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**A more assertive US in the Arctic:**

**aligned or at odds with Norwegian security policy?**

by

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# Student declaration

This dissertation is the sole work of the author and has not been accepted in any previous application for a degree; all quotations and sources of information have been acknowledged.

Signed: *Kristin Svare Granrusten* Date: *28.04.2022*

 *(A typed signature is permissible for electronic submissions)*

# Foreword

Through my work as a military flight officer in the Royal Norwegian Air Force, the High North has been my main area of operations for over the previous five years. Gaining experience on the tactical and technical levels, however, is vastly different from examining the political, strategic, and operational levels. Researching for this study has allowed me to approach a region I am familiar with from a new perspective. That has been highly rewarding.

This study has been written amid world events that will likely mark a paradigm shift in European security and East-West relations. Although the previous five to ten years have already seen major changes in the Arctic security policy landscape, these and other recent developments suggest that we will continue to see significant change in coming years. The UK Ministry of Defence published its inaugural Arctic strategy only a few weeks ago, setting high ambitions for future UK presence in the High North. Furthermore—as a direct result of the conflict in Ukraine—Finland and Sweden, which from 1949 onwards have been the only alliance-independent Arctic nations, are currently contemplating NATO membership, a move that might seriously impact the strategic dynamics of the region. This serves as a reminder that the conclusions drawn in this study are subject to a vast number of complex and dynamic factors, and may thus never be enduring in nature. It is my hope, however, that the study may serve as a useful benchmark, both for looking back and moving forward, as we enter a new era of post-Cold War European security.

I would like to express my gratitude to all who have helped me and contributed to this study in various ways over the last year. My supervisor, Dr. Mitchell, for her valuable guidance and insights; the academic staff at the Royal Norwegian Air Force Academy for their sincere enthusiasm, encouragement, and critical comments; friends and colleagues who have keenly discussed or shared their perspectives with me; and finally, my wife Hanna for her patience and generous support, not only as I have grappled with this dissertation, but throughout my entire time with King’s College London. Undertaking postgraduate studies while also balancing demanding professional commitments is no easy task. Without her I could not have managed it.

# Abstract

After years of being reduced to the periphery of US awareness, the Arctic has regained relevance in Washington as great power competition is once again at the forefront of US strategy. As a result, the US Department of Defense published a new Arctic Strategy in 2019, along with several corresponding sub-department strategies between 2020 and 2021. These documents represent a significant shift from previous versions, setting high ambitions for US military presence in the region. Norway finds itself wedged between the strategic interests of Russia and the US, and has historically pursued a delicate balance between reassuring its neighbor in the east, while also striving to attain security guarantees from allies in the west. This study aims to determine if the US strategies are aligned with Norwegian security policy, and, if not, identify points of divergence and possible implications for Norway. It will approach these questions by conducting a document study identifying core components of Norwegian security policy and US strategy, before the findings are compared and discussed to answer the research questions.

The study finds that US strategy is partially aligned with Norwegian security policy. The two allies share several interests on the strategic as well as tactical levels, such as training and infrastructure development. Some notable differences also exist, however. Most fundamentally, diverging perspectives on what constitutes stability, and what threatens it, result in very different approaches to security in the region. Whereas Washington emphasizes deterrence and competition, Oslo adheres to a long-standing ‘dual policy’ aimed at keeping regional tensions as low as possible by balancing deterrence and reassurance. This produces several challenges for Norway as US interests and ambitions in the region grow, and may serve to reduce Norwegian political and military room to maneuver. A more assertive US in the Arctic might force Oslo to reaffirm or reassess elements of its dual policy, if it is to remain a successful basis for future Norwegian security policy.

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# 1. Introduction

Following the outbreak of conflict in Ukraine in 2014, the international security landscape has been characterized by an increased tension between Russia and the West. This has spurred re-emphasis on conventional capabilities and great power competition. Historically, the Arctic has been both a place of intense strategic competition and high geopolitical interest, while paradoxically also representing an arena for cooperation despite differences. As strategic competition is again on the rise, so is the military relevance of the Arctic, leading the US to return its gaze towards the region. The Arctic strategies issued by Washington from 2019 onwards signal substantial commitment and ambitions by the United States (US) in the region, marking a significant change from previous editions which assigned the Arctic a limited and peripheral role. Norway finds itself wedged between the strategic interests of the US and Russia, and has historically pursued a delicate balance between reassuring its neighbor in the east, while also striving to attain security guarantees from allies in the west. As US presence in the Arctic grows to levels not seen since the Cold War, it is useful to consider long-standing principles of Norwegian security policy, examine current US strategy, and discuss whether the renewed US attention in the region harmonizes with Norwegian interests—and, if not, determine in which areas they diverge, and what implications it may carry for Oslo.

### Research question and academic relevance

The study aims to answer the following research questions:

*To what extent are the new US strategies aligned with Norwegian security policy in the Arctic? On what issues do they diverge? What are possible implications for Norway?*

Much has been written on the impact of US-Norwegian relations on Norwegian security policy throughout the Cold War and after. Authoritative works include Tamnes’ *The United States and the Cold War in the High North* (1991), *Allianseforsvar i endring* by Børresen et. al. (2004), and the more recent *Militærmakt i nord* edited by Heier (2021). Most publications and scholarly debate, however, appear to be aimed at a local audience, with a significant share of the literature available in Norwegian only. Furthermore, academic works addressing how Norwegian policy is affected by the more assertive US strategies published in recent years thus far remain limited. This study aims to provide a modest contribution in both these respects, utilizing contemporary US strategy and practice to highlight Norwegian security policy concerns and perspectives, while making them accessible to an international English-speaking audience.

### Methodology

The research will be based on a study of existing literature and depend primarily on analysis of Norwegian and US government publications such as strategies, policies, assessments, and official statements. Secondary sources offering analyses, insights, commentary, or reports of events will be applied to supplement the primary sources. Consultation of secondary sources is also useful to maintaining a critical approach to the government-issued documents, as their formulations may be influenced by political interests or audiences not directly related to the subject at hand—for instance the desire to please domestic opinion or not to adversely affect foreign relations.

‘Security policy’ and ‘strategy’ are central terms in this study, and a clarification on how they will be understood is therefore prudent. ‘Security policy’ will be used to denote a broad range of national instruments of power—such as information, diplomacy, and military or economic means—while ‘strategy’ is limited to military matters. Both terms are employed in the research question. There are two reasons for this. First, the US and Norwegian government documents forming the basis for this study differ significantly in nature. While US documents follow a strict hierarchy and employ terminology clearly distinguishing military and non-military efforts, Norwegian documents are less consistent in this respect, and tend to combine domestic, foreign, and military issues in documents pertaining to the High North. Considering the disproportion between the two nations, lack of directly corresponding documents is only natural. Second, understanding Norwegian concerns on military matters in the region requires an appreciation of the delicate balance between several instruments of power. Analyzing a broader range of government documents is thus necessary to adequately cover Norwegian perspectives.

While China is increasing its efforts in and attention towards the Arctic—in science and economy as well as in the political domain—and is becoming a prominent feature within contemporary US strategy and discourse, its current position in the region remains limited, and its overt military presence negligible. China will consequently not be considered in this study.

### Structure

The study will comprise five sections in addition to this introduction. First, an appreciation of the strategic characteristics pertaining to the Arctic region will be established, forming a context for the subsequent chapters. Second, Norwegian security policy will be examined, identifying central elements of historical and contemporary practice, and placing them within a theoretical framework. The third section offers a discussion on how strategy may be approached from a theoretical perspective, before proceeding to analyze relevant US strategies and identifying their core components. In the fourth section, key findings from the preceding analyses will be compared and discussed. Finally, the last section will draw conclusions and offer answers to the study’s research questions.

The study will argue that the US strategies are partially aligned with Norwegian security policy. The two allies share several interests on the strategic as well as tactical levels, such as training and infrastructure development. Some notable differences also exist, however. Most fundamentally, diverging views on what constitutes stability, and what threatens it, result in very different approaches to security in the region. Whereas Washington emphasizes deterrence and competition, Oslo adheres to a long-standing ‘dual policy’ aimed at keeping regional tensions as low as possible. This produces several challenges for Norway as US interests and ambitions in the region grow, and may require Oslo to reaffirm or reassess elements of its dual policy if it is to remain a successful basis for Norwegian security policy.

# 2. Strategic characteristics of the Arctic

In order to understand the Norwegian and US approaches to the Arctic, it is necessary first to build an appreciation of the strategic characteristics of the region. This chapter will provide an introduction to central features, establishing a context for further discussions in this study. In line with the scope of the study, the focus will be limited to features impacting security policy and military strategy. First, the relationship between the terms *Arctic* and *High North* will be considered. Second, an examination of regional geographic and geopolitical characteristics will be provided. Last, attention will be devoted to understanding Russian perspectives and posture in the Arctic, as Russia is a is fundamental actor in both Norwegian and US assessments of the region.

## 2.1 Defining the Arctic and the High North

The Arctic is defined in different ways depending on which functional perspective is employed. From a climatic perspective the Arctic may be defined by lines along temperature zones, expanse of Arctic sea-ice, permafrost conditions, vegetation zones, or similar measurements.[[1]](#footnote-1) From an astronomical perspective the Arctic is delineated by the Arctic Circle, which currently runs at 66° 33’ 44” North. The Arctic Council relies on this definition, limiting its membership eligibility to those eight nations whose territory extends beyond the Arctic Circle. Similarly, the US Department of Defense (DoD) employs this definition as a basis for its Arctic Strategies.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Norwegian discourse, official statements, policy documents, and strategies typically address *nordområdene* (the High North) not the Arctic. A brief discussion of this term is therefore prudent. Compared to the Arctic, which may be defined by varying, yet precise methods, the High North is a more elastic and less absolute concept. Explicit definitions of the term are conspicuously rare, and it is perhaps better understood as a political concept than a geographical one.[[3]](#footnote-3) While most Norwegian High North strategies include a significant domestic policy component relating to the nation’s northernmost regions, their main emphasis typically revolves around geopolitics and international cooperation, with the 2017 strategy firmly establishing the High North as Norway’s principal area of foreign policy interest.[[4]](#footnote-4) Consequently, one may propose that the High North includes any portion of the Arctic that naturally falls under the Norwegian sphere of political interest. Norwegian jurisdiction comprises not just the mainland territory and its exclusive economic zone, but also Jan Mayen Island and the Svalbard archipelago, along with their respective waters. Thus, a natural sphere of political interest would include these areas, as well as any adjacent territories and waters. Maintaining respect for the elasticity inherent in the term, this leaves an area covering the northern parts of Norway, neighboring regions of Sweden, Finland, and Russia, as well as the Norwegian Sea, the Barents Sea, a sector of the Arctic Ocean, and arguably parts of the Greenland Sea. Russian use of the term Western Arctic, or Western use of the term European Arctic, would correspond to roughly the same areas.[[5]](#footnote-5)

## 2.2 Geographical characteristics

The Arctic is a region vastly different from most other populated areas of the Earth. Large swaths of the circumpolar land mass are subject to permafrost and long seasons of snow cover, leaving the terrain scarcely vegetated and inhospitable to permanent human settlements. The region is consequently characterized remoteness and lack of infrastructure. A cap of permanent sea ice centered around the North Pole, with zones of seasonal ice extending further south, complicates maritime access to and navigation in the Arctic Ocean. Norway and its neighboring areas represent a remarkable exception in this respect, as the constant flow of warm water provided by the Gulf Stream has a profound effect on the climate in this area. The current ensures warm ocean temperatures in the Norwegian Sea and Barents Sea, allowing both Norway and northwestern parts of Russia to enjoy ice-free coastlines and harbors year-round, and permitting permanent population at latitudes significantly higher than in other areas of the Arctic.[[6]](#footnote-6) Consequently, these areas serve as useful ‘bridgheads’ into the otherwise climatically hostile Arctic region.

