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Growing Soviet naval activity in the vital Norwegian Sea and North Atlantic received little notice despite the region's strategic importance and relative vulnerability. Caught in the dilemma occasioned by an expanding Soviet Fleet and a U.S. overseas force reduction, NATO and more particularly small nations like Norway and Denmark which lie within Moscow's sphere of interest may soon face a choice between accommodation to Soviet political goals or precipitating a direct confrontation between the superpowers. A firm commitment in this strategic part of the world by NATO and the United States is the best insurance against such a situation ever becoming reality.

THE NORTH ATLANTIC: THE NORWEGIAN SEA, A SCANDINAVIAN SECURITY PROBLEM

An article prepared

by

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Introduction. A little more than a year ago the then Norwegian Defense Minister Helleesen announced, in a report to the Norwegian Parliament, that Russian military activity near Norwegian waters and airspace had substantially increased. He also made it clear in his report that the number of units in the Russian Arctic Fleet had increased sharply and that the fighting power of the vessels was much improved. Numerous air and amphibious exercises suggested that Russian forces could conduct offensive operations on very short notice. Similar Norwegian apprehensions were also aired at the 1970 NATO meeting in Brussels where it was noted that the recent expansion of the Russian missile-armed submarine fleet, based principally in the Murmansk area, had automatically increased the strategic importance as well as vulnerability of sparsely populated northern Norway.

These conditions have initiated a far-reaching security policy debate in Norway and other Western European countries. Some observers have suggested that Soviet naval activity in the area surrounding Norway might well prove to be one of the key elements in Norwegian security policy during the seventies. It is interesting to note, however, that while Norway's social-democratic government, led by Prime Minister Bratteli and Defense Minister Fostervoll has expressed concern over the colossal Soviet rearmament in NATO's northern flank, the Norwegian Foreign Ministry seems to have tried to tone down the expression of these fears recently.

The chief of NATO's northern command in Europe, General Walker, has repeatedly warned against underestimating the problems faced on NATO's northern flank. Walker has argued that

the most significant growth in Soviet military power has not occurred in the Mediterranean but along the Norwegian frontier. The Danes have also taken serious note of expanded Russian naval training maneuvers in areas adjacent to their territory. Noted authorities claim that Denmark's strategic position has been radically altered in view of the Soviets' new capability to launch a sea attack against Denmark from the west. Nor has this new development gone unnoticed in West Germany where, in a visit to Denmark and Norway, Defense Minister Helmudt Schmidt discussed the changing military situation in Scandinavia.

Russia—the World's Second Naval Power. When Admiral Gorshkov became Admiral of the Fleet in 1956 he inherited a fleet that was primarily defensive, whose principal task was to support the flanks of the Red army. Today this fleet has balance, is modern, and has gained considerable experience in deep ocean operations. Soviet naval power is now found in the Atlantic and the Mediterranean, in the Indian Ocean, and in the Far East. Russian submarines and missile-armed warships operate around the boundaries of the United States, in the West Indies and along the coasts of Africa and Southeast Asia. Whenever and wherever Moscow wishes to stress her own interests, she has a viable navy which can make its presence felt as a political instrument.

Russia's seagoing surface fleet now includes two helicopter aircraft carriers, 22 cruisers, about 100 destroyers, 105 frigates, plus a large number of maintenance and supply ships. For operations in coastal home waters there are about 250 small escort vessels, 140 missile boats, 250 motor torpedo boats, and 250 minesweepers. To this can be added 200 landing craft and a well-equipped naval infantry force. Today the Soviet Union possesses the largest submarine fleet in the world consisting

of approximately 350 units (80 of which are nuclear powered) and has been constructing between 10 and 15 boats per year. About 20 of the nuclear submarines can be compared with the American Polaris submarines, but the range of their missiles is only half that of the American missiles. Some estimations, however, predict that by 1974 Russia will have more Polaris-type submarines than the United States. The most important element of the U.S.S.R.'s subsurface force consists of 61 nuclear-armed submarines, of which 35 are nuclear powered and 26 diesel powered. In addition to surface and subsurface forces, Soviet leaders have at their disposal a naval air force with an inventory of 500 bombers and reconnaissance planes, plus an equal number of helicopter and tactical supporting aircraft. The bombers are equipped with an air-to-surface missile capability.

