Explaining Continuity and Change in Russian Security Policy:

A Case Study of Russia’s Approaches towards the Nordic Region in the context of the Ukraine Crisis

Karen-Anna Eggen

Master’s Thesis
The Department of Political Science

UNIVERSITETET I OSLO

Fall 2016
Number of words: 46 650
Explaining Continuity and Change in Russian Security Policy: A Case Study of Russia’s Approaches towards the Nordic Region in the context of the Ukraine Crisis

Karen-Anna Eggen

http://www.duo.uio.no/

Trykk: Allkopi AS, Oslo
Abstract

The Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014 took much of the world by surprise. Russia’s actions prompted harsh critique and reactions by many Western countries and introduced a new chill in Russia Western relations not seen since the end of the Cold War. The Ukraine crisis also negatively affected Russia’s relations with its Nordic neighbors and resulted in a negative spillover to the Nordic region in form of increased tensions and uncertainty. However, research on Russian security policy towards the Nordic region, as well as research on broader Russia Nordic security relations, particularly from a Russian viewpoint, is scarce in general, and in the period following the crisis in Ukraine in particular.

By pursuing the aim to contextualize, analyze, and explain Russian security policy in the Nordic region in the context of the 2014 Ukraine crisis, this thesis allows for a comprehensive study of Russia’s security policy in the Nordic region and contributes both empirically and theoretically to the field of Russian security studies by providing new research and enhancing knowledge on Russian security policy in the Nordic region specifically, and the larger field of Russian security studies. The thesis makes use of the classical strategy concepts, defined as ends, ways, means, in order to map and analyze both Russia’s security policy ends (goals) in the region and the various ways and tools Russia has at its disposal in order to enhance and meet these interests and ends.

This thesis argues that Russia’s security policy towards the Nordic region is characterized by both continuity and change. Russia’s overall security policy ends in the region have remained remarkably stable, when compared to earlier periods. This may indicate that Russia, despite the increased tensions, is interested in the region remaining peaceful. Continuity may also be explained by the fact that despite the increased tensions, Russia’s threat perceptions have remained the same (even though some of the traditional Russian concerns have exacerbated in the studied period due to increased Western military presence). However, the study also finds that Russia’s ways, and to a lesser extent its means, have changed in the 2014-2016 time period. This may indicate that Russia to a larger degree is willing to act and use its tools more aggressively, both military and rhetorically, in order to enhance and protect its interests in the Nordic region. Lastly, the study argues that Russia prefers to approach the Nordic region in a diversified or partly diversified manner, rather than a unified way. This may indicate that the latter gives Russia less leeway to meet and pursue its interests in the Nordic region.
Acknowledgements

This thesis and research process would not have been possible to accomplish without the help from my advisor, Katarzyna Zysk, and her colleagues at the Norwegian Institute for Defence Studies (Forsvarets forskningsinstitutt). Katarzyna, I am forever grateful for your excellent advice, encouragements, patience, and guidance. Your constructive and detailed feedback, as well as your expertise and knowledge on the field, has been invaluable to my research. To Magnus Petersson, your insights, feedback, and support have been a guiding light throughout this process and I cannot thank you enough for all your help and time.

I would also like to thank the Norwegian Institute for Defence Studies for taking me in as an MA student and giving me access to valuable resources, an excellent working environment, and, most importantly, to wonderful and engaged colleagues.

To everyone working at the Norwegian Defence University College library, your services have truly been outstanding. Thank you so much for answering all my emails and helping me find books, articles, and the like.

To my wonderful family and friends, thank you so much for all your support throughout this process. Thank you for cheering me on and for encouraging me when I have struggled to keep myself motivated. Thank you for giving me feedback on my work and for proof reading my chapters. I truly do not know what I would do without you and I am forever grateful to have you all in my life.

Last, but not least, to my parents: Thank you for all your love and support throughout my entire time as a student, for encouraging me to follow my dreams and for pushing me when I have needed a push. None of this would have been possible without you.
Outline

1 Introduction ........................................................................................................................................... 1
   1.1 Thesis aim and research questions ................................................................................................. 2
   1.2 Thesis outline .................................................................................................................................. 3
2 Research design ....................................................................................................................................... 6
   2.1 Key definitions ................................................................................................................................. 6
   2.2 Methodological framework ............................................................................................................. 8
      2.2.1 Collecting the data and structuring the analysis ....................................................................... 11
      2.2.2 Approaching the text: Qualitative Document Analysis ............................................................ 17
   2.3 Theoretical Framework .................................................................................................................. 23
      2.3.1 Continuity and change in Russia’s approaches ...................................................................... 24
      2.3.2 Regional and intra-regional approaches ............................................................................... 27
3 Key historical trends: Soviet and Russian approaches toward the Nordic region .......................... 31
   3.1 The Soviet Union’s approaches ...................................................................................................... 31
   3.2 Russia’s approaches in the 1990s .................................................................................................. 35
   3.3 Russia’s approaches: 2000-2011 .................................................................................................... 36
   3.4 Russia’s approaches: 2012-2013 ................................................................................................... 39
      3.4.1 Russian MFA reviews 2012-2013: Regional cooperation ......................................................... 41
      3.4.2 Military activity in proximity to the Nordic region 2012-2013 ............................................ 42
   3.5 Summary ......................................................................................................................................... 44
4 Russia’s security policy ends in the Nordic region: 2014-2016 ....................................................... 45
   4.1 Maximize Russian influence ......................................................................................................... 46
   4.2 Minimize Western influence ........................................................................................................ 50
   4.3 Counter an increase in Western military presence ........................................................................ 52
   4.4 Secure Russia’s military strategic depth ....................................................................................... 54
   4.5 Summary ......................................................................................................................................... 56
5 Russian security policy ways and means in the Nordic region: 2014-2016 ....................................... 57
   5.1 Russian ways .................................................................................................................................. 57
   5.2 Military, political, and informational means ................................................................................ 59
   5.3 Maximize Russian influence ....................................................................................................... 62
   5.4 Minimize Western influence ....................................................................................................... 69
   5.5 Counter an increase in Western military presence ....................................................................... 74
5.6 Secure Russia’s military strategic depth ................................................................. 84
5.7 Summary .................................................................................................................. 92
6 Explaining: Russia’s security policy towards the Nordic region .............................. 94
6.1 Explaining continuity and change .......................................................................... 94
6.2 Regional and intra-regional variation in Russia’s approaches ............................... 97
6.3 Summary ................................................................................................................ 104
7 Conclusion and implications of the research findings .............................................. 106
Literature ...................................................................................................................... 111
Attachment 1 - Russian Air and Maritime activity (March 2015 – October 2016) ......... 137

List of tables
Table 1. Phase one - basic and specific search words .................................................. 14
Table 2. Russia’s political and military ends in the Nordic region .............................. 45
Table 3. Military aviation encounters in the High North and Baltic sub-regions
(March 2014 – March 2015) ..................................................................................... 79
Table 4. Military aviation encounters in the High North and Baltic sub-regions
(March 2015 – October 2016) .................................................................................... 79
Table 5. Military maritime encounters in the High North and Baltic sub-regions (March
- 2014 – October 2016) ............................................................................................. 82
Table 6. Russian strategic assets in the High North and Baltic sub-regions ............... 101

List of figures
Figure 1. The causal dynamics of foreign policy change .......................................... 26

List of maps
Map 1. The Nordic region ........................................................................................... 5
ABBREVIATIONS & EXPLANATIONS

RUS MoD – Russian Ministry of Defense
RUS MFA – Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs
BEAC – Barents Euro-Arctic Council
CBSS – Council of the Baltic Sea States
Rossiiskaya Gazeta – Russian state owned newspaper
RIA Novosti – Russian state owned news agency
RT – Russian state owned news agency
TASS – Russian state owned news agency
BMD – Ballistic Missile Defense
1 Introduction

The Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014 took much of the world by surprise, prompting both harsh critique and action by many Western countries. Almost overnight, Russia was politically, economically, and militarily isolated by the European Union, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and the United States (US). Even in consideration of the already-deteriorating experiencing state of Russia Western relations, the crisis in Ukraine introduced a new chill to the relationship not seen since the end of the Cold War. The Ukraine crisis has also indirectly and directly affected Russia’s relation with its Nordic neighbors, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, and Iceland, who all have voiced deep concern about Russia’s actions in Ukraine, as well as Russia’s subsequent behavior in the Nordic region in light of increased tensions.

From a Russian perspective, the “northwestern flank” has, at least since the end of the Cold War, been considered a peaceful region. At the beginning of the new millennium, the Russian view of its northern neighborhood was one in which the states in the region did not constitute a military nor economic threat to Russia’s interests. Instead, focus had settled on promoting regional cooperation, economic development and cooperative security. The days of strategic deterrence seemed passed and Russia was no longer considered an adversary to NATO and vice versa. Since the Georgia War in 2008, however, the Nordic countries have witnessed an impressive Russian military modernization, as well as the rise of more assertive and anti-Western Russian political leadership. Russia’s interventions in Georgia in 2008 and subsequent annexation of Crimea and intervention in eastern Ukraine (2014), as well as its participation in the ongoing war in Syria, have led to increased uncertainty among Russia’s neighbors regarding its intentions and ambitions, including in the northwest Europe (Fyodor et al, 2001; Åtland, 2016: 163).

The Nordic countries have witnessed changes in Russia’s policies towards the region, including an increased and more aggressive military behavior and changes in official rhetoric towards the High North and the Baltic Sea, although there have been differences in how Russia approach the Nordic countries in these two sub-regions. How, then, can the “new” Russian security policy towards the Nordic region be interpreted and explained? How much continuity and how much change in Russian policies has occurred since 2014? Furthermore, what are the implications of this development for the security situation in the region?
Research on broader Russia Nordic security relations, particularly from a Russian viewpoint, is scarce in general, and in the period following the crisis in Ukraine in particular. This thesis will therefore set out to explore and explain evolution of the Russian security policy towards the Nordic region in the context of the 2014 Ukraine crisis.

1.1 Thesis aim and research questions

The aim of this thesis is to contextualize, analyze, and explain Russian security policy towards the Nordic region, with a particular focus on the period after the start of the Ukraine conflict in 2014. The Nordic region includes the five countries Norway, Iceland, Denmark, Sweden and Finland and their shared geographical space with Russia. Security policy is understood here as the ability to protect a state from external threats, which in practice often involves the use of military force. Such threats may come from another state, non-governmental organizations, or groups and legitimizes the use of drastic means to ensure protection and safety. This understanding of security policy builds on a traditional definition of the concept. However, in light of discoveries made in the empirical data and the increased tendency of combining military and non-military tools in Russian strategic thinking, this thesis will broaden the definition to include political-informational means (Skogan, 2011: 102-203; Adamsky, 2015).

The underlying assumption is that the Russian annexation of Crimea, and the following interventions in Eastern Ukraine, have negatively affected the overall relationship between Russia and the West and, hereunder, led to increased tensions in the Nordic region. Statements from the Nordic countries signaling closer defense and security cooperation between themselves due to increased Russian aggression, have led to reactions from the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, who is concerned that the Nordic countries “have begun to align their defensive strategies against Russia” (Bentzrød, 2015; RUS MFA, 2015).

In light of the increased tensions, this thesis seeks out to examine and explain Russia’s security policy approaches towards the Nordic region. The aim of this thesis will be achieved through answering three interlinked research questions:

1) What security policy ends does Russia have in the Nordic region?

2) What ways and means does Russia use, or is Russia ready to use, to achieve her ends?
3) How can Russia’s security policy towards the Nordic region be explained?

The first two research questions build on classical strategic analysis and the concepts understood as ends, ways, and means. Furthermore, Russia is viewed as a rational and unified actor operating within an environment of external and internal restraints. As such, this thesis assumes that Russia has relatively consistent goal formulations and pursues satisfactory strategies to reach these goals. (Allison, 1969: 694; Freedman, 2013: 592; Underdal, 1984).

By answering the first question, Russia’s interests and goals in the Nordic region is mapped. Since the thesis builds on the framework of the traditional understanding of the security concept, the analysis will focus on mapping and categorizing Russian military and political ends.

By answering the second question, the ways and means that Russia has to its disposal to achieve its ends, will be identified. Because this thesis operates with a broader understanding of the tools a state may use to protect its security interests, this thesis will focus on Russia’s military means in combination with political-informational (public diplomacy, official statements, and information influence).

The insights from the first two research questions will constitute a foundation for the third question, i.e. explaining Russia’s security policy towards the Nordic region by using existing theories. The operationalization of the research questions will be described in more detail in the next chapter.