As Arctic temperatures gradually rise because of climate change, new possibilities and challenges emerge. In addition to impacts on Arctic flora and fauna, declines in average seasonal sea ice extent and thickness opens the potential for new commercial shipping routes, most notably through the Northeast Passage along the Russian Arctic coast.[[7]](#footnote-7) This Northern Sea Route (NSR) provides a significant shortcut between important centers of international commerce, promising reduced transit times and thus increased profit if it can be exploited within reasonable cost. Presently, the route is only fully open for a short period in the summer, and consequently the number of transit voyages remains low. A gradual increase is expected throughout the next decade, however, as the recession of seasonal sea ice continues, and Russia expands its fleet of nuclear-powered ice breakers.[[8]](#footnote-8) The Arctic also attracts economic attention due to the presence, or in some cases assumed presence, of exploitable resources. These include industrial minerals, offshore hydrocarbon reserves, as well as important fisheries—particularly in the temperate and easily accessible waters of the Norwegian Sea and Barents Sea.[[9]](#footnote-9)

## 2.3 Geopolitical Characteristics

Generally, the Arctic is perceived as a stable region characterized by remarkably well-functioning cooperation between nations. The Arctic Council, the Barents Euro-Arctic Council, and other similar multilateral forums have been instrumental in addressing mutual challenges, facilitating cross-border cooperation, and ensuring peaceful resolution of disputes between the Arctic nations—especially within issues such as preservation of Arctic flora and fauna, the rights of indigenous peoples, and emergency preparedness and response.[[10]](#footnote-10) With respect to military security issues, however, the international atmosphere is quite different. As a consequence, the Arctic Council—arguably the most influential intergovernmental body in the region—consistently refrains from discussing military security issues.[[11]](#footnote-11) Depoliticization of the council is seen as a necessary step to ensure the cooperative and solution-minded environment persists, allowing important agreements to be reached on soft security issues such as oil pollution and search and rescue, and even semi-military issues such as coast guard cooperation.[[12]](#footnote-12)

In a Western security policy jargon, the areas surrounding the Norwegian Sea are commonly referred to as NATO’s ‘Northern Flank’. Although not an official designation, the term is frequently recurring among scholars and decision-makers, and is open to various interpretations depending on the context. A Central-European perspective might see this flank include areas as far south as the North Sea and the northern coastline of the European mainland, whereas a perspective oriented more towards the North-Atlantic—and the sea lines of communications (SLOCs) connecting Europe and the US—would likely revolve around the chokepoints formed by the Greenland-Iceland-UK (GIUK) gap and the gap formed between mainland Norway, Bear Island, and Svalbard (the Bear Gap). Adopting instead a US-Russian perspective, the so-called flank is perhaps more accurately regarded as a front. Owing to developments in long-range aviation and ballistic missile technology throughout the Cold War, the Arctic emerged as a significant strategic threat axis, as it provides the most direct route between US and Russian—then Soviet—territories. Norway and its surroundings, Huitfeldt observes, finds itself along the shortest route between the most heavily populated and industrialized areas of the two superpowers.[[13]](#footnote-13) Norway furthermore shares a border with Russia, not only on land, but also in the maritime domain, and finds itself in close proximity to some of Russia’s most vital military assets.[[14]](#footnote-14) Developing an appreciation for Russian posture and interest in the Arctic is therefore instrumental to understanding US and Norwegian perspectives on military security in the region.

## 2.4 Russia and the Arctic

Russia boasts the world’s longest coastline, a majority of which faces the Arctic.[[15]](#footnote-15) Roughly one-fifth of Russia’s land mass lies within the Arctic Circle, and accounts for an equally large share of the Russian export economy.[[16]](#footnote-16) Russia consequently enjoys an indisputable status as an Arctic state, and currently holds the chairmanship of the Arctic Council. Moscow’s main interests in the region, Larssen argues, are economic opportunities and military security.[[17]](#footnote-17) The Arctic is abundant in both marine resources and hydrocarbons and constitutes a strategically important resource base for the Russian economy, enabling funds to be directed towards prioritized sectors—including further development of military capability. Moscow also aims to continue developing trade and transport through the NSR. Taking full advantage of the opportunities present in the Arctic is proving costly and difficult, however, as it requires significant improvements in supporting infrastructure such as communications, transportation, and search and rescue assets throughout the region.[[18]](#footnote-18) Military assets may help alleviate some deficiencies in this respect, functioning as gap fillers where civilian equivalents are prohibitively expensive or difficult to sustain. Thus, Kluge and Paul notes, increased Russian military footprint in the Arctic need not always be an indication of military expansionism.[[19]](#footnote-19)

In 2014, Moscow established the Northern Fleet Joint Strategic Command as a fifth military district, thereby signaling the importance of the Arctic theater and maritime domain to Russian national security.[[20]](#footnote-20) The military significance of the Arctic is further emphasized in Moscow’s 2020 Arctic Strategy, which, contrary to its 2013 predecessor, describes growing concern over military security in the region. The strategy calls for ‘a continuous increase in military capabilities’ to counter ‘existing and projected’ threats as ‘the collective West’—in Moscow’s perspective—continues to militarize the Arctic, demonstrate intentions of offensive expansion, and restrict Russian development in the region.[[21]](#footnote-21) While Baev finds Russian rhetoric is employing an ‘astounding amount of exaggeration’ to describe external threats to its interests in the Arctic, Hjermann and Wilhelmsen caution against brushing off Russian concerns as illegitimate and exaggerated complains, advising both sides to exercise rhetorical prudence to reduce volatility.[[22]](#footnote-22)

Moscow’s core military ambitions in the Arctic are threefold, Rumer, Sokolsky and Stronski argue.[[23]](#footnote-23) First, ensuring that the sea-based nuclear second-strike capability, represented by the ballistic missile submarines (SSBNs) based on the Kola Peninsula coast, remain safe and available. The sea-based deterrent, Kvam argues, secures Russia a seat at the table of negotiations should a conflict arise, and thus guarantees the country’s status as a great power.[[24]](#footnote-24) Protecting this strategic deterrent is the rationale behind the ‘protected maritime region’, or the ‘bastion defense’ as it mostly referred to in western discourse—a layered anti-access/area-denial (A2/AD) construct which, if activated, would stretch west- and southwards from the Barents Sea. Utilizing subsurface, surface, and air assets, the aim is to defend a core ‘bastion’ of SSBNs in the Barents Sea by engaging adversary forces before they can conduct their strikes.[[25]](#footnote-25) To this end, Russia is placing a heavy emphasis on modernizing its submarine fleet and developing long-range air defense and strike capabilities. Noteworthy examples include the sophisticated *Borei*-class SSBN and the cruise-missile equipped *Yasen*-class multi-purpose submarine (SSGN), the *Bulava* ballistic missile, *Zircon* and *Kalibr* series cruise missiles, and the S-400 *Triumf* air defense system. Russian ability to exercise A2/AD throughout the Barents Sea and the Norwegian Sea, Wegge concludes, has improved notably over the last years.[[26]](#footnote-26) Placing strategic emphasis on the sea-based deterrent, Parnemo remarks, ‘markedly diminish the need for an ocean-going fleet.’[[27]](#footnote-27) Advanced submarines and missiles thus represent economically sound solutions to a strained military budget. US intelligence estimates expect further modernization and expansion of Russian nuclear stockpiles, as ‘Russia sees its nuclear weapons as the ultimate guarantor of the country’s survival, perceives a warfighting role for their use, and directs its scarce resources to its nuclear modernization effort.’[[28]](#footnote-28) Russia’s Arctic bastion thus remains central in the foreseeable future.

Second, Moscow seeks to protect its freedom of operations in the Barents Sea, the Western Arctic, and ultimately the North Atlantic. Unlike Russia’s other fleets, who must traverse narrow straits to access the Atlantic Ocean, the Northern Fleet enjoys almost unhindered access to the North Atlantic. The ability to threaten NATO SLOCs in these areas may prove decisive in the event of conflict.[[29]](#footnote-29) In addition, Rhode submits, access to the North Atlantic allows Russia to ‘exert significant strategic pressure around the European theatre in times of tension’, targeting key nodes on land—such as airfields, command units, or political targets—sabotaging communications infrastructure on the seabed, and constituting a threat towards adversary strategic forces.[[30]](#footnote-30) The *Yasen*-class SSGNs represent an especially potent asset in this respect, boasting among other things an impressive arsenal of modern cruise missiles, and operating at quietness-levels causing alarm within western circles.[[31]](#footnote-31)

Third, Moscow aims to ensure adequate protection for its economic interests in the region. This aligns well both with the need to support commercial expansion with relevant assets, and the ambition to remain a military superiority in the Barents region. The solution has been to boost conventional build-up and to reactivate remote base infrastructure, including increased activity and investment in military bases along the NSR and around the Barents Sea—notably also on Novaya Zemlya and Franz Josef Land.[[32]](#footnote-32) Additionally, emphasis has been placed on high-visibility exercises and activities, such as the 2007 planting of the Russian flag on the North Pole seabed and the 2021 simultaneous surfacing of three SSBNs through the Arctic ice.[[33]](#footnote-33)

In sum, the Arctic holds a significant role in Russian security, and Moscow is seriously concerned by what it perceives as Western expansion in the region. Russia demonstrates bold ambitions for the Arctic, both in military and economic sense. Whether it has the capacity to fulfill them remains to be seen.

# 3. Norwegian security policy in the Arctic

Norway’s position as a small state, closely surrounded by greater powers whose behaviors it has limited ability to influence, has been decisive in shaping its security policy and foreign relations. From isolationism during the inter-war years—based on the misguided perception that Norway’s geographic position was too peripheral to attract any strategic interest should war break out on the European continent—the Norwegian approach to security shifted significantly in the wake of World War II, establishing from an early onset what Tamnes describes as a ‘dual policy’.[[34]](#footnote-34) As the war had clearly demonstrated, Norway’s geostrategic position was indeed exposed, and external assistance would be necessary to maintain territorial integrity in the event of a new conflict. Considering Norway’s close proximity to the Soviet Union, however, caution was paramount in this endeavor, resulting in an approach described by the US State Department in 1946 as ‘being pro-US and UK to the greatest extent it dares, pro-Soviet to the extent it must, and pro-UN to the extent it can.’[[35]](#footnote-35) With the establishment of NATO in 1949—Norway being a founding member—the dual policy became more defined. In relation to the Soviet Union, Norway assumed a strategy of extended *deterrence* through its alliance membership, but remained careful to balance deterrence with adequate *reassurance* efforts. In relation to NATO and the US, the same dynamics were supported by pursuit of alliance *integration* whenever possible, carefully combined with self-imposed restrictions aiming to *screen* the country from certain forms of alliance activity.[[36]](#footnote-36) These principles, balancing the need for support from the west against the desire for low tensions in the east, served as the bedrock of Norwegian security policy throughout the Cold War, and endure as fundamental principles today.[[37]](#footnote-37)

The next section will establish a theoretical base for understanding the mechanisms of deterrence and reassurance. The chapter will then move on to examining how these considerations have been implemented in Norwegian security policy, before offering a similar discussion on integration and screening efforts.

