

## Towards Nordic peace: a small state approach

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**Abstract:** Five of the eight member states of the Arctic Council are typically defined as small: The Kingdom of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden. The focus of this article is on Nordic cooperation, its historical context and regards to present and future tasks and challenges. The Nordics hold a different position in the Arctic as two of them – The Kingdom of Denmark and Norway are Arctic coastal states like Canada, Russia and the USA, and, thus, belong to the Arctic five, whereas Finland, Iceland and Sweden do not. To explore the possibilities the Nordics have to influence the security development, security is divided in to categories: hard and soft. The main conclusions are that the Nordics are more likely to find a common ground for cooperation in soft security, where the issues of sovereignty and military matters are less likely to create complications.

### Introduction

By looking at the Arctic, and the circumpolar North, it becomes obvious that the region has something special to offer when it comes to science. That goes for both natural sciences and social sciences and the Arctic has for the past decades served as a ‘laboratory’ for all kinds of researches. The Arctic has also become highly globalized and a number of different actors, state and non-state, coming from both the Arctic region itself and other parts of the world have already shown great interest in the developments and happenings in the Arctic. The tremendous interest shown by large states and other actors raises concerns about the ability of smaller actors, such as the small Arctic states, to have their voices heard in the regional cooperation and decision-making procedures. By making a clear distinction between the smaller

and larger Arctic states this paper aims at answering the following two questions:

Why does the size of the circumpolar states matter in the context of security?

How can the small Arctic states increase their influence in the region, and have their voice heard?

To further illuminate the situation, the challenges and opportunities the small Arctic states, hereafter spoken of as the Nordics have been faced with regarding security cooperation and defense will be briefly discussed.

Out of the eight Arctic states the following five are commonly defined as small – The Kingdom of Denmark (which includes Greenland and the Faroe Islands), Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden. Canada fits

well as a middle power while Russia and the United States of America are large states or even superpowers. The Nordics have a quite different position in the Arctic. In some ways the difference is due to geographical factors, Norway and the Kingdom of Denmark are Arctic Coastal states, which place them in the group of the so-called Arctic Five, along with Canada, Russia and the USA, whereas Iceland, Finland and Sweden are not. Nonetheless, Iceland has ambitions to gain recognition as a coastal state according to its priorities approved by the Parliament, Althingi, in 2011 (A Parliamentary Resolution on Iceland's Arctic Policy 2011). However, the different positions of the Nordic countries cannot solely be explained by geographical location. Their institutional affiliations are also a part of the explanation and the countries have chosen different institutes to associate themselves with. Iceland, Norway and Denmark are members of NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization, member states) but Finland and Sweden are not. Denmark, Finland and Sweden are members of the European Union, but Iceland and Norway are not (European Union, member states). However, Iceland did submit an application to become a full member of the EU in 2009 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2010a) whereas Greenland formally resigned from the Union in 1985 ("The European Union and Greenland"). The paper is divided into two parts and each part sets out to answer one of the questions.

## **Small states and security**

The main reason as for why size matters in the context of security is that small and large states don't face all the same challenges and opportunities, especially in terms of cooperation and influence. This chapter aims at explaining the difference, focusing on the Arctic and using the Nordics as examples.

Being European, the Nordics have inevitably been affected by the profound changes that have been taking place in the continent over the past decades. These changes are both institutional, traceable to the European integration and the NATO enlargement, and because of the different global threats the world faces after the Cold War (Rickli 2008). The impact of these changes is different for small and large states, partly because small states lack resources when it comes to influencing the international community. Hence, it is even more important for small states to join institutions when it comes to security matters. Institutions serve the small states well as they constrain the larger powers and promote peaceful ways of resolving disputes (Wivel 2005). That doesn't change the fact that institutions can be weak or strong, and the smaller regional institutions – such as the ones in the Arctic – have been criticized for being weak as they lack the military strength of NATO, the economic capacity of the EU or the standard setting role of the OSCE (Ólafsson 2009). The size factor becomes important again when we look closer at what happens inside the institutions. While large and/or powerful states do their best to influence the policy-making, to make sure that their interests will

