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The Role of Norway and Sweden in US and NATO Military-Strategic Planning in the Arctic (mid-2020s)

Philipp O. Trunov ¹, Dr. Sci (Polit.), Leading Researcher

¹ Institute of Scientific Information on Social Sciences of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Nakhimovsky pr., 51/21, Moscow, Russia

¹ 1trunov@mail.ru , ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7092-4864>

Abstract. Against the backdrop of Stockholm's official accession to NATO (March 2024), the significance of Sweden and Norway's power for the plans of the community of "Western democracies" is examined. Methodologically, the theory of armed forces construction (for the Scandinavian states, NATO as an institution) and the concepts of securitization are used. The paper determines why the Alliance's forward deployment force network does not de jure extend to Norway, even though Norway consistently contributes to the formation of the bloc's permanent groups. The article explores a set of measures aimed at building up forces in the provinces of Troms and Finnmark as a "springboard" for Western strategic penetration to the Arctic. The evolution of the US presence in northern Norway is shown, with a focus on the 2021 and 2024 agreements on access to the Kingdom's bases. The content and consequences of decisions to significantly increase Norway's ground forces are examined. The goals and characteristics of Sweden's future presence in Finnish Lapland are revealed. It is proven that the United States is the key beneficiary of the measures under consideration. Relying on the increased military resources of its Scandinavian partners, the White House has been strengthening the basis for the penetration to the Arctic Ocean (from Europe), increasing the effectiveness of "containment" of the Russian Federation. The conclusion is drawn that the West has a dangerous desire to catch up with and surpass the Russian Federation in terms of the number of Arctic troops.

Keywords: Arctic, Norway, Sweden, USA, NATO, Troms, Finnmark, Lapland, "containment", Russia, ground forces

Introduction

The accession of Finland (April 4, 2023) and Sweden (March 7, 2024) to NATO significantly changed the situation in Northern Europe, on the continent as a whole and in the Arctic. However, many specific changes have not yet been clearly defined in terms of their content and consequences. Clarifying these issues as quickly and comprehensively as possible is particularly important for the security and defense of the Russian Federation: a series of military steps and plans in Northern Europe are aimed at increasing the effectiveness of "containment" of Russia. Its forced "counter-containment" has to be not only extremely effective and efficient, but also rational in terms of the volume of resources involved, especially human ones. One of the conditions for this is forecasting based on a clear understanding of the opponents' intentions, without which a proactive (rather than reactive) approach is impossible.

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It is important to achieve this in conditions when a new world order is emerging, especially in the Arctic. According to the author, it is reasonable to consider that the Global North largely begins with the Far North [1]. It is not only about territorial access to the Arctic (which is available to a small group of states), but also the ability to demonstrate influence and especially presence there. Both of these categories include a military component as support for political and trade-economic activity. Compared to previous eras, even the “Cold war”, the Arctic is becoming more accessible for development, taking into account technological advances and, in part, climate change. The geo-economic (considering the reserves of various natural resources) and geostrategic value of the Arctic Ocean is growing significantly.

The expansion of NATO to Finland and Sweden makes the logic of confrontation in the Far North even more apparent, and the development of basic rules for participation in it is far from complete [2]. An illustration of this is the attempts of “Western democracies” to cross the “red lines” of the Russian Federation, especially in the matter of military support for the Ukrainian authorities. The fact that Helsinki and Stockholm have officially joined NATO has acquired the same direction. They had a neutral status for a long time (since 1944 and 1814, respectively; after joining the EU in 1995, this status became conditional). The “link” between these two states naturally carries significant military-political value for the community of “Western democracies”. However, in practice, the “link” between Norway (a member of the bloc since its creation in 1949) and Sweden, which has just joined NATO, is no less valuable. The development and use of the armed forces (AF) of both Scandinavian states, directed in a coordinated manner and taking into account the interests of the elites of the “Western powers” (primarily the USA), will have a great influence on security of Northern Europe, the Arctic, and the world as a whole.

The doctrinal level of the USA and NATO as an institution is indicative. Official Washington is constantly improving its system of regional strategy guidelines for the Arctic. In a document with a 10-year planning horizon (until 2032) from October 2022, the White House emphasized the fact that the Russian Federation’s military potential in the Arctic Ocean has been growing over the decade¹ as a justification for actions according to the “come up and get ahead” scheme. The June 2024 strategy, which was developed not at the level of the US government as a whole, but by the Department of Defense, indicated the perception of Sweden and Finland as Arctic countries (despite the lack of coastline in the Arctic); thereby recognizing plans to actively use them in conjunction with Norway to “contain” the Russian Federation, specifically its Murmansk Oblast (referred to as the Kola Peninsula in the document²).

On July 9–11, 2024, a NATO summit was held in Washington, which was by no means ordinary in significance: it adopted a set of schemes for the Alliance’s presence in various parts of the world in the medium and long term. Linked to the accession of Sweden and Finland to the bloc,

¹ National Strategy for the Arctic Region. The White House. October 2022. URL: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/National-Strategy-for-the-Arctic-Region.pdf> (accessed 10 October 2024).

² Arctic strategy. US DoD. June 2024. URL: <https://media.defense.gov/2024/Jul/22/2003507411/-1/-1/0/DOD-ARCTIC-STRATEGY-2024.PDF> (accessed 10 October 2024).

paragraph 2 of the Washington Summit Declaration emphasized the importance of the Far North in NATO's strategic planning. Moreover, when discussing the consequences of the official accession of Stockholm and Helsinki for the Alliance, the factor of expanding activity in the Arctic Ocean was put ahead of that in the Baltic Sea ³. This is illogical from a geographical point of view (Sweden and Finland are located on the Baltic Sea, but do not have direct access to the Arctic Ocean), but it is strategically logical: the potential of two former conditionally neutral states is in demand as additional military cover for the North of Norway and the multilateral penetration into the Arctic that is being deployed from there.

The aim of this article is to examine the value of Norway and Sweden for the military-strategic activities and planning of NATO as an institution and the United States as its leading power. The methodological basis of the work was the theory of armed forces development. It considers the evolution of their organizational and staffing structure (primarily the creation, abolition and reorganization of military units) as an indicator of changes in the distribution of military resources, and thus in the priorities of foreign policy as a whole [3].

