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Scandinavian Defence and Alliance Policies: Different Together

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Introduction

As is the case in many aspects of social and economic policy, Scandinavian countries are often perceived to be “different” in the way they handle security and defence matters. There is a general perception that they traditionally have a distinctive way of responding to strategic challenges, of pursuing their national interests and accommodating them with comprehensive regional and international goals, of engaging with alliances and, and involving their societies in deliberations over policy priorities and core values including in security and defence matters.

This international reputation of Europe’s North is most likely a historically grown one: Over many decades, the Scandinavian countries have remained outside major international confrontations and global as well as European power politics (see Archer et al., 2003 on the “*Nordic Peace*”). They have thus turned into what some recognised as a textbook case of a “security community”, a group of states that have attained stable peace with each other (Adler and Barnett, 1998). In geostrategic terms, Scandinavia is therefore still commonly seen as “the quiet corner of Europe” (Archer, 2008, p. 1).

To this day, as not least exemplified by the very existence of this volume, the Scandinavian countries are often addressed en bloc, and even referred to as some kind of virtual regional club where political bargaining, preference formation and societal engagement follow an alternative and somehow more desirable or even morally superior logic. Indeed, taken together, they have an impressive track record of e.g. international engagement, and one that is hugely disproportionate to their actual size: they have been amongst the most keenly engaged contributors to UN peacekeeping operations (until recently, with the exception of Iceland), and their joint expenditure on development cooperation and humanitarian aid amounts to approximately 11

percent of global development assistance. (OECD 2014; see also Peter Viggo Jakobsen's contribution to this volume).

Scandinavian similarities and differences

The Scandinavian countries had diverging strategic ties during the Cold War, and pursued different alliance strategies after 1989. This can be seen most clearly in each of their institutional and political choices with respect to NATO and the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) as the main security governance structures in the Euro-Atlantic sphere. While Denmark, Iceland and Norway were founding members of NATO, Sweden and Finland have to this day resisted joining the alliance. They have both been active members of the alliance's Partnership for Peace (PfP) ever since its inception in 1994, and have since continuously intensified their collaboration with the alliance.¹ However, they also continue to call on their strategic traditions as "non-aligned" countries, albeit to varying degrees depending on the political leadership at any given time (Forsberg and Vaahtoranta, 2001).

TABLE 1 HERE

Denmark, Sweden and Finland are full members of the EU while Norway and Iceland have firmly remained at the margins of the European integration process at large.² Among the Scandinavian EU members, there are differences in the way membership came about and in the way their memberships evolved, including in the areas of security and defence. Sweden and Finland contribute proactively to the CSDP but some (in particular, Jakobsen, 2009) are more positive about their actual impact on the direction of the policy than others (e.g. Wivel, 2005). Their strategic goals in view of European security and defence as well as their engagement in other areas appear to differ quite considerably in any case (Gebhard, 2013). Denmark in turn has an opt-out from the military aspects of the CSDP, including from the *European Defence Agency* (EDA), along with opt-outs in monetary matters and in justice and home affairs. The Danish defence opt-out also excludes the country from the so-called 'solidarity

¹ At the NATO Summit in Wales in 2014, Sweden and Finland signed a Memorandum of Understanding with NATO that effectively allows allied forces to be stationed on their national territories in both peacetime and war (NATO, 2014). This will arguably bring them as close to de facto membership as possibly conceivable.

² That said, as shall be discussed below, both are closely involved in the practical dealings of the CSDP as third countries.

clause' contained in article 222 of the Treaty of Lisbon (Nissen, 2015), which foresees mutual assistance among EU member states – “by all the means in [each] their power” – in case one of them fell victim to armed aggression. While many observers highlighted how close this would come to NATO's article V and the mutual obligation of collective defence, interestingly, both non-NATO members Sweden and Finland ratified the treaty without pretexts. This shows how difficult it can be to speak of “the Nordics” as a uniform group of states in matters of security and defence; they are not.

TABLE 2 HERE

There are significant and persistent differences between the Scandinavian countries not only in terms of their strategic choices as outlined above but also in view of their strategic cultures (Neumann and Heikka, 2005), their respective security identities (Novack, 2003; Rieker, 2004), their strategic outlook (Saxi, 2011), and, as will be shown, their specific involvement in cooperative defence projects.

