras, Gordon, “Prelude to détente”, in Fitzgerald, Michael R., with Allen Packwood eds., *Out of the Cold. The Cold War and Its Legacy* (London: Bloomsbury Academics, 2013), pp. 39-41.

²¹ See bibliography for full references.

This “missile interchange” scenario of the High North, as well as the MAD situation, lasted out the Cold War.²²

The Barents Sea Bastion, an Independent Theatre of War

The High North was not particularly central to NATO strategies in the 1950-1960, except for the strategic strike forces, but these were more a US concern. SACEURs focus on the central section dominated in the greater NATO discussions. All through the 1960s, SACLANT had argued his concerns about the Soviet Northern Fleet build-up, but without influence on the greater prioritizations.²³ With the development of the Flexible Response strategy, the flanks gradually became more important (as we will see in the following sub-chapter). However, it was more than anything the awakening to the first true SSBN capability of the Soviet which led to the truly strong focus to the High North for NATO.²⁴

The first Soviet nuclear strategic submarine, the Hotel-class, was completed by 1960. The evolution continued, and by 1967 and the production of the Yankee-class NATO reacted to the evolving SSBN threat. The well-known “Bastion” of the Barents and the Arctic soon became a reality with the SS-N-8 Sawfly SLBM which entered service with the Delta-class in the early 1970s.²⁵ The “Bastion concept” came to influence both the balancing of Soviet Naval Forces, as well as it provoke a focused NATO build-up of ASW forces in the High North.

Reading on the scenario of “the Barents Sea Bastion, an Independent Theatre of War” should include the authoritative work by Herricks: “Soviet Naval Doctrine and Policy”. Further detailed reading on the Bastion concept and the SSBNs can be found in: Børresen, Gjeseth, and Tamness “official” Norwegian Defence History, Freedmans “The Evolution of Nuclear Strategy”, Podvigs “Russian Strategic Nuclear Forces”, Polmar and Moores “Cold War Submarines” and Ranft and Tills “The Sea in Soviet Strategy”.²⁶

²² I will argue it still do, and that basic foundation for great power stalemate is what is at stake with the current development of the US Ballistic Missile Defence.

²³ Dyndal, Gjert Lage: “How the High North became Central in NATO Strategy: Revelations from the NATO Archives”, in *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 34:4, 2011.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ The Soviet Navy explored and thought of protection of own forces along and under the ice at several instances during the 1960s, however this became a concept with the Delta-class and their true strategic reach from home-port. Then both the feared US SOSUS acoustic surveillance systems and the GIUK barriers of NATO would no longer hinder the SSBNs.

²⁶ See bibliography for full references.

The development of the Bastion concept of the Barents Sea made the region an independent theatre of war from the early 1970s, including the creation of large and expensive specialised NATO forces of aircraft, hunter submarines and intelligence systems and ships.

NATO Flexible Response, and the Flank as a Peripheral Theatre of War

In American perspective, the “Massive Retaliation” strategy and its “trip-wire” which had developed during the 1950s had become inflexible by the early 1960s. A new grand strategy of “Flexible Response” had become US policy under Kennedy from the early 1960s, but NATO would not officially adopt the new strategy until as late as 1967.

The “Flexible Response” strategy focused on; “direct defence” – seeking out the enemy to defeat him at a conventional level, and if the conventional direct defence should fail, the plans were to go to the next level of “deliberate escalation”, including the use of nuclear tactical weapons. Should all this fail, the last resort was to go to a “general nuclear response”. For this to be credible, NATO needed to: assure a second-strike retaliatory nuclear capability based on a triad of land, sub-surface, and air-launched nuclear weapons, ensure close control of tactical nuclear weapons, and not least develop credible and mobile conventional forces. This latter soon proved to have great influence for the status of both the southern and northern regions of Europe.²⁷

The terminology “flanks”, which also was used at the time, were and are misleading, as the areas of the High North of Scandinavia (and Turkey) in reality became independent theatres of war preparations, partly as a flank – but rather as areas where NATO hoped to limit the war-fighting. More correctly, the High North (and Turkey) under the umbrella of “Flexible Response” should be labelled “Peripheral Theatres of War”.

Also this scenario occupied many researchers during the Cold War, and following a great body of important literature exists: Maloney’s “Fire Brigade or Tocsin? NATO’s ACE Mobile Force, Flexible Response and the Cold War”, Tamnes’ “The United States and the Cold War in the High North” and Groves “The Superpowers and Secondary Navies in Northern Waters during the Cold War” are very useful.²⁸ Additionally, a more general literature dealing with

²⁷ Based on: Dyndal, “How the High North became Central in NATO Strategy: Revelations from the NATO Archives”.

