

Security and geopolitics in the Arctic: The increase of hybrid threat activities in the Norwegian High North



Hybrid CoE Working Papers cover work in progress: they develop and share ideas on Hybrid CoE's ongoing research/workstrand themes or analyze actors, events or concepts that are relevant from the point of view of hybrid threats. They cover a wide range of topics related to the constantly evolving security environment.

Footnote 47 was updated on 20240327. At the author's request, it was added that the mentioned illegal infiltrated the institute at UiT where the author of this paper worked.

The European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats

tel. +358 400 253800 | www.hybridcoe.fi

ISBN 978–952–7472–98–9 (web)

ISBN 978–952–7472–99–6 (print)

ISSN 2670–160X (web)

ISSN 2814–7235 (print)

March 2024

Cover photo: LouieLea / shutterstock.com

Hybrid CoE's mission is to strengthen its Participating States' security by providing expertise and training for countering hybrid threats, and by enhancing EU-NATO cooperation in this respect. The Centre is an autonomous hub for practitioners and experts, located in Helsinki, Finland.

The responsibility for the views expressed ultimately rests with the authors.

Contents

Summary	5
Introduction	6
Potential vulnerabilities in the Norwegian High North.....	8
The region	8
High North cooperation	9
Tensions in “high trust” Norway?	10
Hybrid threat activities in Northern Norway	13
Intelligence gathering	13
Hacking.....	13
Espionage.....	14
Influence operations.....	16
Memory politics.....	17
Academic cooperation and science diplomacy	18
Sabotage.....	20
Physical sabotage	20
Electronic operations.....	20
Conclusions.....	22
Author.....	27

Summary

A significant increase in hybrid threat activities has been taking place in Norway, and in Northern Norway in particular, most of which are either attributed to Russia or suspected to originate from Russia. Northern Norway has been subjected to various hybrid threat activities, with the main efforts being directed at intelligence and/or information gathering, as well as influence operations and, to a lesser degree, sabotage. While Russia is unlikely to seek or engage in direct military confrontation in the European High North, evidence points to the use of “below the threshold” activities, which, short of war or a military attack, could serve to increase doubt and mistrust within society, with the intent to increase destabilization in the target country. Over time, such activities can combine to exacerbate insecurity in Norway, as well as influence developments in geopolitical power dynamics in the European Arctic. Monitoring these activities and their potential combined effects will be increasingly important for informing resilience-oriented policy and practices.

Introduction

The Norwegian High North, or *nordområdene*, corresponds to the part of Norway that extends into the Arctic. It is considered Norway's most important and strategic region for efforts and investments in research and education, resource management and business, and the maintenance of low tension and peaceful relations in the Arctic.¹ Prior to the accession of Finland and Sweden to NATO in 2023 and 2024 respectively, Norway was "NATO in the north". With its Nordic neighbours joining the alliance, the geopolitical balance tips in favour of a stronger defence posture for Norway in its north. A military attack on the North Calotte, as a part of Russia's bastion defence strategy to secure control of the northern seaways and protect the perimeter of its military assets on the Kola Peninsula, would now take on three NATO members (Northern Norway, northern Finland, and the tip of northern Sweden).² Norway continues to play a crucial role in NATO defence, with its maritime

access and control in the Norwegian and Barents Seas, as well as crucial "railroad reach" into northern Sweden and Finland in the event of a blockade of the Baltic Sea.³

The increased military security in the High North does not mean that the region is not vulnerable to potential threats. Indeed, with increased military defence comes the likelihood of increased effort to destabilize or weaken the region through other means, namely hybrid threats, which will not provoke the activation of Article 5 of the NATO Treaty.⁴ The relevance of targeting societal vulnerabilities as a central part of hybrid threat activities to weaken a state is now consistently recognized across the three annual Norwegian threat assessment reports released by the police security service (PST), the national security authority (NSM), and the intelligence service (*etterretningstjenesten*).⁵

- 1 See the Government of Norway: <https://www.regjeringen.no/no/tema/nordomradene/id1154/>.
- 2 Kristian Atland, 'The Introduction, Adoption and Implementation of Russia's "Northern Strategic Bastion" Concept, 1992–1999', *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, 20:4 (2007), 499–528, DOI: [10.1080/13518040701703047](https://doi.org/10.1080/13518040701703047); M. Boulègue, 'The militarization of Russian polar politics', Research Paper, Royal Institute of International Affairs, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.55317/9781784135256>; Jonas Kjellén, 'The Russian Northern Fleet and the (Re)militarisation of the Arctic', *Arctic Review on Law and Politics*, Vol. 13 (2022), pp. 34–52. <http://dx.doi.org/10.23865/arctic.v13.3338>.
- 3 Anne Kauranen and Johan Ahlander, 'How Sweden and Finland Could Help NATO Contain Russia', Reuters, 5 July 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/natos-new-north-fresh-chances-contain-moscow-2023-07-03/>.
- 4 Andreas Østhagen, *The Arctic After Russia's Invasion of Ukraine: The increased risk of conflict and hybrid threats*, Hybrid CoE Paper 18, 10 May 2023, The European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats, Helsinki, Finland, <https://www.hybridcoe.fi/publications/hybrid-coe-paper-18-the-arctic-after-russias-invasion-of-ukraine-the-increased-risk-of-conflict-and-hybrid-threats/>.
- 5 PST, *National Threat Assessment for 2024*, The Norwegian Police Security Service, 2024, <https://www.pst.no/alle-artikler/artikler/ntv-2024/>; NSM, *Risiko 2024: Nasjonal sikkerhet er et felles ansvar* [Risk 2024: National security is a common responsibility], The National Security Authority, 2024, <https://nsm.no/aktuelt/risiko-2024-nasjonal-sikkerhet-er-et-felles-ansvar>; Etterretningstjenesten, *Fokus 2024: Etterretningstjenestens åpne vurdering av aktuelle sikkerhetsutfordringer for Norge* [Focus 2024: The intelligence service's open assessment of current security challenges for Norway], The Intelligence Service, 2024, <https://www.etterretningstjenesten.no/publikasjoner/fokus>.

Hybrid threats are deployed to “exploit vulnerabilities or opportunities [and] to undermine the opponent’s decision-making process, while maintaining a degree of deniable plausibility”.⁶ Individual activities (like information or intelligence gathering) may not necessarily be threats in and of themselves but can be combined with other activities to intentionally cause harm or instability to a state or its society. Hybrid threats are often deployed “below the threshold”, using low-risk, low-cost tools that are not classified as military attacks or acts of war. Hybrid threat activities also need to be understood in terms of the phase of the hybrid threat/warfare campaign in which they are delivered – whether in the initial priming (testing which threat activities will work) phase, the more intense destabilization phase, or the more substantial conflict or coercion phase.⁷

To be best prepared to meet these threats, it is important to learn more about the ways in which different regions are potentially vulnerable. Hybrid threats in and across the Arctic will not have an identical impact or effects across the region. Threat types or threat activities are designed in accordance with both local, regional, and geopolitical factors that affect the

North American, European, or Eurasian Arctic regions differently.⁸ Local/internal/domestic political cleavages become crucial vectors of attack that have geopolitical effects and consequences, by attempting to weaken adversary states and their subsequent abilities to exert power outwards both defensively and offensively. Norway and its High North are targets for increasing hybrid threat activity. Despite this, Norway has some mitigation strategies at its disposal to attempt to minimize the impact of hybrid threats.

