

## Naval War College Review

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Volume 64  
Number 2 *Spring*

Article 7

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2011

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### Recommended Citation

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Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol64/iss2/7>

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## ALLIANCE NAVAL STRATEGIES AND NORWAY IN THE FINAL YEARS OF THE COLD WAR

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*Commodore Jacob Børresen, Royal Norwegian Navy (Retired)*

For those of us who served in the Norwegian armed forces, especially in northern Norway, the 1980s were exciting times. Norway seemed to be the focus of American and NATO attention. There was a continuous flow of high-ranking visitors to Defence Command North Norway (DEFCOMMON), from the staffs of Allied Command Europe (ACE) and Atlantic (ACLANT).<sup>1</sup> Every year thousands of allied soldiers, hundreds of aircraft, and dozens of ships arrived in the area to conduct advanced training and complex exercises. High points were the deployments of U.S. Navy aircraft carriers, elements of Supreme Allied Commander, Atlantic's (SACLANT's) Striking Fleet Atlantic, into northern Norwegian coastal waters in Vestfjorden, outside Bodø: in 1985, USS *America* (CV 66) and, in 1987, USS *Forrestal* (CV 59) in Exercise OCEAN SAFARI; in 1988, USS *Theodore Roosevelt* (CVN 71) and *Forrestal* in TEAMWORK; and in 1989, *America* in NORTH STAR.<sup>2</sup> We were witnessing, and took part in, what later turned out to be the culmination of the Cold War—the period of tension that eventually led to the collapse of the Soviet Union. Norway, neighbor to the Soviet Union and a coastal state on the North Atlantic and the Barents Sea, found itself at the geographical center of this final effort.

What is the relevance of these events today? First of all, it is part of our common recent history, which we do well to preserve and hand down to the generations that follow us. But the Soviet Union is gone, and with it the Cold War. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) has been reorganized; with SACLANT disestablished, it has only one supreme operational commander. Nevertheless, the underlying assumption of this article, especially the second part, is that the events in northern Norway in the 1980s provide insights with

regard to joint and combined planning, exercises, and operations that are still relevant to the United States and its allies as they prepare for coalition warfare elsewhere in the world. Their value lies not only in how divergent interests and differing opinions were handled between NATO supreme commanders. It has as much or more to do with how to handle diverging interests between sovereign allies and between sea-based and land-based commanders in situations where land forces are reinforced or supported from the sea. The notion that in a complex contingency, involving several sovereign nations and both sea-based and land-based forces, a single American or allied commander can simply assume operational command and get on with it may be simplistic.

The purpose of this article, then, is first to discuss some of the political challenges to the Norwegian government in the 1980s as a result of the increased importance to NATO and the United States of the alliance's northern flank. Sea control in the Norwegian Sea was seen as crucial for protecting transatlantic sea lines of communications and to taking out Soviet nuclear-powered ballistic-missile submarines (SSBNs). Second, I will elaborate on some of the implications, primarily at the operational and tactical levels, for Norway and the Norwegian armed forces of NATO's Concept of Maritime Operations (CONMAROPS) and the U.S. Maritime Strategy of the 1980s.<sup>3</sup>

#### GEOPOLITICAL AND MILITARY STRATEGIC BACKGROUND

Since the early 1960s the United States and NATO had formulated their military strategies and based their force and contingency planning on the doctrine of "flexible response."<sup>4</sup> The doctrine rested upon the mutual recognition that the United States and the Soviet Union both had the capability to destroy each other and their respective allies with nuclear weapons; it was an expression of the need to avoid a situation where the only response available to conventional aggression was nuclear retaliation. The implication was a need to be able to conduct conventional operations with an aim to deter hostilities or bring them to a halt prior to escalation to nuclear war. An effect was to increase the importance of the transatlantic lifelines, the ability of the United States to reinforce and resupply its own forces and those of its allies in Europe by sea, across the Atlantic Ocean.

The world of the 1980s was one of violent peace. Cold War tension appeared to be growing. At sea, the Soviet navy had grown significantly in strength and showed increasing tendencies toward belligerence. The U.S. response generally was to "roll back" the Soviet Union through greatly increased defense spending. Its primary focus for planning and force building was opposition to the Soviets in the European theater and support to NATO.<sup>5</sup>

As the Soviets increasingly based their nuclear deterrence on SSBNs, the majority of which were based on the Kola Peninsula, they needed to secure a wider

maritime defensive zone in the Norwegian Sea. In the event of war, the SSBN fleet would operate in the adjacent Barents Sea. Consequently, they saw, U.S. or NATO naval forces could not be allowed to take command of the Norwegian Sea. This Soviet mission of sea denial could require offensive action against Western naval forces. It might also entail a ground assault on northern Norway itself, in order to forward-base aircraft and help secure access for Soviet naval forces to the Norwegian Sea.<sup>6</sup>

To NATO, this ability to push the maritime defensive zone farther and farther out, potentially involving a ground invasion of northern Norway, was a dangerous new offensive factor in calculations of the balance of power, not only because NATO had to control these waters itself but because the allied perception was fundamentally one of defense. Unless the alliance was able to secure Norwegian territory, the Soviets would be in a favorable position to contest control of the seas. By securing important forward positions in Norway, the Soviet Union could deploy more effective land-based air cover for its naval forces.<sup>7</sup> In short, the loss of northern Norway could be decisive in the battle for the Atlantic. Therefore, the support of the land battle in Norway by naval forces was critical. The war could not perhaps be won at sea, but it could easily be lost there.<sup>8</sup>

NATO's response was the Concept of Maritime Operations of 1980. CONMAROPS highlighted the importance of containing Soviet forces through forward operations, of conducting defense in depth, and of gaining and maintaining the initiative at sea.<sup>9</sup> CONMAROPS was based first on deterrence. Should deterrence fail, the strategy was designed to mount a defense far forward in order to protect the territory of the alliance's European member nations.<sup>10</sup> The concept bracketed NATO's naval operations into five operational areas or campaigns: the Mediterranean lifelines, the eastern Mediterranean, the Atlantic lifelines, the "shallow seas," and the Norwegian Sea. The three latter campaigns involved Norway. At this time NATO was also developing elaborate contingency plans for the rapid reinforcement of Europe in the event of an attack by the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact. Each of these plans had forces allocated to it. An elaborate exercise program was developed whereby each plan would be periodically tested and the forces given opportunities to familiarize themselves with the plan and the area of operations. But above all, the exercises in each of several series served as deterrents in themselves, in the form of important political signals of alliance solidarity and shared credible will and ability to defend against attack.