The Russian Navy of today is modern and well developed from every point of view. It has great tactical and strategic mobility, and its firepower in both conventional and nuclear weaponry has increased markedly. Only 1 percent of the warships are more than 20 years old, and according to U.S. sources, the new Russian missile cruisers and missile destroyers are as good, and in certain cases better, than similar U.S. ships. The Soviet Shaddock and Goa sea and air defense missiles are of very good quality. Both of these missiles are included in the armament of the new Kresta cruisers, of which seven are believed to be in service with three more under construction.

The Shaddock missiles, according to official publications, have a range of from 270 to 750 kilometers. About 40 of the Russian submarines are equipped with homing surface-to-surface missiles which can be fired from an underwater position outside the sonar range of submarine hunter-killer groups. These are considered to be a serious menace to aircraft carriers.

Of the four Soviet fleets, the Arctic Fleet is probably the most modern and powerful and includes about 650 ships, of which 160 are submarines. Operating from the Murmansk region and the Kola Peninsula, the Arctic Fleet has what is probably the world's largest base area. While these bases are ice free, they are situated far from the areas of probable operation which means that the time needed for transport is abnormally long.

Because of a change in marine strategy in the last few years, the Soviets have tried to reduce their dependence on naval bases by maintaining and keeping their ships in repair at sea, as do the British and Americans. A large number of supply and maintenance ships have been built for this purpose. In this way the fleet has increased its flexibility and also has improved its capability for rapid response to contingency operations. During the 1960's, Soviet naval operations grew considerably in scope and intensity. Maneuvers in the North Atlantic and the Norwegian Sea have in recent years been extended to the south and west. Surface striking forces, submarines, amphibious forces, and airplanes all take part in these maneuvers. A visibly increased interest in amphibious operations has been noted in the north Scandinavian area as well as in the Baltic. New, modern types of landing craft have appeared during the sixties, and a fast-growing merchant marine is being built up so as to be suitable for use as military transports. This renewed interest in amphibious operations is further substantiated by the fact that the Soviet naval infantry, once disbanded, has again been revived.

Russian Naval Strategy. A nation's naval strategy rests primarily on exploitation of the seas for its own interests and, secondly, when circumstances dictate denying the use of the seas to an enemy. The overall orientation of a nation's military strategy (i.e., maritime

or continental) is reflected by the relative importance it attaches to both of these strategic principles and by the material resources the country can call into play in support of its endeavors at sea. Early Soviet naval strategy, because of circumstances and tradition, was more concerned with trying to prevent others from exploiting the seas than with taking advantage of it for her own purposes. This policy of strategic defense confined Soviet naval forces to the inland seas and waters near her own coasts, while the oceans of the world were left to the devices of others.

By the mid-1950's however, one could begin to perceive a change in Russian naval thinking. For strategic and economic reasons, the Soviets concluded that their national interests dictated a greater need to exploit the oceans of the world. The strategically important submarine fleet acquired access to the oceans at about the same time their growing merchant and fishing fleet found it necessary to exploit more fully the oceans for commerce and fishing.

By the end of the fifties and throughout the sixties, U.S. forces made considerable progress in developing the technology needed to launch a nuclear attack on the U.S.S.R. at great distances from Soviet territory itself. Through exercises simulating attacks against Soviet territory, Moscow became fully aware of the significance of the U.S. carriers and Polaris submarines which regularly patrolled the Arctic regions, the North Atlantic, and the Mediterranean. Within this strategic environment and in view of the Soviets' developing technology and economy, it is quite natural that they reexamined their naval principles. The Soviet Navy we view today is not the result of any sudden change in strategy. What we see has gradually evolved since the middle of the 1950's. Those changes that have taken place scarcely imply any deviation from traditional Russian national objec-

tives aimed at assuring national security. The changes we have seen, however, lie more in the priority given the navy in providing for the national defense and in the equipment it has to do the job. It is apparent that the Soviets have now reached a degree of sophistication where they realize that a powerful navy is required for it to meet its foreign policy objectives.