Recent developments have rekindled perceptions of the Nordics as some sort of community of fate, which, in defence matters, under the surface of great power competition, had been confined to informal cooperation until fairly recently (see Petersson, 2006).³ 2009 saw the creation of *Nordic Defence Cooperation* (NORDEFCO), a comprehensive institutional framework, which resulted from intra-Nordic discussions about the practical pressures for more extensive defence cooperation in view of a changing global security environment, steadily increasing numbers of multinational operations, and, not least, ‘techflation’ – the increasing cost of defence technology and force posture (Adelman and Augustine, 1990, p. 90). Its main rationale is an economic one: as many other countries in Europe, all Scandinavian countries have seen cuts in their defence budgets (SIPRI Military Expenditure Database 2014).⁴ Originally based on Norwegian, Swedish and Finnish initiatives, NORDEFCO now brings together all Nordic countries, and its

³ The Nordic countries only developed functional defence cooperation after the end of the Cold War, starting with the establishment of a framework for the coordination of defence research, development and procurement programmes (Nordic Armaments Co-operation – NORDAC) in 1994, and the establishment of a Nordic Coordinated Arrangement for Military Peace Support (NORDCAPS) in 1997.

⁴ With the exception of Iceland which did not have a separate budget line for defence until 2008 (SIPRI Military Expenditure Database 2014)

chairmanship rotates annually. As will be shown below, the way in which each Nordic country has taken on a somewhat distinctive role within NORDEFCO illustrates the persistent differences between them.

Another recent development is seemingly shifting perceptions of the geostrategic importance of the region, marking a move away from the idea of it as “the quiet corner” of Europe. US President Obama’s move to launch a “US-Nordic Security Dialogue” in September 2013 (The White House, 2013) has considerably raised the global visibility of Nordic security and defence. As will be shown, the Nordics have since taken various steps to accommodate the newly arising strategic interest in their region. However, in terms of preferences, strategies and levels of commitment, differences between them remain.

The chapter proceeds with accounts of each country’s defence and alliance policy; each section looks at the historical context before turning to their contemporary political conduct, their defence posture and strategic outlook.

Sweden

Contemporary Swedish defence and alliance strategy has to be discussed against the background of its history of neutrality, which originated in the early 19th century and became one of the main principles in Swedish foreign policy (see Hadenius, 2003).

Officially, Sweden made every effort to not get involved in great power politics during both World Wars. However, there is evidence that Sweden had not been strictly ‘neutral’ in either the Winter War 1939-40 or the Second World War.

Sweden’s ambiguous attitude also manifested itself after 1945: not only was Sweden centrally involved in the proposition of a Scandinavian Defence Union in 1948, between 1945 and 1966, it also operated a clandestine nuclear weapons programme (Agrell, 2002). In 1949, the *Riksdag* agreed on a specific conception of the foreign policy principle as ‘non-alignment in peacetime, and neutrality in war’. While the main rationale was to build a more credible record of impartiality, Swedish neutrality policy throughout the Cold War was all but straightforward that way (Eriksson, 2003; see also Dalsjö, 2014): Swedish authorities upheld strong ties with the West (breaching the principle of impartiality), particularly in the area of intelligence (Agrell, 2006; Petersson, 2006), pursued policies of ‘armed neutrality’ and ‘total

defence' (Agius, 2012) as well as a distinctive form of diplomatic internationalism (Bergman, 2007; Gebhard, 2005).

Contemporary Swedish defence is conditioned by both the transatlantic and the European frameworks: Sweden is actively involved in both the EU's CSDP and – through PfP – in various operational activities and programmes directed by NATO. Neutrality does not appear to inhibit any practical involvement of Swedish officials and troops with either framework. As for other non-NATO member states like Finland but also Austria and Ireland, the EU 'solidarity clause' as introduced by the Lisbon Treaty in 2009 has called into question how the security and defence policies of these member states could be perceived as non-aligned anymore. Also, despite its continued official status as non-aligned, Sweden takes full part in NATO exercises and operations, and uses NATO standards in its force transformation and capability development programmes resulting in oft-praised levels of interoperability.

Meanwhile, the country continues to contribute to all parts of NATO's areas of operational engagement albeit, at the political level, most of the time in a somewhat less forthcoming and enthusiastic manner than Finland. In October 2013 (five years after Finland), Sweden joined the NATO Rapid Response Force, contributing a "fighter unit" that is deployable under NATO command within 90 days, mainly providing Swedish Air Force fighter aircraft for NATO operations (Nyberg, 2015). As from 2016, Sweden (as well as Finland) also provides Host Nation Support to NATO forces through the provision of logistical and operational support sites, essentially allowing allied forces to be stationed on their territory, including in times of peace (NATO, 2014).