The purpose of the Atlantic lifelines campaign was to protect the transportation of allied reinforcement and resupply across the Atlantic; the associated exercise series was known as OCEAN SAFARI. The shallow-seas campaign was designed to prevent the exit of the Soviet Baltic Fleet into the North Sea and to protect allied convoys in the North Sea and the English Channel; it was exercised

in the NORTHERN WEDDING series. The Norwegian Sea campaign was meant to prevent the exit of the Soviet Northern Fleet into the Norwegian Sea and the North Atlantic and to provide sea-based support to allied air and ground operations in Norway. Its associated exercise series was TEAMWORK.<sup>11</sup>

The U.S. forward-oriented maritime strategy of the mid-1980s was drawn from both NATO and American national military strategies, and it provided that the U.S. Navy and Marines would wage global coalition warfare in conjunction with the Army and Air Force and the forces of allied nations.<sup>12</sup> As such, it dovetailed nicely with CONMAROPS, but in certain areas it went farther—for instance, in the taking out of Soviet SSBNS; operation of carrier battle groups (CVBGs) in coastal waters far forward, sheltered by the mountains surrounding the northern Norwegian fjords; and the concept of horizontal escalation. NATO's and the Americans' objectives in the Norwegian Sea were to repel a Soviet amphibious assault on northern Norway, support northern Norway against land threats, prevent Soviet use of facilities in Norway, and contain the Northern Fleet or destroy it at sea.<sup>13</sup> As opposed to CONMAROPS, which talked about *campaigns*, the U.S. Maritime Strategy dealt with *phases*.

Phase I was called “transition to war.” In this phase there would be global forward movement of U.S. naval forces. Nuclear-powered attack submarines (SSNs) would move into positions far forward, including the Arctic, deep inside the Soviet sea-control and sea-denial areas. Battle groups would begin to form into multicarrier battle forces. Forward-deployed amphibious task groups would increase their readiness, and leading portions of a Marine amphibious brigade would fly to Norway to join their prepositioned equipment. Other Marine air-ground task forces would begin loading out. Sealift of multiservice reinforcements would commence. Britain's Royal Navy would send SSNs forward, and a British antisubmarine warfare (ASW) task group, centered on at least one carrier, would put to sea in the eastern Atlantic. British and Dutch marines would reinforce Norway. Allied army deployments too were important to the Maritime Strategy, including the movement of the British Mobile Force and the Canadian Air-Sea-Transportable (CAST) Brigade Group to Norway.<sup>14</sup>

In Phase II the purpose was to *seize the initiative*, as far forward as possible, preparatory to carrying the fight to the enemy. In the initial antiair warfare campaign, carrier battle forces would engage Soviet air attacks as far forward as possible in “outer air battles,” to cause maximum attrition. Available land-based tactical air (TACAIR) would complement these efforts in the Norwegian Sea. Surveillance, intelligence, and raiding operations against command, control, and communication sites by U.S. Special Forces and American and allied marines in Norway would be valuable supplements.<sup>15</sup>

Phase III entailed *carrying the fight to the enemy*. Heavy strikes on the flanks culminating in attacks on Soviet territory would be conducted as battle forces massed and moved forward with reduced risk and higher confidence of success. In this phase the U.S. Navy would be projecting power ashore in support of the land battle. Amphibious operations would have the purpose of gaining leverage for war termination, securing strategic choke points, and recovering territory lost to Soviet attack.<sup>16</sup>

The desired culmination was *war termination on favorable terms*. This required putting such conventional (i.e., nonnuclear) pressure on the Soviets as to convince them that they would find no benefit in continuing aggression and in fact should retreat, while giving them no incentive to escalate to nuclear war. For the U.S. Navy, exerting this pressure meant neutralization or destruction of the Soviet navy and of ground and air forces on the Eurasian flanks, sea control, and intervention in the land battle.<sup>17</sup>

## IMPLICATIONS FOR NORWAY AND THE NORWEGIAN ARMED FORCES

Prior to World War II, Norway's foreign policy had been based on neutrality, or nonalignment, a policy that went as far back as 1814. To the Norwegians, fighting Nazi Germany, from 1940 to 1945, as part of an alliance was thus something new. After the war there were strong political forces that wanted to return to a policy of neutrality. Accession to NATO in 1949 came about only after a ferocious political debate. What finally decided the issue was the realization that in the event of war between the United States and the Soviet Union, Norway would be pulled into the conflict whether it wanted to be or not. Nevertheless, and despite the fact that once the debate was concluded public support for NATO across the political spectrum was consistently strong, Norwegian governments, whether socialist or nonsocialist, had throughout the Cold War to balance carefully between policies of deterrence against and reassurance of the Soviet Union, and between integration with and screening against NATO.<sup>18</sup>

The concrete expressions of these considerations were Norway's base policy, its nuclear policy, and a series of restrictions on allied exercise activity in Norway. The base policy was first formulated in February 1949 in a note to the Soviet government stating that Norway would "not enter into treaties with any other states that contains an obligation to open up bases to the armed forces of foreign states on Norwegian territory as long as Norway has not been attacked or been subject to threats of an attack." At the NATO summit in 1957, the Norwegian prime minister, who was critical of NATO's nuclear strategy, declared that Norway would not store nuclear weapons on its soil in peacetime. In 1988