The thesis is empirically and theoretically relevant. Empirically, it contributes with new research and empirical data on a current time phenomenon. Furthermore, the literature on Russia’s security policy towards the Nordic region is relatively scarce and the thesis will as such increase the understanding of the topic and nuances therein. Theoretically, the thesis is relevant because it ties the empirical research to existing theory in order to explain the various findings in the collected data. Consequently, these insights may serve as a contribution to the knowledge of Russian security policy in general and towards other regions.

1.2 Thesis outline

This chapter provided a brief account of the aim of this thesis, the research questions, and why this study is empirically and theoretically relevant. Chapter 2 is dedicated to the research
design of this thesis. In the first part, the key definitions pertaining to this study is discussed. The next part elaborates on the methodological aspects of this thesis, including how the study is conducted, how the data is approached, and how to increase the trustworthiness of the research. The last part of the chapter presents the theoretical frameworks that are used in order to explain the various empirical findings in the analytical chapters. In Chapter 3, the study is contextualized by first providing a brief review of some key historical trends in Soviet and Russian policy approaches toward the Nordic region. The second part examines the time period 2012-2013 in more detail in order to enable an easier comparison of the security environment in the Nordic region before and after 2014. Chapter 4 answers the first research question and identifies four Russian security policy ends toward the Nordic region: maximize Russian influence, minimize Western influence, counter an increase in Western military presence, and secure military strategic depth. It then analyzes whether these have changed or remained stable after 2014. Chapter 5 answers the second research question and examines the available ways and means that Russia has at its disposal to meet its security policy ends in the Nordic region. Next, the chapter analyzes the various ways and means by connecting them to the security policy ends in order to determine if they have changed or remained stable after 2014. In Chapter 6, the empirical findings in Chapter 4 and 5 are explained and discussed. Finally, Chapter 7 provides a conclusion and discusses the implications of the empirical findings, the relevance of the study, and future research on the topic.
Map 1. The Nordic region

Source: Original map prepared by Kristian Åtland (2016: 165), additional adjustments made by the author of this thesis.
2 Research design

In this chapter, the research design of this thesis is described in detail in order to specify the procedures used to answer the research questions (Christensen, Johnson, and Turner, 2011: 232; Yin, 2003: 5-8, 20-21). The first part discusses some key definitions in more depth. The second part addresses the methodological aspects tied to the thesis’ analytical chapters (4 and 5). The third part moves from the analytical to the explanatory and provides a theoretical framework for explaining Russia’s security policy towards the Nordic region.

2.1 Key definitions

In Russian, the terms Strany Severnoy Yevropy (Countries of the Northern Europe), from now on the Nordic countries, and Sever Yevropy, from now on Northern Europe, are commonly used to describe what in this thesis is defined as the Nordic region (Fyodor et al., 2001: 5; Trenin, 2011: 47; RUS MFA, 2015; RUS MFA, 2016). Because the term Northern Europe often is used in a wider context to include countries such as Germany, the U.K., Poland, and the Baltic countries, this thesis will use the narrower term Nordic region. This thesis studies Russia’s security policy towards the Nordic region as a whole and the Nordic region is here understood as the shared geographical space between Russia and its Nordic neighbors (see map 1). This space centers around two key geographical areas in the Nordic region: The High North and the Baltic sub-regions, where the Nordic countries to varying degrees are engaged and researchers have indicated that Russia acts differently (Åtland, 2016; Hilde, 2015; Lucas, 2015; Breitenbauch, 2015).

There is no universal definition of the term “High North” (Åtland, 2003; Skagestad, 2010), but in the following it is understood as the areas covering the Barents Sea region (including the Kola Peninsula, Novaya Zemlya, and Northern Norway), the Norwegian Sea (including Iceland), and the southern parts of the Arctic Ocean (including Svalbard and Franz Josef Land). The term “Baltic sub-region” is in the following understood as the Baltic Sea,  

---

1 Norway and Iceland are engaged in the Baltic sub-region, among other through their membership in the Council of Baltic Sea States. Denmark may be said to be firmly embedded in both sub-regions. It is an important Arctic member due to Greenland’s status as autonomous Danish territory. However, the focus here is on mainland Denmark and the country is thus “defined” as part of the Baltic-sub region. Both Sweden and Finland are engaged in the High North, among other through their Northern territories’ location close to the Barents Sea region and their membership in the Baltic Euro-Arctic Council.

2 The decision to use the term “Baltic sub-region” is related to the strategic location of the three Nordic countries vis-à-vis Russia in the Baltic Sea. The empirical data will focus on the territories and adjacent areas of these four
including Russia’s access points from St. Petersburg and the Kaliningrad enclave (located in-between Poland and Lithuania), and the three Nordic countries Denmark (including the Danish Straits), Sweden (including the Gotland Island), and Finland (including the Åland Islands).  

The thesis focuses on the period from March 2014 to October 2016 in order to examine Russian security policy in the Nordic region after Russia’s annexation of Crimea and the negative spillover effects this had to the Nordic region in form of increased tensions. However, in order to contextualize the increased tensions in the Nordic region after the Ukraine crisis, the preceding development trends in Russia’s security policy towards the region are provided in Chapter 3. In addition, the period since Vladimir Putin’s return to power as president and before the start of the conflict in Ukraine (2012-2013), is described in more detail. Putin’s return is said to have opened a “new chapter” in Russian foreign policy, marked by increased assertion and great power ambitions (Khudoley, 2016: 5; Tsygankov, 2016: 233). In this thesis, the Ukraine crisis plays the role of a catalyst for the increased tensions in the Nordic region.

For Russia, security policy is an encompassing concept that, according to the law “On Security”, covers both domestic and foreign policy and involves several categories: moral, culture, political, socio-economic, cyber, terrorism, military, environmental, judicial, and so on (President of Russia, 2015; Hedenskog, Persson and Vendil Pallin, 2016: 97). Such a broad use of the security concept fit into a broadened concept of security as presented by the Copenhagen School (McDonald, 2013: 72). However, several scholars argue that Russia’s political and military leadership to a large degree still adhere to a more traditional view of the security system, emphasizing the importance of “political-military power” in international affairs (Zysk, 2015: 91-92; Masters, 2015; Tsygankov, 2016: 42).

Military power is, obviously, only one of several means or tools that a state may utilize when pursuing its security policy. Thus, the role of Russia’s military (as part of her security policy),

---

3 The Danish straits are located between Denmark and Sweden and refer to the Little Belt, Great Belt, and the Øresund strait. The straits connect the Baltic Sea to the North Sea and Atlantic Ocean through the Kattegat and Skagerrak.

4 The Copenhagen School refers to the “… collective research agenda of various academics at the (now defunct) Copenhagen Peace Research Institute in Denmark, centered around the work of Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver.” (McDonald, 2013: 71).
should be seen in connection with a wider array of means, including political and diplomatic efforts (Tamnes et al., 2015: 60). In this thesis, political and informational means are included. Furthermore, the aim to explain Russia’s security policy towards the Nordic region means that the main focus will be on external threats, events and actors. Russian domestic developments are included only insofar as it helps increase the understanding of Russia’s behavior.

2.2 Methodological framework

This section will begin with a discussion regarding the choice to apply case study as a research design. Second, it will describe how the data for this thesis was collected and then structured according to the strategy concepts, ends, ways and means. Lastly, this section will provide an elaborated discussion on how the data is interpreted and read, as well as what measures that are used in order to increase the thesis’ trustworthiness.

The focus on Russia’s security policy towards the Nordic region, and particularly on developments taking place after the Ukraine crisis, set some premises for how to approach this study. Firstly, this is a relatively new phenomenon, and as a result, there is to date little research on the topic. Therefore, in order to gain insight, an in-depth analysis and an exploratory point of departure is deemed necessary. Secondly, the focus of the study advocates for a small-N study and “non-quantifiable” insight. Thirdly, the study relates to past and on-going processes, and there may as such be several factors influencing the chain of events. This makes it difficult to prove causal effects and provide statistical results, and it is unlikely that such an approach would produce reasonable results. Based on these preliminary premises, case study is therefore chosen as research design (Gerring, 2004: 341; Gerring, 2007: 39; Jacobsson and Meeuwisse, 2010: 64; Yin, 2003: 7).

A case study can be understood as “the intensive study of a single case where the purpose of that study is – at least in part – to shed light on a larger class of cases (a population).” (Gerring, 2007: 20). In this thesis, it is Russia’s security policy towards the Nordic region that is subject to intensive study and thus Russia who serves as the study’s formal actor. However, John Gerring points to the ambiguity concerning case studies when it comes to the “blurry line between a unit that is intensively studied – the case study – and other adjacent units that may be brought into the analysis in a less structured manner (2004: 344).
The “adjacent units” in this study include the Nordic countries, NATO, the US and the EU. These actors are important reference points and serve the purpose of informal actors in the sense that they will receive more superficial attention. Of the informal actors, the main focus is placed on the Nordic countries. However, the Nordic countries are to varying degrees part of the EU and NATO and often viewed (by Russia) as pieces in the larger power-struggle between the US and Russia. As such, any study that fails to analyze Russia’s security policy towards the Nordic region in light of this and place the analysis within a greater Russian security policy context, will at best be incomplete and at worst be outright misleading (Gerring, 2004: 344; Vendil Pallin, 2009: 119, 121). Russia’s relations with the informal actors will be described in more detail in Chapter 3.

This case study take on a qualitative approach due to the nature of the data collection and the qualitative reading and presentation of the empirical material in order to identify Russian ends, ways, and means in the Nordic region. However, some quantitative data is included in Chapter 5 to systemize part of the empirical data, i.e. close military encounters in the air and at sea between Russia and the Nordic countries (Yin, 2003: 14; Hellevik, 2002: 110-111).

In order to answer research questions one and two, this study mainly approaches the material in a deductive manner (Trochim, 2006). The study operates “top-down” in the sense that it formulates two specific research questions to help structure the analysis and gain insight into Russian security policy towards the Nordic region. However, in the initial phase of the data collection, an inductive approach was also used as a helpful tool to collect a broad array of textual sources, while simultaneously specifying the search area (Ibid; Thomas, 2006: 238). Nevertheless, a deductive reasoning, combined with the flexibility of a qualitative case study, has proven to be a valuable approach to a topic with limited existing literature, and furthermore a phenomenon which is new and highly debated. The relatively limited amount of literature on Russian security policy toward the Nordic region may be explained by the relatively common perception that “the Nordic region” (at least since the end of the Cold War) has remained a peaceful and stable region. It has to a large degree been characterized by economic and regional cooperation and “soft” security concerns such as humanitarian security and ecological security.

---

5 Norway, Iceland, and Denmark are members of NATO. Sweden and Finland are on paper non-aligned, but enjoy close cooperation with NATO through the Partnership for Peace program (see NATO, 2016) and Host Nation support agreements (see Mission of Sweden to NATO, 2014). Sweden, Finland, and Denmark are members of the EU. Norway and Iceland enjoy close ties with the EU through the European Economic Area due to their membership in the European Free Trade Association (see EFTA, 2014).
A case study also engages with existing theory, although this may take various forms. According to Robert Yin (2009), the use of theory is one of the most important distinctions between case study research designs and others, such as ethnography and grounded theory. Since the basic premise of this thesis is to analyze and explain change and continuity in Russian security policy toward the Nordic region, a natural starting point for explaining the material theoretically would be theories that can help explain the potential continuity and change identified, as well as various Russian approaches, in the empirical data. However, the research design also necessitates the flexibility to introduce additional theories as new “discoveries” present themselves in the empirical data. As such, this study’s theoretical premise is theory consuming (Walsham, 1995: 76).

This realization, combined with the qualitative approach of the study (due to the focus on a relatively new, unstudied period and a focus on political and information means), means this study may be described as an interpretive case study. The interpretive case study is a middle road between the atheoretical and hypothesis-generating case study (Levy, 2008: 3; Lijphart, 1971: 691). An interpretive case study is a useful approach as it highlights the case and allows for the use of theory to explain the various relevant discoveries and connections in the collected empirical material (Lijphart, 1971). Some drawbacks with the use of interpretive studies is that several competing perspectives may be equally valid or “true”. Consequently, this places several demands on the researcher addressing and interpreting the empirical data. Furthermore, when collecting data and interpreting statements, interviews, articles etc., the researcher’s bias may affect the selection and interpretation of the material (Grønmo, 2004: 188). For example, in this research, an overtly negative interpretation of the data material may result in a conclusion that Russian security policy in the Nordic region is solely aggressive, when the truth may be that not much has really changed when analyzed against a historical backdrop.