If not already throughout the Cold War, Sweden has definitely come to be seen, particularly from the point of view of Russia, as – at the very least – an "ambivalent neutral" (Rieker, 2006) if not outright an undercover ally of NATO. This raises questions over whether there is any residual meaning in Sweden's official 'neutral' stance at all. It has been argued (e.g. Agius, 2012) in turn that Swedish reluctance to fully integrate into the alliance or certain aspects of European integration is more related to a general aversion against the transfer of sovereignty than a true concern over the effects on neutrality. An attack on Sweden's territory, for instance, as staged in a Russian military exercise in March 2015, on the Swedish island of Gotland,

might be a game changer but as things stand, Sweden firmly remains out with the alliance. This is not least due to the perceived lack of popular enthusiasm. Public opinion on the matter indeed shifted under the impression of Russia's aggressions against Ukraine in 2014, showing somewhat stronger support for Swedish membership in NATO: 48% were in favour, compared to an average of 35% in comparable surveys between 2007 and 2013 (Gell and Stenbäck, 2015). However, observers are divided over whether this really marked a lasting change in public acceptance or whether support levels would not bounce back eventually. Public support for NATO membership would possibly take a turn if the debate in Finland moved into that direction. That, however, seems unlikely in its own right (see section on Finland). Affiliations with NATO aside, Sweden has been a key actor within NORDEFCO, building in particular on long-standing cooperation with Norway as a partner with very similar defence structures (Saxi, 2011, p. 13). Swedish political investment in this regional forum is in line with ongoing domestic discussions about budgetary pressures and a shift in priorities following the refugee crisis that unfolded from 2015 onwards.

Denmark

Denmark's modern history as a strategic player in both the North and Baltic Seas has been one of repeated military defeat and continuous territorial decline. Since the Middle Ages, the Kingdom of Denmark has seen a series of cessions, the last one of which, the loss of Schleswig-Holstein to Prussia (1864), marked a key turning point in Danish foreign policy (Mouritzen, 2014): the former empire and regional hegemon had turned into a small state that adopted neutrality as a foreign policy doctrine. Denmark remained formally neutral throughout the First World War (Bludnikow, 1989), reaffirmed its stance later, and signed a non-aggression pact with Nazi-Germany in May 1939 (see Leistikow, 1939 for a contemporary analysis). This did not prevent the country from German invasion less than a year later, in April 1940, as well as from British occupation of both the Faroe Islands and Iceland (then part of Denmark) to pre-empt further German occupation in the region (Dethlefsen, 1990). By 1945, Denmark found itself as a former imperial power, now small state that had been painfully reminded of its material limitations and their repercussions for its strategic room for manoeuvre. In consequence, the country seems to have turned to

multilateral cooperative arrangements as and when they arose: in 1949, attempts at setting up a Scandinavian Defence Union had failed; at that time, regardless of whether or not a Nordic alliance would have come about, however, Denmark would be sure (yet reluctant) to be one of the founding members of NATO. Alliance membership did not so much appear like an opportunity but more of a strategic requirement or “necessary evil” given the very particular systemic conditions at the time (Wivel, 2013a, p. 82).

In 1961, Denmark was also the first Nordic country to apply for membership in the EC; unlike in the later case of Finland, however, the underlying aspirations were not linked to specific strategic concerns. While European integration certainly benefited Danish strategic interests by providing for a stable and institutionalized environment of interdependence, there was little appetite within the public or political leadership to compromise the unique standing of the Alliance as Western Europe’s security umbrella. Ever since joining as a full member of the Communities (with some delay, in 1973), Denmark has been adamant at keeping itself out of any commitments towards a European security and defence policy (Svensson, 1994).

Meanwhile, Denmark’s conduct within NATO throughout the Cold War has been described as “reactive”, “pragmatic” and typical for a “small state” (Wivel, 2013b, p. 299). Danish defence policy at the time seemed deeply embedded in a Nordic “third way” and an inherent focus on multilateral peace politics. The country’s leadership was criticised repeatedly for not meeting NATO capability targets and for upholding a defence budget below agreed thresholds (Ringsmose, 2009). In the 1980s, Denmark’s distinctively reluctant attitude became known as “footnoting”, i.e. as a habit of including amendments and exemptions in multilateral agreements, thus undermining solidarity and political unity for the sake of particular interests. Although there were specific domestic reasons for the frequency of such occurrences at the time (see Pedersen, 2013), the phenomenon has been seen as symptomatic for Denmark’s conduct as a “quasi-outsider” up until fairly recently (Adler-Nissen, 2013, p. 131). Others (e.g. Pedersen, 2012; Petersson and Saxi, 2013; Rieker, 2004) have characterised Danish alliance strategy *after* the end of the Cold War as increasingly “activist” as well as distinctively pro-US or “Atlanticist” (Mouritzen, 2007). Common examples are situations in which Denmark promptly sided with the US even if there was general European as well as intra-Nordic reservation, e.g. in the context of the invasion of Iraq in 2003, or more generally, in relation to Denmark’s active

involvement in the “Global War on Terror” (Petersen, 2012). This perception of a radical shift in Danish defence cooperation from reactivist pragmatism to the relative activism since the end of the Cold War, however, has been found to overstate the degree to which current Danish conduct within NATO in particular departs from the attitude in previous decades (Wivel, 2014).