## 3.1 Understanding deterrence and reassurance

Deterrence is the practice of discouraging an opponent from taking unwanted actions through instilling fear of the consequences. Military deterrence typically aims to prevent aggression by increasing the cost or risk of an attack from the aggressor. Snyder divides deterrence into two base forms: *denial* and *punishment*.[[38]](#footnote-38) The aim of denial is to place enough measures in the way to bar the opponent from reaching his goals without taking unacceptable risks. Positioning enough military forces in an area to defeat an invasion is a basic example of this, whereby the presence of a counterforce denies the opponent a prospective gain. Essentially, Mazarr summarizes, denial represents ‘the application of intention and effort to defend some commitment’, and the ability to deny thus corresponds to the ability to defend.[[39]](#footnote-39) In contrast, deterrence by punishment relies on a threat of severe penalties following an unwanted action by the opponent. This approach potentially grants the opponent his goals, but forces him to consider if the gain outweighs the risk of subsequent punishment. Penalties may be military in nature—such as a retaliatory attack against the aggressor’s forces or strategic centers of gravity—but may also assume political forms, such as economic or diplomatic sanctions.[[40]](#footnote-40) Regardless of form, however, the success of any deterrence strategy depends on both a credible threat—a sum of capabilities and intentions—and a communication of this threat to the opponent.[[41]](#footnote-41)

Deterrence may be exercised in either a *direct* or *extended* manner. Direct deterrence involves efforts to discourage aggression against one’s own interests, while extended deterrence is concerned with avoiding aggression against a third party.[[42]](#footnote-42) NATO’s commitment to collective self-defense is a prime example of extended deterrence, and a policy to which some credit the relative peace maintained throughout the Cold War. Nevertheless, Mazarr cautions, successfully achieving extended deterrence remains markedly more challenging than achieving direct deterrence. First, maintaining military deterrence across far distances is more resource-demanding—and thus requires greater commitment—than doing so closer to one’s own territory. Second, any pledge to defend a third party carries some inherent uncertainty.[[43]](#footnote-43) Even NATO’s article 5, widely perceived as one of the most explicit commitments to extended deterrence today, only requires allies to ‘assist the Party or Parties so attacked by taking … such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force, to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area,’[[44]](#footnote-44) leaving significant leeway to assess each case individually. Extended deterrence is therefore more vulnerable to opportunistic, gradual, limited, or concealed aggression. In contrast, any state experiencing a direct attack against its own territories will almost certainly fight to defend itself.

While deterrence-based strategies may be suitable when faced with expansionist or opportunistic opponents, Knopf warns that this approach might result in an escalatory spiral if applied against opponents whose actions are motivated primarily by insecurity. In such scenarios, Knopf contends, a *reassurance*-based strategy is more appropriate.[[45]](#footnote-45) Reassurance as a strategic means assumes that an opponent may very well may have aggressive intentions, but that these are driven by fear and uncertainty rather than prospective gain. Resorting to preemptive attacks is an example of such behavior. The aim of reassurance, therefore, is to reduce the level and influence of insecurity by demonstrating non-aggressive intentions. Examples of reassuring measures include self-imposed restrictions on military activities and acquisitions, complying with informal regimes to regulate competition, and formal initiatives such as arms control. By convincing the opponent that one does not harbor hostile intentions towards it, and that its security concerns will be respected, fear and uncertainty is alleviated, and the chance of unintended conflict is lowered.[[46]](#footnote-46) As Oma notes however, reality is often more complex than theories allow for. Aggressive behavior may be motivated by an intricate set of drivers, including both fear and prospects of strategic gain. Consequently, a combination of reassurance and various forms of deterrence may be prudent when shaping strategy in a competitive environment.[[47]](#footnote-47)

## 3.2 Deterrence and reassurance in Norwegian Policy

The strive to balance deterrence and reassurance towards Russia represents a central and constant element in Norwegian security policy. Despite changing governments and significant developments in the international security policy landscape over the previous decades, there have been no major changes to these principles. Oslo frequently reaffirms its commitment to the policy, highlighting its role in keeping the Arctic a region of low tension and conflict.[[48]](#footnote-48)

### Deterrence

As the Norwegian armed forces are too small to achieve robust direct deterrence against Russian forces on their own, Norway ultimately relies on the extended deterrence offered by allied support and reinforcement should conflict arise. Norwegian deterrence strategy may thus be understood as two parallel lines of effort: one aimed at establishing a military threshold providing local denial, and another aimed at securing the credibility of the extended deterrence represented by Norway’s alliance membership. Berli expands on this, positing that the aim of Norwegian deterrence is not to ward off Russian advances altogether, but to ensure that any such advances are met with enough force to provoke an allied response, as the prospect of allied support significantly increases the potential cost for Russia.[[49]](#footnote-49) Heier echoes this logic, arguing that finding oneself in a conflict that is ‘too big for Norway, but too small for NATO’ would be Oslo’s ‘worst nightmare’.[[50]](#footnote-50) In other words, Norwegian forces must be able to deny an adversary a fait accompli, or a situation where the conflict level remains in a grey zone below the threshold for allied involvement.

Norway must also ensure that the extended deterrence represented by its alliance membership is credible. Although several factors determining this credibility remain outside Oslo’s control, such as the military capabilities and political intentions of allies, there are also factors that may be influenced. As Norway is geographically separated from its allies by bodies of water, it is essential to ensure that infrastructure and facilities enabling reception of allied support exist and can be adequately protected across the conflict continuum, and that concepts and plans relating to allied support are rehearsed and exercised. At the political and strategic levels, Oslo may also labor to keep the High North on the agenda—as has been attempted with varying degrees of success throughout the Cold War and after—and work to ensure Norway is perceived as a loyal alliance member.[[51]](#footnote-51)

As many allies have returned their gaze towards the north in later years, Norway has hosted several large-scale exercises—including *Trident Juncture 2018* which remains the largest NATO exercise conducted since the Cold War—aimed specifically at collective defense of Norway.[[52]](#footnote-52) In addition to developing regional awareness among Norway’s allies at the political and strategic levels, these exercises are vital to ensuring that deployment and reception of allied support is rehearsed, that allied forces are able to integrate with one another within a Norwegian context, and that allies gain familiarity and proficiency with operations in Arctic and sub-Arctic climates. Without demonstrating these abilities, the credibility of the extended deterrent arguably remains limited. Furthermore, Clem observes, military exercises are useful tools in communicating strategic commitments and postures, allowing the geopolitical message to be tailored by adjusting the exercise design, such as its geographical location, participant nations, weapon systems, scenarios, and media profile.[[53]](#footnote-53)

### Reassurance

Oslo has historically been careful to counter-balance deterrence with reassuring measures. Reassurance, Bragstad observes, comprises a broad spectrum of measures—some of which do not pertain to military issues and are therefore beyond the scope of this thesis.[[54]](#footnote-54) Three main efforts may be identified in Norwegian reassurance. First, maintaining a defensively oriented posture of Norwegian forces, second, acting as a military buffer separating forces from the East and West, and third, seeking cooperation with Russia to promote stability and predictability whenever possible.

Maintaining a defensive national force design and posture has been essential in Norwegian security policy throughout the Cold War, and arguably remains central even today. Norway’s geographic position provides a prime basis for power projection into the Arctic and North-Atlantic theatres, rendering access to Norwegian territory strategically desirable to both Russia and the US.[[55]](#footnote-55) To a small nation commanding only limited military resources, this translates to geostrategic vulnerability. Through careful and deliberate choices in Norwegian force design, decision-makers have hoped to communicate non-aggressive intentions towards the Soviet Union and Russia respectively, in line with Knopf’s description of reassurance dynamics. Examples include the firm decision not to equip or train Norwegian units for offensive nuclear operations—a standpoint subjected to significant pressure from the top military levels of NATO during the fifties and sixties[[56]](#footnote-56)—and arguably the decision not to arm Norwegian maritime patrol aircraft (MPA) with anti-surface missiles, despite this being a standard feature of the aircraft models in question.[[57]](#footnote-57)

Furthermore, Norway has strived to establish and maintain a geographic and strategic buffer between Russia and the West. A series of self-imposed restrictions implemented in the early stages of the Cold War still places significant limitations on allied operations on and from Norwegian territory. By limiting allied presence in time, geography, and offensive capability, Oslo sought to screen Norway off from NATO and the US, hoping to avoid being perceived by Moscow primarily as a ‘steppingstone’ for power projection into its territories.[[58]](#footnote-58) Screening measures represent a core component of in Norwegian reassurance, and will be examined in greater detail in the next section, along with a discussion on alliance integration. In order to truly function as a buffer, it is essential that Norway’s self-imposed restrictions be accompanied by a willingness and ability to assume some of the key tasks that they prevent others—most notably the US—from conducting. The prime example of this is intelligence collection. With most of the Northern Fleet’s bases clustered only a few kilometers from Norwegian borders, along with their associated testing and exercise areas in the Barents Sea, Norway enjoys front-row seats to monitoring Russian activity in the High North.[[59]](#footnote-59) Norwegian ships and aircraft, Heier notes, operate in the Barents Sea on a daily basis and have consequently developed a ‘fingerspitzengefühl’ for non-escalatory handling of tactical encounters with Russian units. Contrary to their US or NATO colleagues, he argues, Norwegian units are largely perceived by Russia as natural parts of the environment.[[60]](#footnote-60) By maintaining ability to conduct these operations, Norway contributes to stability by reducing the need for other nations to operate in the area, which in turn allows the Norwegian screening efforts to remain largely unchallenged.

Lastly, Norway actively seeks cooperation and dialogue with Russia in military matters. This effort has been significantly limited after 2014, but prior to this, Norwegian and Russian naval units conducted combined exercises together on multiple occasions. Presently, an annual emergency response-oriented—and notably civilian-led—exercise in the Barents region is the only remaining bilateral arena in which military units participate. Wide cooperation still exists in semi-military areas such as coast guard and border guard operations, however, and military observers are routinely invited to attend larger exercises in each other’s countries.[[61]](#footnote-61) As national diplomatic dialogue and official communication channels between NATO and Moscow have been reduced or terminated entirely following the 2014 and 2022 events in Ukraine, maintaining contact at the military operational levels has become even more important. Emphasis is placed on continuing the already regular dialogue between the Norwegian Joint Headquarters and the Northern Fleet Headquarters to allow a degree of transparency, and to prevent misunderstandings or inadvertent escalation.[[62]](#footnote-62)

## 3.3 Integration and screening in Norwegian policy

From the initial theoretical discussion in this chapter, it becomes clear that alliance integration and screening are ultimately measures supporting deterrence and reassurance. Because integration and screening efforts are aimed at one’s allies and not one’s opponent, however, the dynamics are different and the concepts thus merit separate attention. The relationship between the two closely resemble what Snyder describes as his ‘secondary alliance dilemma,’ in which the degree of support invested in an alliance may be placed along a continuum ranging from ‘defection’ to ‘cooperation’. To Snyder, the most prevalent risks in an alliance—to be abandoned or entrapped—result from gravitating too heavily towards defection or cooperation respectively. Abandonment in this sense is when the alliance fails to render support where support is expected, while entrapment means being drawn ‘into a conflict over an ally’s interest that one does not share, or shares only partially.’[[63]](#footnote-63)

### Integration

To Norway, alliance integration has been essential to maintain a favorable relationship with key allies—primarily the US—thereby reducing the chance of abandonment, in turn helping secure a credible extended deterrence. This form of integration may be sought through mutually beneficial initiatives, such as cooperation to address common interests or issues, or activities aimed at improving military skills and proficiency in desired areas. Multilateral military exercises serve this purpose by aiding operational and tactical level integration between allies—and may also result in deterrence as a secondary effect. Some recent examples of Norwegian-hosted large-scale exercises include *Trident Juncture* *2018* and *Arctic Challenge Exercise 2021*, and *Cold Response 2022*, in addition to the upcoming *Dynamic Mongoose 2022*.[[64]](#footnote-64)

Integration may also take the form of more transactional military contributions, either through bilateral agreements, or collective initiatives. Sharing information from maritime surveillance and intelligence collection in the High North is an example of the former, while participation in out-of-area NATO operations is an example of the latter.[[65]](#footnote-65) The importance ascribed to the latter during periods of low allied interest in the Arctic is explicitly acknowledged by the Norwegian government: ‘The first and most important objective throughout [our engagement in Afghanistan] was the Alliance dimension: to support the US and safeguard NATO’s continued relevance. Norway largely achieved the objective of confirming its role as a solid and reliable ally,’ or, as Skaar bluntly puts it, ‘winning [the war] is not the most important thing.’[[66]](#footnote-66) As this example illustrates, integration might lead to entrapment. Nevertheless, it appears Oslo considered the prospective gain—reduced risk of abandonment—greater than the associated risks, and consequently accepted participation in a conflict in which it had limited interests.