Reductions Within NATO. Today the U.S. Navy has approximately 700 ships in service. The active navy includes 14 attack aircraft carriers, four ASW carriers, nine cruisers, 220 destroyers, frigates, and escort vessels, 80 landing craft, and nearly 200 maintenance ships, et cetera. The 14 attack aircraft carriers serve as a base for about 800 attack planes which can deliver nuclear weapons to targets at a distance of 1,200 kilometers from the aircraft carrier. The submarine fleet consists of 94 nuclear-powered and 46 conventional submarines. Of the former, 41 are of the so-called Polaris type, each equipped with 16 missiles. Thirty-one of these submarines eventually are to be equipped with Poseidon missiles, each armed with 10 separate nuclear warheads, which will increase the submarines' total nuclear warhead capacity from the present 656 to 5,400. Great Britain has today two attack carriers, three so-called commando carriers, about 80 modern destroyers, and frigates for convoy protection, ASW, et cetera, and 39 submarines, of which 13 are nuclear powered. One of the two aircraft carriers is to be put out of service within 2 years.

While only 1 percent of the Russian warships are over 20 years old, the corresponding figure for the American ships is 50 percent. Of the Atlantic Fleet, 80 percent of the ships are more than 10 years old, and 50 percent are over 20 years old. During 1969 and 1970, 66 new ships were built, while at the same time, 230 became obsolete.

Since 1969 the number of aircraft carriers has been reduced by six and the number of cruisers, destroyers, and frigates by 80. Within several years five more aircraft carriers and about 300 destroyers, frigates, and escort vessels, built during the Second World War, will be ready for scrap. A large percentage of these ships belong to the reserve fleet, which compared with the Swedish reserves is in a very low state of readiness indeed. The reserve fleet includes four ASW support aircraft carriers, eight cruisers, and 200 destroyers. At present two large aircraft carriers, 35 destroyers and frigates, 21 escort vessels, and about 20 nuclear submarines are under construction. A proposal to build one more aircraft carrier has been put before Congress.

By 1978 the number of aircraft carriers in the U.S. Fleet may well be reduced from 18 to 11 and the number of destroyers, frigates, and escort vessels from 450 (not including operational Naval Reserve ships) to about 150. These few units are to suffice for the U.S.'s four fleets. In spite of the fact that the remaining modern and newly built units are larger, better equipped, and have greater operational mobility than their older counterparts, the increased quality would not seem to compensate for the very sharp reductions in numbers. Consequently, the Western nations can no longer patrol as large an area as before nor can they operate in as many regions of the oceans as before.

Iceland's Strategic Significance. One definite advantage retained by NATO, however, is its superior geographical position, allowing it excellent base location for gaining quick access to many of the world's most vital sea lines of communication. Within the NATO sphere—excluding Denmark and Norway which presently do not allow permanent basing of NATO troops on their territory during peacetime—are included the

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Orkney Islands, the Shetland Islands, the Faroe Islands, Greenland, Jan Mayen, and, most importantly, Iceland. By terms of a defense agreement, the United States is permitted to use the Keflavik base for her Air Force and the Hvalfjord base for her naval forces. However, a recent statement by the Icelandic Government indicates there exists the possibility that Iceland may terminate this agreement before 1975, thus forcing the departure of U.S. forces. For NATO a decision of this nature would have exceedingly grave consequences, affecting the entire strategic situation in the North Atlantic and Scandinavia. Iceland's importance to the NATO alliance lies in its prime geographic location. From Iceland it is possible to maintain constant surveillance both above and beneath wide expanses of the North Atlantic and Norwegian Seas. It would also be possible from Iceland to intervene against hostile submarine and surface units which might attempt to move out into the Atlantic. Thus the geographic location of this island would be of major importance in conducting effective anti-submarine warfare operations in the adjacent seas.

The continental shelf extending out from Iceland facilitates NATO's submarine reconnaissance works with mobile and stationary units. The island is likewise of major significance regarding air activities, not only patrol operations but also in the employment of fighter aircraft, defensive missiles, and in the conduct of armed reconnaissance flights.

Iceland would play a vital role in the protection of any allied shipping across the Atlantic. Should NATO find itself in the position of not having access to bases on Iceland, the Soviets would find it far less difficult for their northern fleet units to reach their patrol areas in the Atlantic undetected. Any Soviet occupation of Iceland would breach a vital link in NATO's defense line and

greatly facilitate the undetected passage of Soviet submarines into the Atlantic. In terms of air operations, the establishing of a Soviet base on Iceland would be a major strategic disaster for NATO as the Soviet Fleet would then be assured of extended air support in the Atlantic. In essence, an Iceland defended by powerful Soviet fighter and missile units would constitute a gigantic, unsinkable aircraft carrier in an ideal strategic position.