In this Hybrid CoE Working Paper, the hybrid threat environment in Norway is analyzed. The paper is divided into three sections. The first section highlights relevant features of the Norwegian High North context that may be vulnerable to hybrid threat activities. In the second section, an overview of recent hybrid threat activities in Norway, particularly in the northern part of the country, is provided. In the last section, conclusions are drawn, with some reflections on the status of hybrid threats in Norway today, and potential ways to mitigate both hybrid threat activities and – ultimately – threats themselves.

6 G. Giannopoulos, H. Smith, M. Theodoridou, *The Landscape of Hybrid Threats: A Conceptual Model*, European Commission, 2020, <https://www.hybridcoe.fi/publications/the-landscape-of-hybrid-threats-a-conceptual-model/>, 18.

7 Ibid.

8 W. Greaves, ‘Arctic break up: Climate change, geopolitics, and the fragmenting Arctic security region’, *Arctic Yearbook 2019: Redefining Arctic Security*, 2019, 1–17.

Potential vulnerabilities in the Norwegian High North

The region

Whereas some countries perceive their Arctic regions as remote and inaccessible,⁹ in relation to centres of power and population, Northern Norway is not a disconnected or remote part of the Norwegian state. The archipelago of Svalbard is the northernmost part of the Kingdom of Norway, albeit not designated as a county, municipality, or electoral district.¹⁰ Mainland Norway consists of five regions – Nord Norge, Trøndelag, Vestlandet, Østlandet and Sørlandet. These regions are further divided into twelve counties.¹¹ Nord Norge (Northern Norway) alone includes just over one-third of the total landmass of Norway (34.9%).¹² Around 80% of Norway's maritime area is located within this northern region.¹³ While the remaining 65% of the country is governed across nine counties, regional governance of the vast territory of Northern Norway is shared across just three counties: Nordland, Troms, and Finnmark. The region has had a significant impact on the Nor-

wegian economy when it comes to maritime industries such as fisheries, aquaculture, or industries such as oil and gas, construction, and tourism. Recently, more emphasis has also been placed on the green transition and renewable resources. The region is not only important for the people who live there, but for many more who depend on it for work. The population is small but diverse, and consists of many different groups that include Sámi, Norwegians and Kvens, Forest Finns, as well as Russians and other minorities and immigrants.¹⁴ As of 2023, 8.8% of the Norwegian population live in Northern Norway.¹⁵ The region is experiencing a slow but consistent out-migration.¹⁶

Northern Norway is an integral part of Norwegian security and foreign policy.¹⁷ The region, which shares a border with Russia, is strategically important for both Norway and NATO, and, as noted in the introduction, because of Norway's coastal access to the Norwegian and Barents Seas. The Kola Peninsula is central to

9 Gaëlle Rivard Piché and Bradley Sylvestre, *Vulnerabilities and hybrid threats in the Canadian Arctic: Resilience as defence*, Hybrid CoE Working Paper 24, 29 May 2023, The European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats, Helsinki, Finland, <https://www.hybridcoe.fi/publications/hybrid-coe-working-paper-24-vulnerabilities-and-hybrid-threats-in-the-canadian-arctic-resilience-as-defence/>.

10 Nils Petter Thuesen and Susan Barr, 'Svalbard', *Store Norske Leksikon*, 2023.

11 The counties of Troms and Finnmark were merged on 1 January 2020, becoming Troms og Finnmark, albeit with considerable political opposition. They became separate counties again on 1 January 2024.

12 Geir Thorsnæs, 'Nord Norge', *Store Norske Leksikon*, 2023.

13 Andreas Østhagen, *The Arctic After Russia's Invasion of Ukraine*; Ine Eriksen Søreide, 'Nordområdene, USA og balansekunst' [The High North, the USA and the art of balance], *Internasjonal Politikk*, 81(1), 60–76.

14 The Norwegian authorities recognize the Sámi as an Indigenous people, while Kvens (people of Finnish descent in Northern Norway), Forest Finns, Roma, Romani/Tater peoples and Jews are recognized as minorities with a long-standing attachment to the country. See 'National Minorities', Government.no (Regjeringen.no).

15 Geir Thorsnæs, 'Nord Norge', *Store Norske Leksikon*, 2023.

16 Ibid.

17 Andreas Østhagen, *The Arctic After Russia's Invasion of Ukraine*; Ine Eriksen Søreide, 'Nordområdene, USA og balansekunst'; Ina Eriksen Søreide, 'Mennesker, muligheter og norske interesser i nord – ny giv for nordområdepolitikken' [People, possibilities and Norwegian interests in the North – new impetus for High North policy], *Internasjonal Politikk*, 78:4 (2020), 457.

Russia's military presence in the Arctic and its strategic maritime and air-based forces. The Defence Commission of Norway, in a report released in May 2023 and presented to the Norwegian government, has recognized the importance of strengthening the military presence in Northern Norway through readiness and availability.¹⁸ In the event of a possible conflict with NATO, Russia's defence is dependent on securing its bases on Kola by taking control of the Barents Sea and areas further south in the North Atlantic, often referred to as the "bastion defence". Most of the military effort would most likely be carried out by air and naval forces. However, scenarios regarding territorial incursion, namely the possibility of land forces entering Finnmark and Troms, are also recognized as potential threats.¹⁹ In addition, China has also expressed growing interest in the northern regions, which requires a "broader" security perspective with a significant increase in economic investment and "soft power" in the region.

All in all, the Defence Commission report (2023) argues that an accumulation of factors makes Norway's, and the European, Arctic more important than ever before to national, regional, and global security. The report points out how Norway has become absolutely central to Europe's energy supply, while the strategic relevance of Russia's Northern Fleet is increasing, and large parts of the vast ocean spaces in the north and the Arctic are increasingly opening

up to civilian and military activity. These factors reinforce what has long been acknowledged, namely that the northern regions of Europe – the European Arctic – will play a key role in maintaining and strengthening stable security and a predictable, albeit uncomfortable, geopolitical dynamic in the years to come.²⁰

High North cooperation

What has long been considered a strength can also be abused and become a vulnerability. Norway's emphasis on cooperation in the North has been a pillar of its foreign and defence policy generally, and more specifically with regard to Russia. Russia and Norway have a long history of mutual relations, with over a thousand years of trade (not least fisheries) and peaceful relations. The liberation of Northern Norway from German occupation during WWII, and people-to-people cooperation across the border between Kirkenes and Murmansk since the fall of the Soviet Union, have been significant, recent markers in illustrating this important relationship. Much of this cooperation has now diminished, but not without reluctance.