Additionally, alliance integration may be pursued by efforts not involving military units directly, such as through active participation in political and strategic forums. Engagement on the international decision-making levels offers a chance to shape policy and strategy in favor of one’s own interests. Finding itself a ‘lone’ NATO member in the north, Norway has pushed for the alliance to turn its gaze towards the region on multiple occasions, both during the Cold War and after, fearing that Norwegian defense interests might be marginalized if not closely interlinked with larger strategic interests within the alliance.[[67]](#footnote-67)

### Screening

Whereas integration is generally welcomed, screening has historically elicited protests and challenges from allies. The very first—and arguably still most prominent—screening measure was put into effect shortly before Norway joined eleven other nations in founding NATO. Then-secretary of state Lange cautioned that ‘bases manned by British or American personnel would function as a direct provocation in relation to Russia’ and hence the ‘base policy’ was established, in which Norway rejects permanent allied bases so long as the country ‘is not under attack or exposed to the threat of attack.’[[68]](#footnote-68) The base policy remains in effect to this day, but has been challenged by allies and critiqued both by Moscow and domestic voices multiple times since its inception in 1949, resulting in several clarifications by the Norwegian government on what the policy *does not* prohibit. The main lines of the base policy have endured since they were first clarified in 1951, however, and is understood to allow non-permanent allied presence for training or exercise purposes, establishment of technical installations—such as surveillance equipment, communications infrastructure, or navigational aids—allied pre-positioning of equipment and ammunition, and transfer of command and control over Norwegian forces to NATO headquarters.[[69]](#footnote-69) Since the screening measures are self-imposed, Oma notes, their practical application is subject to interpretation or change by the Norwegian government at any given time.[[70]](#footnote-70)

The base policy is accompanied by two other, closely related screening measures: a nuclear policy rejecting the stockpiling of any nuclear charges on Norwegian soil, and the so-called ‘Bratteli Doctrine’, which establishes that allied naval units using ports of call in Norway shall not be equipped with nuclear weapons.[[71]](#footnote-71) Both measures are, like the base policy, restricted to peacetime, although it remains ‘the constitutional responsibility of any Norwegian government to assess the adequacy of defense measures.’[[72]](#footnote-72) While the nuclear policy carries clear practical consequences and has represented a firm constant in Norwegian security policy, the Bratteli Doctrine could be considered a gentleman’s agreement at best, as it fails to place power behind its demands, and simply ‘expects’ that allies as well as other nuclear powers will respect its preconditions. There are few, if any, examples of actual enforcement of the doctrine. An attempt was made in 1986 by Holst, then newly-appointed Minister of Defense, but his initiative was quickly withdrawn following sharp reactions from Washington.[[73]](#footnote-73) Consequently, it may be argued that the doctrine harbors little value other than as a rhetorical tool to underline the Norwegian stance on nuclear weapons on its territory. Formally, however, it is still in effect, and has recently regained public attention as US nuclear submarines are once again making use of ports in northern Norway for resupply and crew rotations.[[74]](#footnote-74)

Other long-standing screening efforts include strict geographical limitations on allied military presence in the country’s northernmost regions. Notably, allied ground troops are not to exercise or operate in Norway’s northernmost county, Finnmark. Additionally, a line drawn at 24° eastern longitude marks a boundary beyond which allied flights originating from Norwegian airfields may not operate—even if the flight is conducted in international airspace—and beyond which allied naval units may not conduct port calls.[[75]](#footnote-75) These limitations have largely been accepted without protests or controversy.

# 4. US strategy in the Arctic

To understand how the US approaches the Arctic region, it is not sufficient to study the Arctic strategies alone, as US posture and ambition is shaped mainly by the direction established in globally oriented documents. A discussion of US strategy in the Arctic thus requires the study of a spectrum of strategies and sub-strategies. This chapter will aim to identify core elements of the threat perception, strategic ends, ways, and means evident in relevant US strategies.

First, top-tier national strategies with a global scope will be examined. Documents at this level not only form the basis upon which the respective Arctic strategies are based, but serve as a defense policy capstone, communicating the administration’s views on matters such as strategic posture, prioritized security challenges, and force modernization. Second, the Department of Defense (DoD) Arctic Strategy, along with its service-specific sub-strategies, will be addressed. While appreciating that these strategies apply to the entire Arctic region, issues and concepts not impacting the High North remain of limited significance to this study and will consequently not be discussed. Following the respective analyses, some central findings and observations will be discussed by use of secondary sources and examples of actual practice.

Before embarking on an examination of US strategic documents, however, it is useful to establish a theoretical basis for the discussion. The next section will offer a brief introduction to—and critique of—the theories that serve as a structural framework for the analysis and discussion of strategy throughout the next chapters.

## 4.1 Components of strategy

Strategy may be understood and approached from a variety of angles, ranging from Clausewitz’ definition of strategy as ‘the use of an engagement for the purpose of the war’—which understandably comes across as too narrow to many modern readers—to the wider-spanning ‘art of creating power’ suggested by Wilkinson and Gow.[[76]](#footnote-76) In contemporary US doctrine, military strategy is understood as an idea or set of ideas detailing how instruments of power may be employed in pursuit of defined objectives. In its modern sense, strategy is expected to encompass a wide set of abilities, a broad spectrum of competition or conflict, and cover a complex environment spanning several domains or geographic regions.[[77]](#footnote-77)

The ultimate objective of military strategy is to serve security policy. This is achieved by determining what needs be accomplished to support the decided-upon policy, what methods will be suitable to accomplish it, and what assets are required for those methods. Lykke describes the relationship between these factors as an equation in which strategy is the sum of *ends*, *ways*, and *means*. ‘This general concept,’ he argues, ‘can be used as a basis for the formulation of any type strategy—military, political, economic, and so forth.’ In a military context, he suggests, ends may be understood as strategic *objectives* or vital interests, ways as *concepts* or courses of action, and means as the *resources* required to accomplish the mission.[[78]](#footnote-78)

The model might be criticized for being too introspective—not placing enough emphasis on the adversary or security problem which the strategy is designed to address—too simplistic, or too absolute in that the ‘ends’ pursued rarely take the form of final conclusions. King represents the former view, arguing that Lykke’s equation ‘elucidates the problems it was designed to confront.’[[79]](#footnote-79) Cavanaugh echoes this, accusing Lykke’s equation of being both ‘enemy-omitting’ and rigidly ‘end-seeking’, fearing that the model’s dominant position within US military institutions has a constrictive effect on creative strategy development, becoming an academic straitjacket rather than a helpful tool.[[80]](#footnote-80) Other scholars, such as Park, acknowledge the imperfections of Lykke’s equation, but argue that ‘only the most mechanistic application of the model’ would lead to an interpretation in which this simple equation includes all facets of strategy development. Any sound strategist, he submits, appreciates that factors such as policy constraints and strategic environment will introduce complexity to the process.[[81]](#footnote-81) Criticism notwithstanding, the model has endured as a basic principle in the curriculum of US war colleges and has largely become a template for US strategy development. Consequently, it is also a useful point of departure for analyzing such strategies.

As highlighted by Lykke’s critics, establishing an appreciation of the strategic environment is crucial to any strategy development process, and should therefore also be considered when analyzing strategy. Relevant factors may range from geography and access to resources, to area demographics and political relations or security challenges between relevant entities. The scope of this study, however, prohibits comprehensive discussions of the strategic environment. Threat perception will therefore be incorporated as a fourth factor augmenting ends, ways, and means when strategy and security policy is examined throughout the next chapters. This will cover the most significant aspects of the strategic environment and serve to balance the introspective tendency arguably present in Lykke’s model. For the purpose of this study, threats are understood as factors that may challenge national security interests, while ends, ways, and means are understood primarily as objectives, concepts, and resources, as suggested by Lykke.

## 4.2 Global strategies

The top tiers of US security strategy are comprised of the National Security Strategy (NSS) published by the President, the National Defense Strategy (NDS) published by the Secretary of Defense, and the National Military Strategy (NMS) published by the Joint Chiefs of Staff.[[82]](#footnote-82) While the former is openly accessible, the latter two are classified documents with only short unclassified synopses released to the public. Therefore, a testimony delivered by Elbridge A. Colby, which sheds some light on the process and thoughts behind the classified strategies, will be used as a supplementary source.[[83]](#footnote-83) Strategy at this level provides a thorough overview of US threat perception, clearly establishes a set of global strategic ends, and does to some extent introduce ways in which these ends may be addressed. The allocation of means however—at least in the unclassified documents—largely remains too abstract or general in nature to provide substantial value for this study.

### Analysis

Contrary to Bush and Obama era strategies, the 2017 NSS draws a picture in which great power competition takes center stage as the most prominent threat against the US. The strategy argues that the US gradually entered a state of complacency following the end of the Cold War, taking its economic, military, and political advantages for granted and allowing adversary actors to build strength while the US focused its attention elsewhere. The NDS goes so far as to brand this ‘a period of strategic atrophy’, warning that a significant shift has occurred in the global security environment, stripping US of the dominant superiority it has become used to enjoying, and instead leaving domain superiority a matter of enduring contest. As global competition is rising, China and Russia are being portrayed as the main competitors, challenging ‘American power, influence, and interests, and attempting to erode American security and prosperity.’ The reemergence of long-term strategic competition is perceived as the most prevalent threat to US security and prosperity, while the Russian nuclear arsenal remains its largest existential threat.[[84]](#footnote-84)

A natural product of its competition-centered threat perception, the NSS establishes successful deterrence as its desired strategic end. Deterrence across all domains, the NSS posits, will allow a US posture of strength and confidence, which in turn promotes peace. ‘An America that successfully competes is the best way to prevent conflict,’ the strategy argues, stressing that competition must be pursued across the full conflict continuum.[[85]](#footnote-85) Supporting long-term strategic competition through deterrence in all domains, the NDS admits, is ‘is a fundamentally different challenge than the regional adversaries that were the focus of previous strategies.’ The NDS proposes several efforts designed to help drive this shift and tailor the military force posture to deterrence and great power competition. Core ambitions include developing a more agile force, and becoming ‘strategically predictable, but operationally unpredictable’. By introducing unpredictability at the operational level, Washington hopes to ‘challenge competitors by maneuvering them into unfavorable positions, frustrating their efforts, precluding their options while expanding our own, and forcing them to confront conflict under adverse conditions.’[[86]](#footnote-86) Two central concepts underpin these ambitions: the *Global Operating Model* (GOM) and *Dynamic Force Employment* (DFE).[[87]](#footnote-87)

The Global Operating Model (GOM), Colby explains, represents a new approach to warfighting. Contrary to the post-Cold War approach, which has relied on mounting massive assaults to establish dominance in all domains, the GOM accepts that the US might never gain all-domain dominance. Instead, it calls for rapid confrontation of aggression, aiming to blunt and impede an attack at the initial stages of hostility, thereby managing escalation and confining the conflict.[[88]](#footnote-88) The model comprises four layers of forces. First, the *contact* layer, which consists of forces already present in the operational area, is designed to compete below the threshold of conflict, prevent surprise, and deny adversary dominance of the perceptual landscape. Next, the *blunt* layer is tailored to respond swiftly to emerging conflicts, effectively delaying, degrading, or denying adversary gains. Third, the *surge* layer comprises a strong, decisive force which might be summoned should the blunt layer be insufficient to manage the conflict. Fourth, the *homeland* layer defends US territory, enabling the remainder of the Joint Force to focus on forward missions.[[89]](#footnote-89) The GOM carries some implications for US force design. The concept needs capabilities that remain lethal even in the face of sophisticated domain competition, and consequently, Colby notes, the NDS prioritizes developing capability over capacity.[[90]](#footnote-90) Furthermore, the GOM demands forces that can be shifted between various theatres within a short time, allowing for an unpredictable force posture at the operational level. This necessitates both a high degree of readiness and a force design favoring agility.