There is a noticeable increase in expert attention to the strategic activity of "Western democracies" in the Arctic Ocean. However, the body of research on these issues is significantly smaller than on the efforts of the EU and NATO member states in the Indo-Pacific region [4; 5; 6]. In the context of growing confrontation in Northern Europe and the Arctic, experts have focused primarily on studying the lines of the Russian Federation [7; 8], Norway [9], and the United States [10; 11]; there are also studies on Sweden and Finland joining the bloc [12]. However, the military-strategic "link" between Oslo and Stockholm in the changed realities and its value for the bloc have hardly been studied. The activities of NATO as an institution (rather than its specific member countries) in the Arctic Ocean have not yet been sufficiently examined [9]. This "bottleneck" is even more noticeable given the rapid and large-scale growth of the Alliance's power, especially when the transition to a new model of NATO forces began (from 2022) [13; 14].

Norway and the NATO grouping system. On the issue of the absence of FP in the Kingdom

One of the indicators that characterizes the Alliance's plans for a specific member state located on NATO's eastern borders is the timing and scale (in dynamics) of the activation of the Forward Presence (FP) forces. In essence, this is a multilateral investment in the security and defense of the recipient state and, at the same time, a scheme to ensure the long-term presence of the contributing countries on its territory. The political significance of this is even greater than the military one. This rule arose and worked primarily for the bloc's member states in Eastern Europe. The main form of FP presence is ground combat groups. All of these formations were multilateral, each had a "framework state" that provided the majority (usually from 40% to 80%) of troops and controlled them. The status of "framework state" was an attribute of belonging to the most capable

³ Washington Summit Declaration. NATO. URL: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_227678.htm (accessed 10 October 2024).

and influential “Western democracies” and having a particularly trusting relationship with the recipient state.

In January 2017, in accordance with the decisions of the Warsaw Summit (July 2016), one battalion tactical group (BTG) was deployed in Poland and in each of the Baltic republics⁴; at the same time, a US armored brigade was concentrated in all of these countries⁵. All these forces, known as enhanced Forward Presence (eFP), were deployed on a rotational basis. In the following five years, a network of headquarters (up to and including the corps level) was created in Eastern Europe for the prospective growth of the FP. It officially started in March 2022, with the Russian Federation Special Military Operation designated as the basis. The FP not only increased, but also spread geographically. Already in the spring of 2022, the network of combat groups was extended to the south (tailored Forward Presence, tFP): one such group (BTG level) was established in Slovakia, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria⁶; since the summer of 2022, a US airborne brigade was also stationed there⁷.

Since June 2022, plans to increase the existing eFP combat groups began to be outlined. It was gradually determined that at least two formations would be increased to brigade size (5–7 battalions): in Lithuania (the “framework state” — Germany) and in Latvia (Canada with the leading role). Two other multinational units (in Poland and Estonia, with the United States and the United Kingdom playing a leading role) were significantly reinforced with BTGs⁸ (which did not exclude their further growth). At the same time, the approaches of Berlin and Ottawa to the formation of units differed. The German scheme assumed that almost the entire brigade (except for the existing multinational BTG) would consist only of Bundeswehr units, would receive its (not NATO’s) name (42nd Tank Brigade), and would be deployed on a permanent (rather than rotational) basis. The unit would consist of 5.0 thousand people, including 4.8 thousand military personnel and 0.2 thousand civilian employees⁹. Assuming that the contribution of Germany’s partners, including Norway, to staffing the existing BTG will remain unchanged (a total of 0.6 thousand military personnel as of June 2022¹⁰), the Bundeswehr will contribute 4.4 thousand people to its 42nd Tank Brigade in Lithuania, about 90% of the total number of the unit. The Canadian plan was

⁴ NATO’s military presence in the east of the Alliance. NATO. 2024. URL: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_136388.htm (accessed 10 October 2024).

⁵ Warsaw Summit Communiqué. NATO. URL: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_133169.htm (accessed 10 October 2024).

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Fact sheet — U.S. Defense Contributions to Europe. US DoD. URL: <https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/3078056/fact-sheet-us-defense-contributions-to-europe/> (accessed 10 October 2024).

⁸ NATO’s military presence in the east of the Alliance. NATO. 2024. URL: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_136388.htm (accessed 10 October 2024).

⁹ Bundeswehr in Litauen: in großen Schritten zur deutschen Kampfbrigade. 6.11.2023. BMVg. URL: <https://www.bundeswehr.de/de/aktuelles/meldungen/bundeswehr-litauen-grosse-schritte-deutsche-kampfbrigade> (accessed 10 October 2024).

¹⁰ NATO’s Forward Presence. NATO. June 2022. URL: https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2022/6/pdf/2206-factsheet_efp_en.pdf (accessed 10 October 2024).

based on the assumption that the FP brigade in Latvia would remain multinational: Ottawa's own contribution would be up to 2.2 thousand soldiers and officers, i.e. about 40–50% of the estimated number. Thus, Germany chose the role of the dominant (almost the only) recruiter, while Canada continues to be the "framework state". The estimated dates for the full staffing of the brigades are 2027 for the German-led brigade and 2026 for the Canadian-led brigade¹¹. Thus, specific schemes were defined for "Western democracies" in their desire to assume the role of security providers for a specific partner, and in many ways already for a region (in this case, the Baltic states) within NATO's area of responsibility.

Two trends in the development of NATO's FP forces since 2022 — the expansion (albeit initially to the south) and the build-up of existing groups (up to the brigade level) — raised the question of their manifestation already in Northern Europe. Initially, this only applied to Norway. On the one hand, *de jure*, FPs were not deployed on its territory. The Kingdom demonstrated self-sufficiency in the sphere of security and defense, based on the experience of the previous Cold War [15] (there were no foreign / allied forces in the country, unlike, for example, Germany). On the other hand, a presence similar to the FP in northern Norway was established by the United States in its national capacity in the autumn of 2016, i.e. in parallel with NATO's decisions to deploy eFP battle groups. In June 2018, the US contingent increased from 330 to 700 people, i.e. the "core" of the BTG¹². Moreover, these were not ground forces (army) units, but Marine Corps (MC) units. The White House was objectively more interested in this presence than Oslo, as it urgently needed cooperation along the lines of the armed forces to create a significant American Arctic force. In other words, the US urgently needed Norway not only to gain another outlet to the Arctic Ocean (in addition to the existing ones, especially through its own state of Alaska), but also to learn from its experience. In this regard, D. Trump's decision to withdraw forces from northern Norway in September 2020 was illogical¹³ (this was largely due to dissatisfaction with Oslo's advanced cooperation with Berlin, the main target of criticism in the Euro-Atlantic community by the 45th US president) [9, p. 132–133].