Norway's approach to relations in the High North has long been characterized as "High North, Low Tension".²¹ Successive Norwegian governments have emphasized the importance of maintaining a balanced policy and relationship with Russia and, prior to that, the Soviet

18 NOU 2023: 14 (2023). *Forsvarskommisjonen v 2021: Forsvar for fred og frihet* [The Defence Commission v 2021: Defence for peace and freedom]. Oslo. Departementenes sikkerhets- og serviceorganisation.

19 Sverre Diesen, 'Hvordan kan Nord-Norge forsvares? En betenkning knyttet til dagens forsvarsplaner' [How can Northern Norway be defended? A reflection on current defence plans], *Civita-notat*, Nr. 21, 2020.

20 NOU 2023: 14 (2023). *Forsvarskommisjonen v 2021: Forsvar for fred og frihet*. Oslo. Departementenes sikkerhets- og serviceorganisation, 161.

21 NATO ACT, 'The Future of the High North', 2023, <https://www.act.nato.int/article/the-future-of-the-high-north/>.

Union.²² The balance between deterrence and assurance has a long history in Norway, playing a central role in Norwegian security politics since the end of WWII.²³ Norway's security policy has included internal restrictions to "reassure" Russia of Norway's peaceful intentions, restricting the establishment of foreign-driven bases, the presence of nuclear material, as well as guidelines for foreign military activity on Norwegian territory. Norway has focused on building a sufficiently strong military capacity, combined with its NATO membership, to deter a military invasion, while fostering dialogue, diplomacy, and openness with non-allied states at the same time.²⁴

Tensions in "high trust" Norway?

In general, Norway continues to experience relatively high levels of trust between govern-

ment and citizens, as well as between citizens themselves.²⁵ However, Norway has long been considered an important example of "centre-periphery" dimensions and tensions, where questions of (in)adequate representation, and inequalities between regions and identity have arisen.²⁶ Disconnects between groups of people, and between centre and periphery, and north and south, can be targets for influence operations, including disinformation campaigns aimed at further polarizing existing social and political cleavages.

A national survey conducted in October 2022 indicated that trust in North Norway was higher in local political representatives than in national, parliamentary (*Stortinget*) representatives, which is consistent with research over time that demonstrates greater trust in local politicians.²⁷ Questions have been raised

22 J. J. Holst, *Norsk sikkerhetspolitikk i strategisk perspektiv* [Norwegian security policy in a strategic perspective], Oslo, Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI), 1967; J. Wilhelmsen, *Avskrekking og beroligelse. Hvilken effekt har denne politikken, herunder basepolitikken, hatt for Russlands politikk overfor Norge?* [Deterrence and reassurance. What effect has this policy, including the base policy, had on Russia's policy towards Norway?], Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI), Oslo, 2022, https://files.nettsteder.regjeringen.no/wpuploads01/sites/495/2022/09/Forsvarskommisjonsrapport%C2%AD_JW%C2%AD_NUPI.pdf; H.H. Bragstad, *Avskrekking og beroligelse i norsk sikkerhetspolitikk overfor Russland* [Deterrence and reassurance in Norwegian security policy towards Russia], master's thesis, Forsvarets Høgskole, 2016; O. M. Stormoen, 'Beroligelse 2.0: Teori, praksis og rammevilkår i en ny tid' [Reassurance 2.0: Theory, practice and framework conditions in a new era], *Internasjonal Politikk*, 81:2 (2023), 158–187.

23 Stormoen, 'Beroligelse 2.0'.

24 J. Wilhelmsen, *Avskrekking og beroligelse*, 2; Forsvarsdepartementet, *Evne til forsvar – vilje til beredskap Langtidsplan for forsvarssektoren* [Ability to defend – willingness for preparedness Long-term plan for the defence sector], 2020 (Prop.14S (2020–2021)): 22. <https://www.regjeringen.no/no/dokumenter/prop.-14-s-20202021/id2770783/>.

25 J. Stein, M. Buck & H. Bjørnå, 'The centre-periphery dimension and trust in politicians: The case of Norway', *Territory, Politics, Governance*, 9:1 (2021), 37–55.

26 S. Rokkan & H. Valen, 'The mobilization of the periphery: Data on turnout, party membership and candidate recruitment in Norway', *Acta Sociologica*, 6:1 (1962), 111–152; Stein et al., 'The centre-periphery dimension and trust in politicians'; Ingrid Vik, 'Hand i hand: By og land i polariseringens tid' [Hand in hand: City and countryside in the time of polarization], Spartacus: Oslo (2023).

27 B. Denters, 'Size and political trust: evidence from Denmark, the Netherlands, Norway, and the United Kingdom', *Environment and Planning C: Government and Policy*, 20:6 (2002), pp. 793–812; Gunhild Hoogensen Gjorv, *The Neglected Key to Defence: National Survey on trust and preparedness*, UiT The Arctic University of Norway, Tromsø (2022).

regarding the potential for polarizing issues to create political cleavages and conflict in Norwegian society and the state, particularly in light of the potential for disinformation to exacerbate tensions. In a book published in 2023, multiple issue areas were highlighted that illustrate differing perceptions of security and local well-being among citizens, ranging from fish quotas, oil and gas development, power systems and wind farms to defence and security issues, and constant regional governance reforms.²⁸ Disconnects between different local perceptions of security can have implications for national perceptions of security. This was illustrated in an interview with a respondent who was not from the Arctic region but who had worked for the Norwegian armed forces at the border near Kirkenes. The respondent questioned local, civilian support for Ukraine, alluding to mixed allegiances in a community where there is a considerable Russian-speaking population. The same respondent also admitted that they did not have much contact with the local community.²⁹ Such a disconnect between defence and local actors can have implications for the efficacy of civil-military responses to crises.

Security perception disconnects can also be found between regions. Concerns over the discontinuation of the people-to-people cooperation, which has played such an important role in East Finnmark,³⁰ barely register in southern

Norway; most southerners are not even aware of this aspect of regional and foreign policy activity.³¹ More often than not, “security” is delivered to Norwegians as defined by the national political powers in Oslo. However, as author Ingrid Vik points out in the introduction to her book on polarization in Northern Norway: “I found considerable frustration and anger there, and completely different perspectives of reality than those I usually get in the news. I saw how polarized conflicts, and the ways in which these are managed, have contributed to deep fissures between city and countryside and between groups in society. Fissures that in the long run could weaken the Norwegian trust society [*tillitssamfunnet*] and our democracy.”³²

Such fissures also occur between the local populations – the Sámi and the Kvens – and other parts of Norwegian society. The Truth and Reconciliation Report, submitted to the Norwegian Parliament by an independent, non-governmental Truth and Reconciliation Commission in spring 2023,³³ highlights the longstanding effects of previous programmes of “Norwegianization” or the eradication of Sámi and other minority cultures and languages, and continued injustices. Health, language, culture, and traditional livelihoods have all been adversely affected, and the lack of adequate measures ensures that inequalities and

28 Vik, *Hand i hand*.

29 Gunhild Hoogensen Gjörv/Anja Kristine Salo, Interviews, UiT The Arctic University of Norway, Tromsø, 2023.

30 Vik, *Hand i hand*.

31 Hoogensen Gjörv, *The Neglected Key to Defence*.

32 Vik, *Hand i hand*, 10. Translated from Norwegian by GHG.

33 Sannhets- og forsoningskommisjon, *Sannhet og Forsoning: grunnlag for et oppgjør med fornorskingspolitikk og urett mot samer, kvener/norskfinner og skogfinner* [Truth and Reconciliation: basis for a settlement with the Norwegianization policy and injustice against Sami, Kven/Norwegian Finns and Forest Finns], Dokument 19 (2022–2023), Rapport til Stortinget, <https://www.stortinget.no/globalassets/pdf/sannhets--og-forsoningskommisjonen/rapport-til-stortinget-fra-sannhets--og-forsoningskommisjonen.pdf>.

discrimination are still not adequately addressed.³⁴ For example, although all Norwegian citizens, including national minorities, are deemed to have equal access to social services, including healthcare, the lack of services provided in their respective languages, and/or in the communities in which they live, diminishes accessibility and equality for these minorities.