With some important premises for this case study presented above, the next section will describe how the empirical data was collected and then turn to examine the well-known strategy concepts, understood as a combination of ends, ways, and means, in order to structure the data collection and the analysis, and thus gain insight into Russia’s security policy approaches toward the Nordic region.
2.2.1 Collecting the data and structuring the analysis

Ends, ways, and means is a classic strategy concept that can be used both for creating strategy and analyzing strategy. The term strategy is here understood as the idea of “… maintaining a balance between ends, ways, and means; about identifying objectives; and about the resources and methods available for meeting such objectives” (Freedman, 2013: xi). According to Lawrence Freedman, strategy is relevant when faced with actual or potential conflict, something that usually incudes conflicting interests and where “… forms of resolution are required” (Ibid.) However, this thesis is not a clear-cut strategy analysis. This is due to the fact that strategy also includes an analysis of the opponent’s or the adversary’s intentions and countermoves. The policy concept does not have this dimension, nor is the intention here to look at how Russia analyses her opponent’s countermoves (Matlary, 2012: 114; Høiback, 2011: 66). In this thesis, Russia’s foreign and security policy is understood more as the overarching goals/ends in the Nordic region. The basic strategy concept, then, serves here as a tool for analyzing Russia’s foreign and security objectives and how she attempts to reach them (Betts, 2000: 6).

On a national level, a state usually has multiple overarching foreign and security ends, such as preserving the national security of the Russian Federation, promote a multipolar world order, safeguard Russian economic interests and so on. Furthermore, these ends may be divided into various categories, such as political, economic, cultural, military ends. These ends may also be more specific and tied to certain policy areas or regions depending on the interests tied to these areas. Since the aim of this thesis is not to discuss all aspects of Russia’s foreign and security policy, the focus will be limited to Russia’s military and political security interests in the Nordic region. In short, military ends are here broadly understood as Russia’s interest in defending herself (defensive end) or her interest in fending off possible threats (offensive end). Political ends are here broadly understood as Russia’s interest in maximizing her influence (offensive end) or minimizing Western influence (defensive end). These categorizations will be elaborated on in chapter 4.

In order to reach her ends, Russia as a variety of means, or tools, to use. These may be political, economic, psychological, cultural, military, propaganda, and so on (Adamsky, 2015). It should be noted that Russia, in addition to modernizing and increasing the efficiency of her military over the past eight years, also has increased her capability when it comes to non-military means. Furthermore, Russia’s ability to combine conventional and non-
conventional means in order to reach her goals has also increased, something Russia’s operations in Ukraine have demonstrated (Åtland, 2016: 166). Operating with a broadened understanding of the traditional security policy concept, the focus is limited to Russia’s military capabilities and political and information means. The latter category draws inspiration from Dmitry Adamsky’s article on “Cross-domain coercion” and is seen as complementing Russia’s military capabilities. This category includes the use of public diplomacy, Russian diplomats and officials and information influence (including propaganda, disinformation, mockery etc.) in order to reach desired ends. Russian military capabilities play an important role in Russia’s strategic thinking and are generally considered a primary tool to protect your country from external threats or use of force, or to exert pressure on other actors (Skogan, 2011).

Ways refer to how and when means are used in order to reach desired goals. A mean can be used in various ways in order to reach different desired ends. Military capabilities may be used to defend one’s country, but also to exert pressure on other countries. A Russian diplomat may use his or her position to sway foreign opinion or spread propaganda. In other words, this is an important part of the strategy concept and may be seen as a bridge between how to effectively use one’s means in order to achieve desired ends. In addition, in this thesis ways are split into qualitative and quantitative categories. The first refers, among other things, to the frequency of how certain means are used, whereas the latter may refer to whether a means is used more aggressively in order to deter or persuasively in order to reassure. Both ways and means will be elaborated on in chapter 5.

Furthermore, it should be noted that ends, ways, and means are interlinked concepts that may be hard to understand separate from each other. This means that in order to get a sense of what a state’s ends are, it is also necessary to know what ways and means the actor possess and visa-versa. It is thus important to see the three concepts as a combined whole. This may result in reasoning concerning ends appearing in the section covering ways, or that reasoning concerning means may occur in the chapter covering ends and so on.

In the face of increased tensions in the region after the Ukraine crisis, ends, ways, and means will first be used to deconstruct and analyze Russia’s security policy toward the region. Since there are no official Russian documents focusing explicitly on the region, ends, ways, and means are helpful indicators to identify, describe, structure, as well as help gain insight into Russian security policy toward the Nordic region. Consequently, before describing how ends,
ways, and means have structured the empirical material, a description of the initial phase of the empirical data collection is in order. The initial phase is crucial to outline for two reasons. First, it presents the reader with a detailed guide as to how the first part of this study was conducted, which increases the thesis’ reliability. Second, it is the foundation upon which the analytical structuring (ends, ways, means) is built and is a starting point for how to address research question one and two in the overall analysis.

**Collecting the empirical data**

An initial concern of this study was whether there existed enough relevant data to be able to analyze Russian security policy in the Nordic region. Some Russian statements addressing the Nordic region collectively were found, but most of the empirical material was tied to the specific Nordic countries and/or to specific incidents and events taking place in the Nordic region (hereunder, the High North and Baltic sub-regions) after 2014. In order to obtain relevant data, a combination of pre-planned “key search words” and “snowball-method” was used.

Phase one of the data collection, *key search words*, had the following inclusion criteria:

1) The search results have to be uttered by relevant key Russian actors.

2) The search results have to be related to the Nordic region and reference one of, or a combination of, the following: The High North and/or the Baltic sub-regions, the Nordic countries as a collective, the Nordic countries individually, and/or, but subordinate to the above, references to NATO, the US or the EU in the Nordic region.

3) The search results should, as far as possible, be related to security policy matters in the time period 2012-2016.

Lene Hansen argues that when analyzing official discourses on foreign and security policy, one should focus on “… the heads of states, governments, senior civil servants, high ranked military, heads of international institutions or official statements by international institutions” (2006: 60, 64). Thus, statements, interviews, speeches etc. pertaining to the Nordic region have been collected from the following key Russian actors: The President, the Foreign Minister, the Defense Minister, the Chief of the General Staff, and the Prime Minister. Furthermore, key spokesmen and spokeswomen from the different departments and ministries are seen as relevant sources as they convey the official view of their respective bodies when uttering statements in the public sphere. The various Russian ambassadors stationed in the
Nordic countries and the various spokesmen and spokeswomen connected to the embassies are also important actors as they represent Russia and official Russian views in the respective countries.

Building on the inclusion criteria, a preliminary search base was created based on relevant key search words. As shown in table 1, the key search words consist of two groups. The first one, basic search words (BSW), were included in each search. The second, specific search words (SSW), were used either separately with the BSW or appeared in various combinations together with the BSW. Table 1 presents the English key search words with the Russian translation in parenthesis. Both languages were used in the preliminary search phase.

Table 1. Phase one - basic and specific search words

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Basic search words (included in each search)</th>
<th>Russia (Rossiya)</th>
<th>Security policy (Politika bezopasnosti)</th>
<th>Security (Bezopasnost)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Specific search words (included individually with the basic search words or in combination)</td>
<td>The High North (Yevropeyskiy sever, Sever Yevropy, Krayny sever)</td>
<td>The Nordic region (Severny region)</td>
<td>The Baltic region (Baltiyskiy region)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Nordic countries (Strany severnoy Yevropy)</td>
<td>The Baltic Sea (Baltiyskoe more)</td>
<td>Finland (Finlyandiya), Sweden (Shvetsiya), Denmark ( Daniya), Norway (Norvegiya), Iceland (Islandiya), Kaliningrad.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Prepared by the author.

The preliminary search phase played a crucial role in obtaining an overview of the available data concerning Russian security policy in the Nordic region as well as indicating additional key words to use. In addition to conducting searches in search engines such as Google and Yandex⁶, the key search words (in various combinations) were used in the following databases:

- **Eastview**: Large database of military and general journals containing Russian official publications as well as newspaper articles. Search language: Russian.

---

⁶ Russia’s main search engine and equivalent to Google.
- **Eastview Governmental Publications**: Large database containing Russian public publications etc. from the state duma and the federal council. Search language: Russian.

- **Lexisnexis Academic**: Full-text database for primary source newspaper articles. Mainly used for finding news articles related to incidents or Russian statements in the Nordic region. Search language: English.


Phase two of the data collection, *snowballing*, refers to the well-known interview technique in which the interviewer asks the interview object to name other actors that could be relevant for the research (Atkinson and Flint, 2004). This method is effective when it is difficult to gather information on a topic. (Ibid.) In this study, the name implies that the first round of data collection “suggests” where to look next. This second phase included more specific search words tied to key actors, incidents, military activities (including exercises) etc. An example could be that a general search for “Russian security policy in the Baltic Sea” gave a result for a Swedish representative denouncing Russian military activity in the Baltic Sea and Russian military aircraft flying close to or violating Swedish territorial airspace. This would present an opportunity to search for the specific incident mentioned and then the Russian reaction to the Swedish accusation. Parallel to the search processes, all the data material was organized in chronological order by date in order to help identify trends (continuity/change) in the material.

**Structuring the data: ends, ways, means**

After the preliminary collection and sorting of data, the next step involves sorting the data in regard to the ends, ways, and means indicators. A systematic reading of the material was conducted, where statements and exerts that could be connected to one or more of the three strategy components were identified. In order to enable a sorting of the material, motives and
intentions (veiled and open) have also been included in the categorization, without this necessarily being explicitly stated as belonging to the various components.

Since there are no official Russian security documents for the Nordic region, the process of identifying Russian security policy ends in the Nordic region has consisted of two parallel processes. The first has involved looking at historical sources and more recent scholarly literature related to the topic and highlighted factors that contribute to an understanding of Russian security policy objectives in the Nordic region. Several of these contributions are included in the background chapter (Chapter 3). The second process has consisted of a systematic reading of the collected empirical material in order to identify tendencies in the 2012-2016-time period. This process has also consisted of identifying similarities with the various policy objectives presented in the scholarly literature. On this basis, Russian security policy ends in the Nordic region have been divided into four, relatively broad categories. These categorizations are *political* and *military* ends, which again are divided into *offensive* and *defensive* ends (see table 2, Chapter 4).

The categories and four terms are presented in more detail in chapter 4. The aim here is to dwell at some methodological aspects concerning the categorizations. It should be noted that the categories are not “clear cut” in the sense that they may build on each other and some elements may fit into more than one category. Consequently, they do not necessarily provide a definitive and accurate description of reality. Instead, they provide a simplification of reality, which is helpful when systemizing and presenting empirical data (Savigny and Marsden, 2011: 276). Such simplifications are common in social sciences, but also necessitate a critical examination of the categorizations.

The broad and relatively few categorizations help increase the study’s *portability* (external validity), as this facilitates comparing the larger security policy trends. Broad categorizations may also increase the study’s precision criterion (external validity), in that it increases the probability of other researchers, *ceteris paribus*, reaching the same conclusions (Yin, 2003: 34). However, in increasing the portability and precision criteria, the categorization will simultaneously decrease what Yin calls “construct validity”, in that the categories are less specific. This, may warrant the question of whether the categories measure what they claim to measure (Russian security policy towards the Nordic region). The aim here is to attempt to increase all the criteria by limiting the number of categories, while also keeping them specific to the Nordic region.
Furthermore, military and political-informational means were identified in the empirical data, as well as the various ways they have been used in order for Russia to meet her ends (in this case the four end categories). Here, a combination of the empirical material and secondary sources was utilized. The secondary literature was used to help identify common Russian means and the various ways in which they were utilized in the empirical material. This was particularly helpful for the political-informational category. Drawing on insights from, among others, Adamsky’s (2015) work on “Cross-domain coercion”, the various Russian statements could be categorized according to whether they represented attempts of “disinformation”, “threats”, “attempts to break internal cohesion”, and so on. These categorizations are examined in detail in Chapter 5. In order to get a better sense of Russian military activities in the Nordic region, the thesis also builds on insights from two key documents. These are Dangerous Brinkmanship: Close Military Encounters Between Russia and the West (2014) and its updated version (2015), published by European Leadership Network. Based on open sources, the publications present an overview of air and naval military encounters between Russia and the West. This overview includes Russian encounters in the High North and the Baltic sub-regions as well as with the various Nordic countries. However, the data only covers the time period March 2014 – March 2015 (Frear, Kulesa, and Kearns, 2014; Ibid, 2015). In order to increase the validity of the research, I use the incident categorizations in the ELN reports to collect my own data on incidents taking place between March 2015 – October 2016. Because the original categorization scheme was developed by Frear et al., it is hard to know if I have the same understanding of the concepts used. This may have resulted some incidents being coded as a “serious risk”, that the original authors might perceived as “normal routine” (see Chapter 5). This, in turn, may decrease the data’s precision (external reliability).