Defence Minister Johan J. Holst further clarified Norwegian nuclear policy by announcing:

In accordance with international agreements, Norway will not test, produce, or in any other way attain, nuclear weapons; nuclear weapons will not be stored in or deployed to Norway; Norwegian armed forces will not be trained in the use of nuclear weapons; Norway will not enter into any cooperation agreement with an aim to transfer nuclear weapons or information about nuclear weapons to Norway; special storage sites for nuclear weapons will not be established in Norway; Norwegian weapon systems will not be certified for use of nuclear munitions.<sup>19</sup>

In addition, throughout the Cold War there were limits on how many allied soldiers, aircraft, or ships could be present in Norway at any one time, in order not to undermine the base policy. As a measure of reassurance for the Soviet Union, allied units were not allowed to operate in the county of Finnmark, next to the Soviet border, or from Norwegian airfields or harbors or at sea or in the air east of twenty-four degrees east longitude.<sup>20</sup>

#### NORWEGIAN RESTRICTIONS AND THE U.S. MARITIME STRATEGY

The American “rediscovery” of NATO’s northern flank in the 1970s and the resulting reinforcement plans; prestocking of materiel, fuel, and ammunition; and increased exercise activity in Norway in the 1970s and 1980s raised a political debate in the country over the interpretation and practice of Norwegian restrictions—the nation’s nuclear and base policies and its constraints on allied training and exercises. At times the debate generated substantial pressure on the Norwegian government and put limits on how far Norway could go to accommodate allied, primarily U.S. Navy, requirements for support. Of the many issues that were affected by this debate and that caused problems for the government and strained Norway’s relationship with the United States, I will briefly mention five, in their relations to the country’s nuclear and base policies:

- Port visits of U.S. nuclear-capable ships and submarines
- Participation of nuclear-capable aircraft in training and exercises
- Prestocking for the U.S. Marine Corps
- Consequences for Norway of the concept of horizontal escalation
- Logistic support to the U.S. Navy by “forward operating locations” (FOLs).<sup>21</sup>

*Visit by Nuclear-Capable Naval Units.* The provision in Norway’s nuclear policy whereby nuclear weapons would not be stored in or deployed to Norway meant

that visits by ships armed with nuclear weapons could constitute violations of that policy. In 1975 the prime minister, Trygve Bratteli, formulated what has been called the “Bratteli doctrine”: “Our assumption, as foreign ships visit, has been and is that nuclear weapons are not carried on board. Norwegian authorities anticipate that allied, as well as other nuclear powers, respect this assumption.” The doctrine thus took into account both the fact that warships, under international law, cannot be inspected by foreign states and that Western nuclear powers, by policy, neither confirmed nor denied that their ships were carrying nuclear weapons. The Bratteli doctrine was no more than a codification of established practice, but it nevertheless evoked strong reactions by the allied nuclear powers and by Norway’s own Chief of Defence, General Zeiner Gundersen. He feared that the doctrine would lead to a sharp reduction in the visits by allied ships. The doctrine was thus allowed to slip silently into oblivion. In the early 1980s, reference to it was omitted from statements of diplomatic clearance of visits to Norway by foreign warships.

When Johan J. Holst was appointed Minister of Defence in 1986, he decided to reinstate the doctrine, by once more referring to it in diplomatic clearances issued for ship visits. The American reaction was immediate and strong, and Holst had to back down and accept a compromise whereby reference to the doctrine was only indirect. In 1992 Holst reversed his policy on this issue completely, stating that “Norway cannot conduct a policy whereby its allies must prove that they are not criminals.”<sup>22</sup>

*The Participation in Exercises of Nuclear-Capable Aircraft.* In accordance with the limitations on allied exercises in Norway, the government put restrictions on the number and types of allied aircraft that could operate at any one time from Norwegian airfields or in Norwegian airspace. In particular, the government had problems with regard to nuclear-capable aircraft: the B-52 long-range bomber, the F-111D fighter-bomber, and the A-6 Intruder light bomber.

In Exercise ANORAK EXPRESS in March 1980, for example, B-52s based in Britain were to simulate attacks on targets in Norway and then return to base, without having landed on Norwegian soil. The mission was stricken from the exercise by the Norwegian government, and a general rule was established for later exercises whereby B-52s could participate only in other than offensive roles, only versions of the aircraft not certified or equipped to deliver nuclear weapons could take part, and B-52s would not land in the country other than in an emergency.

The F-111D was part of NATO’s intermediate-range nuclear force (INF) and also of the strategic reserve of the Supreme Allied Commander, Europe (SACEUR). In this latter role it could be deployed all over ACE. When SACEUR’s



plan for cross servicing these aircraft at Norwegian airfields came up for approval in November 1983, the conservative Kåre Isaachsen Willoch government demanded that F-111Ds be omitted from the plan as far as Norway was concerned. Like the B-52, the F-111D was so prominently associated with NATO's nuclear strategy that regular visits to Norway by these aircraft or their inclusion in the allied plans for the country's defense would have been seen as eroding the Norwegian nuclear policy.