The lack of adequate dispute resolution mechanisms for conflicting life and security perspectives persists, as exemplified by the “Fosen case”, where a wind farm was erected on Sámi reindeer herding territory, breaching minority rights and human rights in general, and posing a threat to the existence of Indigenous peoples.³⁵

34 NTB, ‘Sannhets- og forsoningskommisjonens rapport – et grunnlag for oppgjør med fornorsking’ [Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s report – a foundation for a resolution with Norwegianization], Truth and Reconciliation Commission, NTB Communication, 2023, <https://kommunikasjon.ntb.no/pressemelding/17969975/sannhets-og-forsoningskommisjonens-rapport-et-grunnlag-for-oppgjor-med-fornorsking?publisher-Id=17848526&lang=no>.

35 Jack Schønberg, ‘Fosen-saken handler om mer enn vindkraft. Den handler om samisk eksistens’ [The Fosen case is about more than wind power. It is about Sami existence], *Aftenposten*, 2 June 2023, <https://www.aftenposten.no/meninger/sid/i/XbJy1x/fosen-saken-handler-om-mer-enn-vindkraft-den-handler-om-samisk-eksistens>.

Hybrid threat activities in Northern Norway

Hybrid threat activities in Norway, and in Northern Norway in particular, can largely be categorized into intelligence gathering (hacking and espionage), influence operations and, to a lesser degree, sabotage. These activities have generally been conducted using a variety of information collection tools and approaches. This section provides examples of activities directed against Norway in general, and Northern Norway in particular. Most of the activities have been attributed to, or are suspected to have been carried out by the Russian Federation. Iran has been identified in academic/technological information gathering. China also raises concerns, particularly with regard to influence operations.

Intelligence gathering

Hacking

As a part of cyber-based threat tactics, hacking has become an almost commonplace practice in the hybrid threat toolkit.³⁶ The Norwegian parliament has frequently experienced hacking incidents, including in summer 2023, when twelve ministries were attacked.³⁷ Different authorities and municipalities in Northern Norway have been targeted by hacking, with many examples taking place in the city of Tromsø.

Tromsø is the largest fisheries port in Norway.³⁸ In November 2020, the Tromsø port was informed by the National Security Authorities of Norway (*Nasjonal sikkerhetsmyndighet*, NSM) that its data systems were under attack by a hacker. The attack was later attributed to a Russian intelligence service. According to the director of the Tromsø port, Jørn-Even Hanssen, it was not surprising that the port was a target, given its capacity and role in the Norwegian fisheries industry, its additional role in defence for Norwegian and allied military vessels (usually with short warning for security purposes), and the fact that it is one of three primary ports included in national preparedness planning.³⁹ The emergency preparedness systems, security analyses, and detailed technical descriptions of the dock area and the recently established nuclear-powered submarine docking area, would be desirable information for an enemy, as putting these important transport nodes out of service would destabilize the region.

The hacking attempt occurred three weeks after it was announced that the Tromsø city council had reversed an earlier decision and agreed to allow nuclear-powered submarines to dock.⁴⁰ It is not possible to confirm whether the hacking incident was in response to the decision

36 Elisabeth Sandve, Erik Wiig Andersen and Kai Stokkeland, 'Datahacking er vår ny hverdag' [Datahacking is our new normal], NRK, 13 February 2017, https://www.nrk.no/sorlandet/_-datahacking-er-var-nye-hverdag-1.13375395.

37 NRK, 'Dataangrep og hacking' [Data attacks and hacking], <https://www.nrk.no/nyheter/dataangrep-og-hacking-1.11351804>.

38 E. Lindbæk, 'Tromsø fryser seg til fiskerihavn-toppen. Tok imot for over 5,2 milliarder kroner i fjor' [Tromsø freezes its way to the top of the fisheries ports. Received over 5.2 billion crowns of fish last year], *Fiskeribladet*, 2022, <https://www.fiskeribladet.no/fiskeri/tromso-fryser-seg-til-fiskerihavn-toppen-tok-imot-fisk-for-over-5-2-milliarder-kroner-i-fjor-/2-1-1158698>.

39 Lindbæk, 'Tromsø fryser seg til fiskerihavn-toppen'.

40 Tonje Hareland, Aslaug Aarsæther and Petter Strøm, 'Tromsø kommune endrer mening – vil ta imot atomubåter fra Nato' [Tromsø municipality changes its position – will allow nuclear-powered submarines from NATO], NRK, 2020, <https://www.nrk.no/tromsogfinnmark/tromso-kommune-vedtok-pa-kommunestyremote-at-de-vil-imot-reaktordrevne-ubater-fra-nato-1.15219612>.

to allow a more visible NATO presence in the harbour, but relegating the incident to mere coincidence would likely be inaccurate as well. This combination of incidents can be understood as part of the dynamics of hybrid threats and warfare.

In December 2020, UiT, the Arctic University of Norway, was subjected to an advanced cyber-attack, hacking into the digital systems used by the university and gaining access to servers and programs used by researchers, administration, and management. The investigation, led by the Norwegian Police Security Service (PST), suspected that the hacker was a significant actor from Russia (albeit unconfirmed).⁴¹ The targets were quite specific, going after not only the university management but also researchers working specifically on the High North.⁴² Cyber-attacks have been registered in various cities in Northern Norway, including Sør-Varanger, Vadsø, Alta, and Bodø. These attacks represent a consistent pattern in attempts to gain an increasing amount of information about the Norwegian High North.

Espionage

In April 2023, fifteen Russian diplomats were expelled from Norway on the grounds that they were undercover intelligence officers rather than actual diplomats.⁴³ Norway has been subjected to both “traditional” human-agent espionage as well as digital forms of espionage. Information gathering in a hybrid threat context is not limited to digital means, as traditional espionage and/or technologically enhanced espionage remain part of the repertoire of tools that can combine to form a hybrid threat. Such espionage or information/intelligence gathering has been occurring on land, in the air, and at sea.