The strategic significance of Iceland today cannot be overemphasized. The confined waters in the Greenland-Iceland-Faroes-Scotland region might be likened to a lock, and whoever holds the key controls the North Atlantic. That key is Iceland. A change in the existing situation would result in an entirely new politico-military picture both in Europe and the north.

Sea and Air Objectives of NATO and the Soviet Union in the Norwegian Sea Area. NATO's most important wartime aims in the north Scandinavian area include the following:

- to attack objectives in the U.S.S.R.
- to attack bases in the Murmansk region and on the Kola Peninsula
- to prevent Russian nuclear-equipped and conventional submarines from reaching their areas of operation
- to protect NATO's sea transports to Norway and Iceland
- to prevent seaborne invasions against Norway
- to watch over the airspace and give early warning of approaching ICBM's.

The task of attacking targets in the Soviet Union should rest first on the Polaris submarines and the strategic air force. For this task the most likely operational area for the submarines would appear to be the Barents Sea and the Norwegian Sea. The increased range and heightened precision of the missiles has made it possible for the submarines in the last few years to fix their areas of

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operation farther out in the Norwegian Sea and the North Atlantic.

A second but equally important target to be attacked by the strategic air force and the carrier-based attack air forces would be vital Russian base areas in the Murmansk area and on the Kola Peninsula. Modern ASM and SSM can be fired against certain targets from outside the range of active air defense.

The third aim of the West—to prevent Russian nuclear-equipped and conventional submarines from reaching their areas of operation in the Atlantic—would probably be accomplished in two combat zones, one lying more forward and situated between Svalbard and the North Cape and the other lying farther back in the line running between Iceland, the Faroe Islands, and the Shetland Islands.

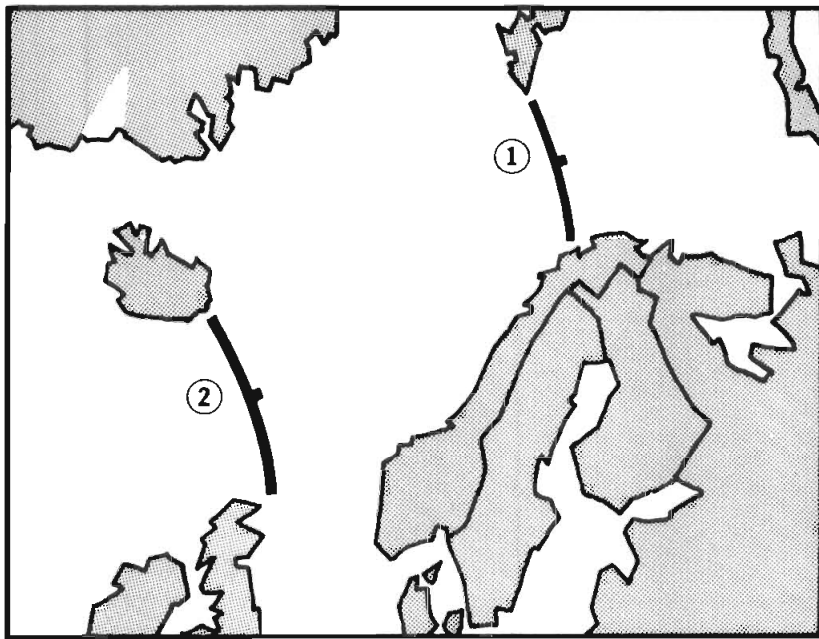
Nuclear-powered hunter-killer submarines would provide the best defense against Soviet submarines in the forward

zone, while ASW forces containing ASW support aircraft carriers and frigates would patrol the Iceland-United Kingdom gap. Present difficulties experienced in locating submarines in open ocean areas can perhaps be reduced through use of advanced satellite technology and electronic detection, plus installation of permanent detection devices on the ocean bottom.

Fourthly, NATO naval forces in the area must be prepared to protect reinforcements and supplies transported over sealanes to northern Norway.

Finally, air defense rests upon the NADGE detection system which stretches throughout Europe from Norway's North Cape to Turkey in the southeast. This system, the largest and most complex air defense system ever set up within NATO, is expected to be fully operative in the middle seventies.