Dynamic Force Employment (DFE) is a concept which, the NDS posits, is developed in response to a global security environment demanding greater flexibility in force disposition and posture. While the previous DoD force employment model scripted deployments months or even years in advance, the DFE calls for a more easily adjusted mindset, allowing quick modifications of force disposition to better exploit emerging strategic opportunities, respond to contingencies, or send political messages.[[91]](#footnote-91) Thus, DFE provides decision-makers available and scalable means to proactively shape the strategic environment or respond to emerging situations.[[92]](#footnote-92) The flexibility offered by the concept is also essential both to operationalize ‘the introduction of unpredictability to adversary decision-makers’ called for by the NDS, and to ensure credible blunt and surge layers exists to support the GOM.

### Observations

The concepts proposed by Washington place heavy emphasis on competition through deterrence, enabled by operational level agility and unpredictability. Some scholars have praised the concepts as long-due adjustments to a new reality. Gallagher, for instance, see them as a much-needed shift towards denial, arguing that deterrence by punishment is ill-suited for modern great power competition between nuclear powers.[[93]](#footnote-93) An argument can also be made, however, that the concepts represent, above all, fiscally tolerable compromises to a strategic situation which presents rising challenges in geographically separated theatres. Acknowledging that the force structure at hand cannot cover all areas of strategic importance to the US, the GOM and DFE offer solutions to a strained military budget and a stretched joint force. The concepts justify a reduced forward presence by ‘capitalizing on agility’ and introducing operational uncertainty, thereby complicating adversary risk estimations and ‘bolstering deterrence,’ effectively promising to accomplish more with fewer resources.[[94]](#footnote-94)

## 4.3 Arctic Strategies

The current DoD Arctic Strategy was released in 2019, is anchored in the overarching global strategies, and includes a classified annex not publicly available. Additionally, the three military DoD sub-departments—Air Force (DAF), Navy (DoN), and Army (DA)—issued their own Arctic Strategies in 2020 and 2021 respectively.

### Analysis

The Arctic has historically enjoyed relative stability, and the DoD assesses the ‘immediate prospect of conflict in the Arctic low’. Nevertheless, the region is perceived to carry ‘immense geostrategic significance’ to the US.[[95]](#footnote-95) Not only does it encompass US territory—which inextricably links the regional security environment to US national security interests—it also represents a significant geographical threat vector against US homeland. The Arctic provides the shortest route between Russian and US territories, making it a key axis of approach for strategic air and missile systems to and from both countries.[[96]](#footnote-96) Strategic power projection across the Arctic remains a fundamental—albeit fairly inflexible—component of US deterrence and territorial defense vis-à-vis Russia. Additionally, the region provides access—and consequently represents a threat—to strategically vital maritime corridors in the Atlantic and Pacific oceans. From a geostrategic perspective, therefore, the Arctic endures as a basic US security interest so long as other great powers are present in the region.

Despite the relative peace and stability characterizing the Arctic, the DoD outlines certain strategic trends that ‘could adversely affect U.S. national security interests, promote instability, and ultimately degrade security in the region’. In addition to a significant increase in military activities, these trends include a changing physical environment, disputes over sea routes and resources, and a susceptibility to horizontal escalation from tension, competition, or conflict originating in other regions.[[97]](#footnote-97) China has demonstrated an increased interest in Arctic matters, but its military footprint in the region har remained negligible thus far, and Russia is still considered the dominant military threat in the region. With respect to Russia, the strategies call special attention to modernizations and investments in the Northern Fleet, the reactivation of peripheral Arctic military bases, and the reinvigoration of large-scale military exercises. Russian military developments, the DA claims, ‘are by far the most advanced driver of great power competition’ in the region. Competition is further stimulated by Russia’s increased ability to project power in and from the Barents Sea. Although the strategies concede that the Russian posture is defensively oriented, the offensive potential inherent in its modern capabilities—such as hypersonic cruise missiles and sophisticated subsurface systems—is considered to have a strategic impact on US homeland defense.[[98]](#footnote-98)

The desired end-state, clearly articulated in the DoD Arctic Strategy, is for the Arctic to be ‘a secure and stable region where U.S. national interests are safeguarded, the U.S. homeland is defended, and nations work cooperatively to address shared challenges.’ This statement, emphasizing stability and cooperation, may at first glance seem to be at odds with the desired end previously identified in the NSS, which stresses ‘deterrence across all domains.’ A closer examination of the DoD strategy does, however, suggest a more competitive posture than initially indicated, as will be outlined throughout the next paragraphs.[[99]](#footnote-99)

The DoD Arctic Strategy articulates three ways which will support the end-state by informing DoD ‘presence, capability, and resourcing priorities in the Arctic.’[[100]](#footnote-100) First, the strategy seeks to build Arctic awareness. Awareness, as outlined by the DoD, encompasses both the ability to detect threats and the more fundamental understanding of the Arctic as an operational environment. This ability is considered challenged by the ‘rapidly advancing’ capabilities of strategic competitors in the region. In the air and space domains, awareness is primarily dependent on an extensive network of infrastructure and static installations spanning the US, Canadian and Danish (Greenland) territories. In the maritime domain, heavy emphasis is placed on surface and subsurface surveillance operations in ‘strategic areas’ by MPA. Deployments to Iceland and patrols in the GIUK-gap are specifically mentioned in this respect. Additionally, the DoN refers to continuous submarine patrols, as well as surface action group (SAG) patrols into the Barents Sea, promising continued deployment of such forces into the region.[[101]](#footnote-101) The strategies furthermore share a concern for the meager communication capabilities and capacity in the Arctic, fearing it may hamper domain awareness and execution of operations. While the DoD strategy is at pains to describe how these deficiencies must be met with development of a diverse and layered communications architecture, the DAF is the only sub-department specifically addressing this issue in their strategy, suggesting development of satellite-based options be pursued to remedy the shortcomings.[[102]](#footnote-102)

Second, the DoD calls for enhancement of Arctic operations. Adapting existing capabilities and conducting ‘Arctic-tailored training, exercises, and posture refinements’, the DoD argues, is necessary to ensuring the credibility of US deterrence. To this end, the strategy advocates regular exercises and deployments in the region to demonstrate and enhance US ability to operate in and Arctic environment. Multi- and bilateral anti-submarine warfare exercises, port calls, and cold weather training are emphasized, and exercises *Trident Juncture*, *Cold Response*, *Dynamic Mongoose* and *Arctic Challenge Exercise* are specifically mentioned as activities promoting deterrence through cooperation with allies.[[103]](#footnote-103) While the DAF and DA remain fairly general in their descriptions on this topic, the DoN offers a significant level of detail, devoting two full chapters of its strategy to explaining how an ‘enhanced presence’ will be maintained, and how a ‘more capable Arctic naval force’ will be built. The DoN sets out to increase regional presence, and improve US abilities in sea denial, SLOC protection, and exploitation of littoral terrain—moves that must be understood in conjunction with the ongoing transformation of the US Marine Corps (USMC) force design.[[104]](#footnote-104) By shifting the Corps’ focus from sustained operations ashore to more agile ‘low-footprint and low-signature’ elements, the DoN aims to provide a ‘landward complement to Navy capabilities’ which may contribute to sea control and maritime domain awareness by better exploiting the littorals.[[105]](#footnote-105) The DoN further highlights the importance of access to essential infrastructure—such as ports and air fields—to support forward presence. This requirement is also underscored by the DoD, which argues that, owing to the geographic and climatic characteristics of the Arctic, forward deployment of forces, pre-positioned equipment, and investments in infrastructure to complement allied host nation facilities are necessary prerequisites for operational flexibility and quick contingency response in this region.[[106]](#footnote-106)

Third, the DoD Arctic Strategy aims to strengthen the rules-based order in the Arctic. Two principal efforts are outlined to this end: preservation of freedom of the seas, and cooperation with allies to present a strong collective deterrent. The first effort is described by no more than three sentences—conveying merely that the DoD intends to ‘continue fly, sail, and operate wherever international law allows’—with the DoN and DAF strategies offering no further amplification.[[107]](#footnote-107) The ambitions for international cooperation are, however, expressed in some detail. In addition to the political- and strategic-level dialogue, the DoD emphasizes military interoperability and mutual developments at the operational and tactical levels. [[108]](#footnote-108) International partnerships and training, the DAF posits, serve not only to ease the logistical burden and help developing better skills and procedures—thus enhancing both US and allied operations in the Arctic—it also demonstrates proficiency and flexibility, thereby ‘conveying a strong deterrent message’. Cooperation on implementation and concept development for the F-35 is highlighted as an example of this.[[109]](#footnote-109)

### Observations

The previous DoN Arctic strategy, although admitting that challenges and opportunities could arise in the future, largely described the Arctic as an inaccessible periphery carrying limited relevance to current military affairs.[[110]](#footnote-110) By comparison, the 2021 strategy portrays the region less as a frontier and more as world ocean and integral component of US strategic posture and homeland defense, which, Bennet notes, helps justify allocating resources towards it.[[111]](#footnote-111) Appropriately, the DoN no longer considers it sufficient to ‘monitor the changing environment’ and ‘continuously evaluate’ its Arctic capabilities and preparedness.[[112]](#footnote-112)
Instead, naval forces are being expected to maintain an ‘enhanced presence,’ operating more assertively in a bid to deter aggression and prevail in day-to-day competition in the region. This represents a clear departure from previous ambitions of ‘periodic presence’ and assessments that ‘the Navy operational requirements [in the Arctic] are currently met … by undersea and air assets.’[[113]](#footnote-113)

Significantly increased US activity and presence in the High North in recent years confirm Washington’s commitment to the Arctic strategies. Several US warships entered the Barents Sea for patrols throughout 2020, and a carrier strike group ventured above the Arctic circle in the Norwegian Sea in 2018—both events being first of their kind since the eighties—with an additional carrier strike group slated for exercise *Cold Response 2022*.[[114]](#footnote-114) Furthermore, US nuclear submarines have returned to Arctic ports in Norway, and Keflavik air base in Iceland is experiencing significant increases in US investments and air operations.[[115]](#footnote-115) Other notable activities include the first ever deployments of B-1 and B-2 bombers to Ørland and Keflavik respectively in 2021, both times using the opportunity to integrate with Norwegian F-35s. The B-1 also conducted refueling in Bodø, marking the first ever B-1 landing above the Arctic Circle.[[116]](#footnote-116) Regular forward deployments are not only useful to send strategic messages and to exercise military interoperability on the tactical and operational levels—they also serve to rehearse the planning, logistics, and infrastructure requirements that support forward operations, allowing flaws and deficiencies to be addressed. Exercising these processes is arguably necessary to achieving the flexibility and short response times demanded under the GOM and DFE.

