

Leangkollen 2017

“Security in Northern Europe after Crimea, Brexit and the US Election”

A brief summary written by volunteers on the Conference

Opening Session at the Nobel Institute: Changing security dynamics

This year's Leangkollen conference, the 52nd one, held annually since the 1950's, was opened on February 13th by Secretary General of the Norwegian Atlantic Committee Kate Hansen Bundt and former minister of Defence and Chair of the board of the Norwegian Atlantic Committee Anne-Grete Strøm-Erichsen.

The backdrop was a very solemn one. 2016 has according to many experts been regarded as “annus horribilis” for the Western security environment. Thankfully, there is still peace in most of Europe, but power-politics and division has to an increasing extent made its mark upon our continent. The irony is striking, the conference starting off at the Nobel Peace Institute, and yet hopeful. We strive for peace nonetheless.

This was also reflected by the Norwegian Minister of Defence, Ine Eriksen Søreide, in her opening remarks: “Imagine that you woke up after a three-year hibernation”. You would likely not believe your own eyes: Crimea annexed by Russia, Britain leaving the EU, Donald Trump elected President of the United States, and tragically, Sweden beating Norway in the cross-country world cup.

The challenges we are facing are so severe that we must face them together. Atlantic or European division is simply not an option. Challenges are arising. A range of them were addressed at the Leangkollen Security Conference 2017.

Present for the following briefs and panel discussions, were a range of notable political and military heavy weights, each with their own unique background and approach.

Peter Hultqvist, current Swedish Minister of Defence, emphasized extending defence cooperation in the Nordics, particularly between Norway and Sweden.

The current backdrop necessitates increased bilateral cooperation between NATO members and NATO partner countries. Sweden is acutely aware of the current threat environment given its strategic position in the Baltic region, seeing a gradual increase in Russian military activity as well as the intensified introduction of new, improved Russian military hardware. This is a concern, and has led to a new orientation for Swedish security politics: Enhancing cooperation with Western countries, increasing budgets and operational readiness, as well as reintroducing conscription, mitigating recruitment issues in the Swedish Armed Forces. Clearly, Sweden is stepping up. We are living in an unstable world. Sweden will play its part to help mitigate that, according to Hultqvist.

Finland's Minister of Defence, Jussi Niniistö, emphasized several of the same aspects as Sweden. In Finland's perspective, Russia is utilizing a range of instruments to assert and increase its influence in a range of theatres. Further, Finland perceives the current order as unstable, the Middle East being the current ground zero for most of today's challenges. Finland currently holds the NORDEFSCO chairmanship, seeking to mitigate today's challenges partly by increasing the relevance of this organization through intensified Nordic cooperation. In parallel to this, Finland is reviewing its defence forces, looking to stay relevant in the 21st century.

James Appathurai further reflected on NATO's role, emphasizing its deterrent role, ever more important in 2017. NATO now has to deal with more actors and potential threats than before, increasingly difficult to counter. These include anti-access/area denial as well as cyber-attacks, posing challenges to a credible deterrence. Still, NATO has stepped up, taking a range of measures to counter Russia's rearmament.

According to Appathurai, Sweden and Finland can be seamlessly integrated into NATO, although the membership issue is something to be handled by these nations themselves. Extensive cooperation can still take place, membership or not.

Norway's perspective is an increasingly realist one, according to Secretary General Bundt: "We hang together, or we will be hanged alone", showcasing our view on NATO, and its increasing importance for a minor, yet wealthy, Atlantic nation.

In sum, NATO has not become any less relevant, and is everything but obsolete. In truth, the alliance is one of very few viable solutions to the emerging threat environment. Still, it cannot remain relevant without member states' prioritization of their Armed Forces, as dialogue comes from a position of strength. You either go somewhere, or run around in circles, according to the opening panel. We should naturally aim for the latter.

Russia's has vastly strengthened its ability to project power via information, according to Appathurai. This ability used to be quite primitive, thus finding little resonance for a very long time, but has evolved to the extent of asserting extensive political influence in the West. This must be countered. The primary battle of the coming time will be a battle of narratives, upholding trust in democratic institutions or failing to do so, with potentially devastating results.

Session II: Key players in transatlantic and European security after Brexit and Trump

Rarely has such an academic panel been assembled in Norway, as pointed out by Asle Toje moderator and well-known Norwegian academic.

It was time for the academic heavy-weights.

Heather Conley pointed out that nothing has really changed regarding US involvement in Europe since November 8th. And yet, everything is possibly changing with Trump's presidency. Still, you will hear the US calling for increasing European commitments, budgets and coherence, as has been the case for the last three decades. Even so, for now we do not know the administration's policies towards Russia. Thus, we are yet to understand whether there will be a change, potentially altering a continuous 70-year transatlantic relationship. Without a doubt, the last 25 years have been an anomaly, academically blamed on "poor professor Frank Fukuyama".