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NATO'S COMBAT ZONES

1. Nuclear-powered hunter-killer submarines.
2. ASW support aircraft carriers, frigates, permanent detection devices.

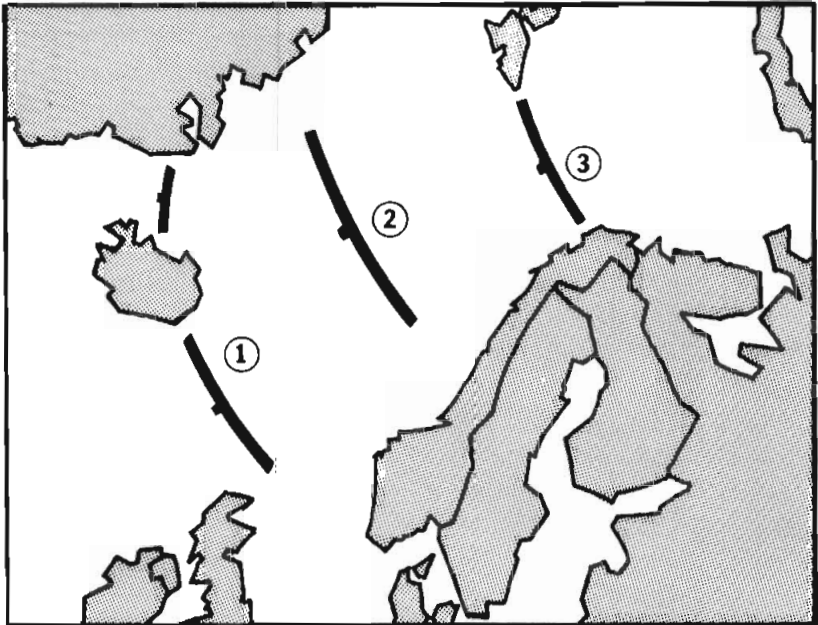
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The Russian objectives in the area in opposition to NATO's aims include the following:

- to assure free passage of their strategic and conventional submarine forces to the Atlantic
- to combat NATO's attack aircraft carrier forces in the Norwegian Sea
- to intercept NATO's maintenance and reinforcement transports to northern Norway
- to protect, support, and carry out amphibious operations to strategically important areas
- to prevent seaborne invasions against the Murmansk area
- to defend by air, bases at Murmansk and on the Kola Peninsula.

The Russian submarine forces have three main aims—strategic retaliation, ASW, and conventional submarine combat. To perform these tasks most of the submarines belonging to the Arctic

Fleet must come out through the passages between Greenland, Iceland, and Scotland, where they must contend with NATO's ASW forces. This task will most likely fall on the missile submarines and the missile-equipped naval air force, which operates in a prominent forward combat zone. Drawn farther back—in the Norwegian Sea—missile cruisers, missile destroyers, and missile submarines can be put into operation against NATO's strike forces as well as against allied seaborne invasions in the Murmansk area and NATO reinforcement transports to Norway. In the rear zone, between Svalbard and the North Cape, Soviet naval forces will likely concentrate on defense against submarines which may try to force their way into the Barents Sea. Under present basing, fighter protection can only be assured for operations near the coast to the north of the Arctic Circle.



RUSSIAN DEFENSE ZONES

1. Naval air force, missile submarines.
2. Missile-armed surface fighting forces and submarines.
3. ASW forces and hunter-killer submarines.

The Strategic Importance of the North Scandinavian Area. The strategic importance of the north Scandinavian area rests heavily on geography. Inasmuch as Norway is a member of NATO, NATO has been assured a favorable position and is heavily committed to preserving this position. From Norway and from Iceland, NATO can obtain the following advantages:

- surveillance over air and sea routes in the north
- base areas for intelligence gathering
- base areas for sea and air forces designed to prevent or render more difficult the egress of Soviet forces from the Arctic Ocean and the Murmansk area.

The greatest importance of northern Norway for NATO lies thus in its flanking position in relation to the Soviets' Arctic Fleet's exit routes to the Atlantic and its proximity to the base area at Murmansk. From the Russian point of view, Soviet base areas in northern Norway would provide the following advantages:

- improved intelligence and readiness (primarily for the naval air force)
- improved active protection of the Murmansk area
- broadening of the base area and thereby increased possibilities for passive protection
- shorter distance between base areas and attack areas in the Norwegian Sea and the North Atlantic
- increased possibility to intercept sea forces in the eastern districts of the Norwegian Sea
- prevent NATO from using Norway as a base for air and sea forces.