The decision of the Biden administration (since January 2021) to return to northern Norway is indicative. Already on March 31 in Washington, and on April 16, 2021 in Oslo, the White House signed an agreement with E. Solberg's administration on the joint use by the United States of four military facilities in the Kingdom: the Rygge Air Force Base (Østfold County), Sola (Rogaland), Harstad-Narvik/Evenes (Nordland) and the Ramsund Naval Port (Finnmark)¹⁴. The last two were

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² US to double number of Marines in Norway amid Russia tensions. URL: <https://edition.cnn.com/2018/06/12/politics/us-marines-norway-russia-tensions/index.html> (accessed 10 October 2024).

¹³ U.S. Pulls 700 Marines Out of Norway. 7.08.2020. URL: <https://www.lifeinnorway.net/u-s-pulls-700-marines-out-of-norway/> (accessed 10 October 2024).

¹⁴ U.S.-Norway Supplementary Defense Cooperation Agreement (SDCA). US State Department. URL: <https://www.state.gov/u-s-norway-supplementary-defense-cooperation-agreement-sdca/> (accessed 10 October 2024).

located in northern Norway, with Ramsund being especially valuable as the largest naval base in the region¹⁵. The Storting ratified the agreement in June 2022, already under J.G. Støre's administration, and it was applied from the moment of signing¹⁶. In February 2024, Washington and Oslo adopted an additional protocol to the 2021 agreement, which expanded the list of facilities with access for the United States by another 8 bases of the Kingdom's troops¹⁷ (12 in total). Among them, the following locations in northern Norway are worth noting: for the Air Force — Andøy (Nordland County), Bardufoss (Troms); for the Army — Setermøen (Troms) and a mountain facility in Osmarka near Evenes Air Base (Nordland). Thus, the US Armed Forces received the right to use 6 bases in northern Norway for all major types of troops. This laid the foundation for the strategic penetration of the US into the Western Arctic from this direction; Norway itself significantly increased its role as one of the most valuable partners for official Washington.

Earlier, in December 2023, similar agreements with the White House were concluded by Finland (US access to 15 military bases, including 5 in the Far North) and Sweden (17 facilities, including 4 in the northern part of the Kingdom)¹⁸. Moreover, this result was achieved with Stockholm even before its entry into NATO (March 2024). In turn, two agreements in 2023 with former conditionally neutral countries of Northern Europe created a favorable background for signing an additional protocol with Norway in February 2024. This became one of the first examples of how the United States ensured the functioning of the "link" between regional players, especially Norway and Sweden, in its own interests.

The common feature of the US presence in northern Norway in 2016–2020 and since 2021 was that these were bilateral (intergovernmental) agreements. However, the scheme from the first half of the 2020s was much more advantageous for the White House: it provided flexibility in choosing the volume of troops at a particular moment, allowed for the free deployment of not only the Marine Corps, but also the Air Force, Army, and other components of the Navy. Geographically, the facilities with US access in northern Norway had important features. The range of facilities and their distribution provided the White House with a diverse and broad base for strategic penetration into the deep regions of the Western Arctic. The bases used by the US Armed Forces were mainly located not in Finnmark, a province bordering Russia, but in Tromsø and Nordland, further away from it. Accordingly, the US forces were located in the operational depth (several

¹⁵ Ramsund. Forsvaret. 2024. URL: <https://www.forsvaret.no/om-forsvaret/tjenestesteder/ramsund> (accessed 10 October 2024).

¹⁶ Agreement between the United States of America and Norway. Signed at Washington and Oslo March 31 and April 16, 2021. Entered into force June 17, 2022. US State Department. 2022. URL: <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/22-617-Norway-Defense-SDCA-Ready-for-Review.pdf> (accessed 10 October 2024).

¹⁷ New Agreement Gives US Access to Four New Military Areas in the North. 7.02.2024. URL: <https://www.highnorthnews.com/en/new-agreement-gives-us-access-four-new-military-areas-north> (accessed 10 October 2024).

¹⁸ New Agreement Gives US Access to Four New Military Areas in the North. URL: <https://www.highnorthnews.com/en/new-agreement-gives-us-access-four-new-military-areas-north> (accessed 10 October 2024).

hundred kilometers from the borders of Russia), having the time and flexibility to manoeuvre if necessary to redeploy closer to the Murmansk Oblast.

The newly deployed US presence in northern Norway was not *de jure* connected with the NATO FP system. At the same time, the Kingdom itself was a rare example of a NATO member state that was simultaneously located in the forward part of the area of responsibility and participated in the staffing of the FP outside its territory, and even at a noticeable distance. Since its creation (2017), Norwegian units have been involved in the rotational staffing of the eFP battle group in Lithuania (the “framework state” is Germany). As of October 2020, the Kingdom’s contribution amounted to 120 military personnel¹⁹, as of February 2022 — 150 personnel²⁰, as of June 2022 — almost 190 soldiers and officers²¹, i.e. it has grown by 1.5 times with the prospect of remaining at this level. This was a mechanized troop with tanks, and since 2022, support components have been added²². At the time of the NATO Madrid Summit (June 2022), Norway’s contribution to the eFP battlegroup amounted to 0.8% of the total number of its armed forces (23.5 thousand military personnel)²³. For Oslo, the burden was by no means insignificant, given the need for rotation (which required reserving 3–4% of the armed forces). The dominant part of the contribution to the FP staffing was made by the “old” member states (which joined the Alliance before 1990); Norway was not exception to this rule. This, coupled with the already noted lack of the FP in Norway itself, further emphasized the viability of this small state. The Kingdom regarded its participation in the eFP activities in Lithuania as a contribution to its own security — from the south, from the Baltic Sea.

In the NATO grouping system, the FP represented fully combat-ready vanguards of the main forces, deployed to the eastern limits of the area of responsibility. Moreover, the bulk of the troops stationed near them were formations of the national armed forces of the Alliance member states that bordered the Russian Federation. These units and formations gradually formed a single whole with the FP forces. The “old” European member states made a decisive contribution to the staffing of not only the FP, but also the main forces of the bloc’s groups [13, pp. 1–2]. The latter consisted primarily of the rapid reaction forces (NATO Response Force, NRF). In conjunction with Germany and the Netherlands, Norway participated in the formation of the NRF as part of its rotation in 2015, overtime (at the initiative of Germany) in 2019, and again in 2023, each time for a calendar year. Thus, in 2019, official Oslo sent mechanized units and combat aviation to the extremely high

¹⁹ NATO’s Enhanced Forward Presence. NATO. October 2020. URL: https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2020/10/pdf/2010-factsheet_efp_en.pdf (accessed 10 October 2024).

