

INTERNATIONAL | by Robbin Laird

# Norway Shaping its 21st Century Defence

Norway is in an especially interesting and perhaps precarious situation or, put another way, is at the crossroads of 21st century history. Norway is a small country bordering a very large territory considered one of the most active military powers, led by a skillful strategist.

Norway's allies are Brexit Britain, Trudeau's Canada, Trump America and various non-NATO allies, such as Finland and Sweden.

There is much uncertainty as well about the future of the European Union and the Euro zone. Significant uncertainties hang over France as looks to elect a new President, and Germany as it continues to be led by a beleaguered Chancellor whose handling of the immigration issue has triggered a European-wide crisis.

Amidst such global uneasiness, Norway is returning to the drawing board to shape a 21st century defense structure that is more appropriate to the challenges they face, as well as one in which core allies can plug and play to provide an extended defense and deterrent capability.

During a visit to Norway in early February, I attended the Norwegian Airpower Conference sponsored by the Chief of Staff of the Royal Norwegian Air Force held in

Trondheim, Norway; it was the perfect opportunity to discuss these developments with senior Norwegian defense officials.

Much of the conference focused on two of Norway's new systems, the F-35 and the P-8. Evidently, the F-35 is seen as a key launching point for the reshaping of defense capabilities. In part, due to the nature of the aircraft, in part due to the fact that the Norwegians will be flying the same aircraft as the Danes; the Dutch; the British; and the U.S. Marine Corps, Navy and Air Force. As *Lieutenant-General Jakobsen*, Commander of the Norwegian Joint Headquarters, put it: "When we fly the same platform, we have common solutions on maintenance, which makes the operating costs lower. That's one good thing. But it also means we have to train together, and that gives us interoperability [...] and of course, a much more capable and integrated force from the ground up."

A key theme within the conference was the re-emergence of Russia as an air and maritime power – globally, and most certainly in the Northern region. The Northern Fleet and the defense bastion built around the Kola Peninsula are two aspects of the Russian presence in Norway's area of interest.

It was made clear that the expanded reach of Russia into the Arctic also affects the nature of the air and sea domain of strategic interest to Norway as well.

The Russian and Norwegian areas of strategic interest are clearly congruent with one another, which means that engaging and deterring Russia in the air and sea space of Norway and into the North Atlantic and the Arctic is central to Norwegian defense. It follows that Norway needs a solid relationship with allies to ensure that both its own extended defense, as well as the defense of NATO's Northern Flank are secured.

With the modernization of Russian forces, the addition of new surface and sub-surface assets and enhanced precision strike capabilities, Norway and, indeed NATO, faces a formidable challenge on both the conventional and nuclear levels.

A key requirement is to have very accurate real time knowledge of the operation of Russian forces and sufficient capability to deal with those forces in times of crisis. The Norwegians already have Aegis combat systems aboard their frigates, which provides an opportunity to build out the fleet and to integrate them with the new air combat power coming to Norway and to NATO in the region.



PHOTO: LANCE CPL BRIANNA GAUDI

March 2016 – Marines with 2nd Low Altitude Air Defense Battalion post security in Namsos, Norway, during Exercise Cold Response. Troops from NATO allies and partner nations enhance their skill sets, strengthen bonds, and reinforce cold-weather environment operational capabilities





PHOTO: ROBBIN LAIRD

*RAAdm Lars Saunes (Navy), LGen Rune Jakobsen (Joint HQ), MGen Tonje Skinnarland (Air Force), and MGen Odin Johannessen (Army) respond to questions at the conference.*

Both the F-35s (with their ability to have significant reach through the new data and ISR linkages among the fleet and the ability to process data in real time) and the P-8 maritime domain awareness strike platform (which can be cross-linked among Norwegian, American and British platforms) provide an important element of shaping a way ahead for the kind of air-sea integration that Norway needs in order to deal with evolving challenges.

One analyst focused on the bastion defense approach being taken by Russia from the Kola Peninsula out, and the challenges this poses for Norway.

The broad point is that not only is Russia modernizing its forces, its military leaders are working at extending reach for those forces from their own territories.

Rear-Admiral Lars Saunes, the Chief of the Royal Norwegian Navy, highlighted the importance of the new air platforms, and the new submarines. He talked of the

need to effectively integrate the data provided by those platforms as well as crafting and evolving the C2 necessary to leverage an integrated air-sea force.