# 5. Aligned or at odds?

Thus far, the study has analyzed Norwegian security policy and US strategy, and identified their respective key elements. This chapter will aim to determine to what extent US strategy is aligned with Norwegian security policy, identify important points of convergence or divergence, and comment on possible implications for Norway. The four strategy components previously established will function as a structural framework for the discussion. Each component will be addressed by utilizing central elements from US strategies as a point of departure from which corresponding elements of Norwegian security policy are considered and compared. Points of convergence or divergence, as well as possible implications for Norway, will be addressed where appropriate throughout the discussion.

## 5.1 Threat perception

The central concern in both Norwegian and US Arctic threat perceptions appear to be a destabilization of the region, which might lead to a conflict with Russia. The perception of stability and what activities threaten it, however, differ markedly between the two nations. This is evident in several factors.

First, from a US perspective, the notion of stability is primarily concerned with global power dynamics and great power competition. Should the US be surpassed by more powerful nations or constellations, it would be perceived by Washington as a disturbance of the current world order and stability. The Arctic plays a significant role in this respect, as it represents both an important theatre for military competition vis-à-vis Russia, and a region with economic potential.[[117]](#footnote-117) To Norway, the fear of destabilization is more regionally oriented. A small nation lodged between the geostrategic interests of two superpowers, Norwegian security is best achieved in an environment of détente and regional stability. As the aim of competition is to gain, regain, or increase an advantage over one’s adversary, it is by nature contrary to stability. Escalating tensions might ultimately reach a level where Norwegian sovereignty is challenged—or worst case, not respected—because of the strategic value associated with Norwegian territory. Norwegian efforts to limit or manage allied presence—and thus competition—in the Arctic must, however, be carefully balanced against the threat of abandonment by allies. To Oslo, anything that might upset the balance between alliance integration and reassurance towards Russia is a central security concern, as high tensions might severely restrict Norwegian political and military maneuvering room. In other words, Oslo perceives increased great power competition—originating within or horizontally escalating into the region—to be a potential risk to regional stability, and thus Norwegian security, whereas *failure to compete* appears the prevalent risk from a US standpoint. This represents the most fundamental difference between the US and Norwegian threat perceptions.

Second, although US and Norwegian documents are quite well aligned in their descriptions of key developments in Russian military capabilities, the dynamics driving the military threat perceptions differ. To the US, Russia represents a direct challenge to the strategic advantage and military technological dominance that US forces have become accustomed to enjoying. Russian investments in force modernization, weapons technology, and remote base infrastructure disturbs the power balance in the Arctic, unsettling Washington and generating a pressure to respond to—and compete with—the perceived rise in military threat in and from the region. Failure to compete, the US fears, will leave it vulnerable and make it more difficult for Washington to negotiate with Moscow from a position of strength. From a Norwegian perspective, Russia as a potential military threat is inextricably connected to the alliance dimension of Norwegian security policy. A Russia that feels cornered is more likely to demonstrate offensive behavior threatening Norwegian sovereignty, interests, or infrastructure, than a Russia at ease. While Norwegian ability to pose a threat to Russia is limited, NATO and the US represent credible threats. As an increasing number of Eastern European and former Soviet countries have joined NATO following the Cold War, much of the geographical buffer that once separated NATO from Russia is gone, causing a feeling in Moscow that Russia is victim to hostile encirclement. As the conflicts in Georgia and Ukraine demonstrate, this sentiment might motivate military aggression. While Norwegian alliance membership mitigates the threat of Russian violations by offering extended deterrence, it also contributes to Norway being perceived in Moscow as a potential steppingstone for offensive operations against Russian territory. This, Heier argues, creates a zero-sum game in which Norway cannot increase its security unless Russia is afforded a similar increase.[[118]](#footnote-118) Recent Norwegian intelligence estimates and official Russian statements suggest that Moscow is increasingly perceiving Norway as a NATO outpost and part of ‘the collective West’ rather than a local neighbor.[[119]](#footnote-119)

Russia’s strategic forces represent a key factor of the threat perception identifiable in US strategies. As Moscow finds itself falling short of great power status in other fields such as conventional military power, economy, and political influence, strategic military forces become essential to sustain Russia’s status as a great power, and therefore also assume a central role in shaping great power competition.[[120]](#footnote-120) Increasingly sophisticated Russian capabilities threaten not only US territory, but also geographically more peripheral, yet strategically vital, interests such as SLOCs across the North Atlantic and freedom of movement in the Northern Sea. To Norway, the most significant consequence of this is the risk of being placed in a strategically difficult position ‘behind’ the bastion, should Moscow activate it in a bid to protect its strategic forces—for instance as a result of horizontal escalation of military tensions originating in other theatres—complicating reception of support.[[121]](#footnote-121)

Third, US strategies regard Russian claims in the NSR as infringements on UNCLOS and US universal interests. The potential ‘fallout’ is a global decline of the ‘rules-based order,’ which might potentially harm global commerce and US markets. Norway acknowledges that the international rules-based-order is challenged, expressing concern over how this might marginalize smaller states and place Oslo under pressure—or worst case, in the crossfire—as great power competition in the region increases.[[122]](#footnote-122) Norwegian intelligence estimates and policies show do not indicate, however, that Oslo perceives the established order of the Arctic to be explicitly threatened by Russia.[[123]](#footnote-123) On the contrary, the Norwegian Intelligence Service expects Russia to act carefully in the Arctic over the next years—despite Moscow criticizing what it describes as Western militarization of the region—desiring to be perceived as a responsible nation while they chair the Arctic council.[[124]](#footnote-124)

## 5.2 Ends

Both Washington and Oslo seek a stable Arctic region, but as the US and Norway appear to have diverging understandings of what constitutes or threatens stability, they also have different perspectives on what must be achieved to secure it. To the US, the fundamental strategic problem and threat to stability is the return of great power competition. To remedy this, the aim is to replace strategic inattentiveness and disregard with assertive competition, actively challenging adversary attempts at expanding their strategic foothold or taking advantage of Western predictability and power vacuums to advance their interests in the region. The desired end-state, therefore, is an Arctic where adversaries are deterred, and their efforts frustrated, by US demonstrations of agility and operational unpredictability.

From a Norwegian perspective, territorial integrity and political interests are best ensured by regional détente, combined with efforts to ensure allies remain sufficiently interested in and capable to operate in the Arctic. As both Russian military developments and the US desire to compete against them may potentially result in instability negatively impacting Norwegian security and maneuvering room, the desired end for Oslo is to keep regional tensions as low as possible. This requires reassuring Russia to the greatest extent possible while also integrating with allies to the greatest extent permissible without upsetting the balance. Although Oslo has adopted harder lines against Moscow following the 2014 and 2022 attacks on Ukraine respectively, the policy of maintaining dialogue and cooperation on central Arctic issues—such as fisheries and search and rescue—has largely remained unchanged. The same holds true for efforts to remain transparent and predictable with respect to military posturing and exercises.[[125]](#footnote-125) The extended deterrence offered through alliance membership, however, ultimately constitutes the backbone supporting Norwegian security policy, and it is imperative to Oslo that allies remain willing and able to support Norway militarily should the need arise. It consequently follows that alliance integration—protecting against abandonment—would likely take precedence over maintaining the balance of the dual policy should the two ambitions become mutually exclusive.

In contrast to the US aim of providing stability through deterrence, the Norwegian strategic end is to maintain low tensions, while also preserving the credibility of extended deterrence. At first glance, the US and Norwegian strategic ends appear to be incompatible—Washington assuming an assertive and competitive stance, while Oslo advocates a cautious balancing act. An argument can be made, however, that there is also a significant overlap in mutual interest between the two approaches. A decade ago, the working assumption among most NATO officials was ‘that [the High North] was more of an area preserved from strategic competition and risks.’[[126]](#footnote-126) Maintaining a minimum of allied attention towards the region during this period required significant diplomatic efforts from Oslo.[[127]](#footnote-127) With its sights firmly placed on out-of-area operations in Afghanistan, Iraq, and later Libya and Syria, Depledge posits, alliance members remained indifferent to the Arctic, even as Russia increasingly expanded its military footprint and assumed a more ambitious posture in the Arctic.[[128]](#footnote-128) The region’s regained prominence among key allies in later years greatly benefits Norway and its territorial defense, while also serving to relieve Oslo of the struggle for strategic relevancy. In addition to strengthening the credibility of extended deterrence, increased US presence and focus might also inspire other nations to follow suit.[[129]](#footnote-129) When combined with the unpredictability and competitiveness advocated in US strategies, however, Norway might risk getting more than they asked for with respect to allied engagement in the region. If the growing attention is to truly benefit and not harm Norway’s strategic ends, Oslo must communicate closely with allies planning to operate in the region to ensure that Norwegian concerns are well understood—and preferably respected.

## 5.3 Ways

In the global US strategies, two concepts stand out as key to managing US security concerns in an environment of increased great power competition and waning US dominance. Both concepts underpin the strategic end—deterrence—by providing solutions to how the US should design and employ its military forces most effectively. As US ambitions for competition stretch the Joint Force to cover several demanding theatres at once, the GOM provides a framework for US military presence, responsiveness, and prioritization of resources. The DFE effectively operationalizes the GOM, promising flexibility to rapidly reposture forces in response to events or to simply demonstrate combat credibility. Ultimately, Rodihan, Crouch and Fairbanks argue, both concepts are acknowledgements that resource constraints prevent the US from maintaining sufficient coverage in all its desired areas of operation.[[130]](#footnote-130) The Arctic strategies are based on GOM and DFE, but also emphasize generating awareness, enhancing Arctic operations, and strengthening the rules-based-order as more specific ways to support the strategic end in the region. While the latter is only modestly and vaguely described, the two formers are devoted ample attention. Increased US military presence—through deployments and operations as much as for training and exercises—and increased demand for infrastructure to support and sustain such operations, appear to be the most prominent consequences for the High North.

To Norway, the dual policy of balancing deterrence and reassurance towards Russia, and integration and screening towards its allies, are the main ways through which its strategic ends of low regional tension and credible deterrence are pursued. Deterrence is achieved through demonstrating military capability, both alone and alongside allies, and requires some degree of alliance integration. Key aims in this respect include ensuring allied proficiency in Arctic operations, and that Norwegian concepts for receiving and supporting reinforcements are validated. These efforts are counter-balanced by reassuring measures. In addition to defensively posturing Norwegian forces and promoting military predictability and transparency vis-à-vis Russia to avoid misunderstandings, a set of screening measures exist to maintain a buffer between Russia and allied forces operating in or from Norway.

The GOM and DFE may challenge Norwegian ways in several aspects. First, unpredictability at the operational level is contrary to Norwegian aims of transparency and predictability to avoid escalation. Combined with the ambitions to broaden Arctic awareness and enhance Arctic operations, one may expect more frequent short-notice US presence in the region. Additionally, operations venturing further north and east than previously the norm may be expected, as improved Russian A2/AD potency westwards from the bastion arguably necessitates US operations closer to the Barents Sea to achieve the desired deterrent effect. The past few years has already seen an increase in such activities, most notably through bomber and MPA deployments, as well as SAG operations within the Barents Sea, as outlined in section 4.3. For Oslo, striving to ensure that Norwegian concerns are understood in Washington, and that Norwegian authorities are ’kept in the loop’ ahead of US operations, become important efforts. Although close bilateral dialogue might reduce uncertainty, provide prior warning, and allow Oslo a forum through which it may attempt to shape US presence in the region, it is doubtful that Norway can substantially impact US posture and decision-making. Similarly, Oslo’s ability to influence the degree of publicity and overtness regarding US Arctic operations will likely also remain limited, as predictability and transparency would effectively defeat the purpose of US concepts.