²⁰ NATO’s Enhanced Forward Presence. NATO. February 2022. URL: https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2022/2/pdf/2202-factsheet_efp_en.pdf (accessed 10 October 2024).

²¹ NATO’s Forward Presence. NATO. June 2022. URL: https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2022/6/pdf/2206-factsheet_efp_en.pdf (accessed 10 October 2024).

²² Ibid.

²³ Defence Expenditure of NATO Countries (2014–2024). Brussels: NATO, 2024, p. 13.

combat readiness formation (“core”) of the NRF²⁴. Since 2022, the basis of the New NATO Force Model (NNFM) has been deployed on the basis of the NRF. According to this model, in the second half of the 2020s, the bloc should have more than 0.8 million military personnel under its command [13, pp. 1–3].

Norway regularly made a military contribution to the strategic preparations of the “Western democracies” both as an “old” member state and as a state bordering Russia on land. At the same time, only official Oslo possessed both of these characteristics in NATO. In this way, it demonstrated its high military capability in practice without excessive emphasis, which set important framework conditions for the development of political interaction with the circle of partners with whom Norway cooperated most closely. It should be emphasized that this was achieved by a country with a small population. The fact that Norway so consistently and clearly fulfilled its multifaceted obligations is all the more surprising given the size of its armed forces. In the second half of the 2010s, they did not exceed 21 thousand military personnel²⁵.

The FP and NRF (later NNFM) tracks primarily involved land forces. From north to south, these included:

- in Finnmark: a separate mechanized battalion (“Porsanger”), land border guards;
- in Tromsø: the main forces of the North Brigade (including armored and 2nd light battalions); the listed formations in northern Norway numbered about 4–4.5 thousand soldiers;
- in the rest of Norway: rapid response units (about 3.3 thousand), a battalion from the North Brigade (“Telemark” in the province of the same name), a guard battalion (in the capital).

In addition, coast guard forces were deployed along the coastline (25 thousand km), and a network of formations²⁶ of territorial defense forces — throughout the country²⁷. The burden of staffing NATO groups fell primarily on formations outside northern Norway; units from the North Brigade were also occasionally involved in a limited manner.

The disposition of the Norwegian troops is indicative: the vanguard is in Finnmark, which borders the Russian Federation, and the strongest group is further away, in Tromsø. Accordingly, the US access plan basically replicated that of the Kingdom’s own forces, especially in northern Norway. The presented deployment of forces was in line with NATO tactics: reserving capabilities for a sudden strike from the depths (in this case, by forces in Tromsø) in a chosen direction in case

²⁴ Germany steps up to lead NATO high readiness force. NATO. URL: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_161796.htm?selectedLocale=en (accessed 10 October 2024).

²⁵ Defence Expenditure of NATO Countries (2014-2024). Brussels: NATO, 2024, p. 13.

²⁶ A small part of the regular staff consisted of permanent personnel (mostly officers and non-commissioned officers), the rest were reservists (up to 30 thousand), who participated in training sessions from time to time. See: Norwegian Armed Forces in transition. Strategic defence review by the Norwegian chief of defence. Abridged version. Oslo, 2015, pp. 15, 17, 23.

²⁷ Norwegian Armed Forces in transition. Strategic defence review by the Norwegian chief of defence. Abridged version. Oslo, 2015, pp. 15, 17, 23.

of a crisis. This practice was the basis for the use of permanent Alliance groups: thus, the NRF (II strategic echelon) was numerically significantly superior to the FP (I echelon); this noticeable difference was preserved in the conditions of the transition to the NNFM.

The Russian Federation's SMO and the nature of NATO's build-up of power (in particular, the development of the Forward Land Forces (FLF) concept as the basis for the FP [13]) have shown that the ground forces are confidently regaining the leading role in planning and conducting combat operations. This required not only increasing their numbers, but also making them more inter-service. This involves incorporating additional units from other branches of the armed forces into ground forces: for example, including special operations forces, UAV for various purposes, air defense forces and, if necessary, boats, as well as amphibious ones, in a tank or mechanized brigade. The reorganization should significantly increase the functional capabilities of ground formations. In parallel, the branches of the armed forces operating on land and in one of the adjacent environments were dynamically developing: airborne (land/air), marines and coastal guard (land/sea).

Norway had sufficient opportunities for this in terms of quality, but a quantitative increase in the ground forces was required. Official Oslo could convert this into an even more significant increase in political influence and value for NATO, the United States and Alliance partners in general, using its military resources as a component of already multilateral forms of presence in the Arctic, with support from northern Norway. The implementation of this trend could lead to the Kingdom of Norway's political weight within the community of "Western democracies" becoming much greater than that of a typical small member state.

Norway's Troms and Finnmark: important and requiring additional military reinforcement

In the mid-2010s, Norway had plans to disband the North Brigade ²⁸, but then decided to keep and strengthen it. This reflected how the perception of the "Russian threat" was evolving among the establishment in Oslo. It is significant that measures to increase military power were thought out and implemented when the armed conflict in eastern Ukraine entered a "smoldering" state (since February 2015, after Minsk-2) and long before the start of Russia's Special Military Operation (February 2022). This indicates that, not without the influence of the United States and NATO partners in general, the Norwegian authorities changed their subjective perception of "Russian threat", getting "into the groove" of confrontation.

In this case, the Kingdom was performing a task that was fundamentally important for the community of "Western democracies" as a whole. Norway, primarily the county of Troms, and to a lesser extent Finnmark and Nordland, were turning into a key springboard for the strategic penetration of non-regional NATO member states into the Arctic [9]. No other Alliance member state with a territorial sector in the Arctic Ocean (Denmark, Canada, the United States) is so conveniently located geographically and, moreover, is ready to provide its territories and infrastructure for

²⁸ Ibid.

multilateral military-strategic activity in the Arctic Ocean. The White House gets the opportunity to supplement its presence in the Arctic based on Alaska using Northern Norway. This allows “containing” the Russian Federation along the eastern and western borders of its possessions in the Arctic, in theory forcing Russia to scatter its forces and become exhausted.

At the beginning of the 2020s, the North Brigade was the only one not only in Norway, but also in the “Western democracies” as a whole, permanently stationed in the Far North. In June 2022, the United States created the 11th Airborne Division (AD) in Alaska consisting of two brigades: the 1st Infantry (former Striker) and the 2nd Airmobile (both were transferred from the 25th Division, located in Hawaii)²⁹. The decision symbolized the full inclusion of the United States and NATO member states in the “race” to significantly increase Arctic forces. As demonstrated by bilateral and multinational exercises in the Arctic, Northern Norway was the most priority area for their use.

