

**Statement by Mr. Svein Efstad,
Policy Director, Ministry of Defence of Norway,
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ENGLISH only

Confidence and Security Building – the Nordic perspective

Excellences, ladies and gentlemen,

Let me first thank you for the opportunity for me and my Swedish colleague to address the Forum for Security Cooperation on the Nordic perspective on the development of the security situation in Europe, and the need for confidence and security building measures.

The Nordic countries have a long tradition of solving disputes and geographical conflicts in a peaceful and responsible manner. We have an extensive military and security cooperation amongst the 5 Nordic countries. We cooperate in training and exercises, participation in international operations, capability development, and we consult on all issues relevant for security and defense. My Swedish colleague, who is chairing the Steering Committee for the Nordic defence cooperation this year, will give a more comprehensive presentation on our cooperation.

Today I will address the need for increased transparency and confidence building due to the significant increase in military activity in Europe. In this speech I will present some examples from our bilateral contacts with Russia on how to establish practical risk-reducing measures. Finally I will share some reflections on an issue of particular concern to Norway – maintaining stability, predictability and security in the High North.

Let me first say a few words on how the security situation in Europe is perceived from our perspective. The current security situation in Europe is challenging. Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea in March 2014 and Russia's continued interference in Eastern Ukraine, has had a profound effect on how we perceive the security challenges in Europe.

We can also clearly see how Russia is improving its military forces in the vicinity of the Nordic area. New vessels, aircraft and missiles are being introduced, and this includes both nuclear and conventional forces. Furthermore Russian forces are more active in training, exercises and patrolling than before. Also on the Western side, there are more exercises and military activities than before. Some of these activities are organized by NATO, some directly by nations involved.

A large refugee crisis has put pressure on already fragile and economically challenged countries. Acts of terrorism, nuclear proliferation and an escalating arms race, the latter mostly outside of Europe, are all high on the international security policy agenda, and have implications for the security in Europe.

Through closer cooperation among the Nordic countries and firm solidarity with the Baltic States, we will contribute to enhanced security in our region, and raise the threshold for military incidents. By acting together in a predictable and consistent way, we contribute to peace and security in our part of the world.

Increased military activity

Over the last years there has been a substantial increase in Russian military activity on NATO's borders. Russia's enhanced ability and demonstrated willingness to project and use military force in the Ukraine has negatively affected the security in Europe.

The NATO alliance has sought to address this through a number of adaptive changes, including the reassurance measures adopted at the Wales Summit in 2014. This includes multinational exercises, increased training, and rotation of forces in the Eastern part of the Alliance, and a new focus on collective defence.

The increase in military activity on both sides has led to a higher risk of misunderstandings and unintended escalation of even smaller incidents. I would argue that Russia's involvement in Ukraine and the ongoing Russian military campaign in Syria, further underlines the need for confidence and security building measures. It should be our common objective to reduce the danger of military incidents or misunderstandings. In this regard, we welcome the efforts of the US and Russia to deconflict their military operations in Syria. This agreement, which I understand has already been entered into, is crucial also for European security.

Our starting point must be complying with the basic principles of the Helsinki Final Act. We must respect each other's sovereignty and territorial integrity, non-intervention in internal affairs, and the peaceful settlement of disputes.

Before the 1975 Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe in Helsinki the questions of early warning and conflict prevention was high on the agenda. Today confidence building measures has regained its relevance, but the current security situation in Europe and adjacent areas makes it challenging to come to agreement on new confidence building measures. This is not a reason to withhold our efforts. We were able to agree on confidence building measures even during the Cold War.

Practical bilateral measures to increase transparency and reduce risks

In the early 1990s Norway and Russia agreed to establish bilateral defence cooperation. This cooperation was developed over more than two decades starting with purely confidence building measures through the exchange of high level delegations expanding to a bilateral military exercise of mutual benefit for both the Norwegian and Russian armed forces. I participated in many of these activities this whole period, and it was most rewarding. This cooperation was suspended in March 2014 as a consequence of events in Ukraine.

However, in some areas we see a common need to continue our contacts and interaction. Thus, the bilateral cooperation regarding coast guard and border control continue. Our coast and border guards are military forces in Norway, and cooperate with their Russian counterparts from the FSB.