Looking at Denmark’s role within the EU, there is a substantive continuity of the country acting as the least “adapted” Nordic (including Norway) (Rieker, 2004, p. 385). In 1992, the Danish public rejected the Treaty of Maastricht, which was to bring about first steps towards a political union including a fledgling security and defence dimension of common foreign policy. To rescue the treaty, Denmark was offered opt-outs from monetary union, justice and home affairs, EU citizenship and in all matters related to defence cooperation and military security. In practice, this continuous Danish “self-exclusion” (Manners, 2013) creates increasingly difficult institutional fault lines as the EU’s external governance continues to mature.⁵ There is in turn very little evidence that Denmark itself has suffered any substantive disadvantages (Nissen, 2015; Olsen and Pilegaard, 2005). That said, Denmark’s somewhat awkward position within the EU is likely hampering more recent attempts at rekindling Nordic defence cooperation in the context of NORDEFCO. In fact, despite being a potentially suitable candidate to take the lead, Denmark has so far seemed relatively reticent (Saxi, 2011), particularly when it comes to recent trends towards a reterritorialization of defence postures in the European North (Lehtonen and Isojärvi, 2015). Overall, Denmark is said to be seeing “more limited space” for enhanced intra-Nordic defence cooperation than its regional partners (Wivel and Marcussen, 2015, p. 209); its focus obviously remains with NATO.

Finland

Talking about contemporary Finnish defence and alliance strategy in a meaningful way also requires a treatment of the country’s history of neutrality or ‘non-alignment’, which in turn cannot be discussed in isolation from its unique relationship with Russia (and formerly, the Soviet Union and Russian Empire). Finland has an extensive history of external domination, which spans across several centuries into very recent

⁵ The inclusion of both civilian and military aspects of the CSDP in the mandate of the European External Action Service (EEAS) has been a particular case in point where the Danish opt-out created substantive practical problems.

times. It was part of the Kingdom of Sweden from the 13th century until 1809 when it was annexed by Imperial Russia. After declaring independence in 1917, Finland found itself fighting wars with the Soviet Union twice: in the Winter War 1939–1940, and in the Continuation War 1941–1944. While it ultimately retained its independence, Finland's history of external dominance did not end after 1945. In 1948, Finland and the Soviet Union signed an agreement of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance (FCMA), which defined specific conditions for Finnish sovereignty and self-defence, and established limitations for Finnish foreign policy at large. This treaty also forced Finland to become a non-aligned but armed neighbour to the Soviet Union.⁶ For decades to come, foreign policy became a careful balancing act between complying with Soviet expectations and retaining a somewhat neutral stance in the view of the West.

Finland's relative success at persisting in this situation of extreme geostrategic exposure, has often been ascribed to the diplomatic skills and foresight of political leaders like Urho Kekkonen (Lukacs, 1992). Unlike in the case of Sweden, where similar success in the face of great power confrontation had largely been ascribed to luck and coincidence (Agrell, 1998; Linder, 1998). This has been so prominent that “Finlandisation” became a common albeit disreputable synonym for the constant policy adaptations and strategic concessions this kind of asymmetric relationship entailed (see Majander, 1999).⁷ The downfall of the Soviet Union therefore marked a dramatic turn in Finnish politics including in its defence and strategic self-conception. On 20 January 1992, Finland and Russia signed a friendship treaty in Helsinki, marking the abrogation of the FCMA, and thereby, the end of an era of external domination and strategic limitation. Some of the first steps for the newly liberated Finland were a deal with the US to buy F-16 fighter planes (Steinbock, 2008, p. 204), the joining of NATO's PfP and the application for EU membership. These can all be seen as conscious choices in an attempt to craft a new strategic context for building a new political track record for the country. From then onwards, it seems, Finnish leadership embraced any opportunity to tie the country into Western political and strategic arrangements.

⁶ The main aim of the agreement from the Soviet perspective was to contain Western influence in Finland and to maintain a buffer zone alongside its North-Western border.

⁷ “Finlandisation” is not an academic term but has instead found prominent (and controversial) use in political discussions over post-independence sovereignty in particular (e.g. in Austria but also in the Balkans and in post-colonial Africa). The concept has recently seen a contested revival in the context of discussions over Finnish concessions to Russia following the invasion of Ukraine (Milne, 2014).