be served, the small states have no other choice than to except the influence of their larger partners. But, there is also a downside to this institutional security arrangement or guaranty that is worth mentioning here. If the large states feel too tied down, or that their interests are better guarded outside the institution, there is a chance they might pack their bags and leave. To make this even clearer; small states increase the risk of losing power and influence by emphasizing the formal powers of the institutions (Wivel 2005). In fact, the five coastal states have already had two formal meetings<sup>2</sup> outside of the regional institutional framework, where the other three Arctic states were not invited (Iceland protests a meeting of 5 Arctic Council member states in Canada 2010).

Another important difference between small and large states is their abilities to influence the international system. While big or powerful states are capable of influencing the system while maintaining their autonomy, small and weaker states are not capable of doing that. The smaller states are faced with the choice of either maximizing their influence through cooperation or maximizing their autonomy by taking up a defensive policy. By choosing the former possibility, there is a chance they might end up in the position of having to fight or support a war with their larger partner or alliance, even if it doesn't serve their own interests. On the other hand, by going for the second one they underline their sovereignty, but risk being left alone in time of need (Rickli 2008). All in all, small states face the problem of not being able to secure themselves without assistance from larger partners, but in order to influence the policy-making of their

larger partners they have to sacrifice a part of their autonomy (Wivel 2005).

The Nordics have all taken a strong approach towards the institutionalization of security matters, yet emphasizing a liberal way by not focusing only on international organizations, but also on trade and investments (Archer 2005). Heininen (2011) has published a comparative study of the policies of the Arctic states, including their institutional participation. According to his findings the Nordics are all members of the UN, EAPC, IMO and EEA<sup>3</sup> (apart from Greenland and the Faroe Islands). Denmark, Finland and Sweden are members of the EU, Iceland is in the accession procedure since 2009 and Greenland resigned in 1985. Furthermore, Denmark, Iceland and Norway are members of NATO and Iceland and Norway are members of EFTA. If we look at the more regional institutions they are all members of the AC, IASC, BEAC, CBSS, NC(M), and ND<sup>4</sup> but only Denmark and Norway (as coastal states) signed the Ilulissat Declaration (Heininen 2011).

### **Nordic security and defense cooperation – historical challenges and opportunities**

The Nordic states have a long and well established tradition of close cooperation in many different fields, security and defense, however, don't fall under that tradition. That can be best be understood by looking at their history. The topic has been discussed over the years and the question of whether the Nordics should establish common defense postures has been raised. In the 1930s such discussions

led to the conclusion that the Nordics had quite different needs and fears. For an example Denmark was concerned over Nazi Germany while Finland feared the invasion of the Soviet Union. This example demonstrates the different kinds of neighbors and problems the Nordics have had to deal with, and how that has influenced the security policies of the states. Denmark felt it had no option other than to sign a non-aggression pact with the Nazi Germany in 1939 and Norway led the way by signing the North Atlantic Treaty in 1948 instead of going forward with the so-called Nordic Defense Union. Interestingly, the Nordic defense union was never spoken of in terms of all the Nordic states, only the Scandinavian states, and the negotiations broke down when Norway and Denmark decided to sign the North Atlantic Treaty, in spite of Sweden not wanting to join (Archer 2010). Former Minister of Foreign Affairs in Iceland, Halldór Ásgrímsson, argued in a speech he gave on the Nordic countries and the Cold War, that the different experience the Nordic states had during the Second World War, determined their Cold War policies, not the least regarding sovereignty matters (Asgrímsson 1998). In spite of the different experiences of the Nordics during the Cold War, they also had some important things in common. One of those things was that they all had to accept the policy consequences of being a part of the East – West divide, whether they liked it or not (Archer 2005). Further, the Nordic region was characterized as a low tension area, where the states considered the position and interests of their neighboring states before making decisions on security matters. This internal Cold War dynamic

of the Nordics is often referred to as the ‘Nordic Balance’ (Archer 2010).