It is important to remember that burden-sharing is a misunderstood concept. We do not have obligations. Being part of an alliance is a privilege.

Constanze Steinzelmüller further elaborated on developments in Europe's primary financial engine. For decades, Germany has been talking reactively regarding security politics. German history definitely shapes German commitment to international law and multilateralism. This gives restraints.

Still, 1989 also gives Germany a moral obligation to support democratic movements in Ukraine. There can be no credible and legitimate foreign policy without domestic politics accordingly in order. Geopolitics is back, but Germany's approach would not be to pull up the

drawbridges. Germany lives off trade, and influence is projected via globalization and multilateralism.

Cold war nuclear dystopia had a profound effect on German thinking, shaping German scepticism, turning the country into a rather reluctant hegemon. In this position, it has had to face difficult decisions continuously, clearly stepping up to the challenges: A Foreign Ministry reform, a new white paper on defence, new procurement routines for defence materiel as well as increasing budgets are all shaping a more active German role. Still, providing the back bone does not really allow for opting out. This is something Germany has to consider, the parliamentary veto still being a holy taboo for participation in operations abroad. There will never again be a German "Sonderweg". One will still adhere to and promote multilateral values.

Dr. Bruno Tertrais further elaborated on France's role. The French are currently assessing what will happen after Brexit, but still believe the extensive cooperation with Britain will continue. The silver lining after Brexit and Trump is that there is an emerging understanding of the importance of an EU, able to act in a more unitary manner within foreign and security politics.

What's been happening validates a typical French narrative: "We told you so, Britain favours the US over the EU and the US does not really care that much about Europe." From a French perspective, the Federalist stream of ideas in the EU is dead.

Paul Cornish stated how the UK's defence budget is indeed troubled. Several concepts have been assessed over the years, capabilities gradually being reduced.

It is acknowledged that for the UK Armed Forces, international by design likely is the way forward. It is clear that national solutions cannot be applied to vastly supranational problems.

The UK faces extensive challenges in the coming years, and cannot muster the strength it could a decade or two ago. It has to be recognized, however, that the UK remains a highly capable partner, offering significant capabilities for Europe's security.

The broad summary is that for the UK, things are business as usual. This is in part due to desperation, seeking to hold the course, currently unable to afford anything else. Brexit or not, the UK will still continue to see itself as a bridge between the EU and UK, seeking to contribute to Europe in other for The UK will also, to a greater extent than before, expect the 2 % goal to be achieved in Europe. Regarding Russia, business will not remain as usual.

Sven Biscop argued that Europe should act increasingly in its own interests. Actively engaging where beneficial, also increasing cooperation with China. Still, this would have to be accompanied by limitations on access to European critical infrastructure. China is not to be fully trusted.

What the EU needs to offer its member states, is resilience. This is problematic, giving few incentives for engagement these days. What Europe needs to do, is offer credible deterrence, including the possibility of force projection. The only way to achieve this is real force integration. A lot depends on the outcome of the 2017 elections in Germany and France, if the European engine is to be restarted.

We are facing interesting times regarding US-EU relations.

President Trump has a very different view on the world than previous presidents. Still, strong forces in the US push for a continuation of long-standing US policies. Unilaterally rejecting

sanctions on Russia via presidential order would, for instance, possibly provoke the promotion of even stronger sanctions from powerful US actors.

An important factor for continued cohesion across the Atlantic would likely be the fulfilment of the 2 % goal from key European actors. This is vital.

Further, it is becoming clearer that “New Europe”, previously emphasized by Donald Rumsfeld, is drifting in an authoritarian direction, and has done so for a while. Old Europe, however, has remained in the Western fold, but currently also sees the rise of strong populist movements with authoritarian traits. NATO is definitely under threat.

The Q&A showed clear cohesion as well as clear division in opinions in the expert panel, particularly regarding China’s emerging power.

In their closing remarks, panellists strongly encouraged the audience to “Not view international politics as a zero-sum game, not get into a serious dialogue with China without a security perspective and not do it without communicating with Washington.”

Session III: Russia and the Nordics

Session three opened with the rather bold question: “Can 1200 years of Russian history be presented in 15 minutes?”

Apparently it can, by renowned Norwegian journalist Halvor Tjønn. He emphasized that, when dealing with Russia, it is important to acknowledge the importance of “the long lines in history”. Tjønn stated that, in some regards, Russian foreign policy has been continuous since the 1500’s, shaped by war, turmoil and conflict. Conclusively, one should always keep in mind the old phrase “Si vis pacem, para bellum” when dealing with Russia. If you want peace, prepare for war.