Unlike for Sweden, Finland's rationale for EU membership was not primarily an economic one; in fact, the very aspects of integration that Sweden was to meet with reluctance (e.g. the implications of a political union, the prospects of a monetary union) constituted particular incentives for Finland (Rieker, 2004). Being closely entangled in the sphere of a Western supranational institution was perceived as a guarantee against Russian influence, and it promoted that way to the public. The domestic discourse at the time also framed political integration with Western Europe as a sort of 'coming home', a return to a cultural identity that had been suppressed (Browning, 2002).⁸ This strong sense of belonging and readiness for commitment as a "pragmatic adapter" (Rieker, 2006) is still very present in Finnish security and defence policy today; although otherwise an active and committed EU member, Finland appears to be particularly devoted to NATO programmes and initiatives, and in defence matters, less so to the EU's CSDP. Meanwhile, however, full NATO membership remains an unlikely and unpopular option for the country. To many observers and international partners, this ambivalence in Finland's alliance strategy has been a source of perplexity and frustration. It is indeed somewhat surprising that Finland did not simply drop its neutral stance after 1992 given that it had not been more than a temporary geostrategic necessity imposed by a strategic giant.

In the last two decades, political attitudes over the issue changed repeatedly – often in line with the general standing of the alliance, and relatedly, the position of the USA within it. While in the 1990s, under Prime Minister Lipponen and President Ahtisaari, NATO membership was discussed fairly openly, 9/11 and the ensuing US call to invoke article V got then president Halonen to become much more cautious. Various political leaders have since attempted to rekindle the debate, receiving mixed reactions from the population, and, most importantly, provoking defensive reactions on the part of Russia (Steinbock, 2008). Apart from the concern that Finnish NATO accession could provoke undesirable Russian counter moves, the debate in Finland continues to be determined by public opinion (Arter, 2015), which has traditionally been sceptical towards the idea of full NATO membership.⁹

⁸ European integration was a welcome opportunity to openly integrate with the West, and one that Finland seized to the fullest, by taking a progressive and unorthodox approach to the multiple pressures of integration on national policy, structure and identity.

⁹ According to recent polls, general support for membership has not changed over the years despite substantive changes in the strategic environment; it sits at a constant low of 25-27% faced with a majority of 57-59% that is opposed to the idea (see TNS Gallup poll discussed in Raeste, 2015).

Finnish awareness of the Russian threat informed and conditioned several strategic choices after the end of the Cold War; it is also a key explanatory factor for why Finland has maintained a conservative defence posture after 1989. While Sweden and Norway, and Denmark in particular, increasingly turned to crisis management and expeditionary operations, Finland preserved substantive conventional capabilities. These substantive regional differences also show in the practical reality of NORDEFCO where Finland has established itself as an enthusiastic and committed partner but one that also maintains their national strategic idiosyncrasies (Saxi, 2011, p. 13). Its geostrategic exposure will remain a particular concern for the country in the foreseeable future. The annexation of parts of Ukraine have revived Finnish apprehension over the demilitarized Åland Islands in particular, which Russia makes no effort to diffuse: in March 2015, the Russian Military staged an exercise that included practicing the capture of the islands (along with other, geographically exposed regions of Norway and Sweden).

Norway

Norway's history is deeply entangled with its Nordic partners; our discussion starts with the non-violent departure of Norway from the personal union with Sweden in 1905, which marked the origins of today's independent Kingdom of Norway.¹⁰ Before 1945, Norway, too, made attempts at neutrality and non-alignment but the Norwegian experience was quite different from the one of neutral Sweden or Finland: during the First World War, Norway saw itself pressured to side with the United Kingdom. Later, during the Second World War, Norway (like Denmark) was invaded by the *Wehrmacht* and remained under German occupation until 1945. That neutrality did not suffice to truly keep Norway out of either of the great wars was as a historical lesson that conditions Norwegian strategy to this day: despite a changing strategic environment, Norway has retained a defensive and relatively conservative defence posture, which reflects an innate lack of trust in its allies. In part, however, there is also a legacy of "neutrality and peacefulness" in the country's security doctrine,

¹⁰ Preceding the Swedish-Norwegian Union (1814-1905), Norway had been part of a personal union with the Kingdom of Denmark (1376-1814) until Denmark had to cede the kingdom to the King of Sweden. After its defeat in the Norwegian-Swedish War in 1814, Norway was forced into a personal union with Sweden albeit remaining, with the exception of foreign policy, a largely autonomous state.

making Norway a somewhat “ambivalent ally” (Rottem, 2007; see also Kelleher et al., 2014 on Norwegian “soft power”).