Towards the end of the Cold War the Nordic states found themselves in a very different security scenario. They were no longer torn between East and West, as they had been since 1948, and the security agenda had broadened out to include security for the environment and societies. As the security scenario changed, and the fear of bipolar conflict in Europe vanished, the Nordic states, took their time to readjust, despite new threats entering the scene (Archer 2005). In fact the Nordic states maintained a traditional security policy longer than most other European States (Rieker 2004). The neutral states of Sweden and Finland joined Denmark in the European Union which Iceland and Norway became linked to through the European Economic Area (EEA). For Sweden to be able to join the EU it was necessary to change the neutrality formulation of the country from “non- alignment in peacetime aiming at neutrality in wartime” to “non-alignment in peacetime”. Finland on the other hand was a different story as the political elite saw EU membership as a way to confirm Finland’s Western identity, but not as a threat to the country’s sovereignty. For the first time Finland could seek security guaranties from the West, although still emphasizing good relations with Russia (Rieker 2004). With this the nature of NATO changed and before long both Sweden and Finland had their forces serving with NATO. On the other hand Denmark’s participation in the European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP) has been limited to civilian tasks, while Sweden and Finland have fully contributed and Iceland and Norway have

made their own contributions. After having excluded security and defense issues from their agenda, with the exception of UN peacekeeping, the Nordic ministers found themselves free to open up the topic again after the Cold War, which they did (Archer 2010).

The increase of security related cooperation between the Nordics after the Cold War becomes evident by looking at their common projects tracing back to 1964, when four of the Nordic states (Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden) established a Nordic cooperation group for military UN matters (NORDSAMFN). This was a forum for meetings at military and political level. In 1993 another Nordic initiative was taken when the Nordics established a Nordic Battalion in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, this was a UN led operation and proved to be very successful. Under NATO, Partnership for Peace, the Nordics joined Poland and established the NATO led Implementation Force (IFOR) later known as the Stabilization (Force SFOR) which operated in Bosnia-Herzegovina. In 1997, when the Nordic cooperation had expanded to participating in missions led by others than the UN, the Nordic states decided to reorganize their cooperation and established the Nordic Coordinated Arrangements for Military Peace Support (NORDCAPS). NORDCAPS aimed at strengthening the existing cooperation of the Nordic cooperation group for military United Nations (UN) matters (NORDSAMFEN), and was meant to expand to cover operations led and/or mandated by others than the UN (Archer 2010; NORDCAPS history). Nordic support structures (NORDSUP) was

another initiative taken by Finland, Norway and Sweden where the Nordic military cooperation (land, sea and air) was outlined. While NORDSUP deals with the support structures the ministers felt the need for a more sufficient system of arming their forces. The result was to establish an institutional framework for such cooperation, built on an agreement signed by the Nordic defense ministers of Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden in 1994, on Nordic armaments cooperation (NORDAC). In 2008 the Nordic defense ministers signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for enhanced cooperation in the field of defense, which has been known as NORDSUP MoU, and was meant to compliment NORDCAPS and NORDAC. A year later, in November 2009, yet another step was taken as the NORDCAPS, NORDAC and NORDSUP were all moved under the structure of the Nordic Defense Co-Operation (NORDEFECO) (Archer 2010). Furthermore, the Nordics established a special Nordic battle group within the ESDP<sup>5</sup> (Boyer 2007). Last, but not least it is worth mentioning that in 2008 the Nordic Ministers for Foreign Affairs agreed to assign to Thorvald Stoltenberg, the former Norwegian Minister of Foreign Affairs, to write proposals on such cooperation. He handed in his report in 2009 (Stoltenberg 2009), but what will be made of his suggestions remains to be seen.