The A-6 Intruder, a nuclear-capable light bomber, also created problems for the Norwegian government. The aircraft was, for instance, initially not allowed to exercise in Norway, and storage of heavy equipment associated with the A-6 was excluded from the 1981 U.S. Marine Corps prestocking agreement, on the premise that storage sites containing an offensive capability like the nuclear-capable A-6 would be regarded as unacceptable provocations to the Soviet Union, by both the Soviets and the Norwegian public. But the A-6 was an integral part of the U.S. Marine Corps's inventory, and as Marine exercise participation in Norway increased in frequency and volume, regular involvement by A-6s became unavoidable. The first time A-6s in the air-to-ground role took part in an exercise in Norway was in TEAMWORK 1984, where they operated out of Bodø in northern Norway. Previously they had operated only out of Ørland, much further south in central Norway in the electronic-warfare role. This proved to be a breakthrough. From then on and well into the 1990s, the A-6 was a regular participant in NATO exercises in Norway, without causing political problems of any kind to the government.<sup>23</sup>

*Prestocking for a U.S. Marine Corps Expeditionary Brigade.* In 1981 American and Norwegian authorities signed an agreement to store the heavy equipment of a U.S. air-landed Marine expeditionary brigade (known as the NALMEB) in the central Norwegian county of Trøndelag. The original plan was to store the equipment in northern Norway, which was where the brigade would operate if it were deployed. This was hindered by strong political opposition in Norway, and a compromise solution had to be found farther south. As compensation, the heavy equipment for South Norwegian Brigade 6 was stored in the north. Also, the Marine brigade's air element was allowed to fly directly to its designated airfields in the north. The net result was thus a considerable strengthening of the defense of northern Norway.

What was the opposition to prestocking for the Marines in northern Norway all about? First, there were those who opposed any prestocking in Norway for the U.S. Marine Corps. Second, there were those who supported it in principle but not in northern Norway. The general opposition to prestocking must, I believe, be seen as a repercussion of the broad and general political opposition in

Norway to the war in Vietnam. The war, which had ended in 1975, was still fresh in memory. Also, the Marine Corps was seen as the epitome of American expeditionary capability; Norwegian politicians feared that prestocking its equipment would pull the country into American global strategy. There were also those who felt that storing equipment for foreign troops could undermine the Norwegian base policy, while others pointed to the fact that because the brigade was nuclear capable, the presence of its equipment would represent a challenge to the nation's nuclear policy.

Those who supported prestocking in principle but opposed it in northern Norway feared that a storage site there would provoke the Soviets and thus be contrary to the long-standing Norwegian policy of low tension in the north. This, by the way, was a general problem with the Maritime Strategy, as many Norwegians saw it. For the Norwegian government, which wanted to tie the United States to the defense of Norway, on the one hand, and on the other to minimize internal debate and political division over defense and security policy, handling the strategy was a difficult balancing act.<sup>24</sup>

*Horizontal Escalation.* In 1978 the dean of the Center for Advanced Research (as the present Center for Naval Warfare Studies was originally known) at the U.S. Naval War College, at Newport, Rhode Island, Francis J. "Bing" West (who, by the way, had participated with John Lehman in the development of "Sea Plan 2000," the precursor to the Maritime Strategy), coined the phrase "horizontal escalation." The phrase signified a concept whereby the U.S. Navy could improve the American bargaining position against the Soviet Union in the early stages of a war by forward maritime operations against the Soviet navy, including its strategic submarines, the SSBNs, thus confronting the Soviets with a choice between nuclear escalation and termination of hostilities.<sup>25</sup> When the Maritime Strategy started to materialize in the 1980s, the idea of horizontal escalation surfaced in the Norwegian debate. If the United States were to respond to a conflict with the Soviets in, let us say, the Persian Gulf by attacking the Northern Fleet base area on the Kola Peninsula, close to the Norwegian border, would that be in Norway's interest and in line with the Norwegian policy of low tension?

In 1986 Johan Holst feared that the U.S. naval strategy could result in Soviet pressure on the Scandinavian countries and in inadvertent escalation to nuclear war. He warned against what he called a "mediterraneanization" of the Norwegian Sea (referring to the permanent presence in the Mediterranean of both the U.S. Sixth Fleet and units of the Soviet Black Sea Fleet). At the same time, however, Holst was engaged in securing regular allied naval presence in northern waters, as that could reduce Soviet dominance and induce restraint on both sides. Again we see the double dichotomy of deterrence and reassurance of the Soviets and of

integration with and screening against allies—that runs as a bright line through Norwegian Cold War defense and security policy.<sup>26</sup>

*Logistic Support to Striking Fleet Atlantic.* An important lesson learned from the participation of the *America* CVBG in OCEAN SAFARI in 1985 was the need to establish logistic support in the shape of forward-located depots of fuel and ammunition. For instance, the SACLANT fuel depot in Namsen, in central Norway, which had been established in 1983, held enough for only three days' consumption. In September 1985 the commander of Striking Fleet Atlantic (COMSTRIKFLTANT), Admiral Henry C. "Hank" Mustin, USN, brought the matter up with Norwegian authorities. It was a subject that was going to haunt them for years, right up until the end of the Cold War, and that would put considerable strain on U.S.-Norwegian relations.

In the summer of 1987, American authorities approached Norway's Ministry of Defence with a request to establish FOLs for logistic support to the U.S. Navy along the Norwegian coast. The Norwegians wanted to postpone the question; the Americans were indignant at this lack of support. In 1989, after considerable U.S. pressure, the Norwegian government went along and initiated negotiations on the subject. The American proposal included four different measures. First was establishment of forward-located ammunition and fuel depots at Bodø. The second was provision of airfields and seaports suitable for the reception and onward movement to ships of replenishment stores and spare parts. The Værnes airport and Trondheim harbor in central Norway were identified as candidates. Third, there was a need for an FOL farther north. Brønnøysund, where there was a modern jetty with a deep berth and easy access to the open sea, was seen as the best alternative. It was located close to an airport, though its runway would have to be extended somewhat and an aviation fuel depot would have to be built. Fourth, agreement had to be reached on the earmarking and preparation of wartime ship-repair facilities. The U.S. Navy had already secured agreement with five shipyards in Norway for peacetime support; similar agreements had to be closed for wartime use. Not until 1991 was the Norwegian government ready to approve a modified logistics agreement. But by this time the Cold War was over, Striking Fleet had left the Norwegian Sea, and SACLANT was no longer interested.