Under the impression of looming great power conflict, and after attempts at setting up a Scandinavian Defence Union had failed, Norway decided to seize the opportunity to join the Alliance in 1949. Throughout the Cold War, however, Norway was also careful to not upset the ‘Nordic balance’, trying to strike a difficult balance between allegiance with NATO, deterrence and reassurance to the Soviet Union (Riste, 2001). Like Denmark, also a NATO founding member, it refused to have nuclear weapons deployed or foreign troops stationed permanently on its territory while there was no specific threat of an attack, a stance that became known as the “Norwegian base policy” (Holtsmark, 1995, p. 425). Along with Denmark, Norway was also reluctant towards allied military activities near the Russian border as well as in the Baltic Sea (Egeland Moen, 1998). Norway otherwise kept a low profile within the Alliance, and its conduct was not received with nearly as much criticism by fellow allies as the one of Denmark (Petersson and Saxi, 2013).

Norway’s involvement in the European integration project is marked by two failed referenda on accession (1972 and 1994). The Norwegian political elite met post-Maastricht ambitions to set up a security and defence component for the Union’s foreign policy, and in particular one that would include an operational branch, with pronounced scepticism (Græger, 2005). Once EU plans started to materialise, however, Norway took on a pragmatic stance and even pushed for a formal arrangement of mutual consultation and exchange of information. Although in practice Norway’s access to the decision-making and decision-shaping process nevertheless remained limited, Norway eventually became quite proactively involved in CSDP operations as well as in the dealings of the European Defence Agency (EDA) (see e.g. Sjursen, 2014). As a third country, Norway has arguably been more engaged in EU-related security and defence matters than Denmark (Rieker, 2006). That said, some have argued that Norway’s turn to Europe in the formative years of the CSDP in particular was more of a momentary reaction to the unilateralist US policy on Iraq as much as a simple attempt to increase Norway’s visibility in the burgeoning CSDP, i.e. what Græger (2002) referred to as a “troops-for-influence” strategy. This links to the more general suggestion that post-Cold War Norway was a “small state seeking international standing” (Carvalho and Neumann, 2014).

Some would argue that this Norwegian quest to be perceived as an international player is directly reflected in the country's budgetary ambitions. Indeed, Norway is the only Nordic country with firm plans to (further) increase defence spending (from 1.4 to 1.58 per cent of GNP in 2016). Relatively speaking, Norway's expenditures have often been the highest in the region which has been ascribed to "Norwegian prosperity as well as Norway's dual ambition to secure defence of its (northern) territory and to participate actively in international military operations" (Wivel and Marcussen, 2015, p. 211).

This 'dual ambition' reveals that there is more to Norwegian defence activism than a simple attempt to increase international standing. There are sentiments that go back to Norway's pre-1945 experience. Even more so than Finland, Norway has been consistently reluctant to compromise on its territorial defence capabilities. Of all Nordic countries, Norway's post-Cold War defence and alliance policy has been most consistent with its pre-1989 position (Steinbock, 2008). Norway's insistent focus on the Russian Threat often made the country seem "out-of-touch with priorities in the post-Cold War alliance" (Petersson and Saxi, 2013, p. 761), predominantly in view of increased expectations for Norway to engage and prepare their forces more ambitiously for multinational crisis management, and from a NATO perspective, for expeditionary 'out-of-area' deployments.

Consecutive Norwegian leaderships have been cautiously aware of the country's geopolitical position, and never ceased to push for the Alliance to up its operational engagement in the High North. Only in summer 2013, Norway requested for NATO to increase its military presence in the Arctic to create a strategic counterweight to Russia's intensifying rearming activity in the region. This, however, was met with reluctance and eventually rejected with reference to the need for "cooperation, not confrontation" (NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh-Rasmussen, cited in O'Dwyer, 2013). Then Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg (as of October 2014, NATO Secretary General), largely unimpressed by rhetorical reassurances of major allies like the US and the UK or Obama's soft initiative to launch a "US-Nordic Security Dialogue" (The White House, 2013), has since continued to push for a greater involvement and focus of the Alliance on Europe's North (see e.g. Stoltenberg, 2015). However, ongoing concerns over developments in Syria have somewhat taken away the momentum this had gained in the face of the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Within NORDEFCO, Norway has established itself as a key contributor both materially and politically. Norway's particular readiness to up its military budget as well as its continued focus on NATO, however, have added to the asymmetry of this regional forum, and thereby contributed to the limitations of a more cohesive Nordic defence framework (Saxi, 2011).