He also highlighted the advantages of having sensors and weapons onboard his surface ships that can interact with air assets to provide support and protection.

Acquiring the new systems can reshape a new force structure approach and exercises with allies will shape new ways ahead with regard to the capabilities they actually need rather than relying on approaches of the past. "It is not just about adding new platforms; it is about shaping joint capabilities for the defense of Norway in a high intensity operational setting," said Major General Tonje Skinnarland, Chief the Royal Norwegian Air Force.

Noting the importance of bringing such a force into being, he is looking at options for training and tasking his people to best shape this new integrated force. "When it



FORSVARET PHOTO: SARA SOFIE ROSENBERG STRENGENES

*Pilot climbs aboard NH90 helicopter during exercise Nord.*



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*HNoMS Roald Amundsen is one of Norway's five Fridtjof Nansen-class frigates, the country's main surface combatants.*



PHOTO: WO C. ARTIGUES (HQ MARCOM)

*SNMG1 – Ships in formation on completion of exercise Cold Response 2016 off the Norwegian coast: (HNoMS Storm (P-961), HNoMS Steil (P-963), ESPS Cantabria (A15), ESPS Alvaro de Bazan (F-101), HDMS Niels Juel (F-363), HMS Iron Duke (F-234), FS Primauguet (D-644).*

which can operate with core allies in extended defense operations,” the NAOC Chief continued.

The UK was highlighted during the conference presentations and interviews as increasingly significant to the Norwegian approach – particularly as the UK modernized its *Typhoons*, added F-35s, P-8s, and the Queen Elizabeth aircraft carriers and generally increasing its presence in the Northern Flank of NATO.

This is part of the Norwegian's view of their *Article III* responsibilities in NATO. Often overlooked by its own members, is the fact that NATO is a club with dues for providing, initially, for your own defense. Article III in the NATO Treaty underscores this commitment by members.

And Norway takes this commitment seriously. Mr. Øystein Bø, the State Secretary and Deputy Defense Minister at the Norwegian Ministry of Defense hammered home that point in an interview with me. “*Article III* is the obligation to have a strong national defense and to be able to be a net contributor to security,” he said. “There is no free ride in NATO, we’ve all got to do our part to be able to defend each other.”

In his view, how Norway is participating in the F-35 program is part of how they are playing out their *Article III* obligation and ensuring greater credibility for allies to help defend Norway.

In the Norwegian case, the Joint Strike Missile (JSM), which is considered a crucial

asset in providing for maritime defense of Norway, is available to other NATO-allies flying the F-35 as well.

State Secretary Bø noted: “This is a 21st century aspect of burden sharing as our investments in ‘our’ missile benefits all F-35 users of this missile across the globe, whether in Japan, Australia or in Europe.”

He went on to explain that “It is not money that goes directly into our armed forces, but it’s a lot of money that goes into developing capabilities that the alliance needs. It is about contributing to our joint security as well.”

In short, it is critical to work in concert with core allies to bolster global security and strengthen the deterrence factor.

As Ine Eriksen Søreide, the Norwegian Defense Minister put it recently: “Parliament approved the government’s new long-term plan in November last year. It represents an historic prioritization of our Armed Forces. Over the next 20 years, we are increasing our defense budget by 180 billion Norwegian kroner, or approximately US\$ 22 billion. After years of insufficient funding and a gradual decline in our defense capabilities, we are now making sure that our Armed Forces have the combat power, flexibility and sustainability needed in a changing and unpredictable security environment.” **FLO**

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comes to opportunities in the new systems, and particularly in the F-35, the conference has alluded to a lot of this – the capability in the aircraft itself, with weapons technology and networking, will come. But how do we make sure that we are able to utilize these technologies fully and effectively? A key will be to exercise often and effectively together.”

The new platforms provide some tools of the modernizing effort, but an overall transformation approach is called for.

As Brigadier-General Jan Ove Rygg, chief of the National Air Operations Center emphasized: “We need to build an effective national command and control capability which seamlessly works with core allies who are crucial to defense operations in the High North,” he said.

“What makes this particularly challenging is what we are taking about is national integration and C2 for national defense ground, sea and air operations,