2.2.2 Approaching the text: Qualitative Document Analysis

The empirical foundation of this thesis is built on various documents which are systematically reviewed and where the content is categorized according to the relevance of the thesis questions. In this study, all written material or texts are considered documents, and the terms documents, material, data, and texts will in the following be used interchangeably. Russian security policy in the Nordic region is thus studied based on how it is presented in written sources, and consist of Russian statements in news articles, official statements, comments or publications on the homepage of the respective Russian departments, interviews with Russian officials and diplomats, official Russian foreign and security policy documents, and annual
reviews by the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, including country reviews on Finland, Denmark, Sweden, Norway and Iceland (covering the time period 2012-2016).

The approach to the written sources follows the principles of qualitative document analysis (QDA). A quantitative approach is chosen because “counting” the material, or identifying how many times certain words appear in the text, seems less fruitful when it comes to measure Russian security policy toward the Nordic region. A quantitative approach, i.e. content analysis, would not provide the results necessary to answer the research questions and would lead to poor validity (Yin, 2003: 33-34). Furthermore, the common quantitative notion of “inter-subjectivity” is rejected, meaning that the various Russian documents may be “read” and “understood” in different ways (Wesley, 2010: 4; Krippendorff, 2004: 22-23). Qualitative researchers must therefore “… rely on their ability to present a clear description, offer a convincing analysis, and make a strong argument for their interpretation to establish the value of their conclusions (Manheim et al, 2002: 317). Some critics blame this approach for relying on pure “intuition” and “guesswork”, taking it for granted that the accuracy and legitimacy of the interpretations should be trusted (Cohen and Harris, 1975: 5; Wesley, 2010: 4). In order to meet this criticism, this thesis follows a set of QDA specific methodological rules for how to treat texts as data, and hence increase the “trustworthiness” of the research. Jared Wesley (2010: 5) identifies four sources of trustworthiness, which should be seen as parallels to the requirements found in the quantitative-positivist tradition. These are 1) authenticity, 2) portability, 3) precision, and 4) impartiality.

According to Wesley, an authentic analysis should strive to offer a “genuine interpretation of reality, or an accurate reading of a particular (set of) document(s)” (2015: 5). Here, the aim is to provide an interpretation of the meanings found in the textual material that is considered believable. Contrary to the quantitative-positivist tradition, where objective standards are used, the qualitative analysis depend upon “… the subjective evaluation of the reader” (Ibid; Krippendorff, 2004: 314). Thus, most texts and acts may be interpreted in different ways or have various explanations, which is also the case in this study. This tendency may be referred to as “interpretive pluralism”. The question thus becomes, what criteria should apply in order to decide what interpretation is “best”? The answer may be found in a combination of what is here referred to as the “holistic criterion” and the “actor criterion”. (Gilje and Grimen, 1993: 157-158, 160).
The first criterion is oriented towards the “inner connection” or the coherence of a text, i.e. it examines how the various parts, or details, and how they harmonize as a whole. In this context, the intentions of the author or actors are not important and the premise for “correct understanding” is oriented towards the isolated text and the inner coherence between the parts. It is therefore these connections that should be referred to when we justify an interpretation (Gilje and Grimen, 1993: 158-159). The second criterion, focus on the intentions of the author or the actors. These take on a privileged, even decisive, role when it comes to deciding what interpretations are the best. In other words, a text or an act cannot be seen in isolation from the actor (Ibid: 160). When interpreting the various Russian statements and documents, a combination of these criteria will be used. On one hand, it is important to look at the entirety of the text in isolation and decide whether the various details harmonize and at the same time be careful not to believe that all textual material constitute harmonic wholes, i.e. that there do not exist texts with irregularities, incompatible claims, or texts that can be interpreted differently (Ibid: 158). On the other hand, we should not ignore the author’s intentions when producing a text, especially not when these texts are used in social sciences. Furthermore, identifying an actor’s intentions play an important role when analyzing an act that is not language-based, i.e. military activity (Ibid: 160-161). When analyzing the collected, empirical material, focus will be placed on both the coherence of the texts and awareness of the intentions of the actors. Thus, when reading an interview with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, the coherence of the details will be examined while also keeping in mind that he is interested in presenting a Russian narrative. However, it should be noted that in principle, interpretations always contain an element of uncertainty and may always be revised in light of new information. Therefore, it is important to be open to other interpretations, also known as “methodological tolerance” (Ibid. 163).

Furthermore, the ability to read Russian sources has been of immense help when collecting and analyzing the various documents. This ability helps to increase the authenticity of the research since the research to a lesser extent relies on interpretations of translated material. However, mistranslations may occur which may lead to a false presentation of the empirical material. In order to limit such mistakes, I have strived to double-check information, and when in doubt regarding a translation, I have sought a second opinion from individuals with substantial knowledge of the Russian language.
Wesley’s second criterion, *portability*, may be understood as what Robert Yin refers to as external validity (2003: 33) and concerns whether a study’s finding may be generalized and transferred to a larger universe of analytical generalizations. For qualitative research, such as this thesis, it is not possible to generalize based on tests of statistical significance. Rather, QDA oftentimes rely “… upon their readers to assess the broader applicability of the lessons drawn from their findings … [Results] can be extended to another context … - not by the original investigator – but by the student seeking to make the transfer” (Wesley, 2010: 5 [original italics]). However, the assumption here is that insights from this study may allow for some discussions and comparison (i.e. portability) with regard to Russian security policy approaches toward other regions and with Russian security policy in general.

The third criterion, *precision*, has its equivalent in the term “external reliability” (Bryman, 2004: 273). In quantitative research, a way to increase external reliability is to thoroughly document the procedures conducted during the study. In this way, other researchers may assess whether they would reach the same general conclusions if they had access to the same documents (Yin, 2003: 36; Wesley, 2010: 5). In order to meet the precision criterion, section 2.3 is devoted to giving the reader a detailed insight into how the empirical data has been collected and structured. As an additional gesture, the collected empirical data can be made available by request.

The forth criterion, *impartiality*, refer to the common critique concerning qualitative studies, that “subjective” judgments are used to collect the data, which results in the case study investigator failing to “… develop a sufficiently operational set of measures” (Yin, 2003: 34). It is thus important that the researcher strives to remain impartial and ensures that the conclusions are rooted in the “evidence at hand”, and not based on the “predispositions of the researcher (Wesley, 2010: 5). One way to combat this problem is through collecting data from various sources, and corroborating findings using other sources of evidence, also known as triangulation (Yin, 2011: 84; Boyatzis, 1998: xii). This study has used several and various sources related both to the variation in the collected sources (statements, news articles, interviews, official documents) as well as the use of primary and secondary sources (research
papers, journals, articles) in order to strengthen the empirical foundation. Using secondary sources may also help increase the study’s trustworthiness as it may support existing interpretations or introduce alternative understandings. Furthermore, since there are no specific Russian doctrines or policy documents concerning the Nordic region, the combination of all the above-mentioned documents will be applied in order to attempt to highlight tendencies in Russia’s security policy in the region. However, some additional notes regarding the sources are necessary.

The official Russian documents include the 2013 Foreign Policy Concept (Kontseptsiya vneshney politiki Rossiiskoy Federatsii), the 2014 Military Doctrine (Voennaya doktrina Rossiiskoy Federatsii), the 2015 National Security Strategy (Strategiya natsional’noi bezopasnosti Rossiiskoi Federatsii), and the annual Russian Foreign Ministry reviews (Vneshnepoliticheskaya i diplomatcheskaya deyatel’nost’ Rossiiskoy Federatsii – Obzor MID), including country reviews on the Nordic countries. The first three documents are considered to reflect real official Russian long-term policy intentions and together they provide a comprehensive image of the overall envisioned foreign and security policy direction for Russia. Nevertheless, they also “serve a bureaucratic function of achieving consensus among state institutions and therefore can have a lowest-common-denominator aspect to them” (Hedenskog, Persson and Vendil Pallin, 2016: 98).

However, most of the empirical material consists of more “spontaneous” data, such as comments and statements by the Russian authorities presented in news articles, interviews, speeches and so on. Such “spontaneous” sources are considered better tools to reveal actual tendencies as they occur (Hansen, 2006). Oftentimes officials have to respond to unexpected events which may lead to less prepared retorts. This is in stark contrast to official policy documents that have been developed for months. For this reason, the more spontaneous sources may as such increase the potential for acquiring more descriptive and true information and increase the thesis’ validity (Ibid.). These official Russian documents are also important insofar as they provide insight into formalized and (relatively) organized Russian thinking around security, both internal and external, and viewed as complimentary to the collected empirical data.

---

7 Primary sources are data collected for the study at hand, whereas secondary sources are existing data, which the analysis may draw upon (Hellevik, 2002).
Another important note, which also may be tied to the authenticity criteria, is the importance of contextual assessment when analyzing the data (Grønmo, 2004: 190). This means that the document is considered in relation to its context which may help evaluate the authenticity and trustworthiness of the document. The conflict in Ukraine, and the negative spillover in the form of increased tensions and reduced trust between Russia and her Nordic neighbors, has to a certain extent polarized the security debate in the Nordic region. On one hand, there is Russia and her perspective and perceptions. On the other, there are the Nordic countries which to a high degree share the Western perspective (incl. NATO, the US and the EU); and both sides blame the other for being aggressive. However, Russia’s approach to the Nordic region is more complex than simply pure aggression and may also include attempts to decrease tensions. Mapping Russian statements and actions in the Nordic region in more detail will enable a more nuanced picture of Russia’s intentions in the region, something a qualitative case study approach makes possible.

It is also important to keep in mind where the source (statement, quote, policy paper etc.) originated from. The Russian empirical material consists of statements, interviews, comments, and so on, from key Russian officials and diplomats and is more likely to serve the official Russian narrative. This is not necessarily a problem, since the aim of the thesis is to attempt to map Russian security policy. It is more important to be aware of statements and quotes cited in other sources, since various news outlets usually have their own agenda when using the material. The use of sources presented in other documents may also result in missing important information that has been left out by other author or that the material is analyzed or presented differently than originally intended. In this case, it is easy to miss important information and the source will to a larger extent be tainted by a subjective understanding of reality (Repstad, 2007: 106). A way to combat this, and something that has been strived for in this study, is to always attempt to locate the original source of the statement as well as using independent sources on the same topic and cross-reference the information.

Lastly, the “sensitivity” of the topic may hinder access to important material which is classified by Russian authorities. This, however, is a problem that any student conducting security studies may face, and the only way to meet this challenge is to base the research on open sources.
2.3 Theoretical Framework

This section addresses the third research question: How can Russia’s security policy towards the Nordic region be explained? To begin with, a short discussion on the concepts of rationality and Russia as a rational actor is presented. The next section will examine Jakob Gustavsson’s model for foreign policy change and Charles Hermann’s typology on graduated levels of foreign policy change. These theoretical frameworks are later used to explain continuity and change in foreign policy in Chapter 6. The last section presents some explanatory frameworks for explaining various Russian approaches (diversified, partly diversified, and unified) towards the Nordic region:

The use of a strategy framework to study Russian security policy toward the Nordic region builds on the assumption that the strategy is rational, i.e. that the available means are utilized in a way that reasonably connects it to the pursued ends in a satisfactory way. This thesis is not based on the assumption of complete rationality. Rather, Russia is understood as adhering to the principle of bounded rationality. This means that there is a limit to any decision-maker’s ability to receive and sort information which in turn limits the possibility for knowing all possible alternatives and their consequences. Thus, when Russia is hereby referred to as a rational actor, it is based on the premise of bounded rationality (Diesen, 2012: 7; Gilje and Grimen, 1993: 203-205; Underdal, 1984; Freedman, 2013: 592).