Iceland

Iceland's history as a fully sovereign country is short given that much of its past was determined by foreign rule, first under Norway (1262-1380), and, until a peaceful release in 1918, under Denmark. Iceland was occupied by UK and US forces during the Second World War, and only gained full independence from Denmark, as the contemporary 'Republic of Iceland', in 1944. After 1945, despite having become a fully sovereign country, in security and defence terms, Iceland continued to rely heavily on external support. Based on a defence agreement, US forces (*Iceland Defence Force*) were stationed on the NATO base in Keflavík in Iceland between 1951 and 2006, providing an important strategic hub to US military aviation, and serving as a security umbrella (see Ingimundarson, 2012, 2003).

Despite being a founding member of NATO, Iceland does – to this date – not have a standing army. However, the Icelandic Coast Guard patrols Icelandic waters and maintains the Air Defence System, which performs ground surveillance of Iceland's air space. Since 2001, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs also operates a Crisis Response Unit (*Íslenska Friðargæslan*), which has been deployed to multinational peacekeeping operations (NATO, OSCE, UN). Like non-EU member Norway, Iceland has also played an active role in the CSDP, despite its obvious material limitations. Discussions over Icelandic EU membership culminated in 2008, when in the aftermath of the economic crash Iceland put in an application; however, the accession process has been put on hold when a new centre-right government came in in 2013. Icelandic popular perception of the EU as a "bully supporting larger states oppressing a small, defenceless neighbour" was expressed in a wave of post-crisis nationalism that charged public discourse for years to come (Thorhallsson, 2015, p. 44; see also Bailes and Ólafsson, 2014).

After the withdrawal of US troops in 2006, Iceland had a vacuum to fill in its alliance strategy. Although the country remains subject of the Alliance's mutual defence

guarantees, and despite the launch of a NATO Air Policing scheme in 2008, there have been clear incentives to reactivate intra-Nordic ties, in particular with fellow NATO-members Denmark and Norway (Ingimundarson, 2009). For some time, Iceland also reached out to the UK again but this connection suffered substantively under the “fallout” over the banking crisis (Saxi, 2011, p. 29). Iceland has recently tried to reframe its foreign policy around the increasing strategic salience of the Arctic while at the same adamant to not “securitise” the region as the site of potential great power competition (Ingimundarson, 2009, p. 75).

Within NORDEFCO, Iceland cooperates closely with its Nordic partners on aspects related to dual-use procurement, education and training but remains offside when it comes to most of the military components of cooperation (Saxi, 2011). It seems that within its given material and geographical reality, particularly in security and defence matters, Iceland will continue to be the “reactive small state on the periphery” (Thorhallsson, 2015, p. 34). Icelanders proudly uphold their self-determined national identity yet remain painfully aware that they lack the capability to defend it, at least militarily. This awareness is also what will inform Icelandic strategy in the mid-term future: a focus on non-material security, most importantly cyber security, and a distinctive prioritisation of societal security, civil emergency management, and more generally, civil protection, not primarily in view of a potential military attack but of natural disasters, such as the volcanic eruption of 2010 (Utanríkisráðuneyti, 2014).

Comparative outlook

From a realist pragmatist point of view, the continued divergence between defence and alliance policies of the Nordic countries, and their asymmetric ties to either NATO, the CSDP or both seem much like a “deadlock”, an impediment to a “rational long-term solution” for regional defence (Forss and Holopainen, 2015). However, in practice, the fault lines are much less pronounced than such an assessment would suggest. Arguably, coordination costs are often limited to technical or institutional issues, and do not routinely arise from substantive political disagreements but rather from a divergence in priorities. Such divergence would likely be found in any grouping of states even if they were all small, culturally entangled with and neighbouring each other. However, based on a long-standing perception of the Nordic