In spring 2023, four Nordic broadcasting companies (Norwegian NRK, Swedish SVT, Danish DR, and Finnish Yle) joined forces to map suspicious trajectories of Russian fishing trawlers, merchant and research ships that frequently passed over known oil and gas fields, and were often in close proximity to military exercises and to American submarines when they surfaced.⁴⁴ The investigation tracked over fifty ships that appeared to be collecting data along the seabed, as well as monitoring military and other activities taking place

41 Lars Adrian Giske, ‘Dataangrep mot UiT: Tok seg målrettet inn i epostkontoene til seks UiT ansatte. Gunhild var en av dem’ [Data attack against UiT: Targeted email accounts of six UiT employees. Gunhild was one of them], *iTromsø.no*, 2 March 2022, <https://www.itromso.no/nyheter/i/PoBpMJ/dataangrepet-mot-uit-tok-seg-maalrettet-inn-i-e-postkontoene-til-seks-uit-ansatte-gunhild-var-en-av-dem>. The author of this paper is the “Gunhild” referred to in the headline.

42 Ø. B. Skille, Tormod Strand, Pål Hansen, ‘Russland skal stå bak dataangrep mot nordområde-forskere i Tromsø’ [Russia is behind the cyberattack against High North researchers in Tromsø], 1 March 2022, <https://www.nrk.no/tromsogfinnmark/russland-skal-sta-bak-dataangrep-mot-nordomrade-forskere-i-tromso-1.15872979#:~:text=En%20PST%20detteforsknin%20viser%20at,universitetet%20som%20er%20narmest%20Russland>.

43 V. S. Wikan, O. I. Aas, H. Sjeggstad, K. Hanssen, S. Barstad, K. Rønneberg, P. A. Johansen, ‘Norge utviser 15 ansatte ved Russlands ambassade: – Ikke genuine diplomater’ [Norway expels 15 employees at the Russian embassy – not genuine diplomats], *Aftenposten*, 13 April 2023, <https://www.aftenposten.no/norge/i/15yzBK/norge-utviser-15-ansatte-ved-russlands-ambassade-ikke-genuine-diplomater>.

44 B.M. Pettersen, I. Eriksen, H. Gulldahl, B. Fredriksen, E. Koppergård, J. Nordstrøm, E. Ursin, ‘Spionskipene’ [The spy ships], 18 April 2023, NRK, <https://www.nrk.no/nordland/xl/fiskebater-og-andre-fartoy-fra-russland-kan-drive-spionasje-og-etterretning-i-norge-1.16371100#intro-authors--expand>.

within Norwegian territorial waters. In mid-October 2022, six Russian citizens were arrested in Norway on suspicion of flying drones to gather sensitive information. Much of this activity took place in Northern Norway near military installations or airports. Four of the six had video footage of locations subject to extra levels of security.⁴⁵ In summer 2023, the Norwegian Supreme Court overturned the acquittal of British-Russian businessman Andrey Jakunin by the lower courts in Northern Norway (Hålogaland Court of Appeal and Nord-Troms and Senja District Court), who was charged with illegally flying a drone in Svalbard in summer 2022.⁴⁶ The Supreme Court found that drone flying fell within the scope of Norwegian sanctions and aircraft restrictions for Russian citizens. This was the most high profile of all the cases of Russians flying drones in restricted areas, where the majority of incidents took place in Northern Norway. The extent of drone activity in Norway, particularly by foreign (in this case Russian) persons, was more significant than previously recorded.

The sudden proliferation of drone activity was soon followed by another unexpected information-gathering or espionage event that came to light in October 2022, when it was revealed that Norway had been infiltrated by a suspected

illegal at UiT, the Arctic University of Norway.⁴⁷ This should not be viewed in isolation from other attempts to target the university and its research community, including the aforementioned advanced hacking attack just two years earlier. The notion of an illegal had not received much attention in official threat evaluations by the Norwegian security services. However, it has been acknowledged that Norwegian citizens can be targeted as sympathizers, and be influenced over time to provide information to foreign embassies.⁴⁸ In general, those who engage Norwegian locals are foreign officials often in a diplomatic setting where they enjoy diplomatic immunity, such as those expelled from the Russian embassy in April 2023.⁴⁹ Illegals, on the other hand, are intelligence operatives who use a false identity, and lead seemingly normal lives while gathering information such as technical and technological data by clandestine means.⁵⁰ Illegals do not attract much attention because they blend into society. Their work is premised on playing the long game, whereby the immediate acquisition of secrets is less important than familiarizing themselves with society, and gradually building up a network of potential sympathizers or contacts that can be operationalized for various purposes in the future.

45 I. Undheim, T. K. Henriksen, B. Hjellen, K. A. Tornås, 'Kritiserer Norge etter dronepågripelsene: – Har opptrådt veldig naivt' [Norway criticized after drone arrests: – Has acted very naively], NRK, 18 October 2022, https://www.nrk.no/norge/kritiserer-norge-etter-dronepagripelsene_-_har-opptradt-veldig-naivt-1.16142475.

46 I. L. Rostad and K. V. Prestøy, 'Flyforbudet for russiske borgere omfatter droneflygning' [Aircraft restrictions for Russian citizens includes flying of drones], NRK, 30 June 2023, <https://www.nrk.no/tromsogfinnmark/hoyesterett-yakunin-floy-ulovlig-1.16460982>.

47 As of March 2024, the case against the suspect had not gone to court. The mentioned illegal infiltrated the institute at UiT where the author of this paper worked.

48 PST, *National Threat Assessment for 2024*, The Norwegian Police Security Service, pst.no, 2024, <https://www.pst.no/alle-artikler/artikler/ntv-2024/>.

49 M. M. Lowenthal, *Intelligence: From secrets to policy*, CQ press (2022).

50 K. Cozine, 'Setauket to Abbottabad: The value of film and television in teaching human intelligence', *Journal of Strategic Security*, 8:3 (2015), 91.

Influence operations

Influence efforts and operations may be aimed at a particular audience in a target country or at an aggressor's own population, and can also be used to influence international credibility and power as part of a geopolitical strategy.⁵¹ Influence operations can range from manipulating the law (lawfare) to disinformation, understood as information deployed by elusive state or non-state actors, which is purposefully distorted or twisted, or flatly false for the purposes of causing harm, including political polarization of a society. Attempts to influence people and the law have been increasing in Norway. As early as autumn 2015, in what can in hindsight be referred to as an effort to weaponize migration, approximately 5,500 asylum seekers suddenly crossed the Norwegian-Russian border in the High North. The possible intent appeared to be a combination of overwhelming the small border station and the local community, fomenting anti-migration sentiment in Norway, and/or putting Norway's human rights reputation in a bad light if the country were to return people in need.⁵² Contrary to the requirements of Norwegian law, the Russian border authorities did not

prevent third-country nationals from entering Norway without a visa, claiming that they were incapable of doing so and bound by the European Convention on Human Rights.⁵³

In a more recent case of potential lawfare with the possible intent to cast Norway in a negative light, questions have been raised regarding Russia's application of the law of the sea, and its intentions to study the seabed in the Norwegian EEZ (exclusive economic zone), in the vicinity of oil and gas installations.⁵⁴ Norway's denial of Russian access to these waters for research purposes could be framed by Russian authorities as a breach of the protocol within the law of the sea, which could in turn be used for future justification of Russian breaches of the same law and/or to damage Norway's global reputation as a state abiding by the rule of law. In the end, the Norwegian government permitted the research trip, with the Russian research vessel spending three days in the Norwegian EEZ, instead of the original 44 days that Russia had applied for.⁵⁵

Among studies conducted to date in the Norwegian context, including a December 2023 study of a global network of fake news sites,

51 Merlin Boone, 'Strategic Influence Operations: A Call to Action', *Journal of Public and International Affairs: Annotations Blog*, 26 August 2021, <https://jpia.princeton.edu/news/strategic-influence-operations-call-action>.