What Oslo cannot change it must adapt to. The next challenge, therefore, is to decide what role Norway will assume in relation to US operations in the region. While Norwegian participation in various training opportunities and operations south of Finnmark and west of 24° eastern longitude appear to be welcomed by Oslo—embraced with an unprecedented or even naive vigor, some would suggest—the 2020 SAG operations venturing beyond these lines and into the Barents Sea arguably revealed an awkward indecisiveness. When US and UK ships conducted ‘maritime security operations’ north of the Kola peninsula in May 2020, Norway abstained from joining the operation. While political leadership in Oslo plainly commented that participation ‘was not prioritized this time,’ military leadership stated that the decision was made to avoid provocation, and that having other NATO units operating so close to Russian territory in the High North is undesirable from a Norwegian standpoint. ‘The Russians are accustomed to the presence of Norwegian aircraft and vessels in the Barents Sea,’ lieutenant general Jakobsen expressed, ‘this is how we maintain low tensions. We would like it to remain so in the future.’[[131]](#footnote-131) The choice not to participate elicited concerns that Norway had lost influence over the security situation in the High North. During similar operations in September that year, Norway joined the SAG with one frigate, political leadership citing the importance of participating to ‘shape credible and transparent activities in the Barents Sea.’[[132]](#footnote-132) Following October 2020, no further surface operations by US or NATO units in the Barents Sea have been reported in open sources, and it appears as though Norway has yet to take a formal stance on how to position itself in this question.[[133]](#footnote-133) As of April 2022, allied activity in the High North is once again on the rise. Oslo must expect to be challenged to make similar decisions again, and, if necessary, be prepared to balance it against other measures aimed at integration or reassurance. Ensuring that own as well as allied strategic messaging is supporting Norwegian interests will require careful work on Oslo’s part.

Furthermore, the dynamic nature of the US concepts requires supporting infrastructure readily available in the High North, both on land to facilitate air operations, logistics, and pre-positioning of equipment and weapons, and in space to build regional awareness and address the existing challenges in Arctic communications infrastructure. To Norway, the US infrastructure needs provide a welcome opportunity to integrate own capabilities and dip into US resources otherwise out of reach, but also prove challenging to balance against the self-imposed restrictions fundamental to Norwegian reassurance and screening efforts. Cooperation on Arctic satellite communications is one such example. Secure broadband connectivity is necessary to fully exploit the potential of new platforms such as the F-35 and P-8 aircraft, and improved Arctic coverage is thus a mutual interest between Norway and the US. The decision to allow protected US communications equipment onto Norwegian satellite payloads, however, jeopardized the project as critics discovered that the equipment could be used to communicate with US strategic assets in the event of a nuclear war, which, it was argued, would constitute a breach of the Norwegian nuclear policy.[[134]](#footnote-134)

Similar concerns have been raised over the increased use of Norwegian bases by US forces. Recent examples include the stationing of USMC units for cold-weather training in Norway, and a 2021 bilateral agreement which might see establishment of permanent US operating facilities on certain Norwegian bases. The USMC deployments ultimately represented a continuous presence between 2017 and 2020, although the personnel were rotated every six months and were therefore considered by Oslo to be in compliance with the base policy.[[135]](#footnote-135) The potential construction of US infrastructure on Norwegian bases, political leadership explains, is linked to increased focus on maritime surveillance in the region, and might include installations exclusively accessible to US personnel. Official statements indicate that US authorities have asked for more than has so-far been granted by Norwegian decision-makers in this question, suggesting that the base policy is under some degree of pressure from Washington. Oslo consistently dismisses that the US infrastructure would constitute permanent allied bases, as no plans are made to permanently station US forces at the facilities, and reiterates that the base policy remains unchanged.[[136]](#footnote-136) In both these instances, critics have accused the Norwegian government of eviscerating the base policy, while Moscow has complained that Oslo ‘undermines peace, stability and the atmosphere of trust in the region.’[[137]](#footnote-137) Both examples likely serve to reinforce Moscow’s perception of Norway as an ‘arena of aggressive NATO expansion,’ and advance its distrust of Western promises.[[138]](#footnote-138) The examples illustrate well the difficulties associated with interpreting and adhering to the Norwegian self-imposed restrictions, and maintaining a balance between integration and reassurance as pressure builds on Oslo to accommodate and support an increasing and more dynamic US presence.

## 5.4 Means

US strategic ambitions and concepts appear to have two direct impacts on resource allocation to the Arctic. First, for the GOM and DFE concepts to be effective, certain changes are required to US force design. This impacts prioritization of new capabilities, shapes US expectations with regard to allies’ abilities to integrate quickly with US elements, and thus carries implications for Norwegian force design and resource allocation. Ambitions for the USMC are altered under the new concepts, shifting the corps from land-oriented operations to more agile capabilities supporting littoral warfare, affecting the nature of potential US reinforcements to Norway. The shift may be beneficial to Norway, as a great portion of its territory is of littoral character, but may also require Norway to take steps to bolster its own ground component, Gulling argues, as it can no longer rely on US blunt forces to contribute as significantly towards land battle on Norwegian soil.[[139]](#footnote-139) It seems doubtful, however, that Oslo will prioritize substantial resources toward this end at expense of other capabilities. Closer integration with US blunt and surge layer forces, on the other hand, is already underway, and is arguably happening at an unprecedented scale. Examples include integration training between various US bombers and Norwegian F-35s, efforts to make Norwegian and USAF
F-35 maintenance personnel interchangeable between organizations, and the decision to commit one of only four Norwegian frigates to Carrier Strike Group 8 throughout 2021 and 2022.[[140]](#footnote-140)

Second, the US demonstrates increased willingness to prioritize a substantial number of resources—including from the blunt and surge layers—to missions and exercises in the region. Examples include carrier strike groups, strategic bombers, and longer deployments of ground forces and MPA units. Exercise *Cold Response* may serve as a useful yardstick to illustrate the magnitude of the change in US force allocation. From sending a few hundred marines on foot in 2012, the 2022 exercise attracted several thousand US troops and numerous high-end surge layer assets.[[141]](#footnote-141) To Oslo, the US commitment to Norwegian-led exercises is a valuable reassurance. An argument can also be made that the exercises benefit Oslo by covering much of the US Arctic training demand, thus allowing Oslo to set the terms for a substantial portion of US presence in the area, as opposed to unilaterally executed operations. As demonstrated in the previous section, however, increased presence of US assets may also represent a challenge to Norwegian self-imposed limitations. In terms of force design, Norway has deliberately chosen not to equip some of its military platforms with certain offensive capabilities in order to maintain a non-aggressive posture. For instance, Norwegian MPA are not equipped with anti-surface missiles, and Oslo has firmly rejected to integrate or acquire capabilities for ballistic missile defense (BMD) purposes.[[142]](#footnote-142) The credibility of Oslo’s reassuring steps is, however, compromised when allies operate with such capabilities close to Russian territory in areas previously frequented almost solely by Norwegian forces, as exemplified by the 2020 SAG operations, which placed US MPAs and BMD-capable warships within miles of the Kola peninsula. The move elicited critique and official concerns from Moscow.[[143]](#footnote-143) Although sporadic US or allied operations in the Barents Sea would not invalidate Norwegian force design restrictions all-together, Oslo should be prepared to reassess or reaffirm its stance on this topic—especially if forward operations by allies into these areas become more common.

To mitigate this dynamic, it is essential for Norway to maintain—and preferably further develop—its ability to independently provide awareness throughout relevant areas of interest in the High North, thus reducing allied need to operate there. A satisfactory Norwegian surveillance and intelligence collection ability, Dyndal asserts, was a critical in underpinning the Norwegian dual policy throughout the Cold War, effectively permitting the base policy and the geographical limitations to remain in place without serious protests from the US.[[144]](#footnote-144) The strategic importance of the Barents Sea, both as a potential origin for Russian power projection and as prime intelligence collection ground, is as great today as it was at the height of the Cold War. As US attention towards, and presence within, the High North grows, so does the need for information. With higher demands, allies might no longer be content with ‘leaving it to Norway’ unless the Norwegian intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance capacity is continuously developed and adjusted to adequately meet the requirements at hand. Oslo has taken several steps to address this, recent military investments including P-8 MPAs, a new intelligence collection vessel of the *Marjata* series, and upgrades to intelligence collection radar systems in Vardø.[[145]](#footnote-145) These resources arguably form a ‘Norwegian contact layer’, alleviating US desire and need to pursue awareness through own contact forces in the region. Maintaining a robust national presence and capability is thus central to ensuring Norwegian ways and ends are met—enabling the dual policy to remain effective, and serving to keep regional tensions as low as possible.

# 6. Conclusions

This study has analyzed Norwegian security policy and US strategy in the Arctic, identified their core components, determined points of convergence and divergence, and commented on possible implications for Norway. In conclusion, US strategies are partly aligned with Norwegian security policy, but also partly in conflict. The US strategies signal renewed military dedication to the Arctic region in response to the reemergence of great power competition, placing heavy emphasis on deterrence. This complicates the enduring principle in Norwegian security policy of balancing its role as a good ally to its prime security guarantors, while also striving to maintain neighborly relations to Russia. Key elements of this principle include deterrence and reassurance measures towards Russia, and integration and screening measures aimed at US and other allies. To Norway, a more assertive US presence and posture in the region may therefore constitute both a welcome return of allied attention, but also a cause for concern.

In terms of threat perception, Washington and Oslo are congruent in their descriptions of rising Russian military capability in the High North, and the threat it constitutes to allied freedom of movement in the region. Superficially, the two nations also appear to align when highlighting stability as their prime interest. Their notions of stability, and consequently what threatens it, diverge markedly, however. While Oslo sees increased great power competition as a threat to regional détente and stability, Washington perceives *failure to compete* as a threat to global—and by extension also Arctic—stability and security, as competition is necessary for the US to retain its position as the dominant superpower. US strategies consequently establish successful deterrence as the desired end, whereas Oslo strives for de-escalation and balance. This represents the most fundamental gap between US and Norwegian views, and gives rise to other points of divergence.

In pursuit of strong deterrence, the US strategies advocate an assertive and less predictable posture, as well as increased military presence in the Arctic. The GOM and DFE concepts are central ways towards achieving these ambitions, and recent years’ allocation of military assets to operations and exercises in the region indicate that Washington is dedicated to following the ambitions through by prioritizing the necessary mean to the region. Bolstered US ambitions are beneficial for Norway, who has long strived to ensure sufficient allied attention towards its areas of interest. The US presence serves to cement its security guarantees to Norway, rehearse and validate plans for allied reinforcement to Norwegian territory, while also providing extended deterrence towards Russia. Increased US commitment furthermore creates arenas for integration through cooperation and development, on the tactical and technical levels, as well as in common infrastructure investments.