And that was precisely why Defence Minister Johan Jørgen Holst and the Norwegian government had dragged their feet on the subject in the first place. Holst knew that the deployment pattern of the U.S. Navy was according to American needs, not Norway's wishes. He had observed that American strike carriers had been conspicuously forward deployed in the Norwegian Sea in the 1950s but had disappeared in the early 1960s when submarines took over the

nuclear-deterrence role. Now the U.S. Navy was back in the Norwegian Sea as a result of the forward maritime strategy, but he had no guarantee that this new engagement would last. On the contrary, strategies invariably change as political situations change and create new requirements and as developments in weapons technology bring forward new capabilities.

The considerable allied military presence in Norway in the 1980s—on average around ten thousand personnel in training and over fifteen thousand involved in exercises per year, in addition to a large number of ships and aircraft—had created an impression that allied soldiers were almost continually present in Norway and that this constituted an erosion of Norway's base policy. Moreover, the exercises and training had reached the limit of what Norway was able to support and still maintain control over the activity. In this situation, to rally sufficient political and popular support for the establishment of forward operating locations—a euphemism for forward bases—for the U.S. Navy required unusual political skill, and a positive result would come only at a considerable political price. It was a price Holst was not willing to pay, since the chances were that no sooner would the FOLs be in place than the U.S. Navy would leave once more—which, of course, is exactly what happened.<sup>27</sup>

#### STRIKING FLEET ATLANTIC IN NORTH NORWEGIAN WATERS

Let me now turn to some implications for the defense of Norway at the operational and tactical levels. A concrete expression in Norwegian waters of the U.S. forward maritime strategy was the deployment of Striking Fleet Atlantic to the northern Norwegian Sea and into the coastal waters of northern Norway. Striking Fleet (STRIKEFLT) was organized in four subordinate commands: the carrier, ASW, amphibious, and Marine strike forces.<sup>28</sup> STRIKEFLT thus contained naval, air, and ground forces, and it was capable of establishing sea control and air superiority as a basis for force projection ashore.

Accordingly, its routine deployment to northern Norway represented an enormous boost to the defense of the region, for three reasons. First, it contributed convincingly to deterrence, in that it demonstrated American determination and ability to defend Norway, not through altruism but for reasons of U.S. security. Moscow would have to regard it as highly probable that an attack on Norway would mean war with the United States. Second, it constituted a crucial contribution to the defense of Norway. The operation of STRIKEFLT, with its two or three mutually supporting CVBGs, in the Vestfjorden and adjacent ocean areas meant allied sea control and air superiority along the Norwegian coast at least as far north as Lyngen Fjord, the northernmost of the fjords that penetrate deep into the key defensive positions of the Norwegian army in inner Troms County. Depending on the number of CVBGs, Striking Fleet's presence off the

Norwegian coast constituted a doubling of the number of air-defense fighters and a tripling of the number of fighter-bombers available to Commander, Defence Command North Norway (COMMON).<sup>29</sup> The most dangerous potential Soviet course of action in the event of war was considered to be an amphibious assault into the northern fjords to outflank the Norwegian army or attack it in the rear, in coordination with a simultaneous frontal assault on the defensive line between Lyngen Fjord and the Finnish border. Deployment of STRIKEFLT to the area would make such an assault a very risky undertaking.

Third, the planning and execution of complex joint and combined operational-level exercises that included integration of land-based and carrier-based air and amphibious landings raised the proficiency of COMMON's staff and of the Norwegian armed forces in general. Operations at the tactical level in the extremely target-rich environment of the major NATO exercises in northern Norway contributed to the efficiency and morale of Norwegian units on the ground, at sea, and in the air.

But there were challenges too. They were a result of deploying STRIKEFLT into a zone "up threat" (that is, in the direction from which the threat was expected) that was already the area of responsibility (AOR) of a "principal subordinate NATO commander," namely, COMMON, who had substantial naval, air, and ground forces under his own control. The complications were primarily related to airspace and water-space management and coordination in order to ensure the safety and security of "own units" and avoid "blue on blue" engagements while at the same time allowing the forces to fight effectively. The challenges can be grouped in four categories:

- Coordination and deconfliction of land-based and carrier-based air defense
- Shape and size of the amphibious objective area
- Employment of Marine air-component aircraft in support of COMMON's air campaign
- Coordination and deconfliction of COMMON and COMSTRIKFLTLANT naval operations in coastal waters.

In addition, there were issues regarding the conduct of complex joint and combined exercises in northern Norway in peacetime in such a way as to avoid accidents involving civilians and damage to civilian property. I shall briefly comment on each of these issues.

*Land-Based and Carrier-Based Air Defense.* As carrier battle groups approached the coast of northern Norway, their "outer defense zones," which could extend as far as three hundred nautical miles from the carriers themselves, would start to overlap COMMON's airspace.<sup>30</sup> As the carriers were under the command of

SACLANT but COMMON was under SACEUR, there was no higher-up command with overriding authority to take on overall responsibility for airspace management. This was nothing new. For many years, operating in the waters between Greenland, Iceland, and the United Kingdom (then famous as the “GIUK gap”), U.S. CVBGs had experienced the same problem in relation to the United Kingdom’s air-defense region. The U.S. Navy of the 1980s strongly preferred to plan for and exercise coordinated, cooperative, and deconflicted (but separate) sea-based antiair and strike campaigns rather than integrated TACAIR operations over both the land and sea under one powerful, central operational theater-air commander—who would likely be, in many important scenarios, a U.S. Air Force officer.<sup>31</sup>

