

Norway moves to join NATO anti-missile shield targeting Russia

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Norway is intensifying its plans to join the US-NATO missile defence system and serve as a strategically located military outpost of NATO on Russia's northwestern border.

A joint analysis group from the Norwegian Defence Forces and the US Missile Defence Agency is expected to finalize its advice to the Norwegian government by the end of this year. The group will make recommendations on joining the NATO ballistic missile defence system. The main components are expected to be the Globus II/III radar, on the Russian border just a few kilometres from the home base of Russia's strategic submarines, and sea-based AEGIS systems on five Norwegian frigates.

The Maritime Theater Missile Defense Forum (MDMDF), which has existed for 17 years, was founded by the United States, the Netherlands and Germany. Several other countries joined later, including Norway in 2014. Now, three years later, the recommendations will be made.

Norway's right-wing prime minister, Erna Solberg, already said in a 2015 statement to NTB, "It is necessary for us to participate in this. As a committed NATO member, we should also be committed to that part of the strategy," i.e., the missile defense system.

This marks a significant shift from Norway's stance 15 years ago. In 2003, when US President George W. Bush scrapped the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, supposedly to counter threats from Iran, the move was universally condemned across the Norwegian political spectrum. Jens Stoltenberg, the current NATO general secretary who was then then prime minister for Labour, claimed he was skeptical about the system at a summit in Moscow in 2007.

Since then, Norway—where defence and security policy traditionally is formulated by consensus between the main parties, which are all strongly pro-NATO—has moved towards a stance more favourable to missile defence.

Klassekampen newspaper writes, "Cables ~~Tilten~~ the US embassy, leaked by WikiLeaks, show that the US government started an intense diplomatic offensive after Stoltenberg's statement. Ambassador Ben Whitley wrote: 'Due to this pressure, Norway will continue to criticise the missile shield in public, while secretly working for missile defence within NATO.'"

When Stoltenberg became Secretary General of NATO, it became clear that he had had a change of heart. On May 13, 2016, he personally broke the ground for the construction of the US-led missile defence site in Redzikowo, Poland. The day before that, he and other US and NATO officials gathered in Romania to launch another anti-missile site.

The Defence Ministry claimed that "the NATO ballistic missile defence is a purely defensive capability," a position that has repeatedly been criticized as dishonest by Russia.

Moscow fears that the missile shield will alter the strategic balance—giving Washington and NATO the ability to launch a first nuclear strike on Russia and prevent Russia from launching a counter-strike. This would effectively allow NATO not only to threaten and dictate terms to Russia, but also to destroy it in a nuclear war.

In line with the rearmament and military escalation aimed at Russia taking place across Europe, Norway is executing a drastic change in its military policy, towards a far more aggressive posture. Three hundred US Marines will be deployed in the central areas of Norway, officially on a "rotating" basis. The US forward storage areas in the country—huge caves with equipment for, amongst others, 16,000 Marines—have been upgraded to store state-of-the-art military equipment.

Norwegian forces are increasingly integrated with other NATO forces. Though Norway spends \$7.3 billion annually on the military—more than Sweden (\$5.7 billion),

a country whose population is twice as large—former Norwegian Chief of the Defence Force Sverre Diesen said: “Norway and other small states are probably too small to maintain their own national defence.” He envisages a closer cooperation and shared capabilities with other NATO allies or the non-NATO states of Finland and Sweden.

Labour and Norway’s two main right-wing parties want an increased focus on “strategic assets” like the F-35 fighter, submarines and surveillance capabilities. Ground forces are to get less priority, except for an elite expeditionary force that can be used at the request of other allies. In case of a war, Norway’s 52 F-35 fighter-bombers are supposed to execute deep strikes in Russian territory against ships, naval bases and air bases.

Such preparations underscore the fact that Norway would rapidly be drawn into any war that NATO launched against Russia—a fact that has prompted comment in academic circles.

In a May 2016 interview with NRK, MIT Professor Theodore Postol warned that Norway “would be dragged into a conflict between the great powers. ... The radar in Vardø is of the type GBR-P, formerly deployed on the Kwajalein Atoll in the Pacific. It was formerly intended to be the most important radar in the US missile shield, to be deployed in the Czech Republic.”

The Norwegian Department of Defence denied Postol’s claims, in line with its routine denials of all information in this sensitive area, declaring: “The radar has the same mission as the one it replaces. DoD is therefore of the opinion that there is no reason for reactions towards Norway.”

The Norwegian military’s denials notwithstanding, their plans unquestionably make Norway a target for Russian military action. When Denmark decided to join the missile defence system in 2015 with several frigates, Russia’s ambassador to Denmark, Mikhail Vanin, wrote in an open letter that the country will be a nuclear target if the government joins NATO’s missile defence system.

“I don’t think that Danes fully understand the consequence if Denmark joins the American-led missile defence shield,” wrote Vanin. Similar Russian responses came after NATO bases in Poland and Romania were announced.

Norway’s important military infrastructure, despite its population of only five million people, means it would also play a substantial role in the event of any conflict and therefore would be a target in a war. It has the sixth biggest military budget per capita—after the United States,

Israel and some Persian Gulf oil sheikdoms—and joined the NATO wars of aggression in Yugoslavia and Libya.

Norway participated in a 2015 exercise where the goal was to discover and intercept enemy missiles. A Norwegian frigate participated with radar sensors. Though official reports released for public consumption only mentioned sensors and tracking, these ships are equipped with missiles that are able to shoot down enemy missiles.

According to the book *The Satellite War* by Bård Wormdahl, a Norwegian journalist who has written several books about Norway’s secret military cooperation with USA, Norway has three important radar stations across the globe. One of them is in Vardø, as close to Russia as you can get, and the other two are placed in [the arctic] Svalbard-archipelago and in Antarctica.

The radar in Vardø and presumably the one in Svalbard are of high value in American nuclear strategy. They are vital to discover and intercept Russian missiles over the North Pole headed towards the continental US. In the past few years, a steady stream of senior US politicians has inspected these radars, including Secretary of Defence Ash Carter and Senator John McCain.

Since Svalbard was demilitarized by a 1925 treaty, the radar installation there is probably in breach of that treaty. Therefore, the official purpose of John Kerry’s visit to Svalbard in July 2016 was to “view the effects of climate change.”

Similarly, when McCain visited Ny-Aalesund on Svalbard in August 2015, it was declared that the purpose was “to highlight the plight of polar bears.”



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