

## **Norway - the hub of militarism (Greenland/Arctic)**

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### **Baltic sea - a sea of peace**

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Dear peace friends, thank you for the invitation to participate in this important initiative for peace in the north. I am happy to join you from the Arctic. We do need each other in this very precarious and terrible world situation that is weighing heavily on all of us!

Once upon a time there was a rather peaceful, small, country way north, crossing the Arctic Circle, called Norway. Norwegians thought, at least in certain periods, that the best security guarantee they could have was a high level of welfare at home, solidarity with and assistance to countries and people in need and being an active and supportive partner of the UN. Because, who would want to attack or challenge such a friendly and peaceful country?

Once the country had a so-called "broken gun" or neutrality status yet, a militaristic minded minority in the country managed by a bureaucratic coup and certainly also by gratefulness for the US Marshall help after WWII, to enlist the country in Nato from the beginning in 1949. Yet, the country did not want to antagonise the neighbour in the north east, the Soviet Union, which had helped free the north from Nazism. For years the balance between deterrence and reassurance was a vital part of Norwegian foreign policy.

The fact that Alfred Nobel gave the responsibility to Norway to handle the Nobel peace prize as of 1901, gave and gives valuable experience and insight in peace initiatives and processes and at least partially lay the ground for the country's claim to be a peace nation. The country has important institutions for peace studies, peace and human rights research and have long experience from peace negotiations and from UN peace keeping operations.

Yet, here we are to-day with an almost unanimous insistence both from politicians and mainstream media, and to a large extend also echoed and supported by Academia, that "weapons are the way to peace". The fact that Jens Stoltenberg, former Secretary General of Nato has become minister of finance in the labour government is reinforcing this situation.

Whilst Norway continues to be on the top of international rankings as to democracy and freedom of expression, almost any opposition to the ongoing and frenetic militarisation, is met with scepticism, labelling and cancelling. Suggesting alternatives to war and working for multilateral cooperation and peaceful relations has become suspect. The anti-Russian propaganda is enormous and the fear created is of course vital to the military industrial establishment's ability to get acceptance for a rearmament that profits heavily a few but is undermining the well-being of the majority.

Norway has blatant double standards in its reaction to Russia and to Israel. Whilst all types of sanctions were immediately unleashed upon Russia especially as of February 2022, Norway has been very slow in its protests against Israel, although the government has accepted Palestine as a state, kept their support for UNWRA and a few days ago sanctioned two of the the most extremist ministers of the Government of Netanyahu. But more and

more people are horrified by the genocide in Gaza and yesterday's unlawful attack on Iran by Israel, with US consent, will strengthen people's cry for peace and justice.

The official Norway continues to consider USA as its closest ally and continues military co-operation and trade based on the frameworks and rules given by the US. But the country is at the same time seeking closer cooperation with the EU also on defence and security issues. The peace movement must confront militarisation whether it is through Nato or through the EU. A start could be to inspire the use of NATO's paragraph 13, which indicates how to leave the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation. It is actually easy - after a year of membership, just inform the government of the US, and they will inform the others!

There are approximately four million people living in the Arctic area, many of whom are indigenous peoples. Throughout history and in a harsh climate, the peoples of the Arctic have been dependent on each other for their survival, which has involved trade and exchange as well as mutual care and assistance in emergency situations. At times, the borders have been quite porous. Different languages (Finnish, Kven, Norwegian, Russian, Sami and Swedish), different ethnic and religious backgrounds and a long coast with proximity to seafaring peoples, have made the High North a rather well-functioning multilingual and multi-ethnic area, which is historically quite different from the rest of Norway and the Nordic countries.

People in northern Norway benefit from the warming effect of the Gulf Stream, which makes life easier than for others at the same latitude. Access to rich fishing and hunting resources has been the main basis for settlement and life for generations. Now, global climate change is affecting the food supply, settlement patterns as well as living conditions and opportunities in the Arctic. In addition, people's livelihoods are deteriorating and are being destroyed as society increasingly prioritises a so-called efficient use of natural resources, for example through large-scale trawling for fish, oversized salmon farming, expanded energy production, seismic shooting and mining. The result is a dramatic weakening of the region, which in turn leads to displacement and thereby also weaker preparedness.

The geopolitical situation in the Arctic has worsened dramatically by the Swedish and Finnish entry into NATO and the significant expansion of the number of US bases in the Nordic countries. And not far from the Norwegian border, Russia has its large military base on the Kola Peninsula with nuclear submarines and nuclear weapons.

Bilateral agreements have been signed for 47 American so-called joint areas in the Nordic countries; Sweden 17, Finland 15, Norway 12 and Denmark 3. Through this process, the Nordic countries have become part of a global network of around 900 American bases in over 80 countries. By comparison, Russia is considered to have eight bases on foreign soil and China one. Our defence has been strongly Americanised - almost without real debate. This comes in addition to the fact that Norway for many years has been considered "NATO's eyes and ears in the North", with sophisticated American surveillance and espionage installations in the air, on land, at sea and probably also in cyberspace, allowed over time by shifting governments. The almost total servility towards the United States is difficult to understand.