The result had been the so-called CADIMS (Coordinated Air Defense in Mutual Support) agreement between British and American authorities, with procedures for the deconfliction of carrier- and land-based air. CADIMS was now used as a template for a similar agreement between COMMON and COMSTRIKFLTLANT. The concept was simple; the agreement essentially divided the airspace between the two and set forth special procedures for aircraft of one command that for some reason had to enter the airspace of the other. For exercise purposes in peacetime, the dividing line ran parallel to the Norwegian coast; COMSTRIKFLTLANT had control of the airspace to seaward. This allowed COMMON to carry out his responsibility for the defense of Norwegian airspace prior to war. In a wartime situation the delineation of COMMON and COMSTRIKFLTLANT airspace would probably have run east to west, with SACLANT responsible up threat.<sup>32</sup>

*Shape and Size of the AOA.* In an amphibious assault, U.S. doctrine gave the commander of the amphibious strike force complete control at sea, on the ground, and in the air within the “amphibious objective area,” the AOA. This control included, as a minimum, coordinating authority over all friendly units within the AOA. The AOA had to be large enough to allow for effective self-defense. Moreover, operational control over the Marine strike force, including its air component, would not pass to COMMON until the amphibious objective had been obtained. That could, realistically, take at least a week, often more. Consequently, when American planners arrived at COMMON planning conferences convened to organize amphibious assault exercises in Troms, they presented AOAs that encompassed all of COMMON’s key defensive area in that county, plus the northern parts of Nordland County and large chunks of northern Sweden.

If it had been only a question of the defense of a generic country against a generic threat, as in NATO exercises today, this would not have been a big problem.

But NATO's exercises in northern Norway during the Cold War were designed to test and refine NATO's contingency plans for war with the Soviet Union. Concepts and procedures for exercises had therefore to be as close to the real thing as peacetime safety regulations and political considerations (such as the necessity to avoid violation of Swedish airspace) would allow. To COMMON it was unacceptable to turn over to an allied commander (who might not even be under NATO command) control over his own key areas—where his entire anti-invasion force of four to six mechanized infantry brigades and a considerable number of naval ships, submarines, and fighter aircraft would be concentrated—in order that a single light Marine amphibious brigade could deploy. It did not make the situation easier that, according to plans, elements of the amphibious brigade's air component could deploy to northern Norwegian airfields immediately prior to or during the landing, when the shift of operational control to COMMON had not yet taken place.

To further complicate the issue, the amphibious commander would be a foreigner, with much less knowledge and experience of operations in the highly demanding terrain and climate of northern Norway than COMMON and his subordinate commanders. At the same time, it was unacceptable to the amphibious commander to land his units on the beach without being certain that he would be able to defend them effectively in the vulnerable landing phase before the amphibious brigade had time to regroup and get ready for combat ashore. Even if the assumption was that the amphibious brigade would land prior to hostilities breaking out, the very fact that it had done so would make the political situation so tense that hostilities could break out at any moment.

The issue of the AOA in northern Norway first went onto the agenda in the NATO command-post exercise WINTEX 1975. A solution that was acceptable to both parties would have to be based on confidence on the part of the Americans that COMMON had sufficient control in his area of responsibility that the size of the AOA could be reduced and its shape tailored to the geography in such a way that COMMON's units would not be unduly hindered in their movements while the amphibious landing was in progress. But a solution on those lines was not found until TEAMWORK 1984, and luckily we will never know whether the Americans would have accepted it in a real situation.<sup>33</sup>

*Marine Aircraft in Support of COMMON's Air Campaign.* In accordance with its operational concept, a U.S. Marine air-ground task force, or MAGTF, is an organic whole, and its air and ground combat components are integral parts that cannot be separated.<sup>34</sup> COMMON, on the other hand, considered that the U.S. Marine brigades could be more effectively employed in the defense of northern Norway if the ground combat component were placed under tactical command of the Norwegian 6th Division and the air component were under his own air



component commander, COMAIRNON, and integrated in the COMMON air campaign.

This was emphatically rejected by the Americans. It would constitute an unacceptable violation of their doctrine. Also, according to current plans, COMMON was allocated only operational control over the U.S. Marine brigade, and that did not include authority to divide it. COMMON had to give in on this point and accept that his ability to use his entire defense force in an optimal and flexible way, especially in the air, would be somewhat reduced. Anyway, given the considerable fighting capability of the Marine brigade, the net effect on the defense of Norway would be positive, compared to not getting the brigade at all. In the years of exercising together that followed, as mutual confidence and respect between Norwegian and American personnel increased, the Americans found it possible to compromise just a little: “excess sorties,” ready sorties not employed by the Marine force commander in direct support of his force, were made available to COMMON for his air campaign.

*Coordination and Deconfliction of Naval Operations.* As noted, the boundary between SACLANT’s and SACEUR’s areas of responsibility ran parallel to the Norwegian coast, only a few nautical miles out.<sup>35</sup> As Striking Fleet crossed the line and approached the Norwegian coast, however, it did not change operational command or control to SACEUR but operated in accordance with current NATO procedures for “cross boundary operations.” They required that all STRIKEFLT units establish radio communications with COMMON in order to report their positions and intended movement and to receive information about friendly units in the area, recognition procedures, IFF (identification, friend or foe) settings, and so on.

This was absolutely crucial in order to avoid blue-on-blue engagements. Especially along the coasts of northern Nordland and Troms Counties, every inlet was covered by powerful artillery units, gun and torpedo batteries, and minefields. Numerous fast missile and torpedo boats and coastal submarines would also be employed as part of Norway’s anti-invasion scheme. In a real instance of the kind of scenario we are talking about, where STRIKEFLT had deployed in the defense of Norway against imminent attack from the Soviet Union, all Norwegian naval units would be on high alert and authorized to fire at darkened warships that entered territorial waters without responding to calls on the radio. Striking Fleet surface combatants and underway replenishment ships that entered Norwegian coastal waters prior to the arrival of the high-value units—for precursor operations, replenishment of fuel and stores, or other reasons—without listening on the appropriate radio frequencies or responding correctly when challenged would immediately be shot out of the water.



