

# US-NATO Presence on Russia's Doorstep: Norway on the Way to Become Unfriendly Neighbor in Russia's Eyes

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*Norway is executing a drastic change in its military policy, towards a far more aggressive posture. A total of 330 US Marines have been stationed for a trial period from January at the Vaernes military base east of Trondheim. The deployment marks the first time since World War II that foreign troops have been allowed to station in Norway. Last year, the Norwegian Parliament approved a one-year trial period for the US military presence, including two six-month rotations. Now it is planned to [double the Marines presence](#) in the country from 330 to 650 soldiers. Norway and the United States are now discussing the usefulness of continuing this agreement beyond 2017.*

The airport in Nord-Trøndelag [can become](#) a major military air base. The US Marine Corps Prepositioning Program-Norway, already stores large amounts of military equipment in caves. The caves currently hold enough to equip a fighting force of 4,600 Marines. The US military [plans](#) to enlarge the stockpile allowing it to store enough weapons and equipment for a Marine Expeditionary Brigade (up to 16, 000 servicemen). Planners are completing an analysis of the current gear cache that should wrap up in the next 12 months.

There are other plans to increase US military presence in the country. Last summer, a study group from the US Navy visited both Andøya and Evenes airports in northern Norway to see if they could host American P-8 Poseidon patrol aircraft.

According to Washington-based Center for Strategic and international Studies (CSIS) [report](#),

“The former Royal Norwegian Navy base at Olavsvern is ideal for supporting submarine operations in the extreme North Atlantic and Arctic Seas”.

The paper says it may be possible for Norway to nationalize and reopen a portion of the facility to support the rotational presence of US submarines. Olavsvern is NATO's closest naval base to the Kola Peninsula. The paper notes that the United States needs to leverage its bilateral relationships with Norway in order to develop and deploy a new generation of undersea sensing capabilities.



The Globus II overlooking the town of Vardø (Source: [BarentsObserver](#))

The construction of sophisticated new radar system known as Globus 3 in Vardø [has started](#). Formally, the radar's mission is to track space debris but it's an open secret that the site is an element of the US-led NATO ballistic missile defense (BMD).

The radar located in Svalbard (the Arctic) can also be used by US military for missile defense purposes. The site has been frequently visited by US officials and politicians. This radar is installed in violation of the 1925 treaty which states that Svalbard has a demilitarized status.

Norway used to be skeptical toward the BMD plans. In 2002, Norway condemned the US decision to pull out from the ABM Treaty. **Jens Stoltenberg**, the current NATO General Secretary, was skeptical about the system at a summit in Moscow in 2007. But **Prime Minister Erna Solberg** announced the decision to join the NATO missile defense in 2015 - the same year Norwegian ships participated with radar sensors in an allied BMD exercise.

The joint American-Norwegian radar project is an openly hostile move, which has become an irritant to negatively affect the Russian-Norwegian bilateral relationship. The missile shield will alter the strategic balance—giving Washington and NATO the ability to launch a first nuclear strike on Russia and prevent it from launching a counter-strike. Besides, the radar will be used for intelligence collection being stationed just 40 miles from the Russian Kola Peninsula where strategic submarines and other military assets are based.

[According to Professor Theodore Postol](#), a professor at Massachusetts Technological Institute and a well-known scholar, Norway

“would be dragged into a conflict between the great powers... The radar in Vardø is of the type GBR-P, formerly deployed on the Kwajalein Atoll in the

Pacific. It was formerly intended to be the most important radar in the US missile shield, to be deployed in the Czech Republic”.

“Norway has to understand that after becoming an outpost of NATO, it will have to face head-on Russia and Russian military might”, **Teimuraz Ramishvili**, Russian ambassador to Oslo, [told](#) Norway’s state broadcaster, NRK.

“Therefore, there will be no peaceful Arctic anymore”.

Formally, the radar’s mission is to track space debris but it’s an open secret that the site is part of US global ballistic missile defense (BMD) system, making Norway a prime target for attack in the event of a conflict.

Norway plans to have over 50 US-produced F-35 stealth warplanes in 2019. It will give it the capability to strike deep into the Russian territory. It underscores the fact that Norway would rapidly be drawn into any war that NATO launched against Russia. Indeed, the preparations unquestionably make Norway a target for Russian military action.

The US military presence represents a shift from the peacetime policy of prohibiting the posting of foreign troops in Norway. Before joining NATO in 1949, Norway pledged not to allow deployment of foreign military on its soil “as long as it is not under attack or threat of attack.” No Norwegian government has said it is threatened by Russia. Quite to the contrary, just a few days ago Prime Minister Erna Solberg said that she doesn’t consider Russia to be a threat to Norway’s security in an [interview](#) with German *DW*. According to her,

Oslo and Moscow have a “good partnership”, especially in the Arctic. “We don’t believe that Russia is a direct threat to Norway, but we believe that Russia has become more unpredictable in its policies”, the PM noted.

Hardly so, Russia is very much predictable because it has no alternative to taking [measures in response](#).

The border between Russia and Norway has been peaceful for centuries. The two countries have always been good neighbors. It is all changing now. Foreign troops on Norwegian soil and the construction of the new radar are parts of unfriendly policy toward Russia, which believes that the provocative moves are unacceptable. Perhaps, it should be taken into account by Norwegian politicians as the country nears the parliamentary elections in the fall.

**Peter Korzun** is an expert on wars and conflicts.

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