These decisions have only to a modest extent been made known to the public. Perhaps not even to the majority of the parliament? To the extent that people in Norway are informed, there is confusion about what is cooperation with NATO and what is cooperation with the USA. This confusion is probably intentional. For a long time, the public has been led to believe that NATO is absolutely essential to Norwegian security. At the same time, there is concern about the democratic collapse in the USA. There is reason to believe that people would be much more sceptical to these new bases if they had known that they were agreed upon on a bilateral basis between the USA and Norway, initiated by the USA and with no other connection to NATO than the US NATO dominance.

This heavy militarisation of the Arctic will not contribute to increased security, as both the Norwegian and the other Nordic governments preach, quite the opposite. The escalation is by the Russian side considered as a serious threat to their security. The recent Ukrainian drone attack on the Russian military base of Olenja, in Murmansk, just 200 km from the border with Norway, stirred up fear of retaliation from Russia, directed at US bases in the area.

This militarisation is happening in parallel with an ongoing weakening of ordinary, friendly, cultural, diplomatic and business cooperation with Russia. This new iron curtain has harmful effects. In the North, this is not least evident in relation to the important cooperation between indigenous groups, security at sea and the protection of a vulnerable Arctic nature.

The Arctic is attracting strong international interest as global warming and melting ice open up for more fishing, more drilling of oil and gas and hunt for minerals on the seabed. In addition, there is increased shipping, especially in the Northeast Passage, with faster trade and transport opportunities between the West and the Far East.

The region's geographical proximity between the great powers and expanded access to a wide range of natural resources, cause increased geopolitical tension in the Arctic. Fortunately, Norway and Russia have solved their border disputes in the sea. Yet the situation in and around Svalbard/Spitsbergen is open for different interpretations, and after that the president of the US plainly expressed that he wanted Greenland, the Greenlanders and Denmark got an acutely volatile situation at hand, the outcome of which remains unclear.

The important Arctic Council deals with issues that are common to the Arctic countries and vital to the people of the North, with particular emphasis on the environment, climate and sustainable development. The Council consists of the eight circumpolar countries Canada, Denmark (with the Faroe Islands and Greenland), Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden and the United States (with Alaska). And uniquely, six indigenous organisations have the status of permanent participants in the Council.

Military environmental pollution and CO<sub>2</sub> emissions are largely excluded from the climate accounts required by the UN climate agreements and the effects of militarisation on the environment is also the elephant in the room of the Arctic Council. Lack of knowledge about military ecological degradation makes it difficult to comprehensively and effectively combat both global warming and nature- and environmental destruction.

Cooperation in the Arctic Council was frozen after February 2022. During the two years leadership of Norway which was recently handed over to Denmark, cooperation with Rus-

sia was reopened at scientific levels, though only digitally. A small, but positive sign! Meetings at diplomatic level between the Arctic officials remain on hold.

It is time to get out of this dangerous, polarised situation with one-sided enemy images of each other that only serve the military industry and its profiteers and that risks leading to a full-scale Third World War. Militarisation must be reduced and diplomacy and cooperation supported! In this context, the Arctic Council, the OSCE (Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe) and the UN are extremely important. Let us all reread the UN Charter on creating peace by peaceful means, bring up again Olof Palme's plan for "common security" and Mikhail Gorbachev's dream (see e.g. his Murmansk speech) of a common, nuclear free European home.

Faced with this tremendous and dangerous militarisation, risking a full nuclear and/or environmental devastation, we must sharpen our strategic tools. But what tools can break through the militarised armours? Is it "we, the peoples" who are the real force for peace and cooperation; is it the UN, the UN Charter; a reformed and more democratic Security Council with less privileges to the big powers; is it the new UN Pact for the Future; is it international law as opposed to the neoliberal "rules based world order" only profiting the big countries and multinational corporations; is it a strengthening of our regional and sub-regional institutions and organisations; or is a cultivation of our humanism, our creativity and the arts? Probably all of the above.

When the war propaganda is so heavy and to a large degree blocks people's access to the truth, even militarising people's minds, it is obvious that we need to put peace at the very top of our agenda – even above being right. But we are up against very strong forces, fighting for economic, military, political, technical, even cultural dominance – on land, in and on the sea, in the air and in space. The hawks both in the east and the west have been allowed to take over the narratives – they scrupulously explain reality in military terms day after day - and facilitated by an obedient mainstream media - make people accept the enemy images of "the other" – and make war and war logic seem normal and inevitable. They pretend knowing what the other side is up to and are not willing to seek neither alternatives nor compromise.

It is obviously a need for a humanistic revolution – a new paradigm - a new way of thinking – new insights - new attitudes. We must not allow the militarisation of our heads. Instead of the old patriarchal model of economic growth, militarism, competition and confrontation, with warfare over welfare, which risks leading ultimately to apocalypse, we acutely need to strengthen our peace- and disarmament processes, including eliminating nuclear arms, and in stead build trust and international solidarity.