There were several ways to build up forces there and/or in the interests of the sub-region with the aim of providing additional military cover. The first option was to deploy military forces from non-regional (non-Northern European) NATO member states there. In the spring of 2023, the development of measures for the transcontinental transfer of units of the 2nd Airmobile Brigade of the 11th US Airborne Division from Alaska to Northern Norway began³⁰. At the same time, the United States Marine Corps continued to develop its skills there; its capabilities have not diminished compared to the late 2010s, when there was a rotational BTG in Tromsø and Finnmark. All of these measures were carried out not only as part of NATO exercises, but also with the support of permanent access to the six Royal Navy bases located there. The 11th Airborne Division, like the Marine Corps, is confidently capable of deploying 1–2 BTGs with support components in Northern Norway. These troops represent the equivalent of the “core” of a mixed brigade, which may also include units of British marines, German paratroopers and especially mountain riflemen: the latter, from the 23rd Mountain Brigade of the Bundeswehr, regularly participated in NATO exercises in northern Norway³¹. All the listed troops were classified as “light”, highly mobile (with transport for various environments), but with almost no armored vehicles or tanks. This can be partially compensated for by storing US tanks in Norway (a traditional scheme for them to have military bases with partners in Europe for possible troop deployment), but only fully through cooperation with the “heavy” troops of the Kingdom.

²⁹ Army Forms 11th Airborne Division Amid Focus on Arctic Warfare. Military.com. 6.06.2022. URL: <https://www.military.com/daily-news/2022/06/06/army-forms-11th-airborne-division-amid-focus-arctic-warfare.html> (accessed 10 October 2024).

³⁰ Statement of general Christopher G. Cavoli, United States Army. United States European Command. DoD. URL: <https://armedservices.house.gov/sites/republicans.armedservices.house.gov/files/04.26.23%20Cavoli%20Statement%20v2.pdf> (accessed 10 October 2024).

³¹ See: Was passiert am nördlichsten Punkt Europas? BMVg. 4.03.2024. URL: <https://www.bundeswehr.de/de/aktuelles/schwerpunkte/quadriga-2024-nato-landstreitkraefte-ueben-buendnisfall/was-passiert-am-noerdlichsten-punkt-europas-5752476> (accessed 10 October 2024).

The second option is to increase Norway's military potential, especially its land forces. In the first half of the 2020s, the North Brigade was reorganized. The number of military battalions in its composition increased from three to four. Previously, only one was "heavy" (armored), but now all of them became so: the 2nd Light and Telemark became mechanized again; in addition, the 4th (mechanized) battalion was formed. Furthermore, the technical capabilities of the engineer battalion were increased — in essence, it became an assault battalion. Most of the units (except for the Telemark battalion) were compactly concentrated in Troms county: in the areas of Bardufoss (headquarters, most of the support formations), Skjold (engineer and 2nd battalions), and Setermoen (armored and 4th mechanized battalions)³². The US military gained access to bases in Bardufoss and Setermoen under agreements in 2021 and 2024, ensuring future growth in military and political cooperation between Washington and Oslo.

The transformation of the North Brigade into a heavy brigade, i.e., the decision to equip it with heavy military equipment (primarily tanks, as well as infantry fighting vehicles, armored personnel carriers, and artillery), seems paradoxical at first glance: Northern Norway is predominantly tundra (swampy areas) and mountainous terrain. Logically, "light" troops should be used there. However, even a small number of armored vehicles, especially tanks, if their use is prepared (especially in engineering terms), can lead to quick and noticeable results in combat operations in the Far North. The experience of the rapid Petsamo-Kirkenes Operation of the WPRA's Karelian Front (October 7–29, 1944) is noteworthy. It resulted in the liberation of the occupied territories of the Soviet Arctic and part of Northern Norway. The Front conducted a key offensive with light rifle corps (the only ones in the Red Army operating here), but the KV-1 regiment (i.e., heavy tanks, not even medium T-34s) proved to be an extremely effective striking force [16, p. 407]. For these reasons, the transformation of the North Brigade into a heavier unit can appropriately be viewed as a tactic aimed at increasing the effectiveness of the functions of "containment" and "repulsion" of the Russian Federation in the Murmansk direction.

By 2025, the reorganization of the North Brigade was largely completed. Against this backdrop, the Norwegian Ministry of Defense outlined further plans in April 2024 to expand its ground forces (their full implementation is scheduled for 2032). The number of brigades is to increase from one to three:

- *The Finnmark Brigade is being established in the province of the same name.* It already had a separate mechanized battalion, Porsanger, a garrison in Sør-Varanger (a border detachment in the easternmost municipality), and territorial defense units. Additionally, it is planned to form and deploy a motorized infantry ("medium") and artillery battalion; a brigade headquarters and support components (rear, medical, and engineering); and a

³² See: Norwegian Armed Forces in transition... P. 15, 17; Brigade Nord. Forsvaret. 2024. URL: <https://www.forsvaret.no/om-forsvaret/organisasjon/haeren/brigade-nord> (accessed 10 October 2024).

military police troop³³. Considering that, at least for now, the brigade has only declared two regular battalions (Porsanger and the new motorized infantry battalion), it is reasonable to assume that another 1–2 battalions will be composed of territorial defense units in Finnmark. Publicly stated objectives include increasing its “core” personnel, intensifying reservist training, and significantly upgrading its technical capabilities, particularly with anti-tank defense systems³⁴.

- *The North (Nord) Brigade, as a “heavy” brigade, will continue to be stationed in Troms County*³⁵. It is reasonable to assume that three of its four battalions (armored, 2nd, and 4th mechanized) will remain, but Telemark will be withdrawn. A new battalion will likely be created to replace the departing one: it may be either regular (most likely) or made up from territorial defense forces;
- *The South (Sør) Brigade will be formed*. The details about it are less specific. It is intended to consolidate troops, including newly created ones, in the southern part of the country. It is logical that the Telemark Battalion stationed there will be reassigned from the North Brigade to the South Brigade. The latter should serve as a general reserve and be the Kingdom’s primary contributor to NATO’s permanent groups: primarily the eFP battlegroup in Lithuania and the NNFM as the basis for Oslo’s presence in the Baltic states.