Our concern was that what you do not regularly exercise and practice in times of peace, you will probably not automatically practice in the first phases of crisis and war, until you have learned your lesson the hard way. Another concern, from COMMON's perspective, was that this lack of adherence to agreed procedure reduced the value of the exercises to all participants and had a demoralizing effect on Norwegian naval and coast-artillery personnel, to whom the chance to interact with powerful allied units was something they had looked forward to immensely and prepared themselves for with enthusiasm.

In all the exercises I took part in or was involved with—and that is the majority of all the exercises carried out from 1968 until 1993—allied warships, especially those of the U.S. Navy, did not take this seriously. They very rarely responded to radio calls and generally ignored the presence of minefields. In a real situation, that could have proved catastrophic—but then, they probably would have learned quickly.

*The Planning and Conduct of Major NATO Exercises.* Running a complex, multinational live exercise in an area not closed to the general public is like putting together an intricate jigsaw puzzle. To prevent unnecessary traffic jams and road accidents, to keep ships from steaming into fishing nets, and in other ways to avoid damaging or hindering civilian activities is challenging enough. But the most daunting task was devising an exercise in the air that was sufficiently challenging to all participants but neither posed hazards or unnecessary restrictions on military sorties or civilian air traffic nor created a diplomatic scandal by repeated violations of Swedish airspace. It added to the complexity that Soviet aircraft routinely operated within or adjacent to that part of the exercise area that stretched into international airspace. The Soviet presence constituted a potential safety risk. It was necessary to allocate sorties in order to intercept and shadow the Soviet aircraft, and these sorties had to come out of the exercise air tasking order.

All air movement had to be meticulously planned in order to avoid low flying or breaking the sound barrier over inhabited areas or in the vicinity of fur farms. The whole setup had to be coordinated with the civilian air traffic routes—something that represented a challenge of its own, as civilian and military aircraft operated from the same airports and the airspace over Nordland and Troms is not large. The airspace was further limited in that military aircraft were allowed to approach the Swedish border no closer than twenty nautical miles. Nevertheless, through the 1970s and '80s, up until 1988, there were annually one or two violations of Swedish airspace, each an embarrassment to the Norwegian government.

The NATO exercises at times stretched the capacity of the civilian air-traffic control system to the limit. A special problem was keeping track of, and

deconflicting, carrier-based air under COMSTRIKFLTLANT and land-based air under COMMON. The combination of limited radar coverage and a shortage of civilian air controllers led to a situation where the traffic control system was unable to cover the large NATO exercises and at the same time deal with civilian traffic. During Exercise OCEAN SAFARI in September 1987, Scandinavian Air Lines had to cancel two daily flights between Oslo and northern Norway; the Ministry of Transport decided to close Norwegian airspace between Bodø and Alta, in Finnmark, to civilian traffic every morning and evening for the duration of the exercise.<sup>36</sup>

The U.S. Maritime Strategy and NATO's Concept of Maritime Operations put Norway on both Brussels's and Washington's military strategic maps in an unprecedented way. It contributed to increasing the credibility of American and NATO deterrence of the Soviet Union. It redressed the extremely unfavorable force balance between the Soviet Union and Norway, on the alliance's northern flank, and it brought considerable NATO infrastructure investment to Norway in the form of fuel and ammunition storage sites, hardened aircraft shelters, improved runways, communications and aircraft early-warning equipment, and the like. It also brought exercise activity that contributed to a considerable increase in the knowledge and proficiency of Norwegian defense planners and operators.

Nonetheless, this strategic centrality constituted a challenge to Norway's policy of low tension in the northern region and to such key elements of the nation's defense and security policy as its base policy, nuclear policy, and restrictions on allied exercise activity. It thus became the source of fierce internal debates over Norway's defense and security policy. These were debates that successive Norwegian governments sought to avoid, as it was believed that for a small country in an exposed strategic position to indulge in visible political divisions over its defense and security policy would only contribute to further weakening of that position.

The U.S. Maritime Strategy and CONMAROPS thus presented the Norwegians with a difficult task of balancing between, on the one hand, tying the United States firmly to the defense of Norway and, on the other hand, trying to minimize internal debate in a population traditionally skeptical of what it perceived as American interventionism. Alliance strategy in this way brought to the fore and made visible the recurring theme of a double dichotomy in Norwegian security and defense policy—that of deterrence and yet reassurance of the Soviet Union, and that of integration with and screening against allies—that ran as a thread through Norwegian Cold War defense and security policy from beginning to end.

## NOTES

The article is based on a presentation by the author to the Cold War Oral History Conference at Bodø, Norway, on 21 August 2007.