52 Tormod Strand & Mohammed Alayoubi, '5000 migranter over Storskog: – Russland ville teste Norge' [5,000 migrants across Storskog: – Russia wanted to test Norway], NRK, 29 January 2023, https://www.nrk.no/norge/5000-migranter-over-storskog_-russland-ville-teste-norge-1.16264314.

53 Arild Moe & Lars Rowe, 'Asylstrømmen fra Russland til Norge i 2015: Bevisst russisk politikk?' [The flood of asylum seekers from Russia to Norway in 2015: Deliberate Russian policy?], *Nordisk Østforum*, 30:2 (2016), 80–97.

54 Eskild Johansen, 'Mener russisk forskningstokt i nord er forsøk på provokasjon' [Russian research expedition in the north is an attempt at provocation] NRK, 16 November 2023, <https://www.nrk.no/tromsogfinnmark/forsker-mener-russlands-forskningstokt-er-geopolitisk-spill-1.16625549>.

55 Roald Ramsdal, 'Russisk forskningsskip fikk lov til å undersøke norsk sokkel to ganger i år – uten at tillatelsene er brukt' [Russian research vessel approved to investigate the Norwegian continental shelf twice this year – the permits were not used], *Teknisk Ukeblad*, 22 December 2023, <https://www.tu.no/artikler/russisk-forskningsskip-fikk-lov-til-a-undersoke-norsk-sokkel-to-ganger-i-ar-uten-at-tillatelsene-er-brukt/540758>.

14 of which exist in Norway,⁵⁶ there is little evidence to suggest that either lawfare or disinformation has had much impact on Norwegian society or politics thus far.⁵⁷ However, influence operations may also include leveraging people in positions of trust (politicians, academics, community leaders, etc.), and play an important role in information gathering, an aspect that has seen increased activity in Norway.

Memory politics

Since the escalation of Russia's war in Ukraine, debates have taken place on the extent to which Northern Norwegian entities should continue to cooperate with their Russian counterparts. "Friendship agreements" between northern cities (e.g., Bodø in Norway and Vyborg in Russia) have in many cases been frozen rather than cancelled altogether, but not without critics suggesting that these friendship agreements can be abused by Russian actors.⁵⁸ Particularly since 2014 when Russia invaded Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula, many of the friendship agreements between Norwegian and Russian cities have been used for patriotic and militarized nation-building among school-age children, emphasizing Russian military symbolism while celebrating the liberation of East

Finnmark by the Soviet Red Army.⁵⁹ The impact of such celebrations may be a useful tool for attempting to influence young people on both sides of the Norwegian-Russian border about Russia's role and its importance for both countries.

Several friendship agreements have also increasingly included "technical municipal cooperation", allowing Russian municipal authorities to visit water supply and waste removal facilities, as well as fire stations in Norwegian municipalities located near the Russian border. The friendship agreement between the Norwegian border town of Kirkenes and the closed military town of Severomorsk, located in the Murmansk Oblast, and the administrative base for the Northern Fleet, served as the foundation for Russian Orthodox priests to request visits to the water supply systems of their Norwegian counterpart in 2019.⁶⁰ In consultation with the local police, the request was refused by the Kirkenes municipal authorities. It was not made clear why Church officials would be interested in such infrastructure systems.

Coinciding with activities connected with "friendship" agreements, it has become increasingly evident that the Russian state has been engaged in "memory politics" in Northern

56 Eskil Grendahl Sivertsen, Håvard Lundberg, Thomas Albrechtsen, Aylin Dursun, & Sofus Henger, 'Two layers of fog – anonymous Norwegian websites linking to Russian-affiliated domains', FFI Report 2023, 23/02382.

57 NOU 2022: 9, *En åpen og opplyst offentlig samtale* [An open and enlightened public conversation], Kultur- og likestillingsdepartementet (Ministry of Culture and Equality), 2022.

58 Skjalg Fjellheim, 'Pinlig for Nord Norge' [Embarrassing for Northern Norway], *Nordnorsk debatt*, 3 July 2023, <https://www.nordnorskdebatt.no/pinlig-for-nord-norge/o/5-124-253610>.

59 Kari Aga Myklebost, '"Vennskap" med våpentrening og militære parader' ["Friendship" with weapon training and military parades], *Nordnorsk debatt*, 13 November 2022, <https://www.nordnorskdebatt.no/vennskap-med-vapentrening-og-militare-parader/o/5-124-209179>.

60 Thomas Nilsen, 'Orthodox Church from Severomorsk wanted to study Kirkenes water supply', *The Independent Barents Observer*, 5 October 2022, <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/security/2022/10/orthodox-church-severomorsk-wanted-collaborate-drinking-wanter-kirkenes>.

Norway through so-called Russian-Norwegian patriotic memory tours from 2011 to 2019.⁶¹ These tours were seen by the Russian media as crucial for maintaining the desired positive relationship with Russia's Norwegian neighbours, especially after the 2014 annexation of Crimea. The tours were aimed at revising "false" information about WWII and teaching younger generations about the heroes who fought against Nazism, combined with narratives of an increasing threat from neo-Nazism in Ukraine and the Baltic states.⁶² The result has been an "export of Russian military-patriotic and Soviet nostalgic symbols and war history perspectives to east Finnmark".⁶³ These tours have made use of the sense of shared history with the Soviet Union that Northern Norwegians have shared since the end of WWII, but with a firmer intention to tweak the historical narrative in Russia's favour to garner support for Russian perspectives.⁶⁴ The Russian Orthodox Church has also been actively used in promoting Russian state-driven "Pomor history" to legitimize Russian geopolitical interests, including setting up Pomor crosses in different locations in east Finnmark, and most recently in Pyramidene on Svalbard.⁶⁵

These practices are consistent with longstanding efforts by Russia to counter Central and East European states' attempts to distance themselves as independent states from the former Soviet Union and the Russian Empire. This history-based propaganda has received little attention from the Norwegian authorities.

Academic cooperation and science diplomacy

Academic cooperation can also be abused, either as part of influence campaigns or for gathering information/intelligence. In 2020, the Norwegian Police Security Service (PST) voiced concerns about the ways in which academic cooperation could be subject to manipulation or the inadvertent sharing of sensitive (particularly technological) information.⁶⁶ The Norwegian academic environment depends on open, international cooperation, but this can simultaneously weaken the same environment if knowledge and research are extracted illegally and used against Norwegian security interests. Some of the issues raised pertained to hiring people from countries that have demonstrated what the Norwegian authorities have perceived as challenging or hostile intentions,

61 K. A. Myklebost, 'Minnediplomati i grenseland. De russisk-norske patriotiske minneturene 2011–2019' [Memory diplomacy in the borderland. The Russian-Norwegian patriotic memory tours 2011–2019], *Nordisk Østforum*, 37, 2023, 130–155.