All in all, due to geopolitical and historical differences between the Nordic states cooperation in the fields of security and defense have proven to be a challenge. Nonetheless, the Nordics have had a change of attitudes regarding cooperation in the field of security and defense and taken steps

to enhance this cooperation by establishing several bodies or frameworks for this cooperation. Unlike during the Cold War, their different institutional affiliation is not an obstacle to such cooperation.

## Small states, security and influence

In this chapter a distinction will be made between hard (traditional) and soft security to explore where small states are most likely to be able to have influence. Making this distinction between those two categories means that the subject is being simplified a great deal as hard and soft security can both easily have a number of sub-categories. However, this division is believed to be useful to display the different challenges facing the small states.

The traditional or military definition of security became the most common during the Cold War, when the focus was on military threats to states, coming from the outside. This is when the Arctic became militarized (Heininen 2010). Modern states are built on the idea of sovereignty, exclusive right of self-government over its legal territory and population. Since force is such an effective way to secure the territory, states use their militaries for that purpose. Although, it is far from being the only purpose of militaries. Because of this, the states are still the most important security actors and the governing elites of the states are recognized as the political and legal claimants of the legitimate right to use force, both inside and outside of their territory (Buzan *et al.* 1998). In comparing the military expenditures of the Arctic

states a huge difference becomes obvious. USA is on top of the list, and spends far more than any other state in the world on the military; Russia is in the fifth place and Canada in the fifteenth. Norway holds the 30<sup>th</sup>, Sweden the 32<sup>nd</sup>, Denmark the 38<sup>th</sup> and Finland the 47<sup>th</sup>. Iceland is in number 148, out of 154 totals (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute 2010). This shows that all the circumpolar states, except for Iceland that has no military on its own, spend relatively much on military. If we look at the amounts the states are using the difference becomes even more obvious. The USA spends (all in US dollars) 698,105,000,000, Russia: 52,586,000,000, Canada: 21,800,000,000, Norway: 6,200,000,000, Sweden: 5,500,000,000, Denmark: 4,330,000,000, Finland: 4,051,320,000 and Iceland: 9,900,000 (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute 2010). Compared with Heininen's comparative study on the Arctic policies, it becomes clear that the circumpolar states that spend most on military are the same states that have the strongest emphasis on sovereignty, namely, the coastal states (Heininen 2011).

Moving on to the Arctic, the Nordic states have expressed their concerns about the risks those arise from increased access to natural resources and new shipping lanes. They fear that increased traffic in the area may cause too big of a risk for any one of the Nordic states to handle on its own. The Nordics do not have the capacity to solve the increasing number of practical issues individually, and have expressed willingness to explore how they can benefit from increasing their cooperation. However, they have made it clear that increased

cooperation between them should not be competing but complimentary to their previous commitments to the EU, NATO and OSCE (Nordic Ministers for Foreign Affairs, Declaration 2009). Both NATO and the EU have been advocating more cooperation and equipment harmonization (Saxi 2011) which is an opportunity the Nordics could make use of, without heading towards any competition with the large institutions.

After the Cold War the tension between the two superpowers decreased and there was room to consider other and broader aspects of security. The post-Cold War security spectrum included various softer security aspects which also grew in importance (Heininen 2010). Soft security, according to Cottey (2007), is non-military threats such as threats to the environment, mass population movements and crime. By referring to a security threat as soft, is not to indicate that it is any less serious than a hard security threat. The Arctic region has been very affected by climate change. Over the past decades the Arctic sea ice has been decreasing, both in thickness and extend (Arctic Marine Shipping Assessment 2009 Report). Cottey has listed the consequences of global warming, and his list becomes very relevant in the Arctic context. Rising sea levels; altered weather patterns; spread of diseases into areas previously free from them; eco-system disruption and loss of species diversity; disruption of agriculture; mass migration and increased likelihood of environmental and resource conflicts (Cottey 2007) are all examples of threats the circumpolar states must be prepared to deal with, and may be too big for them to deal with individually.