1. At this time Commander, Defence Command North Norway, COMMON, a Norwegian three-star general, was “double hatted” as national commander, subordinate to Chief of Defence Norway, and as an allied “principal subordinate commander” in the Supreme Allied Commander, Europe (SACEUR) chain of command. The boundary between Supreme Allied Commander, Atlantic’s (SACLANT’s) area of responsibility (ACLANT) and that of SACEUR (ACE) ran parallel with the Norwegian coast just a few nautical miles out to sea. A major part of NATO’s air reinforcements, and all of NATO’s naval and amphibious reinforcements to northern Norway, were, however, SACLANT forces. As units of SACLANT’s Striking Fleet crossed into ACE and approached the Norwegian coast, they did not immediately or necessarily change operational command or control to SACEUR but generally operated in accordance with current NATO procedures for “cross boundary operations.” For the purpose of submarine operations and naval surveillance, COMMON acted as a functional commander in the SACLANT chain of command.
2. The last Cold War deployment of U.S. carriers to Norwegian coastal waters prior to these had been in the NATO exercise MAINBRACE in 1952, when USS *Midway* (CVB 41) and USS *Franklin D. Roosevelt* (CVB 42) took part. Deployment of U.S. carriers into the Norwegian Sea was, on the other hand, not uncommon. From February 1954 U.S. carriers were incorporated into American plans for strategic nuclear warfare. This meant regular deployment into the Norwegian Sea to prepare for the offensive nuclear-strike role in the event of war with the Soviet Union. These deployments subsided with the introduction of the SSBN to the U.S. Navy from 1964 onward. Between 1964 (Exercise TEAMWORK) and 1985, U.S. carriers would regularly participate in NATO exercises in the North Atlantic and the Norwegian Sea, carrying out air interdiction missions and air support to forces on the ground in North Norway from positions out to sea. Rolf Tamnes, *The United States and the Cold War in the High North* (Oslo: ad Notam forlag AS, 1991); Joel J. Sokolsky, *Seapower in the Nuclear Age: The United States Navy and NATO, 1949–80* (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1991); Kjetil Skogrand, *Norsk forsvarshistorie* [Official History of Norway’s Defense Forces], vol. 4, 1940–1970 (Bergen: Eide forlag, 2004); and Jacob Børresen, Gullow Gjeseth, and Rolf Tamnes, *Norsk forsvarshistorie* [Official History of Norway’s Defense Forces], vol. 5, 1970–2000 (Bergen: Eide forlag, 2004).
3. The U.S. Maritime Strategy was signed by the Chief of Naval Operations on 4 May 1984. For an extended treatment of its development, see John B. Hattendorf, *The Evolution of the U.S. Navy’s Maritime Strategy, 1977–1986*, Newport Paper 19 (Newport, R.I.: Naval War College Press, 2004), available at [www.usnwc.edu/press/](http://www.usnwc.edu/press/). The signature date is on p. 296.
4. Sokolsky, *Seapower in the Nuclear Age*, pp. 92–93.
5. John B. Hattendorf and Peter M. Swartz, eds., *U.S. Naval Strategy in the 1980s: Selected Documents*, Newport Paper 33 (Newport, R.I.: Naval War College Press, 2008), pp. 7–8, available at [www.usnwc.edu/press/](http://www.usnwc.edu/press/).
6. Sokolsky, *Seapower in the Nuclear Age*, pp. 85–86.
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 87, 98.
8. Hank C. Mustin, “The Role of the Navy and Marines in the Norwegian Sea,” *Naval War College Review* 39, no. 2 (March–April 1986), pp. 2, 4.
9. Sokolsky, *Seapower in the Nuclear Age*, p. 2.
10. Mustin, “The Role of the Navy and Marines in the Norwegian Sea,” p. 2.
11. Børresen, Gjeseth, and Tamnes, *Norsk forsvarshistorie*, vol. 5, p. 101.
12. Mustin, “The Role of the Navy and Marines in the Norwegian Sea,” p. 2.
13. *Ibid.*, pp. 4–5.
14. Hattendorf and Swartz, eds., *U.S. Naval Strategy in the 1980s*, pp. 74–77.

15. Ibid., pp. 78, 82–84.
16. Ibid., pp. 85–86.
17. Ibid., p. 92.
18. Rolf Tamnes, “Integration and Screening: The Two Faces of Norwegian Alliance Policy, 1945–1986,” in *Forsvarsstudier: Defence Studies VI Årbok for Forsvarshistorisk forskningscenter—110 Forsvarets høgskole 1987*, ed. Rolf Tamnes (Oslo: Tano, 1987), and *United States and the Cold War in the High North*, p. 298.
19. Børresen, Gjeseth, and Tamnes, *Norsk forsvarshistorie*, vol. 5, pp. 108–109.
20. Skogrand, *Norsk forsvarshistorie*, vol. 4, pp. 161–74; Børresen, Gjeseth, and Tamnes, *Norsk forsvarshistorie*, vol. 5, pp. 106–18.
21. Tamnes, *United States and the Cold War in the High North*, pp. 289–94.
22. Børresen, Gjeseth, and Tamnes, *Norsk forsvarshistorie*, vol. 5, pp. 109–11.
23. Ibid., pp. 108–13.
24. Ibid., p. 63.
25. Tamnes, *United States and the Cold War in the High North*, p. 262.
26. Børresen, Gjeseth, and Tamnes, *Norsk forsvarshistorie*, vol. 5, p. 114.
27. Ibid., pp. 101, 114–15.
28. Eric Grove, “The Superpowers and Secondary Navies in Northern Waters during the Cold War,” in *Navies in Northern Waters 1721–2000*, ed. Rolf Hobson and Tom Kristiansen (London: Frank Cass, 2004), p. 219.
29. Børresen, Gjeseth, and Tamnes, *Norsk forsvarshistorie*, vol. 5, p. 60.
30. Jacob Børresen, *USA-marinens operasjoner i Nord-Atlanteren og Norskehavet* [U.S. Navy Operations in the North Atlantic and the Norwegian Sea], Norwegian Institute for International Affairs Report 89 (Oslo: May 1985), p. 19.
31. Hattendorf and Swartz, eds., *U.S. Naval Strategy in the 1980s*, p. 15.
32. This section is based on my own unpublished notes from the time. During our work with the *Official History of Norway's Defense Forces* from 2000 to 2004 I was unable to confirm these arrangements in the COMMON archives. Interviews with colleagues from the Norwegian Air Force have, however, reinforced my belief that my notes and memory are correct in this matter.
33. Børresen, Gjeseth, and Tamnes, *Norsk forsvarshistorie*, vol. 5, pp. 63–64.
34. Once more, the only source of this section is my own unpublished notes from my time as DACOS Plans, Defence Command North Norway, in 1985, confirmed through conversations with officer colleagues I served with at the time.
35. This section too is mostly based on my own unpublished notes and recollections.
36. Børresen, Gjeseth, and Tamnes, *Norsk forsvarshistorie*, vol. 5, p. 103.

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*Naval War College Review, Spring 2011, Vol. 64, No. 2*