²⁸ Maloney, Sean, “Fire Brigade or Tocsin? NATO’s ACE Mobile Force, Flexible Response and the Cold War”, in *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol.27, Dec 2004; Stromseth, *The Origins of Flexible Response*; Tamnes, *The*

the High North of the 1970s and 1980s, also dealing with this “scenario” includes the works of: Alford, Amundsen, Archer and Scrivener, Bertram and Holst, Børresen, Gjeseth and Tamnes, Bridge and Slade, Duffield, Ellingsen, Flynn, Goldstein, Jervell and Nyblom, Kokoshin, Kolnogorov, Mawdsley, MccGwire, Nieminen, Skogan and Brundtland, Sokolsky, Spencer, Till, Tunander and Dyndal.²⁹

Soviet Fighting for Access to the Atlantic Ocean

The Soviet Union have had global maritime aspirations at several points of history in modern time, all from the 1930s, by when Stalin envisioned an ocean-going navy, as he also did in the immediate years following the Second World War, “The Great Fatherland War” in Russian history, and following the Korean War.³⁰ However, the Soviet Navy did not prioritize the global maritime aspirations until the 1960s, by when the Black Sea Fleet and operations in the Mediterranean became a reality, and soon after also proved their global reach to the Indian Ocean and South-East Asia. As the Northern Fleet build-up came about in the late 1960s for the sea power part of the nuclear triad, the Barents Sea also became the prioritized basing for the global reach naval surface forces. The Northern Fleet, from the Barents Sea, via the northern Norwegian Sea and out through the Greenland-Iceland-United Kingdom (GIUK) Gap, was the least restricted access the “global reach” Soviet Navy could get. With the status of NATO forces, both the Baltic Sea and Black Sea were effectively closed off for such large fleets. The main surface forces were transferred from the two other fleets in the mid-1960s.³¹

The true growth of the global reach came about in the 1960s, and is well documented by several important academics of the time, especially MccGwire, Mitchell, Ranft and Till, Herrick and Fairhall.³² The works of admiral Gorshkov are also still important documentation of the maritime global aspirations³³, and several other works gives important details and discussions: Allard, Archer and Scrivener, Christoph and Holst, Børresen, Gjeseth and

United States and the Cold War in the High North, pp.195-207, 225-226, 233-238; Grove, “The Superpowers and Secondary Navies in Northern Waters during the Cold War”, pp.215-218.

²⁹ See bibliography for full references.

³⁰ Dyndal, “The rise of the Soviet Navy, a re-visited Western view”.

³¹ Ibid.

³² MccGwire, *Soviet Naval Developments*; Mitchell, Donald, *A History of Russian and Soviet Sea Power* (London: Andre Deutsch Limited, 1974); Ranft and Till, *The Sea in Soviet Strategy*; Herrick, *Soviet Naval Doctrine and Policy*; Fairhall, *Russia looks to the Sea*.

³³ Gorshkov, *The sea power of the State*. The status and importance of Gorshkovs writing, both this book which was published in the West and his many articles in the Soviet Union are well discussed in Herricks “Soviet Naval Doctrine”.

Tamnes, Chernyavskii, Ellingsen, Friedman, Mawdsley, Skogan and Brundtland, Sokolsky, Walsh, and Winkler.³⁴

The Northern Fleet of the Barents Sea, and this scenario of the “Soviet Fighting for Access to the Atlantic Ocean” became apparent with the famous *Okean* naval exercise out in the north Atlantic in 1970 (and 1975).³⁵ Also this scenario of “global access” remained throughout the Cold War.

Conclusions

As we have seen, the terminology, including both the geographical and strategic meaning, have changed over time, as well as in the perspectives of different actors.

The terminology “flank” meant that the region was subordinate to and part of the more central battlefront. The southern shores of the Baltic Sea and the countries bordering the Baltic Sea were important as a flank to the Central Front. In SACEURs perspective, this was the case throughout the Cold War. If you go to more naval dominated communities, the terminology “flank” was less used, where the terminology “front” or “theatre” was largely used about the northern Norwegian Sea in the latter half of the Cold War.

As a “flank”, the perceptions could be either about the Baltic Sea and southern Scandinavia, which was the case for the first two decades of the Cold War. The threat was at its highest around 1950, and then less in focus until a somewhat modern Soviet amphibious capacity was rebuilt from the mid-1960s. From the late 1960s, the term “flank” was still used, but the general perception had shifted to the northern parts of Scandinavia, mostly North Norway and the northern seas. However, the “High North”, here meaning North Norway and northern Scandinavia and the seas up to the polar region, became in reality independent “peripheral theatres of war” under the era of Flexible Response. In NATO strategy one hoped to limit the war-fighting to these regions, and thus using the terminology “flank” would all-together be misleading.

The review of the existing literature, both the most prominent Cold War literature and the (limited) new research, have proved that perceptions and status of the region and the

³⁴ See bibliography for full references.

³⁵ Skogan, John and Arne Brundtland eds, *Soviet Sea Power in Northern Waters* (New York: St.Martin’s Press, 1970), p.15; Kokoshin, Andrei A.: *Soviet Strategic Thought, 1917-91* (Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1998), p 130.

following use of terminology have changed over time and with context. The chapters main contribution is to make researchers and readers aware of these important distinctions, here defined as seven different scenarios for how and to whom different parts of the region were important in the Cold War NATO strategies.

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