

With its painstaking balancing act, Norway prepares for both peace and war

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The winner of the Nobel Peace Prize will be announced here on Oct. 7, with the award ceremony taking place in December. This happens every year, of course. But this year, the context is different, because Norway's trademark traditions of balance and peace have been tested by recent events.

The Norwegian military is on high alert, especially in the far north, where Norway shares a 196-kilometre border with Russia. In March, shortly after the Russian invasion of [Ukraine](#), 30,000 soldiers from 27 countries tested [NATO's](#) ability to rapidly send reinforcements to that Arctic frontier. In the waters offshore, Russian warships sail just outside Norway's 12-nautical-mile territorial sea, while fighter jets and bombers engage in similarly close, entirely legal but deliberately provocative maneuvers in the sky. Russia is also behaving dangerously by jamming the signals of GPS satellites, which guide civilian aircraft in Norwegian airspace, and made thinly veiled threats around using tactical nuclear weapons in Ukraine.

Norway's large exports of oil and gas, meanwhile, are helping other European countries withstand Russia's efforts to starve them of energy and therefore political will. These exports could make Norway's energy infrastructure a target for Russian air or missile strikes, or for sabotage, as appears to have happened south of Norway, to the Nord Stream pipelines linking Russia to Germany under the Baltic Sea.

No one here is naïve about the Russian threat. During the Second World War, German forces occupied Norway for five years, and during the Cold War, Soviet and U.S. nuclear submarines played high-risk games in the Norwegian and Barents seas. Most Norwegians now support increased military spending and the shipping of high-tech weapons to Ukraine. Norwegians are also enthusiastic about neighbouring Sweden and Finland joining NATO; just last month, a Finnish delegation was in Oslo to discuss cooperative air defence.

The U.S. military is also being welcomed with open arms. In June, the Norwegian parliament approved a new defence pact that provides U.S. forces with unhindered access to three Norwegian airfields and one naval base, including the right to build their own facilities there. Their presence is intended as a tripwire, deterring a potential Russian invasion by ensuring that a direct conflict with the United States would result.

But Norway also cooperates and communicates with Russia, to prevent accidents and misunderstandings and also to hold up existing treaties. As Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Store said [in June](#): "Norway has shared a border with the Soviet Union and then Russia, and while being a

member of NATO, managing a balanced relationship of cooperation and also necessary deterrence next to military power.”

Indeed, for five decades, Oslo and Moscow have successfully co-managed fish stocks in the Barents Sea; in September, they agreed on science-based quotas for 2023. When the European Union banned Russian fishing boats from its ports, Norway did not, and Russian boats still land fish and change crews here.

In 2010, Norway and Russia also divided 175,000 square kilometres of disputed water and seabed in the Barents Sea in half. The maritime boundary treaty was a huge victory for Norway’s negotiators, led by Mr. Store, who was then foreign minister. He also acquired an important friend in Moscow: 12 years later, his then-counterpart Sergei Lavrov remains Russia’s foreign minister.

In 1920, Norwegian sovereignty over the Svalbard archipelago, located 800 kilometres north of Norway, was recognized through a widely ratified treaty. That sovereignty is subject to a right of economic access for all the other parties, including Russia, which has long operated a coal mine there. When Norwegian sanctions impeded its resupply earlier this year, Norway solved the problem by transferring the supplies from Russian to Norwegian trucks at the land border between the two countries. It then shipped the supplies to Svalbard for the Russians.

When Russia complained that Norway was violating a demilitarization clause in the Svalbard treaty, Norway responded by denying two allied militaries permission to use the archipelago’s ground station to download data from their satellites. Norwegian military ships and planes have studiously avoided entering the waters and airspace on the Russian side of maritime boundary, even though they have every right to do so – provided they remain more than 12 nautical miles offshore.

The U.S. and British militaries, however, have not exercised the same restraint. They regularly send ships and planes into the area, which lies just alongside the submarine bases that provide Russia with its all-important nuclear deterrent. These allied exercises could easily lead to an accident, threatening the balance between cooperation and deterrence that Norway works so hard to maintain.

Norway, with a population of just 5 million, has little influence in Washington and London. But it does have this: Anyone who can bring some stability to the NATO-Russia relationship, whether inside or outside Ukraine, has an excellent chance of being invited to an award ceremony here. And that still matters.

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