62 Ibid.

63 Ibid., 131.

64 Kari Aga Myklebost and Joakim Aalmen Markussen, 'Norge under russisk minnepolitiske press' [Norway subjected to Russian memory political pressure], *Nordnorsk debatt*, 8 September 2023, <https://www.nordnorskdebatt.no/norge-under-russisk-minnepolitisk-press/o/5-124-264790>.

65 Myklebost and Markussen, 'Norge under russisk minnepolitiske press'; Thomas Nilsen, 'Bishop Iyakov, who backs Putin's war, raised giant cross at Svalbard without Norway's knowledge', *Independent Barents Observer*, 12 August 2023, <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/arctic/2023/08/russia-worlds-arctic-power-said-war-blessing-bishop-who-week-raised-giant-patriotic>.

66 Osman Kibar and Stine Engen, 'PST hudfletter universitetene: "Fullstendig blåøyde og veldig, veldig naive"' [PST flays the universities: "Completely blue-eyed and very very naive"], *DN.no*, 2020, <https://www.dn.no/magasinet/dokumentar/politiets-sikkerhetstjeneste/ntnu/tekna/pst-hudfletter-universitetene-fullstendig-blaoyde-og-veldig-veldig-naive/2-1-919171>.

either regionally or globally. The PST identified instances of foreign researchers being involved in espionage and the illegal transfer of information, but also highlighted the recruitment of Norwegian researchers by foreign states by means of bribery, blackmail, or both, to assist in gathering insider information or in conducting influence operations.⁶⁷ Numerous Iranian scholars have been investigated for potentially sharing information/intelligence with the Iranian government, though the validity of some charges have been questioned in court.⁶⁸ Influence operations could include the promotion of security narratives by Russian or Chinese political interests, for example, which could be useful both within the recruiting countries, showing that “Western scholars” agree with or validate Russian or Chinese national activities, and in Norway to convince Norwegian audiences of the same.

In addition, researchers expressing controversial or politically problematic views, which are protected by freedom of expression and academic freedom, may find themselves or their views exploited and manipulated by propaganda efforts to demonstrate their compliance with authoritarian state narratives.⁶⁹ Similarly, the ability to conduct independent research, and

even the safety of colleagues in Russia and/or China, for example, may be jeopardized if researchers are considered to be cooperating with “foreign agents”.⁷⁰ Concerns were raised in 2023 when a professor working at a Norwegian university was actively participating in conference activities in support of Russia’s war and claims in Ukraine, funded by Russian sources, and frequently interviewed in Russian media that critics claim have contributed to Russian propaganda.⁷¹ Both ethical and security considerations come into play when working with scholars in restrictive, authoritarian countries. Opportunities for independent, in-depth research still exist, but need to be carefully negotiated so as not to put any scholars (in Norway or the cooperating country) at risk.

Lastly, issues related to research cooperation, which is essential for knowledge creation, are stressing the concept of “science diplomacy”. Ideally, science diplomacy can be a functional tool for finding areas of engagement or cooperation with countries with which relations are otherwise poor, where science is purported to build bridges between societies. Science diplomacy also potentially provides an opportunity to address issues between countries when more formal or official mechanisms are unavailable

67 Kibar and Engen, ‘PST hudfletter universitetene’.

68 Johannes Børstad and Olav Døvik, ‘Tysk-iransk NTNU-professor frikjent i lagmannsretten’ [German-Iranian NTNU professor acquitted in court of appeals], NRK, 8 December 2023, <https://www.nrk.no/trondelag/tysk-iransk-ntnu-professor-frikjent-i-lagmannsretten-1.16670924>.

69 Geremie R. Barmé, ‘In a retro mood: The ethical dilemmas of cutting a deal with Xi Jinping’s China’, *The China Project*, 15 September 2023, https://thechinaproject.com/2023/09/15/in-a-retro-mood-the-ethical-dilemmas-of-cutting-a-deal-with-xi-jinpings-china/?fbclid=IwAR2AuVr3K051gmBZBNUpGjexNlP5mkvN6QN3SA7-fPXeQwMvbc3fuhQ_ahw.

70 Human Rights Watch, ‘Russia: New Restrictions for “Foreign Agents”’, 1 December 2022, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/12/01/russia-new-restrictions-foreign-agents>.

71 Anders Lohne Fosse, ‘Rektor etter kontroversielt Russland-besøk: -Han detter på fritiden’ [Rector after controversial Russia visit: He participates during his free time], *Nettavisen nyheter*, 22 June 2023, <https://www.nettavisen.no/nyheter/rektor-etter-kontroversielt-russland-besok-han-deltar-pa-fritiden/s/5-95-1175980>.

due to conflict.⁷² However, science diplomacy remains vulnerable to manipulation. Pressure exerted by hostile, often authoritarian and restrictive national governments on their own citizens, or citizens of other countries, to share information illicitly or influence populations,⁷³ potentially for purposes that could pose an immediate or future threat to a target state like Norway, exposes academics to a certain degree of risk.

Sabotage

Physical sabotage

In April 2021, a deep-sea cable disappeared above the Arctic Circle just outside the region of Vesterålen in Northern Norway. The cable was used to collect and transmit information for research and for the Norwegian Armed Forces; eight months later, the connection to another important cable was damaged just off Svalbard.⁷⁴ Russian fishing vessels had been seen passing over the locations at times consistent with the disappearance/removal of, and damage to, these cables. It is possible to track ships due to the Automatic Identification

System (AIS) signals specific to individual ships. It took months before the first cable, 4.2 km long and weighing multiple tonnes, was located. Its final resting place was also noted to be a spot where Russian fishing vessels had been sailing. The cable between Svalbard and the Norwegian mainland was damaged, but technicians were able to ensure that the northern island's communication and other information transfer capabilities were restored. It was nevertheless clear that this was a human-induced event rather than a natural one.⁷⁵

The research as well as the sensitive data that these cables are used for could pose a risk to Norwegian security if destroyed or infiltrated for information. Police cannot confirm who caused the damage, but in both cases they believe that the damage and/or removal of the cable was human-induced. Sabotage has been included as a potentially increasing threat to Norway.⁷⁶

Electronic operations

Electronic operations or attacks overlap with the attack categories of sabotage and cyber warfare, and include "the use of electro-

72 Pierre-Bruno Ruffini, *Science and diplomacy: A new dimension of international relations*, Springer International Publishing (2017), 11.

73 Osman Kibar, 'PST: "Enhver kinesisk borger" kan pålegges å samarbeide med Kinas etterretningsapparat' [PST: "Any Chinese citizen" can be forced to cooperate with China's intelligence apparatus], Dn.no, 2022, <https://www.dn.no/teknologi/pst/kina/spionasje/pst-enhver-kinesisk-borger-kan-palegges-a-samarbeide-med-kinas-etterretningsapparat/2-1-1166762>.