With the increased range of both submarine missiles and manned aircraft, the strategic importance of northern Norway can only grow. Forced to project their defense operations further to sea and away from relatively safe coastal waters, Soviet naval units must pass through areas patrolled by NATO

forces around northern Norway. In a wartime environment, reconnaissance and strike aircraft which must operate in the Norwegian Sea or the North Sea will be required to fly around or along NATO defense areas, with the attendant risk of being shot down. On the other hand, if the Soviets were able to establish bases in northern Norway, it would be considerably easier for them to perform both tasks in the North Atlantic and the Norwegian Sea, in addition to facilitating the defense of their Arctic Fleet base complex.

Of course, any Soviet action against northern Norway would place the southern half of Scandinavia in jeopardy. If the Russians were to come into possession of southern Norway, they would only be in a position to dominate the northern flank of the Baltic Sea's western approaches and large portions of the North Sea, but also flank NATO defenses in the entire Baltic area. Today it is militarily feasible for the Soviets to make their push into southern Norway via the west coast of Sweden or through middle Sweden. Thus, any reduction of Swedish defense systems would make such a military option even more attractive. Such a development would be most unfortunate for Norway and for NATO and would necessitate a radical retesting of current defense philosophy.

Consequences to the Security Policy of Scandinavia. Scandinavia's security is essentially a problem for the naval strategist. Russian naval rearmament and operations in the sea area around Norway have important strategic and security policy consequences for Scandinavia—an area of decisive importance for Soviet security. It is obvious that Norway and the adjacent areas of Scandinavia are being drawn more closely into the Russian sphere of interest. Simultaneously, one is aware of a diminishing U.S. interest in Europe. The prospect is that Europe in the near future will most likely have to fend for

herself to a greater degree than at any time since the early days of World War II. Of particular importance is the fact that American naval resources are being reduced which, unless strong countermeasures are taken, will mean a change in the balance of power at sea on Europe's northern flank—thereby granting the Soviets increased freedom of action both politically and militarily.

The appearance of the Arctic Fleet in the North Sea and the Norwegian Sea may serve as a harbinger of future Soviet political intentions. The U.S. Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird said in a speech recently: "If the Russians have superior military strength they can reach their political goals all over the world without using weapons. There is no military advantage in an extreme use of violence, but the political gains will be enormous." British Prime Minister Heath took up the same theme in a speech he made recently to the House of Commons:

The Soviet Union seems to have hopes that the obvious difference in military strength will leave Western Europe in the end without a convincing strategy. Suitably applied political pressure, supported by the threat from a clearly superior military force, can oblige some of the more vulnerable members of the alliance to glide over to neutral status. Then a process of dissolution can begin, which in turn can lead to the ultimate fact; a gradual widening of Russia's sphere of influence to countries that are now members of NATO.

There ought not to be much doubt that Heath was thinking primarily of Norway and Denmark. If Norway and

Denmark were to be exposed to political blackmail as described, one can think of two reactions. Either they submit and become dependent on Russia, or they will reevaluate their policies on basing foreign troops on their soil, permitting NATO forces to be stationed in their respective territories. The latter alternative is politically impossible today, but developments can lead to a change in position. Pressure in this direction might possibly come from the United States in the event that the United States and NATO were to find their interests on the northern flank directly threatened. A possible consequence of any future decision by Oslo to permit foreign troops on Norwegian territory might instigate a Russian countermove in Finland. Therefore, it is vital that both the Soviets and NATO carefully evaluate their respective security needs in Scandinavia in order not to precipitate events that could lead to a greater confrontation in which both would be the loser.

BIOGRAPHIC SUMMARY



Capt. Christer Fredholm, Royal Swedish Navy, is a graduate of the Royal Naval College, of the Swedish Military Staff Course, and of the Royal National Defence College. He has served as commanding officer and squadron leader in torpedo boats, as commanding officer of a fleet minelayer, and as aide-de-camp to the Supreme Commander, Swedish Armed Forces. Captain Fredholm currently is serving on the staff of the Commander in Chief, Active Swedish Fleet.