Furthermore, Russia may be considered a relatively unified actor due to the current status of Russia’s political system. Since president Putin came to power in 1999, he has consolidated power around himself and established authority through a so-called “power vertical”, i.e. through steering political processes from the top-down. The consolidation process has included, among other, ensuring elite loyalty and cohesion, weakening of the civil society, control of the military and civilian bureaucracy, and ensuring control of the mass media. As a result, President Putin (and his increasingly narrow circle of trustees) occupy center the stage of Russia’s political system and decision-making processes, including priorities of Russian foreign and security policy (Kaczmarski, 2014: 389; Póti, 2002: 135; Ven Bruusgaard, 2014; Chaguaceda, 2016: 81; Snegovaya, 2015; Åtland, 2016: 166).
2.3.1 Continuity and change in Russia’s approaches

The concept of continuity and change will be examined on the basis of a theoretical model that seeks to explain foreign policy change. For a long time, this field remained relatively understudied, with foreign policy studies largely focusing on the concepts of continuity and stability. However, in recent years this trend has turned due to various systemic changes and paradigm shifts in international politics (Gustavsson, 1999: 73; Blavoukos and Bourantonis, 2014: 483). Continuity is understood as “broad patterns in foreign policy that tend to persist over time, encompassing more micro and incremental changes”, whereas change is understood as a “foreign policy phenomenon that experiences broad alteration, ranging from more modest shifts to major foreign policy restructuring” (Rosati, 1994: 225; Rosenau, 1978; Mochamad Yani, 2009: 3). The latter definition opens up for the study of various levels of change, from more modest modifications to major turns. Charles Hermann (1990) follows a similar approach to foreign policy change in his much-praised typology on graduated levels of foreign policy change.

In his work, Hermann distinguished between four levels: The first one, adjustment changes, refer to changes in the level of effort, here understood as minor changes occurring in the level of effort put into a policy. The second level, program changes, refers to changes made in the methods or means used in order to reach goals or problems being addressed. What is done and how it is done changes, but the purpose or goal remains unaltered. The third level, problem/goal changes, look at the change or replacement of the purposes or the goals themselves. Lastly, the fourth level, international orientation changes, is the most extreme form and involve the “…redirection of the actor’s entire orientation toward world affairs”. The changes are in other words fundamental and involve several policy changes occurring more or less simultaneously (1990: 5; Gustavsson, 1999: 76). According to Hermann, these changes may occur all at once, in combination, or separately (Ibid.). Furthermore, a common assumption is that changes in established foreign (and security) policy will meet resistance by various structural elements within the government, “… and the greater the shift the stronger the resistance”. This is to imply that it is easier to change the means and ways [program changes], than it is to change the goals or policy ends as these are considered to be more “fundamental” (Hermann, 1990: 8).

---

8 The framework focus on change in foreign policy. However, the interconnectedness of foreign and security policy means that this framework also may be used in security policy studies.
Building on Hermann’s typology, Jakob Gustavsson presents a model for explaining actions taken by states through a “three-step procedure”, illustrated in Figure 2. The steps are: 1) international and domestic factors, 2) individual decision-makers, and 3) the decision making-making process, followed by Hermann’s typology (1999: 84). As such, Gustavsson’s model uses different levels of analysis and draws on both the systemic-level and an actor-centered emphasis (Ibid: 77). He identifies international and domestic “sources” that are mediated by an “individual decision-maker” who acts within a state’s decision-making process in order to implement change (1999: 83). Gustavsson’s dependent variable thus becomes foreign policy change. As for the two independent variables, international and domestic factors, Gustavsson does not provide many details. He divides the international level into international politics and international political economy, before defining international level factors as “power relations” and “traditional military aspects of national security” (inspired by realist theory). This category could arguably also include factors such as geography, neighboring states (and patterns of amity and enmity), technology, and systemic developments. As for the domestic level, Gustavsson is inspired by public choice theory and thus focuses on factors such as electoral results, public opinion and the creation of coalitions “… between major political actors.” (1999: 83). An important element here is the “cognitive factor”, as it is “… not the objective reality that counts, but how this is perceived and reacted to by the decision-makers.” (Ibid: 84).

The cognitive factor is seen as an individual level ordeal rather than as a collective affair. This implies, as is often the case for micro-level, behavioral analyses of international politics, that the explanans provided by the structural levels (the international and domestic) is “filtered” through the individual decision maker occupying a central place in the policymaking system (Ibid: 84; Blavoukos and Bourantonis, 2014: 484; Hermann et al., 2001). The assumption is that “… sources of change need to be perceived by individual decision-makers and trigger alterations in their beliefs in order to have an impact of foreign policy” (Gustavsson, 1999: 84). For practical reasons, Gustavsson argues that only the individuals that are assumed to have the greatest impact of the decision should be included in the analysis, but that “…which individuals and how many of them to examine, would have to depend on the circumstances” (Ibid.). He then admits that this pragmatic view may lead to criticism of over-simplification. Furthermore, not only should the formal policy-making procedures be examined, but also the informal processes found in the “pulling and hauling” of politics, or “… the strategies that the
actors use in order to persuade and manipulate others into accepting a new political orientation” (Gustavsson, 1999: 84; Allison, 1971: 171).

**Figure 1. The causal dynamics of foreign policy change (Gustavsson, 1999: 85)**

As seen in Figure 1, Gustavsson’s model also consists of a feedback mechanism, where changes in Hermann’s typology may again affect factors in the international or domestic domains, which may induce a new round of changes (1999: 84).

However, thus far, Gustavsson’s model has not explained *when* a foreign policy change is likely to occur. Blavoukos and Bourantonis identify three mechanisms that may induce foreign policy change. The first mechanism focuses on states interacting with each other within a system of friends and foes, where state’s conflicting interactions may lead to a crisis, which in turn opens a “window of opportunity” for foreign policy change. The second focuses on international interactions in the form that states may seek membership in international organizations where negative and positive forms of political conditionality (“sticks and carrots”) may affect and lead to changes in the foreign policy of the candidate state. Lastly, membership in international organizations may also lead to foreign policy change through socialization processes (2014: 489). Here, the focus will be on the first mechanism as the other two are seen as outside the scope of this thesis.
At the center of the “window of opportunity”-concept stands the “policy entrepreneur” and:

… When the time is right, typically due to simultaneous changes in what [Kingdon] refers to as the ‘problem stream’ and the ‘political stream’, this individual [the policy entrepreneur] seizes the moment and manages to put his or her favorite proposal on the political agenda, persuading others that it would constitute an ideal solution to the problem at hand (Gustavsson, 1990: 86; Kingdon, 1984).

In order for the policy change to occur, or the opportunity window to open, John Keeler stresses the importance of a (perceived) crisis situation (1993: 436). This is because a crisis often induces a sense of fear and urgency which may help “unlock institutional structures” and allow for decisions-making without “institutional inertia” (Gustavsson, 1999: 86). Gustavsson ties three established properties to the concept of “crisis”: Firstly, it relates to the perception of threat to some established value. Secondly, it includes uncertainty over the outcome, and thirdly, it usually includes a shortage of time (Ibid: 86-87). Here, a fourth property may be included based on the basic premise that states interact within a system of friends and enemies, namely the uncertainty regarding the intentions of other actors. The argument here is that this uncertainty may have a destabilizing effect on the crisis situation.\(^9\)

In other words, by drawing on insights from domestic reform politics, Gustavsson’s model emphasizes the importance of political agency and crisis situations to introduce foreign policy change. By including Hermann’s typology on graduated levels of foreign policy change, the model allows for an examination and identification of continuity and change in Russian security policy on the four parameters, adjustment changes, program changes, problem/goal changes, and international orientation changes. The general assumption is here that if the results show a large degree of continuity in Russia’s security policy towards the Nordic region, it can be explained by the fact Russia’s interests in the region have not changed significantly. On the other hand, if the results point towards a large degree of change, this may be explained by the fact that Russia’s interests in the region have changed significantly.

### 2.3.2 Regional and intra-regional approaches

The second part of chapter 6 will address the question of whether Russia applies a “unified” or “diversified” approach towards the Nordic region. A unified approach would entail that

---

\(^9\) For similar arguments regarding uncertainty in international relations, see for example Liff and Ikenberry, 2014; Nash, 1975.
Russia’s statements and behavior address the Nordic region as a whole, i.e. that Russia see the region as a collective entity and act accordingly. A diversified approach would entail that Russia’s statements and behavior address each Nordic country individually or treat the two sub-regions vastly different. In other words, does Russia approach the Nordic countries as a collective regional entity or are there signs of intra-regional approaches, and if so, how may this be explained? For analytical clearance, the unified-diversified approach will not be treated as a dichotomy, i.e. Russia may also opt for a middle ground, or a combination of both approaches in the Nordic region.

Furthermore, the two key geographical areas, the High North and the Baltic sub-regions will be used as tools to understand nuances in Russian security policy toward the Nordic region. Indications that the situation in the two regions is different have been pointed out by some researchers (see for instance Åtland, 2016; Hilde, 2015; Lucas, 2015; Lysvold, Thonhaugen and Skeie, 2015), but there is a lack of a systematic and coherent research related to this assumption.

The basic assumption here is that Russia’s approach towards the Nordic region should be understood in accordance with Russia’s interests. Thus, building on the concept of realpolitik, a state acts according to self-interest and its security primarily rests on the relative balance of power vis-à-vis other states (Shafritz, Goldstein, and Williams, 2006: 92). If Russia decides to address countries bilaterally, rather than within multilateral frameworks, this may be understood in terms of the power distribution between Russia and the other actor(s), i.e. Russia has more to gain from approaching countries bilaterally. Thomas Wright defines bilateralism as “… a value-free concept, and the substance and output are likely to be driven by the relative power between the two parties and, by extension, by the interests of the stronger party (2013). In a Nordic context, Russia is considered a great monolith placed outside the Western security community. This means that it is practically impossible for the Nordic countries not to take Russia into account, both economically, politically, and in security assessments. The power distribution between Russia and the Nordic countries may be described in terms of small states (the Nordic countries) and big powers (Russia). Both in theory and in practice, this may have implications since, ceteris paribus:

… the state with great economic resources and a large population has more influence on events outside its frontiers, greater security from pressure and attack, more prestige, and a larger element of choice in respect of the national policy it pursues. A small state is more
vulnerable to pressure, more likely to give way under stress, more limited in respect of the political options open to it, and subject to a tighter connection between external and internal affairs.” (Ingebritsen, Neumann, Gstohl and Beyer, 2006: 77-88).

In other words, there is an element of asymmetry in the power relations between small states and big powers. This, in turn, may be offset by smaller states seeking protection in form of forging or joining alliances, either among themselves, or within the framework of larger organizations (i.e. NATO). Such affiliation gives smaller states, such as the Nordic countries, greater influence vis-à-vis Russia (Shafritz, Goldstein, and Williams, 2006: 92). In this regard, the Nordic region consists of various military and political constellations, the two most important being NATO/non-NATO members and EU/non-EU members. In security terms, the former may be considered the most important constellation due to NATO’s growing role as a security provider in the region (Åtland, 2016: 169).

In addition to the focus on power dynamics as a variable for explaining Russia’s approach towards the Nordic region, another explanatory factor may be found by looking at “historical patterns of amity and enmity” between Russia and her Nordic neighborhood. In Buzan and Wæver’s seminal work on Regional Security Complex theory, this variable is termed social construction (2003: 51). This variable builds on a constructivist framework in that it looks at the degree of amity and enmity among states and “… hence interpretations of states are one of the determinant factors” (Soltani, Naji, and Amiri, 2014: 169). Amity, in its pure form, refers to relations between states that are based on genuine friendship and expectations of protection and support. Enmity, in its pure form, refers to the state in which relations between actors are based on suspicion and fear (Buzan, 1991: 189-190). Due to the assumption of the world as anarchic, which in turn created a fundamental insecurity for a state, an implication of enmity may be that it increases the effect of a security dilemma (Jervis, 1978: 178; Hovi and Underdal, 2010: 49-50). The security dilemma in international relations is understood as follows: Due to the inherent state of uncertainty that follows from an anarchic world system, a state, in pursuit of security, may allocate more resources to armament. This, in turn, may increase insecurity for other countries, since the perception is that weapons rarely are used exclusively for defensive purposes. Thus, armament in country A may give country B an incentive to also increase resource allocations to armament which again may contribute to a reduction in A’s security and so on (Hovi and Underdal, 2010). In the Nordic region, and particularly after the Ukraine crisis, “…[t]he underlying problem seems to be a persistent lack
of certainty about the other actors’ peaceful intentions” (Åtland, 2015: 146 [my italics]). This will be discussed in more detail in chapter 6.

Lastly, the question of whether Russia’s security policy towards the Nordic region follows a unified or diversified approach should also be considered in relations with some key geopolitical factors. According to Saul Cohen (2003: 24): “The essence of geopolitical analysis is the relation of international political power to the geographical setting”. The claim is as such that geographical features are important in order to understand how states act. Thus, geopolitical analyses may say to have two key aspects: “… 1) description of geopolitical settings as they relate to political power; 2) laying out of spatial frameworks that embrace interacting political power units” (Ibid: 25). Consequently, chapter 6 will examine closer how the individual Nordic countries are located geographically vis-à-vis Russia and the general geographical typography of the High North and the Baltic sub-regions. Furthermore, it will also examine how Russia is located in the Nordic region based on a set of strategic factors: military infrastructure, including key bases and location of nuclear capabilities; anti-access and area denial capabilities; access to oceans and primary ports; NATO presence; and strategic economic interests (see table 6).