Paal Sigurd Hilde further elaborated on Russia, presenting statistics on Russian military manoeuvres and violations in the Nordic area during the last few years. He stated a clear division in behaviour towards separate countries, Finland seeing a range of violations and Norway seeing none. Further, he addressed deterrent measures effectuated in eastern Europe: More and heavier forces are needed to put back a potential attack, but such an attack will likely never happen. A potential attack will likely happen with other means. Thus, NATO needs to prepare for hybrid war and cyber war.

Kristin Ven Bruusgaard further specified, on the topic of a potential reset between Trump and Putin, that a naïve hope would be that “reality also bites Trump”, coercing him to adhere to advice from allies and partners, giving fewer and weaker incentives for agreeing with Vladimir Putin’s narrative.

Regarding this, a range of US efforts are currently defined by Russia as threats to its national security, some of them military capabilities of great strategic value to the US, giving a direct potential conflict between agreement with Russia and “America First”. The Kremlin has possibly not considered this to the fullest extent.

Regarding Norway’s potential security challenges, we no doubt face challenging times, even though it has been repeatedly stated by the Norwegian MoD that Russia poses no threat to Norway. The main challenge is a potential conflict spill-over, Norway being affected by something much larger than itself. Minor incidents may of course happen, such as the recent hacking of the Norwegian Labour Party. Given current political developments, Norway may in time face a crossroads, relevant to Trump’s talk of NATO being obsolete. Parity with Russia will not be possible, and in such a scenario, even the 2 % goal will be nowhere near

enough. It can be said that, in the way the Taliban does that “they have all the watches, but we have all the time”.

We do indeed live in interesting times, as the old Chinese curse states it.

Day Two

As the second and last day of the conference was about to begin, the venue could hardly look more beautiful as it was lit up by sunbeams and veiled by morning mist at the same time. After yesterday’s immense loads of information, it was clear that a cup of coffee was considered necessary for most our participants (it might in fact have served some defrosting purposes as well).

Session IV: Defending Northern Europe

Day two was officially opened with remarks by our Secretary General, Kate Hansen Bundt. She noted that the resignation of president Trump’s security advisor, Mike Flynn, is a clear indication that there is going to be many surprises in the time to come. The news from D.C. therefore constituted as a suitable «starter» for the upcoming sessions, which were to discuss the defence of Northern Europe and the future of the transatlantic order.

The opening speech was held by Lieutenant General Rune Jakobsen, Commander of the Joint Headquarters of the Norwegian Armed Forces. The General Lieutenant emphasized that there is no such thing as a common defence of Northern Europe, due to obvious differences in multilateral affiliations as well as geography. The grounds for security cooperation is however fertile, he continued, as we share characteristics of importance such as being small states and having geopolitical significance. In the Norwegian case, he highlighted that a military conflict is not likely to start in the High North – but rather spreading out from elsewhere. Although Russia’s strategic objectives remain unclear from a NATO perspective, Norwegian and Russian forces share high respect of each other. Lieutenant General Jakobsen also used the occasion to point out that Norwegian security is more linked to international security than ever, and by all means still is dependent on NATO.

After Lieutenant General Jakobsen’s insightful opening speech, Professor Cornish invited the first of the panellists to come forward. Professor at the Norwegian Institute for Defence Studies, Rolf Tamnes, was to talk about the strategic dimensions of the North Atlantic. Tamnes started his speech with an optimistic note as he said the following: “There has been a lot of pessimism [so far at the conference] – we should not forget that the West continues to be overwhelmingly strong, both economically and militarily”. He supported this statement by arguing that Russia has been experiencing “Soviet-style” economic and political stagnation, among other factors. However, there is great need for NATO to address more forcefully Russia’s anti-access capability, according to Tamnes. He gave a clear message to the audience when he stated that he thinks NATO is moving in the right direction – although he did not find the speed impressive.

Fortunately for NATO, Commander of NATO’s Allied Maritime Command, Vice Admiral Clive C. Johnstone, was next up and eager to defend NATO’s speed graph. First he had to apologize for operating with a high pace – but he was in a hurry to get started fixing NATO’s previously mentioned problems. «NATO is improving and generating faster than any time in history. [...] We have been innovating harder and faster than any time I have ever seen. Yes, we can do more – but I need your help», was Vice Admiral Johnstone’s call to the audience. The Vice Admiral applauded the extraordinary support NATO is receiving from the US. To his Norwegian colleagues present, he said they should be proud of the Norwegian officers in the Maritime Command and that «he loves the way they think». Regarding Russia, he

disagreed with Tamnes who claimed she's a fading power. He also emphasized that they are not our enemy – but a problem in deed.