At the same time, however, the renewed US interest in the High North also challenge Norwegian security policy on several points, complicating its dual policy of deterrence and reassurance, integration and screening. First, US forces are returning to areas from which they have been absent for decades. Paired with a deliberately unpredictable nature and a posture aimed firmly at deterrence, this serves to escalate tensions with Russia. Such deployments are contrary to Norwegian aims of predictability, transparency, low tensions, and non-aggressive posture, at times placing Norway in a dilemma where reassurance and alliance integration becomes mutually exclusive. Second, increased presence and strategic significance generates a greater need for information. Norway has ensured awareness and intelligence collection throughout the periods of low allied attention towards Arctic, reducing the need for other forces to operate close to Russian territory, and thus establishing a buffer between the East and West. If Norwegian capacity cannot satisfy the rise in demand for information, US assets will cover the gap, resulting in escalation as the buffer erodes. Last, the US desire to operate more frequently in the region challenges Norwegian self-imposed restrictions, both with respect to geographical areas of deployments and operations, capabilities, and infrastructure development.

A more assertive US in the Arctic carries several implications for Norway if its dual policy is to remain a successful basis for Norwegian security policy. It will be vital for Oslo to push for close dialogue with Washington to ensure Norwegian concerns are understood when US forces plan deployments in the High North, and to create as much predictability and transparency as permissible under the DFE. As Norway is increasingly perceived as part of the ‘collective west’ in Moscow, it is essential for Oslo to clearly demonstrate its reassuring measures if neighborly, albeit strained, relations are to continue with Russia. Successfully combining this endeavor with the arguably unprecedented focus on integration with high-end US assets is a difficult task that will require skill and cautiousness from the Norwegians. Furthermore, Oslo must ensure that Norwegian military capabilities are able to satisfactorily cover certain gaps and needs that would otherwise require or attract US assets. This applies to future development of own territorial defense—as changes to US concepts and force design affect what reinforcement can be expected—but, more importantly, to ensure a Norwegian ability to maintain awareness and conduct intelligence collection in the Barents Sea. Finally, Oslo must expect some of its self-imposed restrictions to be put under pressure, and be prepared to reassess their credibility and value in face of a changing security landscape in the High North.

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# Appendix - illustrations

### Figure 1: The Arctic

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------------ **The Arctic Circle**
The southernmost latitude in the Northern Hemisphere at which the sun can remain continuously above or below the horizon for 24 hours. 66° 33’ 44” North.

**————**  **The 10° July isotherm**
The area where the average temperature for the warmest month (July) is below 10°C / 50°F.

Map and accompanying text downloaded 15.01.22 from https://arcticportal.org/maps/download/arctic-definitions

### Figure 2: The Russian Bastion



Illustration from Black et. al. (2020) p. VI

1. Arctic Centre (n.d.). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. DoD (2019) p. 2.
The Arctic nations include Canada, USA, Denmark, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Russia. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Skagestad (2010) p. 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Utenriksdepartementet (2017) p. 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Kofman (2021) p. 43. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Norwegian Polar Institute (n.d). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. IPCC (2019) 3.2.1.1 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Gunnarsson (2021) 4.1; Hamre and Conley (2017) p. 48. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Østreng et al. (2013) pp. 99-103 and 109-112. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Utenriksdepartementet (2020). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. As per its founding document, the Ottawa Declaration. The Arctic Council (1996). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. The Arctic Coast Guard Forum was established to this end in 2015, signaling willingness to cooperate even after the events in Crimea in 2014. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Huitfeldt (1987) p. 101. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Russian submarine bases are located as close as 60km from the Norwegian border. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Parnemo (2019) p. 43. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Larssen (2017) p. 57. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Mehdiyeva (2021); Rumer, Sokolsky, and Stronski (2021) pp. 6-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Kluge and Paul (2020) p. 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Parnemo (2019) p. 61.
For a discussion on the role of seapower in Russian doctrinal tradition, see Speller (2019) on the Soviet New School, and Admiral Gorshkov, pp. 66-69. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Mehdiyeva (2021); Etterretningstjenesten (2021) p. 46. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Baev (2019) pp. 25-26; Hjermann and Wilhelmsen (2022) p. 119.

Analyses of the Russian perspective by Norwegian researchers Hjermann and Wilhelmsen (2022) and Russian researchers Trebukh et al. (2020). make for an interesting comparison and further reading. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Rumer, Sokolsky, and Stronski (2021) p. 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Kvam (2021) p. 2 [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Kofman (2021) p. 47; Tamnes (2017). See also Appendix A, figure 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Wegge (2020) p. 363. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Parnemo (2019) p. 55. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. DIA (2019). See also Roberts (2020). [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Rumer, Sokolsky, and Stronski (2021) p. 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Rhode (2019). [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Kaushal et al. (2021). [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Sergunin and Konyshev (2017) p. 182; Etterretningstjenesten (2021) p. 46. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Naval News (2021). [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Tamnes (1987) pp. 59-60; Tamnes (2017) p. 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Cited in Tamnes (1987) p. 65. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Ibid., p. 60. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Hilde (2019) p. 60. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Snyder (1960) p. 163. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Mazarr (2018) p. 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Snyder (1960) p. 163. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Ibid., p. 165; Oma (2021) p. 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Mazarr (2018) pp. 3-4. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. NATO (1949) Article 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Knopf (2012) pp. 383-385. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Oma (2021) p. 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Utenriksdepartementet (2020) p. 20; Forsvarsdepartementet (2022) p. 41. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Berli (2019) p. 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Heier (2021) p. 23. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Langmyr (2021) p. 25. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. NATO (2018b). [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Clem (2018) p. 133. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Bragstad (2016) p. 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Heier (2021) p. 54. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Tamnes (1991) pp. 160-166. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. Hilde (2021) p. 322; Nordhagen (2021) pp. 44-48; Dyndal in ibid., p. 52. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Heier (2021) p. 72. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Dyndal (2015b) p. 115. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Heier (2021) pp. 50-59. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. Skare (2021) p. 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. Utenriksdepartementet (2020) p. 27; Nilsen (2022c). [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Snyder (1984) p. 466. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. NATO (2022). [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. For a discussion on the strategic value of Norwegian intelligence-sharing, see Klevberg (2012) p. 411. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. Forsvarsdepartementet and Utenriksdepartementet (2016) p. 11; Skaar (2021) p. 333. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. Hilde (2019) p. 62; Bragstad (2016) p. 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. Tamnes (1987) p. 67. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. Huitfeldt (1987) p. 107. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. Oma (2021) p. 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. Tamnes (1987) p. 83; Tamnes and Eriksen (1999) pp. 23-31. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. Forsvarsdepartementet (1960) pp. 36-43; Huitfeldt (1987) p. 108. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. Tamnes and Eriksen (1999) p. 30. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. Rognstrand (2021). [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. Tamnes and Eriksen (1999) p. 28. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. Clausewitz (1984) p. 177; Wilkinson and Gow (2017). [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. JCS (2019) I-1. See also AAP-06, NATO (2013) 2-M-6. [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. Lykke (1989) pp. 3-4. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. King (2020). [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. Cavanaugh (2017). [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. Park (2017) p. 127. [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. JCS (2019) v-vii. [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. Colby led the development of the 2018 NDS, serving as Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense (2017-2018). [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. POTUS (2017) pp. 2-3; p. 27; DoD (2018) pp. 1-4. [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. POTUS (2017) pp. 25-28. [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. DoD (2018) p. 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. JCS (2018) p. 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. Colby (2019) pp. 5-6. [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. DoD (2018) p. 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. Colby (2019) p. 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. For discussions on previous models see Eckstein (2018a); Ellehuus et al. (2020). [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
92. DoD (2018) p. 7; JCS (2018) p. 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
93. Gallagher (2019). [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
94. Rodihan, Crouch, and Fairbanks (2021) p. 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
95. DoD (2019) p. 3; DAF (2020) p. 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
96. DAF (2020) p. 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
97. DoD (2019) pp. 3-6. [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
98. DA (2021) pp. 17-18; DoN (2021) pp. 7-8; DAF (2020) p. 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
99. DoD (2019) p. 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
100. Ibid., p. 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
101. DAF (2020) pp. 37-38; DoN (2021) p. 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
102. DoD (2019) p. 10. DAF (2020) p. 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-102)
103. DoD (2019) p. 11; DoN (2021) p. 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-103)
104. DoN (2020) p. 7; DoN (2021) p. 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-104)
105. USMC (2020) pp. 2-4; DoN (2020) p. 14; DoN (2021) p. 16. [↑](#footnote-ref-105)
106. DoN (2020) p. 18; DoD (2019) p. 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-106)
107. DoD (2019) p. 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-107)
108. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-108)
109. DAF (2020) p. 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-109)
110. US Navy (2019) p. 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-110)
111. Bennett (2021). [↑](#footnote-ref-111)
112. US Navy (2019) pp. 10-13. [↑](#footnote-ref-112)
113. DoN (2021) p. 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-113)
114. Eckstein (2018b); Eckstein (2020); Nilsen (2022b). [↑](#footnote-ref-114)
115. Nilsen (2022a); Jonassen (2021); Woody (2021b). [↑](#footnote-ref-115)
116. Woody (2021a); Woody,(2021b). [↑](#footnote-ref-116)
117. Black et al. (2020) p. 6; DoD (2019) p. 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-117)
118. Heier (2021) p. 23. [↑](#footnote-ref-118)
119. Etterretningstjenesten (2021) p. 46. See also Hjermann and Wilhelmsen (2021 and 2022). [↑](#footnote-ref-119)
120. Fink and Oliker (2020) p. 37. [↑](#footnote-ref-120)
121. See discussions by Guttelvik and Hennum (2019) p. 13; Black et al. (2020) p. 20. [↑](#footnote-ref-121)
122. Forsvarsdepartementet (2020) pt. 2.2. [↑](#footnote-ref-122)
123. The Svalbard Treaty (1920) is subject to discord between Oslo and Moscow, but similar disagreements also exist in between Oslo and Washington, London, and several other signatories. See Granrusten (2019). [↑](#footnote-ref-123)
124. Etterretningstjenesten (2022) p. 35. [↑](#footnote-ref-124)
125. Regjeringen (2022a). [↑](#footnote-ref-125)
126. Grand in Sprenger (2020). [↑](#footnote-ref-126)
127. See Utenriksdepartementet (2009) pt. 12; Østhagen (2021). [↑](#footnote-ref-127)
128. Depledge (2021) p. 81. [↑](#footnote-ref-128)
129. The UK MoD released its inagural Arctic strategy 29th March 2022, in which expanding military interoperability and cooperation with Norway is prioritized. [↑](#footnote-ref-129)
130. Rodihan, Crouch, and Fairbanks (2021) p. 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-130)
131. Johnsen (2020). [↑](#footnote-ref-131)
132. Bakke-Jensen (2020). [↑](#footnote-ref-132)
133. See Klevberg (2022); Heier (2021). [↑](#footnote-ref-133)
134. Moxnes in Wormdal (2018). [↑](#footnote-ref-134)
135. Søreide (2017). [↑](#footnote-ref-135)
136. Regjeringen (2022b). [↑](#footnote-ref-136)
137. Staalesen (2020); Arstad (2021); Hjermann and Wilhelmsen (2022) pp. 123-130. [↑](#footnote-ref-137)
138. Hjermann and Wilhelmsen (2021) p. 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-138)
139. Gulling (2021) p. 46. [↑](#footnote-ref-139)
140. Forsvaret (2021b); Forsvaret (2022c). [↑](#footnote-ref-140)
141. Nilsen,(2022b); Forsvaret (2022b). [↑](#footnote-ref-141)
142. Nordhagen (2021) p. 49. Forsvarsdepartementet (2019) pp. 15-16.
Radar systems on shore and onboard frigates were among the potential candidates for BMD integration. [↑](#footnote-ref-142)
143. Alberti (2021) p. 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-143)
144. Dyndal (2015b) p. 114. [↑](#footnote-ref-144)
145. Børresen (2021); Forsvaret (2021b); Forsvaret (2022a). [↑](#footnote-ref-145)