The general assumption is here that if the results indicate that Russia prefers a unified approach towards the Nordic region and its actors, this may be explained by the fact that such an approach better serves Russia’s security policy interests in the region. Similarly, if the results show that Russia prefers a diversified approach towards the Nordic region, this may also be explained with reference to Russia’s interests.
3 Key historical trends: Soviet and Russian approaches toward the Nordic region

As the largest country in the world by area, Russia stretches over two continents and thus, from a security perspective, faces multiple dilemmas such as avoiding a two-front war, ensuring internal cohesion, border control, and moving troops and material over large distances in the event of military conflict. At the same time, Russia is a country with global ambitions and regaining status as a great power has been of high importance in the new millennium and may as such be considered an overall goal for the political leadership. The Nordic region is just one of many bordering Russia with distinct historical relations with the great eastern monolith. This chapter will examine Russia’s policies and approaches towards its northwestern neighborhood against the backdrop of international developments. Despite the focus on the Nordic region and the Nordic countries, it is impossible to study Russian security policy without also connecting the discussion to Russia’s relationship with the US, the EU, and NATO (Vendil Pallin, 2009: 119; Tsygankov, 2016; Zysk, 2015: 91-92).

The first part will examine and identify larger trends and interests, beginning with Soviet policies toward the Nordic region, but will also touch upon the turbulent 1990’s and Russia’s approach to the region in the 21st Century. The second part narrows the period of focus to 2012-2013 in order to give a “close-up” of Russia’s relations to the Nordic region prior to the 2014 Ukraine crisis. This enables an easier comparison of the situation before and after the crisis and will, together with part one, allow for an informed discussion in regard to continuity and change in Russia’s security policy towards the Nordic region.

3.1 The Soviet Union’s approaches

Previous research has identified some key elements in Russian security policy thinking in the Nordic region. These are important to examine because they may indicate longstanding trends Russia’s thinking and approaches towards the region. In the article on Soviet attitudes to Nordic cooperation from 1920-1955, Sven Holtsmark has identified several key interests of the Soviet Union vis-à-vis the Nordic countries, which are still actual today. One of them is the opposition towards any kind of “formation of political, economic or military regional
groups among European states in the Soviet Union’s immediate vicinity” (1992: 5). This also included political and military cooperation among Nordic countries (see also Berner 1986: 2-3) although this view shifted in combination with the evolving European political landscape and regional developments in the Nordic region during the time period. The idea of the North as a strategic buffer zone was re-introduced at the end of the 1930s, in this case against aggressive German expansionism (Ibid: 36, 46). During World War II, and in the first years after the end of the war, Soviet propaganda in the Nordic region was primarily aimed at Sweden who was blamed for being more “anti-Soviet” than Norway and Denmark (Ibid: 62, 73). However, the Cold War, in addition to Norway and Denmark’s (as well as Iceland’s) decision to join the newly established NATO, changed the Nordic military-political landscape. From that point, any kind of “Nordic cooperation” was perceived by the Soviet authorities as an attempt to integrate “neutral” Sweden into western military alliances as well as being a tool for British, and later US, hegemony in Scandinavia (1992: 63, 74). For Finland, who held a special status with regard to the Soviet Union, this perception meant that she was denied access to the Nordic council, a forum for Nordic political cooperation (not aimed at discussing foreign and security policies) (Ibid: 74).

According to Holtsmark, it was not until 1955 that noticeable change in Soviet attitude appeared and non-military Nordic cooperation was not seen as “dangerous” (as opposed to the previous assessment that non-military cooperation eventually would become military) (1992: 65). Analyzing the late 1950’s and early 1960s, Holtsmark highlighted two somewhat contradictory Soviet foreign policy aims regarding Scandinavia: The first one related to the aim of preventing any military cooperation between Sweden and the two NATO countries Norway and Denmark. The second foreign policy aim related to preventing Norway and Denmark to further integrate into NATO’s “… political and military structures and Western strategic defence planning.” (Ibid: 66-67). In both cases, the Soviets would have to attempt to provide a viable alternative to NATO, something closer Nordic cooperation ultimately could provide (Ibid: 67).

In short, Soviet authorities in addition to showing a skepticism towards Nordic (military) cooperation (including challenges to Sweden’s “neutral” status and further integration of Norway and Denmark into NATO), also opposed increased Western influence in the Nordic region. Holtmark also points at the Soviet notion of the Nordic region as a buffer zone, in this case against Hitler’s growing powers and increased tensions in Europe (1992: 5). During the
time period, it was also evident that considerable resources, including both the diplomatic and communist press, were utilized in order to influence Scandinavian and Finnish policies and to prevent moves that could be perceived as anti-Soviet (Ibid: 33-34).

In his book on Soviet policies toward the Nordic Countries, Örjan Berner highlights similar trends as Holtmark. His research also discovered that the Soviet leadership pursued various “policy-combinations” to attempt to persuade their Nordic neighbors to orient themselves eastwards, including solely bilateral efforts to more regionally comprehensive (1986: 3). However, Berner argues that the Soviet Union mainly conducted special bilateral policies for the individual Nordic states rather than policies for the Nordic region as a whole, but that military planning was prioritized above all (Ibid: 5). The end of World War II saw the rise of the Cold War and of a block system with primarily NATO on the one side and the Warsaw Pact countries on the other (Maddock, 1990: 99-114; Kureev, 2015). The block system further increased the focus on military capabilities and resulted in major military exercises on both sides involving several hundred thousand troops (Kureev, 2015). The Soviet Union increased its military strength during the 1960s and 1970s with a particular focus on the far North (High North). However, some of the tensions in the Nordic region were alleviated by other international conflicts. Furthermore, the introduction of missiles that could hit targets from a long distance also reduced some of the importance of stationing and moving troops, aircraft, and ships. (Berner, 1986: 182).

Nevertheless, buffer zones still continued to play an important role for the Soviet leadership and were considered important for securing the Soviet Union’s strategic depth. Furthermore, despite the tensions experienced during the Soviet era and the Cold War, the Nordic region was still considered more stable compared to other regions and “… Soviet policies here [were] anchored in a tradition of considerable restraint” (Ibid: 185). The Soviet Union traditionally viewed the Nordic region as a “window to the West”, both in military terms due to the Atlantic coastlines and the important exits in the Baltic sub-region and for commercial and cultural reasons (Dahl, 2014: 69). When combined, the Nordic region was the second biggest Western trading partner of the Soviet Union. (Berner, 1986: 2).

---

10 The Warsaw Pact was the Eastern bloc counterpart to NATO. The pact was created in 1955, partly as a military response to NATO, but mainly due to West Germany’s inclusion into the Western alliance system (Maddock, 1990: 99-114).
As for the High North, the region’s importance grew rapidly throughout the 20th century, peaking at the heights of the Cold war due to its geopolitical and strategic location. It was the shortest distance between the US and Russia in the scenario of nuclear exchange between the two superpowers and a region with vast reserves of natural resources. The importance of the Northern Fleet was significant (and overtook the Baltic Fleet as the main element of the Soviet Fleet) due to the Kola Peninsula’s ice-free ports and the open access to the Atlantic Ocean (Hilde, 2014: 153; Dahl, 2014: 71). This also meant that control over important sea lines of communication (SLOCS)11 between North America and Europe was important (Dahl, 2014: 69) The militarization of the High North was a result of the great power struggle between the two blocks which also affected the Nordic states in the region. This was especially true for NATO member Norway, whose northern region together with the Arctic and Barents areas was seen as a strategic center for the “Northern Flank”, who also shares a border with the Soviet Union in the High North. However, the northernmost parts of Sweden and Finland were also affected as well as Iceland and Denmark due to their locations in the High North/North Atlantic region (Tamnes and Holtsmark, 2014: 31-35; Dahl, 2014: 69).

Just as the Kola Peninsula became one of the most militarized regions in the world during Soviet times (Ibid: 31), the same was the case for Kaliningrad in the Baltic sub-region (Oldberg, 2015: 7). Furthermore, the Kaliningrad was also seen as important for the Soviet Union as it gave access to an ice-free port located much closer to the region where conflict with the West might arise (Godzimirski, 1999: 31). Kaliningrad was seen as a strategically significant located Soviet outpost in the Baltic Sea and became even more important as the Soviets developed their global strategy and the Soviet Navy attained grew in importance (Ibid: 32). The strategic significance of the narrow exits (the Danish straits) connecting the Baltic Sea to the North Sea and the Atlantic Ocean, among others, furthermore placed Denmark on the map in the Baltic sub-region. Documents discovered after the end of the Cold War revealed Soviet plans of nuclear attacks against Denmark in case of an East-West conflict (Dahl, 2014: 70). Sweden served as an important military buffer zone between he East and the West, and as mentioned earlier, the Soviet leadership emphasized the importance of Sweden’s neutrality status (Ibid).

---

11 Describes the primary maritime routes between ports, used for trade, logistics and naval forces. It is generally used in reference to naval operations to ensure that SLOCs are open, or in times of war, to close them.
3.2 Russia’s approaches in the 1990s

The end of the Cold War and the fall of the Soviet Union (1991) marked a period of a significant change in relations between what was then the Russian Federation and the West. International agreements were reached that aimed to decrease military tensions and establish transparency and cooperation (Kureev, 2015). However, for Russia, the 1990s also marked a decade of great change, difficulties and uncertainty. Goals of speedy economic and political modernization were designed to integrate Russia into the “Western club” and attract foreign Western investment and assistance. However, the “shock therapy” did not give the intended results, namely the integration of Russia into the group of rich Western nations and the prevention of further economic stagnation and social deterioration (Tsygankov, 2016: 57). Skepticism and distrust towards the West increased through the 1990s, together with a sense of “Russian hurt pride and identity” in the face of powerlessness both with regard to economic autonomy and security issues related to military and ethnic conflict inside Russia (Chechnya), but also in post-Soviet states (Ibid: 57-58). Russian foreign and security policy autonomy was restored somewhat under Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov (Ibid: 58-59).

Relations between Russia and NATO developed during the 1990s and cooperation was established through the formation of the Russia-NATO Permanent council (1997) (Oldberg, 2016: 5).

However, echoing interests from the Soviet era, Russia continuously tried to prevent NATO enlargement, especially the inclusion of former Soviet states (Ibid: 17-18). Despite the drastic reduction in the region’s strategic significance following the Cold War, the High North and the Kola Peninsula retained their importance for Russia’s nuclear deterrence strategy and thus the country’s national security. This led Russia to react strongly to foreign military activity, e.g. various military exercises held in northern Norway under the auspices of NATO and the Partnership for Peace program (PfP) (Zysk [notat]). Furthermore, the previously Soviet military equipment from the previous “Central Front” was relocated to Kaliningrad and the Kola Peninsula (Dahl, 2014: 71). The fall of the Soviet Union also changed the geopolitical

---

12 For example, the 1990 “Vienna Document” and the 1990 Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (ratified in 1992).
13 “Shock therapy”: A term, or “medicine”, introduced by President Yeltsin and Foreign Minister Kozyrev to try and rapidly revive the deteriorating Russian economy which included, among others, commitment to Western values and adopting principles of rapid marketization (private investments and financial assistance) (Tsygankov, 2016: 57).
map in the Baltic sub-region, with Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia becoming independent (and increasingly Western-oriented) states. This resulted in Kaliningrad being severed from mainland Russia and “sandwiched” between Lithuania and Poland. It thus became important for Russia to secure easy transport to the exclave as well as ensuring free transport of oil and gas from the High North sub-region (Sergeyev, 1999: 26). The number of military forces stationed on Kaliningrad was also reduced in the 1990s as part of the overall military withdrawal from Central Europe (Oldberg, 2015:5). As for traditional concerns, Russia continued to pay attention to Finland and Sweden as they strengthened their cooperation with the West. Both became members of the EU in the mid-1990s and have furthermore increased their security cooperation with NATO through the PfP program since 1994. They have still kept their official “non-align” statuses, although in Russian eyes, closer cooperation with the EU and NATO is seen as taking a step away from this policy (Ibid: 72). The 1999 NATO enlargement that incorporated three former Warsaw Pact countries Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic was also met with great criticism from Russia (NATO, 2015).