five as a more or less unified bloc there is of course an expectation that they would fare dramatically better at coordinating each other's defence and alliance policies. Arguably, the creation of NORDEFCO constitutes a novelty in Nordic cooperation; in times of austerity, however, defence cooperation in the form of pooling and sharing is a necessity, and one that the Scandinavians have in common with many other countries in Europe. The mere existence of NORDEFCO does therefore not yet signify a substantive revival of inter-Nordic relations more generally (Forsberg, 2013). Beyond obvious short-term practical merits, it remains to be seen whether NORDEFCO will lead towards a truly 'common' Nordic defence, fundamental reforms and force transformation within each Nordic country, let alone towards the build-up of a post-national Nordic military. Budget limitations and the lack of a common strategic vision have been mentioned (Saxi, 2011) as likely inhibitors for NORDEFCO to truly serve as a catalyst for renewed Nordic unity. Criticism has also been raised over the lack of substantive successes and tangible outcomes to date, particularly in the areas of joint procurement and pooling. Rieker and Terlikowski (2015) identify challenges that will unlikely become eradicated any time soon: national industrial interests differ, as does legislation e.g. on procurement procedures. More profound harmonisation is needed before the framework can yield the ambitious results set out in the founding memorandum (NORDEFCO, 2009). That said, strong new incentives have arisen from the recent internationalisation of strategic debates in the region following renewed territorial confrontations with Russia in 2014. In April 2015, Nordic defence ministers announced closer cooperation in reaction to Russia's aggressive behaviour towards neighbouring Ukraine (Bentzrød, 2015). While NORDEFCO seemed to be the obvious institutional avenue, the statement strongly emphasised intra-Nordic linkages more broadly. Arguably, there are instances of the Nordic countries moving closer together (e.g. statements at a recent Nordic Defence Minister meeting in Stockholm, see NATO, 2015), which might indicate increasing Nordic unity. Meanwhile, global awareness of the direct territorial threat emanating from Russia increases, and the adjacent Arctic is more and more recognised for its geostrategic importance (Kraska, 2011; Knecht and Keil, 2013; Keil and Raspotnik, 2014; Sergunin and Konyshov, 2014). These general strategic trends might change long-term perceptions of the North, and lead to a renewed politicisation of the region.

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Table 1: summing up the institutional affiliations of the five countries

	NATO	EC/EU	NORDEFCO
Denmark	Founding member, 1949	Member since 1973, opt-outs from military aspects of CSDP	Founding member, 2009
Finland	PfP only, since 1994	Member since 1995	Founding member and initiator, 2009
Iceland	Founding member, 1949	European Free Trade Association only, since 1970	Founding member, 2009
Norway	Founding member, 1949	European Free Trade Association only, since 1960	Founding member and initiator, 2009
Sweden	PfP only, since 1994	Member since 1995	Founding member and initiator, 2009

Table 2: functions performed in Scandinavian defence policies

	NATO	EC/EU	NORDEFCO
Denmark	Mutual Defence guarantee; Framework for contributions to multi-national operations; Force transformation; Cooperation in Defence Research and Development; Pooling and Sharing; Training of Personnel; Procurement Standards and Interoperability; Consultation and Diplomacy;	Consultation and Diplomacy; Framework for civilian contributions to multi-national operations;	Consultation and Diplomacy; Procurement and Capability Development; Training and Exercises; Coordination of Contributions to multi-national operations; Pooling and Sharing;
Finland	Framework for contributions to multi-national operations;	Consultation and Diplomacy; Framework for contributions to	Consultation and Diplomacy; Procurement and

	Force transformation; Cooperation in Defence Research and Development; Pooling and Sharing; Training and Exercising; Procurement Standards and Interoperability; Consultation and Diplomacy;	multi-national operations; Capability Development and Interoperability; Training and Exercising; Involvement in Nordic Battle Group; Mutual Defence Guarantee;	Capability Development; Training and Exercises; Coordination of Contributions to multi-national operations; Pooling and Sharing;
Iceland	Mutual Defence guarantee; Framework for (financial and civilian) contributions to multi-national operations; Pooling and Sharing; Air Surveillance Support; Consultation and Diplomacy;	Consultation and Diplomacy;	Consultation and Diplomacy; Procurement and Capability Development; Training and Exercises; Pooling and Sharing;
Norway	Mutual Defence guarantee; Framework for contributions to multi-national operations; Force transformation; Cooperation in Defence Research and Development; Pooling and Sharing; Training of Personnel; Procurement Standards and Interoperability; Consultation and Diplomacy;	Consultation and Diplomacy; Framework for contribution to multi-national operations (as partner); Involvement in Nordic Battle Group;	Consultation and Diplomacy; Procurement and Capability Development; Training and Exercises; Coordination of Contributions to multi-national operations; Pooling and Sharing;

Sweden	<p>Framework for contributions to multi-national operations;</p> <p>Force transformation;</p> <p>Cooperation in Defence</p> <p>Research and Development; Pooling and Sharing; Training of Personnel;</p> <p>Procurement Standards and Interoperability;</p> <p>Consultation and Diplomacy;</p>	<p>Consultation and Diplomacy; Framework for contributions to multi-national operations; Capability Development and Interoperability;</p> <p>Training and Exercising;</p> <p>Involvement in Nordic Battle Group; Mutual Defence Guarantee;</p>	<p>Consultation and Diplomacy;</p> <p>Procurement and Capability</p> <p>Development; Training and Exercises;</p> <p>Coordination of Contributions to multi-national operations;</p> <p>Pooling and Sharing;</p>
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