The estimated strength of a fully equipped brigade is up to 5 thousand military personnel. Based on these provisions, North will remain a full brigade; Finnmark and, most likely, South will probably be incomplete in terms of the number of regular troops, but will also include territorial defense forces.

In terms of developing its ground forces, Norway is following the path already taken by the armed forces of several NATO member countries in Eastern Europe, primarily Poland, Lithuania, and Estonia. Lithuania, with a population half that of Norway (2.8 million versus 5.5 million), increased the number of ground brigades from one to three (two full and one cadre brigades) in 2014–2022. The size of the Vilnius Armed Forces increased from 8,600 to 15,700 troops, significantly less than Norway’s figure even as of the early 2020s (20,600 in 2020)³⁶.

Compared to this group of NATO member countries in Eastern Europe, Oslo only began implementing a significant increase in its armed forces in the early 2020s. This position, along with the fact that one of the three brigades would be oriented toward deployment outside the Kingdom, once again demonstrated its self-sufficiency and actual confidence in its own strength, despite the fact that it shares a border with Russia. This reveals a difference between the declared

³³ Norwegian MoD Stresses Importance of Enough People in Northern Norway. 25.04.2024. URL: <https://www.highnorthnews.com/en/norwegian-mod-stresses-importance-enough-people-northern-norway> (accessed 10 October 2024).

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Defence Expenditure of NATO Countries (2014–2024), p. 13.

(very high) and actual (significantly more limited) sensitivity of the authorities in Oslo to the “Russian threat”. This is confirmed by the fact that the significant increase in the Norwegian Armed Forces did not begin in 2022 (supposedly as a reaction to the Russia’s SMO), but already in 2021, having been prepared at the turn of the decade: in other words, it was fundamentally not a reactive (in response to the “threat” from Russia), but a proactive process.

While in the second half of the 2010s, the Kingdom’s Armed Forces numbered around 20,000 soldiers and officers, in 2021–2022 — 23,000 (an increase of about 15%), and in 2023–2024, they were continuing to increase gradually to 24–24.5 thousand military personnel (Table 1).

Table 1

Dynamics of the number of armed forces of the countries³⁷ of Northern Europe³⁸

Year / country	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023 ³⁹	2024
Denmark	16.9	17.2	17.3	16.7	17.2	16.3	16.9	16.9	16.7	17.3	17.3
Norway	21.0	20.9	20.5	20.2	20.2	19.2	20.6	23.1	23.5	24.0	24.3
Finland	32.5	31.0	31.3	31.0	31.8	31.1	31.3	31.1	30.5	31.0	30.8
Sweden	14.7	15.0	15.0	15.9	17.8	19.1	20.1	21.1	20.9	21.5	23.1

On the one hand, already in the early 2020s, the Norwegian Armed Forces increased by approximately 3,000 personnel, or the equivalent of an incomplete brigade. This allows for the reorganization of the ground forces into three brigades. On the other hand, this process faces obstacles, some of which are not obvious. The share of regular military personnel in Norway’s total population ranges from 0.4% (approximately 0.45% by 2025) to 0.5%⁴⁰. For NATO member states, whose armed forces have expanded most rapidly, these figures by the mid-2020s were over 0.5% for Poland (with a projected increase to 0.75%) and almost 0.65% for Lithuania (which also intends to exceed to 0.75%). However, as already noted, Norway not only borders Russia but is also an “old” NATO member state. Among them, this figure is significantly lower. For example, the United States has 0.4%, France — 0.3%, Germany — less than 0.25%, and the United Kingdom — 0.2%. Similar figures were observed in other “old” member states: for example, the Netherlands has around 0.25%. Given Norway’s membership in both groups of NATO member states and the country’s high level of social welfare, it is logical to assume that in the medium term, Oslo’s Armed Forces will be around 0.5% of the population (27–28 thousand military personnel), which would allow for the formation of two new brigades, albeit incomplete. At the same time, Norway, unlike some NATO partners (in particular, Germany), is unlikely to transfer some of its military personnel from other branches of the armed forces to the ground forces. The Royal Navy (primarily frigates and submarines, support vessels, marines, and aviation) and the Royal Air Force, with their unique experience operating in the natural and climatic conditions of the Far North, are in high demand as one of the foundations of the multilateral groupings of “Western democracies”, intended to oper-

³⁷ Iceland is not included in the table due to its lack of AF.

³⁸ Made by the author on the basis of: Defence Expenditure of NATO Countries (2014–2024). NATO, 2024, p. 13.

³⁹ For 2023 and 2024, the data is preliminary.

⁴⁰ From here on, the calculations are based on open data on population size and Defence Expenditure of NATO Countries (2014–2024). Brussels: NATO, 2024, p. 13.

ate in the deep waters of the Arctic Ocean. The scenario for overcoming these problems is improving training, equipment, and integrating territorial defense forces with regular troops.

Inevitably, questions arise about the technical equipment of troops (both existing and newly created formations). Oslo, given its capabilities, has been very active in supplying weapons and military equipment to the authorities in Kyiv: in 2023, it transferred eight Leopard 2 tanks ⁴¹; in 2024, it purchased another 14 of these tanks jointly with Denmark; it was among the first countries to provide 6 F-16 aircraft ⁴². The list of these countries is interesting: in addition to Norway, it includes Belgium, Denmark and the Netherlands (which also actively participated in the supply of tanks and armored vehicles). With their decision, this group of small, “old” NATO member states emphasized both their tough stance toward Russia and their self-sufficiency in terms of the strength (by national standards) of their arsenals. In practice, however, the Norwegian Armed Forces, like many “Western democracies”, experienced a shortage of military equipment, primarily ground-based, especially given plans to significantly increase their forces. In financial terms, the proposed acquisitions are feasible, given Norway’s core expenditures: \$7–8 billion per year in the early 2020s, with potential for growth; 28-29% was spent on weapons and military equipment ⁴³. The issue of physical acquisition of weapons and military equipment is more complex: the Western European military industry, in particular the German one, needs time to significantly increase production, the required volumes can be achieved in the late 2020s. This factor has been taken into account in the plans for the development of the armed forces, especially the army, until 2032 (a period starting in 2024, not 5 or 10 years, but an intermediate value). Moreover, diversification of importers is not ruled out. If Oslo decides to renew its submarine fleet (the most problematic area in the development of the Navy) through purchases from Germany (Project 212CD submarines ⁴⁴), then for tanks, it is considering not only Germany (the existing Leopard 2), but also South Korea (K2 Black Panther) (or both of these options). The implementation of these measures will allow Norway to increase its value to NATO, the United States, and its Alliance partners, becoming, by the standards of “Western democracies”, an “Arctic power”, ready and capable of exerting multi-lateral influence in the Arctic Ocean. As already noted, a significant increase in military power, specifically in the case of Norway, given its geostrategic position, could lead to a much greater increase in political influence within the Euro-Atlantic community.