The changed dynamics following the Cold War, however, also opened up room for an increased regional cooperation and investment opportunities in the Nordic region (Rowe and Hønneland, 2010; Lie and Jervell, 2015: 16). Furthermore, despite the overall difficulties, Russia’s strive towards economic revitalization and modernization required closer integration with the West and opened opportunities for Russia to establish cooperation with her Nordic neighbors both in the High North and Baltic sub-regions. Furthermore, the Nordic countries were perceived by Russia as “advanced economies” with treasured modernization resources (Trenin, 2011: 48; Wilhelmsen, 2015: 111). The interest in establishing closer cooperation in the Nordic region in the 1990s is perhaps best exemplified by the creation of the Council of the Baltic Sea States (1992), the Barents Euro-Arctic Council (1993), the Arctic Council (1996) and the EU Northern Dimension in (1997) (Hattrem, 2015; Lie and Jervell, 2015: 17). Consequently, the renewed focus on regional cooperation helped improve relations and lower tensions in the region which to a large extent pushed aside much of the previous “polarization and strategic competition” (Ibid.).

### 3.3 Russia’s approaches: 2000-2011

Despite the opening up of new possibilities for rapprochement and cooperation between Russia and the West, the 1990s is also considered to be an anomaly (Rowe and Hønneland,
President Putin’s accession to power in 1999 came with a determination to revitalize the deteriorating Russian military as well as to return Russia to the status of a political and economic great power, something Russia argued had been undermined by the West during the 1990s. This became particularly apparent during Putin’s second presidential term (2004-2008). To reach this goal, an important feature has been to modernize and improve Russia’s military and defense capabilities. Russia sees a correlation between influence in world affairs and the strength of military power it possesses. As formulated by Katarzyna Zysk: “…The military is seen as a key foreign policy tool in peacetime, in addition to its traditional wartime role.” (2015a: 91).

As such, after more than a decade of decay and humiliation, cumulating with the apparent inefficiency during the war in Georgia in 2008, orders were made to initiate a large-scale military modernization process (Renz and Thornton, 2012; IHS Jane’s, 2015). Russia has since systematically increased her defense investments and shown political will to pull herself out of the outdated Soviet military era and into one of the most comprehensive reforms in Russian military history (Bukkvoll og Hakvåg, 2012: 2; Zysk, 2015: 90). The aim here is not to give an extensive presentation of Russia’s military modernization, as this has been done excellently elsewhere. Instead, it is to reiterate that the Russian military build-up, also in her northwestern region, was a process that was initiated before the outbreak of the Ukraine crisis and was largely due to the dire state of Russia’s Armed Forces in combination with a view that military force play an important role on the international stage. The military modernization also came with the re-introduction of larger-scale military exercises in order to improve Russia’s combat readiness. Russia also took part in several joint military exercises with her Western partners, including with her Nordic neighbors.

This military improvement paired with a rapid economic growth due to high and stable oil prices further increased Russia’s claim for a larger role in the international arena. According to Carolina Vendil Pallin, this must also be seen in connection with Russia’s perception of being geopolitically surrounded. From a Russian point of view, the West has taken advantage of Russia’s period of weakness and continuously moved their position in Russia’s neighboring regions at the cost of Russia’s interests. The “double enlargement” of NATO and the EU in 2004 may serve as an example as well as plans to deploy American missile defense systems in Europe (Vendil Pallin, 2009: 120; Remington, 2012: 258). Russia still perceives

---

15 See for example Zysk, 2015; Renz and Thornton, 2012; Trenin, 2016; Masters, 2015.
security as a zero-sum game where “hard” military power or military security is superior and political-military power plays a decisive role in world affairs (Vendil Pallin, 2009: 121; Zysk, 2015: 91). In the 21st century, Russia has put considerable effort into changing the post-Cold War security architecture (in Europe) which she perceives as unfavorable to Russian interests. In Russia’s view, the current system has allowed too much power and influence to the US and NATO, something that was emphasized by former President Dmitry Medvedev in his 2009 draft of the European Security Treaty (Zysk, 2015: 91-92). Despite experiencing a period of rapprochement in the aftermath of the 2001 terrorist attacks on the US, relations relatively quickly resumed to normal state of affairs throughout the first decade of the 21st century (although improving somewhat during Dmitry Medvedev’s presidency 2008-2012).

These developments are important to keep in mind when analyzing Russia’s policies towards the Nordic region. For the time period covered in this section (2000-2011), Russia has generally perceived relations with her Nordic neighbors as being favorable (Vendil Pallin, 2009: 122; Trenin, 2011: 47). Relations with Finland are perceived as the warmest, something that may be explained by their shared historical ties as well as Finland’s role as a link to the West during the Cold War. By contrast, relations with Sweden are less warm due to what Russia perceives as Sweden’s tendency to meddle in Russia’s internal affairs and scold Russia without good reason (Ibid) Relations between Norway and Russia reached new heights in 2010 when a decades old dispute ended with the signing of a treaty establishing the maritime boundary between the two countries in the Barents Sea and the Arctic Ocean (Nilsen, 2010; Heier and Kjolberg, 2015: 15). It has also been argued that Russia see improved relations and increased regional cooperation as an entry to use Nordic countries’ influence to push other EU and NATO members towards a path Russia sees as favorable (Vendil Pallin, 2009: 122).

However, keeping in line with traditional concerns regarding her Nordic neighborhood, Russia still emphasizes the importance of preventing further NATO enlargement in the region Trenin, 2011; Vendil Pallin, 2009). As such, Russia has continued to encourage Sweden and Finland to remain non-aligned and has observed with worry how the two countries have continued their collaboration with NATO, particularly through the PfP program (Ibid.). Furthermore, increased security collaboration between the Nordic countries and the West (the US and NATO) continues to be perceived negatively by Russia (particularly Norway’s increased collaboration with the US and what Russia perceives as Norway allowing vital parts of US anti-missile components being stationed on Norwegian territory) (Vendil Pallin, 2009: 122).
121). Criticism regarding US/NATO plans to deploy ballistic missile defense systems (BMD) in Europe has since 2007 been met with Russian threats of deploying Iskander ballistic missiles in the Kaliningrad region (now deployed). The Iskander missiles have an estimated range of over 500 km and are capable of carrying tactical nuclear warheads. The announcement of deployment was stated by former President Medvedev both in 2008 and 2011 (Oldberg, 2015: 6; Iskander-M, 2016).

In summary, relations between Russia and her Nordic neighbors, as well as Russian interests in the Nordic region, have remained relatively stable since the Cold War. Adhering to the previously mentioned trends, director of the Carnegie Moscow Center, Dmitry Trenin summarized what he saw as the main Russian policy goals in the Nordic region towards the end of 2011 (2011: 47):

1) Keeping a stable security environment in the area which abuts the country’s strategic assets: its “second capital,” St. Petersburg; the Kola Peninsula, which hosts Russia’s sea-based nuclear deterrent; and Russia’s only exclave, Kaliningrad;

2) Getting access to the Nordic countries’ advanced technology and investment resources; and using the Baltic Sea for direct and unimpeded access, including by pipelines, to Russia’s principal partner in Europe: Germany.

The first policy goal reflects the more security oriented focus of this thesis and may be seen as a prolongation of Russia’s overall interest to maintain her regional strength and influence as well as ensure that Western influence do not intervene in the current security environment. However, number two is also important insofar as it shows Russia’s interest in maintaining positive relations in the Nordic region in order to secure Russia’s economic and technological interests.

3.4 Russia’s approaches: 2012-2013

If Medvedev’s presidential term (2008-2012) was perceived as a rapprochement with the West, the return of Vladimir Putin to power in May 2012 signaled a shift in Russia’s foreign policy. According to Andrei Tsygankov, Putin’s return revitalized Russia’s more assertive course that cumulated with the Georgian war in 2008 (2016: 263-264). Putin’s foreign policy may be said to have been shaped by the perceived continuation of the West’s (particularly the
US) attempts to assert its values, the rise of non-Western nations, and internal domestic crisis (2016: 234). As for the first factor, Russia has reacted with frustration to, among other, the US and EU’s criticism and “meddling” in domestic Russian affairs. This includes President Putin’s reelection in 2012 and his handling of the massive protests that took place in Moscow and St. Petersburg in 2011-2012. Furthermore, Russia was frustrated by the Western criticism regarding Russia’s attempt to pull Ukraine closer towards the Eurasian Union, while American and European leaders simultaneously attempted to steer Ukraine towards closer cooperation with the EU and the West (Tsygankov, 2016: 235). When asked in an interview with a Swedish newspaper about the apparent change in Russia’s security policy after President Putin’s reelection in 2012, Foreign Minister Lavrov asserted that it was a necessary change, since “business as usual” no longer was possible for Russia. The simple reason was because “as usual” for the EU, NATO, and the West only meant one thing: that Russia should become like them: “… We will only talk as an equal partner and we will not respond to the proposal that we accept any EU idea as a given” (RUS MFA, 2016a).

Turning to the Nordic region, both the Barents and the Baltic Sea have continued to be perceived by Russia as important waters for trade and transport, and Russia view the Baltic sub-region as an important gateway to Central and Western Europe, both through sea and air. Geopolitically, the High North plays a different role than the Baltic sub-region due to the location of strategic nuclear capabilities on the Kola Peninsula (Lie and Jervell, 2015: 19; Tamnes et al, 2015: 17). This is also highlighted by Pavel Baev, who argues that one of the most distinguishing features when it comes to Russian military activity in the High North and Baltic sub-regions is the extensive deployment of nuclear assets in the High North sub-region. (2015: 54).

As mentioned in the previous section, Russia is continuing to modernize both her nuclear and conventional forces as well as strengthen the Russian military in the High North. This ambition further increased after Sergey Shoigu became Minister of Defense in 2012 and makes Russia better equipped to assert power, both in the Arctic and in the Baltic Sea (among others) (Ibid; Zysk, 2015a: 77). Highlighting some aspects of Russia’s interests in the Nordic region in a 2013 article, Katri Pynnöniemi, pointed to Russia’s interest in preserving both internal stability and the “current security constellation in the Nordic region”, i.e. that Sweden and Finland remain outside NATO (2013: 1). Furthermore, and similar to Dmitry Trenin’s 2011 analysis, Russia saw continued “joint technology projects” with the Nordic countries as
an important resource in Russia’s modernization process (Ibid.). The following section will take a closer look at regional cooperation from a Russian perspective.

### 3.4.1 Russian MFA reviews 2012-2013: Regional cooperation

The annual Russian MFA reviews are comprehensive documents covering Russia’s foreign policy and diplomatic activities around the world. The reviews also cover sections for each of the Nordic countries, which describe developments in political relations, trade, economy, as well as other specific areas of cooperation and disagreements. The 2012 and 2013 reviews show that Russia is eager to cooperate with her northwestern neighbors, especially in the trade and economic sphere (Obzor, 2012; Obzor, 2013). The overall tone regarding the five Nordic countries is positive, and both reviews point to an increase in parliamentary ties and satisfactory political dialogue as well as well established diplomatic relations with all the Nordic countries. President Putin also emphasized historical ties, good relations, and hope for continued successful cooperation between Russia and Norway and Denmark during a 2013 inauguration ceremony of newly appointed ambassadors to Russia (President of Russia, 2013).

This being said, the 2012 and 2013 reviews also point to some negative aspects of Russia’s relations with her Nordic neighbors, including long standing and unresolved issues regarding Swedish authorities’ refusal to extradite “terrorist” Chechens as well as disagreements between Russia and Norway regarding Russia’s presence on Svalbard (Obzor 2012; Obzor, 2013). Nevertheless, the main emphasis falls on the positive development of bilateral relations as well as regional and economic cooperation. In his 2013 speech during a ministerial meeting of the Northern Dimension, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov emphasized that Russia’s Northwestern regions serve as a gateway to Russian cooperation with Europe, supported by regional organizations such as the CBSS, the BEAC, and the Arctic Council. Lavrov further called on “the North” to be a showcase for crafting a new “European architecture”, reiterating former President Medvedev’s call for a new security system, built on the principles of “equality, non-alignment and transparency”.¹⁶ Lavrov further emphasized the importance of keeping political tensions outside of all Northern European cooperative frameworks and that Russia, at this point in time, did not see any issues or contradictions in the region that would

¹⁶ And, as mentioned earlier, a security system that no longer disproportionally weigh in favor of the US and NATO (Zysk, 2015: 91; Lo, 2009).
justify or necessitate the use of military resources or the presence of military and political blocs (RUS MFA, 2013).

In 2013, regional cooperation is still mainly characterized by low tensions and platforms such as the BEAC, CBSS, the Northern Dimension, and the Arctic Council, are all arenas where Russia plays and important part. Furthermore, these platforms were seen as helpful interaction forums between Russia and the EU and Russia and its Nordic neighbors (Pynöniemi, 2013: 1, 5, 8).