In their Arctic policies the Nordic states show that they are all aware of the environmental threats in the region by referring to them under the term “environmental security”. They also include other softer aspects of security, but without presenting them with the security label (Cela 2010). The three Nordic non-coastal states, Finland, Iceland and Sweden emphasize comprehensive security and they all stress environmental protection and international cooperation. Although, they do have different focus points in that respect for an example Norway’s emphasis on Russia and the Barents region, and Finland’s very strong EU focus (A Parliamentary Resolution on Iceland’s Arctic Policy 2011; Finland’s Strategy for the Arctic Region 2010; Denmark, Greenland and the Faroe Islands: Kingdom of Denmark Strategy for the Arctic 2011-2020 2011; The Norwegian Governments High North Strategy 2006; Svergies strategy för den arktiska regionen 2011). The Nordics have been active in doing environmental research in the Arctic and a special program under the Nordic Council of Ministers is evidence of that (“Nordic Arctic Research Programme”). Furthermore, as societies, the Nordics are often spoken of in relation to the so-called Nordic Model. Among the characteristics of the model are relatively high living standards measured in GDP per capita, they are all parliamentary democracies with strong centralized interest groups and labor parties. The model is also known for a strong welfare system, the distinctive position of women in politics and regional cooperation agreements between the Nordic states (Ingebritsen 1998). Hence, the Nordics have very important common concerns, and

characteristics that might make increased cooperation more feasible.

## Conclusions

In this paper it has been argued that small states have fewer opportunities than the larger ones to influence the international system on their own, and thus become more dependent on the institutionalization of security and defense. Therefore they must accept a certain power imbalance within the institutions, or else risk that the larger states find their interests best guarded outside of the institution. This is a very real concern in the circumpolar context as the Arctic five have already had two exclusive meetings outside the institutions, where Denmark and Norway participated but Finland, Iceland and Sweden were not invited. When looking into the possibilities of enhanced Nordic cooperation on Arctic affairs it has to be taken into account that the Nordic states have quite different positions in the Arctic. Norway and the Kingdom of Denmark are coastal states and have somewhat broader interests to guard, resulting in them being more concerned with their sovereignty than Finland, Iceland and Sweden are. Because of these different emphases the Nordics place on sovereignty military cooperation can be rather problematic. Another influencing factor in that respect is that even combined their militaries are not that big. Yet another influential factor is that even though they have come a long way, after the Cold War, regarding cooperation in security and defense, their

history is still the same. Furthermore, they have still chosen different cooperation to guaranty their security, and their larger alliances have their priority. Nonetheless, as both NATO and EU are encouraging increased harmonization, the door is open for enhanced cooperation that does not at all have to compete with their previous commitments. They are still more likely to find common ground in the softer security matters, where they can enhance their cooperation, specialize within and contribute more – without disturbing each other's sovereignty, ambitions and exercises. Furthermore, the scientific cooperation of the Nordics is an important contribution to policy-making in the region, as it helps decision-makers to build their decisions on real facts and figures. The importance of this should not be underestimated because managing the softer security issues and keeping them under control might be one of the best preconditions for keeping the outbreak of harder security threats from happening.

Taking the state centric view, as done in this paper, is only one way to look at the big picture, and thus only provides a small piece of the puzzle.

## End notes

<sup>1</sup> Within the field of small state studies there is no single definition that all scholars agree upon and there are many different discourses. Nonetheless, the categorization used in this paper is rather common view.

<sup>2</sup> Ilulissat, Greenland 2008 and Chelsea, Quebec, Canada 2010.



<sup>3</sup> UN: United Nations, EU: European Union, NATO: North Atlantic Treaty Organization, EAPC: The Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council, IMO: International Maritime Organization, EEA: The European Economic Area, EFTA: The European Free Trade Association.

<sup>4</sup> AC: Arctic Council, IASC: International Arctic Science Committee, BEAC: Barents Euro-Arctic Council, CBSS: Council of Baltic Sea States, NC(M): Nordic Council (of Ministers), ND: EU's Northern Dimension.

<sup>5</sup> ESDP: European Security and Defence Policy.

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