The last talk before the panel discussion was held by Bruce B. Stubbs, Director of Strategy for the Chief of Naval Operations at Pentagon. He started his briefing by telling an old tale from when Norway's King Olav visited a US navy ship. According to the tales, the first thing the King did when he got on board was to open a bottle of brandy and invite the Captain for a drink. The Captain's immediate response was «Your Majesty, I can't drink, we are on a US navy ship!». The King wouldn't take no for an answer and replied: «You don't understand, wherever I am. This is Norwegian territory, so right now you're in Norway! I command you to join me». According to Stubbs, this story communicates the continuing close relationship between the US and Norway. During his talks, he praised Norway for her efforts and investment in transatlantic security and maritime defence in the North.

The first session was summed up by professor Cornish as being characterized by both optimism and grave realism. After the following round of questions from the floor, Secretary General Hansen Bundt awarded the speakers with a pair of Norwegian handmade mittens. As a Norwegian, Lieutenant General Jakobsen naturally already owns a pair of these, and therefore received a gift card. After four stark and provocative presentations, either the panellists or the audience seemed too reluctant to leave for some refreshments.

Session V: What do we see in the future of the Transatlantic Order?

The last session at the 52nd Leangkollen Conference was chaired by Constanze Stelzenmüller, who had been speaking on the previous day. The four panellists were requested to give their presentations sitting together at the front before the floor would be opened for questions from the audience.

First out was no less than UN Special Adviser on Cyprus, Espen Barth Eide. Barth Eide has previously served as both Norway's Minister of Defence (2011 – 2012) and Minister of Foreign Affairs (2012 – 2013). His topic was the future of the transatlantic order. Eide highlighted that the security issues we are most concerned about at conferences like this one are most likely to originate from the periphery. Among the security issues he mentioned was the rise of economic inequalities within countries, which has contributed to the strengthened ideas of nationalism and protectionism in the West. Although a lot of Europeans are transatlantic in instinct, it is important from our side to acknowledge that even if the US is there to help, we also have to help ourselves, Eide said.

“Just another major crisis – past and future in transatlantic relations” was the next topic, which was to be discussed by Professor Geir Lundestad, an acknowledged Norwegian historian and former director of the Nobel Institute. His message was clear – there will continue to be crisis in NATO, because there has always been crisis in NATO. According to Lundestad, there have never been any golden years within the Alliance. He stressed that a common phrase from non-historians is that history repeats itself, but this is not true. “History is so full of complexities that it is impossible to decide in advance which are the relevant parallels. [...] As a historian I make predictions about the past. The media seems to only be concerned about the future”, Lundestad said. He concluded his remarks by saying “the Trump administration is already one man down (Flynn), if we get rid of Bannon as well we might see some favourable developments in Washington”.

After professor Lundestad's concluding remarks, an American perspective could not have arrived at a more convenient time. Next up was Barry Pavel, Senior Vice President of the Atlantic Council. In thread with Eide's talks about the rise of protectionism and nationalism,

Pavel's topic was "Trump's foreign policy: isolationism vs. expansionism". According to Pavel, the Trump administration will not be defined by isolationism. The new approach will be characterized by what is best for the American people and the working class, he said. This doesn't mean that the US is leaving alliances - America first doesn't mean America alone. He reassured the audience by noting that "all Presidents have said they are going to change Washington" and that "the key is what the administration will build after they have disrupted and destroyed". Regarding the national movement in the US the media has been focusing on, no such movement exists according to Pavel; "No one showed up to the elections. There is not a new national movement. Trump got fewer votes than McCain and Romney, and Clinton got fewer votes than Obama". In other words – the situation does not look as dramatic from D.C. as it might do from Europe.

"The illusion of "the end of history": a crumbling liberal order?" was the title of the next speech, which was a quite difficult question to grasp according to the speaker himself, Asle Toje. Toje, who is the Research Director at the Norwegian Nobel Institute, argued that the greatest challenges facing the West are not external – they are internal. The friends of the new administration in the US run the danger of seriously misinterpreting how the international system works and how this benefits the US. Similarly, they run the mistake of underestimating the strength and resilience of democracy and how it can handle the opposition winning power, he argued. The West is not lost, neither is the liberal order, but there will be change. Either we will affect it, or we will have it forced upon us in Europe. Politics is after all temporary solutions to permanent problems. Modelling through is hardly through the most inspiring of suggestions, yet on the upside the NATO allies have 70 years of experience at it, he concluded.

The last session, like the first, was brought to an end with a Q&A session. Secretary General Hansen Bundt "wrapped up" the conference by stating that we had concluded much more optimistically here than what the motto of the upcoming Munich security conference suggests, which is "post-truth, post-West and post-order".