⁴¹ Norway with comprehensive tanks-package to Ukraine. Government.no. URL: <https://www.regjeringen.no/en/aktuelt/brusselnyhet/id2963053/> (accessed 10 October 2024).

⁴² Norway will donate F-16s to Ukraine this year. Government.no. URL: <https://www.regjeringen.no/en/aktuelt/norgevil-donere-f-16-til-ukraina-i-lopet-av-aret/id3048341/> (accessed 10 October 2024).

⁴³ Defence Expenditure of NATO Countries (2014–2024). P. 8, 14.

⁴⁴ Rüstungskoooperation zwischen Deutschland und Norwegen. Beschaffung zweier U-Boote für die Bundeswehr unter Vertrag. BMVg. URL: <https://www.bundeswehr.de/resource/blob/5109066/e3a362cf0b87ca7cb68b3f8a41e607ff/20-beschaffung-zweier-u-boote-fuer-die-bundeswehr-unter-vertrag-data.pdf> (accessed 10 October 2024).

Prospects for Sweden's military presence in Finland

The task of providing additional military cover for northern Norway can be solved by a third option, which complements the other two: increasing the presence in Finnish Lapland, which borders northern Norway, especially with troops already stationed in Sweden. Immediately upon Stockholm's official accession to NATO, it began negotiations with Helsinki regarding the future deployment of Swedish contingents in its territory. They are to become part of the new FP combat group, this time in Finland⁴⁵. For the bloc's FP, this would not simply mean expanding northward (as a demonstration of this capability by the network-centric group, the Alliance as a whole), but would also allow for strategic linkage of troops in Northern Norway with the eFP and national armed forces in the Baltic states and Poland.

For Sweden, this will become an important tactic in realizing its leadership (power) ambitions in Northern Europe, allowing it to legally (under the NATO flag) return militarily to Finnish territory, which was part of the possessions of the official Stockholm from the 10th century until 1809. Furthermore, the Kingdom of Sweden presents its plans as an investment in the security and defense of neighboring Norway. The Swedish presence in Finland is expected to take two main forms. The first one is staff personnel. Two NATO directorates are being established in the possessions of the official Helsinki:

- Command North (to lead Alliance forces in the part of Europe of the same name [14, p. 4]) in Mikkeli in southern Finland;
- Headquarters (prospectively, divisional level) for Forward Land Forces, stationed in the north, in Lapland (in Rovaniemi or Sodankylä)⁴⁶. Sweden will assume the key burden here, initially allocating 20–50 officers⁴⁷.

Another type is military presence. At the initial announcement stage (late August — September 2024), there were numerous uncertainties regarding the specifics. Plans were announced to deploy a “heavy” (armored or, less likely, mechanized) NATO FP brigade, with Sweden playing a leading role. It has already been noted that such units under the Alliance's flag are being deployed only in Lithuania (with Germany as the leading contributor) and Latvia (with Canada as the “framework state”). Thus, Stockholm, with significantly fewer human resources than Berlin or Ottawa, is striving to join the ranks of the most influential “Western democracies” and to become the key one in Northern Europe.

Several media outlets, citing an authorized leak in the Finnish periodical “*Ilta-lehti*”, suggested the Mikkeli region in the south of the country as the proposed location for the FLF formation. However, it seems more likely that the unit will be stationed in Lapland. The deployment of Swe-

⁴⁵ Sweden Announces Ambition to Lead NATO Force in Finland. URL: <https://www.highnorthnews.com/en/sweden-announces-ambition-lead-nato-force-finland> (accessed 10 October 2024).

⁴⁶ NATO headquarters will appear near Russian border. URL: <https://lenta.ru/news/2024/09/18/nedaleko-ot-granitsy-s-rossiy-poyavyatsya-shtaby-nato/> (accessed 10 October 2024).

⁴⁷ Sweden Announces Ambition to Lead NATO Force in Finland. URL: <https://www.highnorthnews.com/en/sweden-announces-ambition-lead-nato-force-finland> (accessed 10 October 2024).

dish and NATO forces in Finland is largely aimed at allowing the country's armed forces to focus their attention on the south, near the borders with the Leningrad Oblast and the Republic of Karelia. Accordingly, the multilateral forces, with Sweden making the leading contribution, will have to take on an increased burden north of the borders with the Murmansk Oblast. The latter is the primary target for "containment" from northern Norway [7]. The FLF command will be located in Lapland; logically, the Forward Land Forces (the first and currently the only unit under the command of this headquarters) will also be concentrated nearby, rather than hundreds of kilometers away in southern Finland. This scenario was supported by the practice of deploying Swedish units specifically to northern Finland: this has been practiced since at least autumn 2022 during bilateral⁴⁸ and multilateral exercises (e.g., Nordic Response 2024)⁴⁹. At that time, Swedish contingents were placed under the temporary command of Finland; now, the subordination situation is reversed.

The next question concerns the authorized and actual sizes of the FLF combat group. The brigade is a formation of 4,000–5,000 military personnel; however, the initial plan is to permanently deploy only one BTG or a reinforced one, i.e., 800–1,000 soldiers and officers⁵⁰. For the remaining units, heavy military equipment (primarily), weapons and equipment will be permanently stored, but they themselves will be located outside Finland, quickly deploying here if necessary. The current BTG and the brigade as a whole will be multinational in composition, with the participation of the USA, Great Britain, possibly Germany, and definitely Norway⁵¹. Thus, its troops will contribute to the staffing of two FP combat groups (in Lithuania and Finland), in the latter case ensuring a "link" with the grouping of the royal troops in Tromsø and Finnmark. However, Sweden will certainly be the "framework state" for the FLF brigade. Taking into account not only the wishes of Helsinki, but also the practical capabilities of the official Stockholm forces, a plan for a "heavy" brigade was determined.

In the mid-2010s, Swedish troops were small in number (approximately 15,000 soldiers, Table 1); this primarily applied to the ground forces: *de jure*, they consisted of regiments, but *de facto*, most of them had only one battalion. At the end of the 2010s, Stockholm began to gradually increase its armed forces — by about 1.5 times, to 23,000 troops in 2024 (Table 1). Transitioning to NATO standards, Sweden began creating brigades from battalions, the first of which are still being tested. The capabilities of the Swedish armored vehicle brigade (Strv 122 tanks based on the Leopard 2A5 and CV 90 infantry fighting vehicles) are being tested in the SMO Zone by the 21st Mechanized Brigade of the Ukrainian AF, which is equipped with these vehicles.