74 B. Fredriksen, B. M. Pettersen, G. K. Hesla, I. Eriksen, H. Guldahl, 'Kabelmysteriene' [The cable mysteries], NRK, 26 June 2022, <https://www.nrk.no/nordland/xl/russiske-tralere-krysset-kabler-i-vesteralen-og-svalbard-for-brudd-1.16007084#intro-authors--expand>.

75 NTB, 'Menneskelig årsak til brudd på fiberkabel mellom Svalbard og fastlands-Norge' [Human cause of break in fibre cable between Svalbard and mainland Norway], *Inside Telecom*, 11 February 2022, <https://www.insidetelcom.no/artikler/menneskelig-arsak-til-brudd-pa-fiberkabel-mellom-svalbard-og-fastlands-norge/517239>.

76 PST, *National Threat Assessment for 2022*, The Norwegian Police Security Service, 2023, <https://www.pst.no/alle-artikler/trusselvurderinger/ntv-2023/>.

magnetic energy, directed energy, or anti-radiation weapons to attack personnel, facilities or equipment with the intent of degrading, neutralizing, or destroying enemy combat capability".⁷⁷ East Finnmark, the northernmost region in Northern Norway bordering Russia, has been increasingly subjected to jamming, "a form of electronic attack that interferes with [radio frequency] communications by generating noise in the same frequency band and within the field of view of the antenna on the satellite or receiver it is targeting".⁷⁸

The Norwegian airline Widerøe frequently flies between smaller communities in Northern Norway as well as between north and south Norway. The airline has reported an increase in Russian-instigated jamming activities targeting its GPS signals, with incidents increasing

significantly since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.⁷⁹ The National Communications Authority (Nkom) registered a fivefold increase in the number of days with GPS failure in the airspace over Finnmark in the twelve months following the start of the 2022 escalation of the war in Ukraine compared to 2021.⁸⁰ It is not only air traffic that is of concern; attempts or occurrences of jamming are also being conducted around the continental shelf, as multiple industries use GPS, including the gas installation at Melkøya in Hammerfest. Jamming can also affect the speed and capability of search and rescue operations.⁸¹ It is believed that Russia has increased its electronic operations against industries and capabilities that come within range of the airspace and military bases that it wishes to protect.

77 Michael Niewöhner, 'Sabotage and Disclosure of Flight Test and other reasons & methods to intercept, jam or spoof telemetry', The European Test and Telemetry Conference Proceedings, 2018, 123–129.

78 G. Giannopoulos, H. Smith, M. Theodoridou, *The Landscape of Hybrid Threats*, 51.

79 Tor Kjetil Kristoffersen, 'Russerne jammer Widerøes GPS-er: Skaper store problemer for oss' (Russians jamming Widerøe's GPS: Creates large problems for us), *Nettavisen Nyheter*, 21 December 2022, <https://www.nettavisen.no/nyheter/russerne-jammer-wideroes-gps-er-skaper-store-problemer-for-oss/s/5-95-819901>.

80 Stian Strøm, 'Kraftig økning av GPS-jamming over Finnmark' [Sharp increase in GPS jamming over Finnmark], NRK, 24 February 2023, <https://www.nrk.no/tromsogfinnmark/kraftig-okning-av-gps-jamming-over-finnmark-1.16309499>.

81 Strøm, 'Kraftig økning av GPS-jamming over Finnmark'.

Conclusions

Norway is subjected to a complex array of hybrid threat activities that occur with moderate to high frequency. Awareness of these activities has only emerged more recently, largely due to the Russian escalation of the war in Ukraine.⁸²

Based on the types of hybrid threat activity that have been taking place, it is possible to conclude that Norway is subjected to priming activities, the initial stages of hybrid threat development. This means that Norway is not necessarily subjected to what can be characterized as a hybrid threat operation, but that there are frequent and apparently increasing attempts to gather information from Norway for potential future hostile use, as well as to test the ground for the degree to which current vulnerabilities in Norway can be exploited.

There has been a demonstrable escalation of activity when considering the different types of activities (from intelligence gathering to influence operations and possible sabotage) and their frequency. A number of these activities, especially the drone and illegal spy activities in 2023, were not particularly highlighted in earlier threat assessments by the Norwegian authorities. In other words, Norway was not prepared.

Insufficient attention has been paid to the range of influence operation activities, not just from unattributable or hidden sources, but also from persons in positions of trust that have the right to freedom of expression and academic freedom, but also a duty to ensure that they share information responsibly.

The extent and nature of the hybrid threat activities that Norway is exposed to is significant, and more than likely to increase. It is important for both Norwegian as well as Nordic and European security that Norway continues to have a stable and highly trusted political and social system capable of countering ongoing attempts to infiltrate and collect information on Norwegians, as well as mitigating attempts to influence hearts and minds. At the same time, it can be argued that Norwegians are not well prepared for the implications of diverse hybrid threat activities. Norwegian defence planning can be a key tool for enhancing preparedness, as well as important dialogue between Norwegian authorities and citizens. However, more initiatives and developments are needed to ensure that Norwegian society can address these challenges, including digital/technological mitigation measures against various cyberattacks, increased public awareness of what hybrid threats are and how they affect societal institutions and trust, and non- or de-digitalized preparedness measures, including the stockpiling of supplies in case of a crisis, and establishing information and supply contact points (such as local schools) when power and communications go down.⁸³ At the same time, Norway needs to be cognisant of the values it stands for, such as human rights (including Indigenous rights), freedom of expression, academic freedom, and the importance of debate for democracy. The global credibility of democracies, including

82 Trine Jonassen and Birgitte Annie Molid Martinussen, 'Nordland Chief of Police: "The Russian Intelligence Threat Has Never Been Greater"', *High North News*, 4 October 2023, <https://www.highnorthnews.com/en/nordland-chief-police-russian-intelligence-threat-has-never-been-greater>.

83 Gunhild Hoogensen Gjörv, Jardar Gjörv, Ørjan N. Karlsson, Marte Aasen and Gjermund Forfang Rongved, 'De sivile rolle i sammensatte krigføring' [The role of civilians in hybrid warfare], in *Totalforsvar i Praksis* [Total defence in practice], Gjermund Forfang Rongved, Per Martin Norheim-Martinsen (eds), Gyldendal, Oslo (2022), 94–105.

Norway, and how they manage crises while maintaining rights, transparency and openness, is one of the prime targets for hybrid threats in the attempt to shift geopolitical power towards authoritarian regimes.

Author

Gunhild Hoogensen Gjörv is Professor of Security and Geopolitics (Critical Peace and Conflict Studies) at UiT – the Arctic University of Norway, and Arctic 5 Chair in Security Studies (arcticfive.org). Her research examines comprehensive security dynamics in the context of hybrid threats and warfare, civil-military interaction (including Norwegian total defence), and Arctic perceptions of security.



Hybrid CoE

The European Centre of Excellence
for Countering Hybrid Threats