Norway emerges as key staging ground for US military provocations against Russia

Jordan Shilton
26 February 2023

As the US-NATO war against Russia enters its second year in Ukraine, Washington is recklessly escalating the conflict. After it sent battle tanks to Ukraine, there is public discussion of sending fighter jets and even NATO ground troops, which could quickly trigger a global military conflagration between nuclear-armed powers. Beyond Ukraine, Washington and its European imperialist allies are ratcheting up pressure on Russia, including in the Arctic and Baltic Sea regions.

Norway's Evenes Air Station, north of the Arctic Circle, is to become a regional hub for surveillance of Russia. Details on the joint project between the United States, Britain and Norway were provided earlier this month in comments by Norwegian Minister of Defence Bjørn Arild Gramm, who said the base will host USP-8A Poseidon surveillance aircraft.

Two Arctic bases, Evenes and the Ramsund naval base, are the subject of an upgraded bilateral defence cooperation agreement between Washington and Oslo. They are classified as "agreed areas," which grant US forces unimpeded access to the bases and exclusive rights to certain parts of them. The agreement provides for US jurisdiction over all US Army personnel in the country, including for crimes they commit off-duty, and even over Norwegian citizens who come into contact with the "agreed areas."

Washington initiated talks on the bilateral agreement, and the Biden administration said the deal was an "invariable requirement" for further US investment in Norwegian facilities.

Eight months after the agreement's commencement, it clearly aims to create a framework for a massive military build-up across the Arctic and Scandinavia. Indeed, Washington is negotiating similar arrangements with Denmark, Finland and Sweden. A likely candidate for "agreed area" status in Sweden is the island of Gotland, the site of a key Cold War-era Swedish military base just 300 kilometres northwest of Russia's Kaliningrad exclave.

Charly Salonius-Pasternak, a researcher at the Finnish Institute for International Affairs, said Washington could demand "agreed areas" in Finland as well, including the Rovaniemi Airport in the north, writing:

> The opportunity to store equipment and materiel in advance, which is included in the Norwegian-American agreement, clearly expresses American commitment. It would be beneficial if the US and Finland agree that American forces can store, for example, 500 anti-tank missiles and 500 anti-aircraft missiles in Finland and that a mechanism is designed so that Finnish forces can use these in extreme cases before US support arrives.

On "agreed areas" in Norway, Defence Minister Gramm said: "At Evenes, the aim is to develop cooperation between Norwegian, British, and American P-8 maritime surveillance aircraft—in accordance with the investments that are made in the Norwegian Armed Forces' long-term plan." These include five P-8A Poseidon surveillance aircraft bought by Norway, which will work with British Poseidons to search for and destroy underwater targets, i.e., submarines. Evenes also hosts Norway's US-produced F-35 fighter jets.

Ramsund will serve as a "maritime logistics hub" for large-scale military activities in the region by the US and other NATO powers. Gramm said:

> In the current long-term plan for the defense sector, it is planned that the Ramsund Naval Base will have an expanded role as the Navy's base in the North—and that the base is further developed to support the Navy and allies, including expanded quay facilities, storage of ammunition, logistics, and maintenance. … Our NATO allies train and exercise regularly in Norway, something that may also involve periodical presence in connection with logistics support. Increased cooperation with the US and other allies at Evenes and Ramsund is desired and will provide economies of scale and increased operative effect.

Norway's location on the northwest of the Scandinavian Peninsula and with a 196-kilometre border with Russia make it a key ally for US imperialism to open a northern front in its war with Russia. This was underscored in a new military summit on

© World Socialist Web Site

the Arctic in January in Oslo. Chaired by General Mark Milley, chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, it included US and Norwegian officials and from 11 “close allies and partners” that the Norwegian Armed Forces refused to identify.

Emphasizing that the gathering will convene several times per year, the Norwegian Armed Forces declared: “This meeting with Allies and Partners builds collective understanding of the evolving strategic environment and informs military advice on key issues. The senior military leaders exchanged perspectives on shared strategic challenges, to include the Arctic and High North, the persistent threat of terrorism, and the changing dynamics of the South China Sea.”

January’s meeting was the latest in several military-security gatherings on geostrategy preparing for war in the Arctic and Northern Europe. Last August, Canada hosted an Arctic Chiefs of Defence meeting with representatives of the US, Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden. In October, the Northern Europe Chiefs of Defence Conference was held in Poland. Participants included the Nordic countries, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Germany, the Netherlands, Britain, Canada and the US.

Norway also hosts regular military exercises. Over 10,000 Norwegian and allied troops, including forces from the US, Britain and the Netherlands, will participate in Joint Viking 2023 in the Troms district of northern Norway on March 4-16. Norway also hosts the NATO exercise “Cold Response,” which is being expanded for 2024 into a jointly-organised exercise with Finland and Sweden called “Nordic Response.”

These exercises are part of a comprehensive regional plan for war on Russia. This emerges in advice prepared by the Nordic countries’ chiefs of staff to their governments for a meeting of the Nordic Defence Cooperation (Nordefco) last November. Nordefco was set up in 2009 and has helped train Finnish and Swedish military personnel to use NATO equipment and procedures even if they are not yet NATO members.

Their proposals included identifying four ports in western Scandinavia that could be used as transport hubs for military personnel and equipment in the event of a “crisis.” The ports include Narvik and Trondheim in Norway, Gothenburg in Sweden and Esbjerg in Denmark.

Veteran journalist Seymour Hersh’s exposure of the US role in bombing the Nord Stream pipelines in the Baltic last September underscored just how important Norway already is to US military and intelligence operations. Hersh documented secret meetings between US and Norwegian military and intelligence personnel in the months prior to NATO’s “BALTOPS 22” exercise in June 2022, which served as the cover for US military divers to plant the explosives on the pipelines.

One such meeting took place in March 2022 between the Norwegian secret service and navy and US officials. It led to a proposal by Norway to take advantage of shallow waters off Bornholm, an island on Denmark’s east coast, to bomb the pipelines. Norwegian officials also proposed using NATO’s “BALTOPS 22” exercise in June 2022 as the cover to plant explosives on the Nord Stream pipelines.

After the Biden administration decided on a delayed explosion to create a degree of plausible deniability, it was, according to Hersh, a Norwegian aircraft flying over the Baltic Sea on September 26 that dropped a buoy to trigger the blast. Explaining Norway’s centrality to US operations against Russia, Hersh wrote:

> In the past few years of East-West crisis, the U.S. military has vastly expanded its presence inside Norway, whose western border runs 1,400 miles along the North Atlantic Ocean and merges above the Arctic Circle with Russia. The Pentagon has created high-paying jobs and contracts, amid some local controversy, by investing hundreds of millions of dollars to upgrade and expand American Navy and Air Force facilities in Norway. The new works included, most importantly, an advanced synthetic aperture radar far up north that was capable of penetrating deep into Russia and came online just as the American intelligence community lost access to a series of long-range listening sites inside China.

Norway’s powerful energy sector has been a major beneficiary, together with the United States, of sanctions on Russia and the destruction of the Nord Stream pipelines. Norwegian natural gas exports to Europe rose 3.3 percent in 2022. Deliveries to Germany shot up 11 percent year over year.

Germany has expanded its network of liquified natural gas terminals to include locations in Wilhelmshaven, Brunsbüttel and Lubmin. By December 2023, they will have a total annual capacity of 30 billion cubic metres—about half the gas supplied through Nord Stream 1 in 2021. This exposes the interests underlying the unprecedented decision of Norway’s Labour-led government to criminalise an oil strike last summer, immediately after a visit by German Economy Minister Robert Habeck.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site