We believe that direct channels for communication such as our bilateral “hotline” between our Operational Headquarters in Bodø and the Russian headquarters of the Northern Fleet, is an important risk reducing instrument. Similarly, our bilateral Incidents at Sea-agreement with Russia help set a standard on how our armed forces operate in adjacent areas. This also provides a forum for review of events which could have caused incidents. Such measures and agreements are of vital importance in order to avoid misunderstanding, unintended escalation and dangerous episodes.

The need for such channels and agreements will differ from one country to another, depending on geography and military activities. We would therefore encourage other countries to look at how to set up similar lines of communication and agreements to ensure a more safe and secure environment. This would be of interest to Russia, as well as allies and partners, and will contribute to increased security and confidence in the Europe.

While bilateral agreements can be implemented as an immediate tool to reduce the risk of unwanted incidents, in a longer term perspective we must also look to already established mechanisms for arms control and confidence building measures.

Arms control and confidence building measures

It is essential that we honor existing instruments for arms control and confidence building, but we must also look at how they can be improved. The Vienna Document is scheduled to be updated and re-issued in 2016. Several nations have submitted proposals that will improve the document and make it better suited for today’s security environment. Keywords are increased predictability through transparency, confidence building and verification.

The Vienna Document and the yearly information exchange does not disclose the real capacity of our national military forces. Among the 57 signatories, some have only smaller forces like we do, while others have a full nuclear arsenal. Consequently we must look at additional ways to inform each other on the structure of our armed forces and planned military activities.

As part of the Vienna Document a military doctrine seminar takes place at least every five years. This is a good opportunity to share information. The next such seminar will, I understand, take place in February 2016 and you discussed the planning of this event here in the FSC last week. While this is an important event, I believe we must take it further and look at other ways to increase the overall transparency on military activities in Europe. I think this could be done by a presentation by each country every year.

The focus should be on planned activities, exercises, training and so on. Of course not in detail. It would be unrealistic to expect countries to disclose detailed plans in advance. The idea of snap exercises, if they are large and conducted in border areas, could be most destabilizing. And they could contribute to create hostile perceptions, serious misunderstandings or overreactions.

Although this may seem difficult at the moment, there is a need to modernize our arms control regime. We must increase trust and confidence and reduce the potential for misunderstandings. Our first opportunity is the discussion of the new issuing of the Vienna Document next year.

The Arctic – a region of peaceful international cooperation

Finally, let me turn your attention to the Arctic region. As you are all aware of, NATO's area of responsibility goes from the Tropic of Cancer to the North Pole. The climate changes, oil, gas and tourism have all brought up new challenges.

It is in our common interest that the Arctic remains a peaceful and stable region, and that the Law of the Sea and the established management regimes, not least for fisheries, are complied with. International cooperation in the north, not least with Russia, has produced good results in areas such as maritime safety, fisheries management, the environment, nuclear safety and people-to-people cooperation. This has to continue.

Norway is pleased that all countries with interests in the region respects the Law of the Seas and that UNCLOS will be the basis for solving issues concerning economic zones, continental shelves and the like in the Arctic.

We support the proposal to establish an Arctic Coast Guard Forum which can facilitate cooperation in search and rescue, protection of the environment, and sustainable fisheries management.

Because of Norway's interests and responsibilities in the Arctic, it is essential for us to maintain a presence in the region and protect our rights and fulfil our obligations. Norway is therefore increasing the Armed Forces' presence at sea, and improving our situational awareness. We do this in a way which by no means can be interpreted as provocative or threatening. In fact, I believe that keeping fully informed about the ongoing activities prevent us from misinterpretations or overreactions.

This is partly important because the Kola peninsula is a center for Russia's maritime strategic nuclear forces. And the High North is again becoming an area of growing military activities with modern military capabilities.

In the end I will encourage the establishment of bilateral communications directly at the operational HQ level for all countries which conduct military activities in areas where

episodes may occur. Furthermore, I would argue that incidents at sea arrangements are more necessary than before in our part of the world. Lastly, I would suggest using the FSC in order to present planned military activities for the next year in order to improve predictability, transparency and confidence building.

Thank you for your attention.