⁴⁸ 800 Swedish troops under Finnish command in northern Finland. Swedish Armed Forces. 30.08.2022. URL: <https://www.forsvarsmakten.se/en/news/2022/08/800-swedish-troops-under-finnish-command-in-northern-finland/> (accessed 10 October 2024).

⁴⁹ Nordic Response 2024. Norwegian Armed Forces. 14.05.2024. URL: <https://www.forsvaret.no/en/exercises-and-operations/exercises/nr24> (accessed 10 October 2024).

⁵⁰ A NATO armored brigade will be stationed in Finland — Italehti. URL: <https://rossaprimavera.ru/news/fe8ab9bb> (accessed 10 October 2024).

⁵¹ Sweden Announces Ambition to Lead NATO Force in Finland. 17.09.2024. URL: <https://www.highnorthnews.com/en/sweden-announces-ambition-lead-nato-force-finland> (accessed 10 October 2024).

For these reasons, Stockholm, being interested in establishing a military presence in Finland, is ready to start with a “core” BTG in 2026⁵². Moreover, the Swedish Armed Forces will work to increase it to almost a full brigade (excluding the contribution of a number of “Western powers” and Norway). In the medium-term future, most or all of its units could be permanently based in Finnish Lapland. In this case, Stockholm would most likely choose the German staffing scheme for the FP Brigade: almost entirely Swedish military personnel (except for a number of units in the existing battalion), with a Swedish army number (not NATO), stationed permanently.

The solution to this task, which has not yet been declared, is seen as a significant incentive for the growth of the Swedish Armed Forces. This will demonstrate the specific image and practical benefits of militarization in the form of a presence in Finland as a former part of the Swedish Kingdom. Another motivating factor is the increase in forces in the Baltic Sea (through the Navy; significantly strengthening the garrison on the island of Gotland and troops in the south of the Kingdom). In general, the speed and, most importantly, the interim results of the increase in the armed forces are becoming an important criterion of effectiveness for NATO member states. In the mid-2010s, Sweden ranked 4th (last; Iceland was not included) among the Nordic countries in terms of the number of regular armed forces, while having the largest population (10.5 million versus 5.5–5.9 million for Denmark, Norway, and Finland). By the mid-2020s, Stockholm moved into third place, slightly behind Norway in second place and with Finland in first place showing no growth, as can be seen in Table 1. In the medium-term, and especially long-term, Sweden should emerge as a leader, given its combination of demographic potential and geopolitical ambitions.

Having joined NATO and following a pattern of intensifying confrontation with Russia, the Kingdom of Sweden is beginning to use its military potential as a key “filler” for Alliance groups in Northern Europe. Germany has chosen a similar approach, but at the level of the bloc as a whole, also announcing its intentions in advance [17]. Such practices greatly serve the interests of the United States, allowing it to rely on the resources of its continental European partners in “containing” Russia, while maintaining freedom of maneuver when using its national armed forces. Norway also stands to benefit significantly from the presence of Swedish troops in Finland, particularly Lapland: this provides additional support for Norway’s role as a “springboard” for “Western democracies” in realizing their Arctic aspirations. At the same time, the Swedish presence in northern Finland will bring Oslo no less military and, more importantly, political dividends than Stockholm itself. The latter indirectly invests in covering northern Norway from the south, increasing its value for NATO, the United States, and Alliance partners in the context of their plans to strategically penetrate the Arctic. Moreover, the growing presence of the Navy and Air Force here sets the framework for a noticeable increase in trade and economic activity, primarily by companies specializing in the extraction of hydrocarbons and natural resources in general.

⁵² Ibid.

Conclusion

The accession of Sweden and Finland to NATO and the deployment of Sweden's military forces on the territory of Finland, coupled with Norway's growing power, particularly in terms of ground forces, are important for the US and Alliance establishment. Measures to "contain" Russia have proven to be more effective, and the resources of the two Scandinavian countries are being used to create a powerful "springboard" for penetration into the Arctic Ocean and its deep waters. Its base is the Norwegian province of Troms. The ability to "contain" Russia in the Arctic, in many ways proactively, is emphasized.

First of all, it is noteworthy that NATO member countries are catching up with Russia in the number of Arctic troop units capable of operating on land, in coastal and island zones. Russia had the 61st Coast Guard Brigade and the 80th and 200th Separate Motorized Rifle Brigades (SMRBs). All of them are stationed in the Murmansk Oblast [7]. Some units of these three formations participated in the Special Military Operation, suffering inevitable losses, replenishing their numbers and gaining experience in large-scale combat: for example, the 200th Motorized Rifle Brigade received the title of Guards Brigade for its distinguished service in April 2023. In 2024, the process of expanding and reorganizing the 61st Brigade (as well as all other marine and coast guard brigades) into a division began, i.e., the equivalent of approximately two brigades. Thus, in the future, which has not yet been precisely defined (the timing of the completion of the Special Military Operation and the return of units to their permanent locations is also important), the Arctic forces grouping in the Western Arctic should have four brigades.

Until the early 2020s, "Western democracies" had the North Brigade from Norway, a reinforced battalion in Finnmark, and separate US MC units, i.e., less than 1.5 brigades. By the early 2030s, the "heavy" North Brigade will be supplemented by the "medium" Finnmark Brigade; another "heavy" brigade, with Sweden playing a leading role, will appear in Finnish Lapland. The United States, and to some extent other "Western powers", will be able to deploy "light" forces equivalent to at least a brigade (airborne units, marines, and mountain riflemen) in northern Norway. Accordingly, NATO member states are equalizing the potential of their Arctic forces with Russia (four operational brigades on each side), while maintaining the ability to further increase their forces in order to achieve superiority. This trend appears dangerous for international security, especially in the context of the emergence of a new world order. The growing power of the Arctic troops of Western countries, especially the United States, Norway, and Sweden, will be accompanied by a decrease in susceptibility to Russian forces in the Murmansk Oblast, to the point of an illusory perception of the ability to block them if necessary, thereby setting the conditions for more provocative steps towards Russia in the Western Arctic. This will become an important part of attempts to reduce the role of the Russian Federation in the Global North and to diminish the influence of the Global East in the Arctic Ocean.

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