### 3.4.2 Military activity in proximity to the Nordic region 2012-2013

In addition to successful regional cooperation, Russia also engaged in military cooperation with its Nordic counterparts, exemplified by joint military exercises such as the Russia Norwegian Pomor exercises (2010, 2011, 2012, 2013) in the Barents and Norwegian Sea, the 2012 BALTOPS exercise in the Baltic Sea (including among others Russia, Denmark, Sweden, and the US), and the 2012 biennial Northern Eagle exercise taking place in the Norwegian and Barents Sea including the US, Norway, and Russia (Pettersen, 2012; Pettersen, 2013; Tresch, 2012; RusNavy, 2012). Nevertheless, Russia’s rapid military modernization, particularly since 2008, has resulted in military build-up and increased military activity, also in proximity to the Nordic region prior to the escalating tensions after the Ukraine crisis. In the High North, Norway reported an increase in Russian military activity after President Putin both signaled increased Russian international presence in 2007 and reinstated long distance patrol flights with strategic bombers (Mogen, 2016; President of Russia, 2007). To highlight this, in 2006 Norwegian F-16 aircrafts identified only 14 Russian aircraft whereas the numbers for 2007 and 2008 were 88 and 87 respectively. A new peak was identified in 2012 with 71 identifications and was illuminated by Russia’s decision to allocate more resources to the Russian Armed Forces (Ege, 2012). 2013 saw a slight dip in the number of identifications (58) before again peaking at 74 identifications in 2014 (27 percent increase from 2013). However, these identifications are still modest when compared to the 554 identifications that took place in 1984 during the Cold War (Ibid.).

Increased activity was also registered in the Baltic sub-region when Russia in 2011 resumed long-range flights with bombers over the Baltic Sea (Tracz, 2015: 31; Cenciotti, 2013; Forsvarets Efterretningstjeneste, 2014: 15). Furthermore, incidents involving Russian aircraft took place in the Baltic sub-region prior to 2014. In March 2013, Russia surprised the Nordic
region and NATO when two Russian strategic bombers, escorted by four fighter jets, carried out mock attacks on targets near Stockholm and south of Sweden. Unprepared, Swedish military failed to scramble jets to identify the planes. Instead Danish fighter jets from NATO’s Air Policing Mission intercepted the Russian aircrafts. The behavior resembled Soviet Cold War flights patterns and the fact that the mock attacks took place at night further alarmed Sweden and the West (Tracz, 2015: 31; Cenciotti, 2013). A month later, Russia again caused concern when a Russian reconnaissance aircraft flew in international airspace in the small gap between the Swedish islands of Öland and Gotland during a military exercise that included Sweden, Finland, the US and the Baltic countries (Tracz, 2015: 32; Cenciotti, 2013). Russia’s activity was perceived as unusually aggressive, nearly violating Swedish airspace, and could be seen as a signal to Finland and Sweden that Russia is paying attention to their increased collaboration with the US and NATO.

One of Russia’s traditional positions is that she does not want closer Finnish and Swedish military collaboration with the US or NATO, something she has voiced systematically prior to 2014. In the 2001 report on Russia’s interests in Northern Europe, the influential SVOP stated that it was in Russia’s interest that Sweden and Finland remained non-aligned (Fyodor et al., 2001). The same sentiment was expressed by Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev during the annual Barents Summit in 2013: “New participants emerging close to our border will change the parity, and we’ll have to take this into account and respond to that. NATO … has a military potential which can be used against our country in certain cases” (cited in Reuters, 2013). In Russia’s view, the inclusion of Finland and Sweden would upset the balance of power and force Russia to respond (Ibid.) In spite of its perception of the Nordic region as a relatively calm neighborhood, Russia is also wary of the developments in the Nordic countries’ security policies that may undermine what is perceived as Russia’s strategic interest in the region. Russia’s increased military presence that has resulted from the larger modernization of the Russian armed forces has been one of the means to support Russia’s security interests and assets in the region.

That being said, Russia’s focus in the Nordic region prior to 2014, in addition to its traditional interest in limiting closer Nordic and Western (here political and military) cooperation, was mainly on developing regional cooperation. However, Pynnöniemi also warned that the

17 “Scramble” refers to when an aircraft is activated in order to identify foreign aircraft flying close to another state’s airspace. In most cases, it is only identification missions, but it can also be a response to a threat where it is necessary to intercept hostile aircraft (Mogen, 2016).
current status quo in the Nordic region could be undermined by Russia’s push to project her power abroad: “… It cannot be excluded that in the future inter-regional cooperation will be re-politicized in one form or another and further marginalized. Much depends on Russia’s internal development and whether the threat perceptions [between Russia and the West] diverge even further apart.” (2013: 1). Only months after this statement, the Ukraine crisis and Russia’s annexation of Crimea took place.\textsuperscript{18}

### 3.5 Summary

This chapter has first examined and identified key historical trends in Soviet and Russian approaches (in the 1990s and 2000s) toward the Nordic region. The historical review found that Russia persistently has been interested in maintaining the Swedish-Finnish buffer zone, i.e. that Sweden and Finland remain out of NATO. Furthermore, Russia has strived to regain its great power status and sought to in increase its influence (militarily, economically, politically). Another occurring trend is the ambivalent relationship with the West and Russia’s interest in limiting Western influence that may undermine Russia’s interests (primarily military and political). Closely tied to this, Russia has remained skeptical to closer security and defense cooperation between the Nordic countries and opposed Nordic rapprochement with the US and NATO (and to a lesser degree the EU).

The second part of the chapter narrowed down the period of focus to 2012-2013. This was done in order to provide a “close-up” of Russia’s relations to the Nordic region before Russia annexed Crimea in 2014. The close-up showed that Russia generally viewed its bilateral relations with the Nordic countries as “good neighborly” and practical. A closer examination of Russia’s military activities pointed to examples of military cooperation and joint exercises between Russia and the Nordic countries, but also supplied examples of provocative Russian military behavior prior to 2014.

---

\textsuperscript{18} Pynnöniemi’s article was published in December, 2013.
4 Russia’s security policy ends in the Nordic region: 2014-2016

As shown in Chapter 3, Russia’s overarching security policy ends in the Nordic region have been relatively permanent over time. These overarching ends are summarized in table 2, and include two broad categories: political and military. Furthermore, based on whether they are “defensive” or “offensive”, these categories are then divided in two sub-categories.

Table 2. Russia’s political and military ends in the Nordic region (prepared by the author)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political ends</th>
<th>Offensive</th>
<th>Defensive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maximize Russian influence in the Nordic region</td>
<td>Minimize Western influence in the Nordic region</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military ends</td>
<td>Counter an increase in Western military presence in the Nordic region</td>
<td>Secure Russia’s military strategic depth in the Nordic region</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The terms offensive and defensive take on slightly different meanings when applied to political and military ends respectively. However, broadly speaking, offensive is understood as action initiated by Russia without prior action from other actors. Defensive is understood as Russian reaction to other actors’ actions. Political ends are understood as Russia’s aim to increase its influence as much as possible (maximize) and to limit Western influence as much as possible (minimize). Military ends focus more explicitly on aspects of military power.\(^{19}\)

Military ends are thus understood as Russia’s ability to attack or initiate necessary countermeasures in face of a Western threat and Russia’s ability to defend itself and secure strategic depth. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the categories are not clear-cut or mutually exclusive, but rather serve an important purpose of structuring the analysis. These categories will be further explored in the following sections.

\(^{19}\) On influence and power, see Baldwin, 2016.
The crisis in Ukraine led to a deterioration in Russia Western relations and had a negative spillover effect to the Nordic region in the form of increased tensions. The question is if this development has had any effect on Russia’s security policy ends towards the region after 2014. The aim of this chapter is to identify Russia’s security policy ends toward the Nordic region since 2014, building on the background chapter (Chapter 3), the collected empirical data, and additional secondary literature. Russia’s security policy ends will be identified, sorted, and divided in relation to the overarching ends in table 2. If there are huge discrepancies between the overarching political and military categories, and the identified trends in the empirical material, this would indicate a change in Russia’s security policy ends in the region.

4.1 Maximize Russian influence

The first end is characterized as offensive in the sense that the tensed environment in the Nordic region after 2014 means that Russia has to more actively seek out ways to enhance its political influence in the region. Maximize is understood as Russia’s wish to increase its influence to the extent possible. This section will focus on Russia’s bilateral and regional cooperation within the Nordic region as well as the negative spillover effects to the Nordic region from Russia’s actions in Ukraine. Historically, this end has roots back to the Cold War as well as the tumultuous 1990’s, where Russia was weakened both politically, economically, and militarily. Since then, Russia has worked actively, also in the Nordic region, to regain its “lost influence” within the political, economic, and military sphere (Kaljurand, 2012: 1).

In this section, Russia’s interest in maximizing its influence is tied to the role that the Nordic region, including both sub-regions and the Nordic countries, has played as an important resource in Russia’s modernization process (Trenin, 2011: 48). Consequently, the negative spillover from the Ukraine crisis in terms of deteriorating relations with Russia’s Nordic neighbors has not been received well, something the Russian MFA reviews may help exemplify. The MFA reviews covering the years 2014 and 2015 are notably different from the 2012-2013 reviews. Overall, Russia describes a situation in which relations with its Nordic neighbors have deteriorated. This is in large part blamed on the Nordic countries’

---

20 Direct connections between the Ukraine crisis and negative spillover has been voiced by, for example, Russian ambassador to Sweden, Viktor Tatarintsev (Winiarski, 2014), Foreign Minister Lavrov (Aarstad Aase, 2014), and President Putin (President of Russia, 2016a). See also RUS MFA, 2015 and Nilsen, 2015.
21 Such as the Foreign Policy Concept, the National Security Strategy, the Military Doctrine.
participation in EU’s “anti-Russia” course and sanctions (Obzor, 2014; Obzor 2015). The reviews focus on the impact of the sanctions on trade and economic relations as well as the freeze in political dialogue, particularly on a higher political level. (Ibid.). The 2015 review is less optimistic than the one conducted in 2014, which likely corresponds with the realization that the sanctions and worsening relations will not easily be restored. Despite this, both reviews still focus on the areas of continued cooperation and highlights Russia’s readiness to continue pragmatic and practical relations and cooperation with all of its Nordic neighbors (Obzor, 2014: 86-88; Obzor 2015: 107-110).

Russia’s willingness to continue pragmatic and practical cooperation with the Nordic countries is also tied to another aspect of Russia’s aim to maximize its influence in the Nordic region. Besides the obvious economic and political gains that come with such cooperation, Russia is also interested in limiting negative spillover effects from the Ukraine crisis. This is because such spillover leads to increased NATO presence and additional costs to Russia’s aggression in Ukraine, politically, militarily, economically, and so on. The sanctions imposed on Russia by the West has, for example, already halted military cooperation between Russia and its Nordic neighbors and limited Russia’s access to Nordic industrial technology. Thus, when the Nordic countries announced that they would increase military cooperation due to increased Russian aggression in the Nordic region (Bentzrød, 2015), the Russian MFA voiced concern that the Nordic defensive strategies aimed towards Russia “…could undermine the positive and constructive regional cooperation in the North that has been building over the past few decades.” (RUS MFA, 2015). A year later, Foreign Minister Lavrov further stated that Russia “works persistently to preserve Northern Europe as a space of neighborliness, partnership and mutually beneficial cooperation … This region has no need of dividing lines and artificial fanning of tensions” (RUS MFA, 2016). The comments show that Russia is actively seeking to maintain beneficial and constructive regional cooperation in the Nordic region.

In other words, the fewer consequences Russia’s actions in Ukraine have on relations with its Nordic neighbors, the higher the chances are of cooperation proceeding “as usual”. Russia may not have expected the degree of “whiplash” from its interventions in Ukraine based on earlier experiences tied to the use of military force in its foreign policy dealings. When Russia intervened in the Georgian conflict “… the swift return to business as usual with the West … confirmed Moscow’s conclusion that force can be used against neighbors to achieve strategic
gains at little long-term cost” (Giles, 2016: 4). The use of military force as a means to achieve foreign policy goals will be discussed closer in Chapter 5. However, the example shows that Russia’s ability to maximize her influence in the Nordic region, is dependent upon its ability to limit spillover from other regional (or international, i.e. Syria) conflicts that it is engaged in. The Ukraine crisis has proven difficult to “isolate” and has thus affected Russia’s relations with the West, including its Nordic neighborhood. This has a negative impact on Russia’s influence in the region and an important aim for Russia is therefore to attempt to “normalize” relations.

This is particularly the case in the Arctic (including the High North sub-region) where President Putin has uttered the wish to keep the region shielded from “geopolitical games”, “military block mentalities” and “struggles of spheres of influence” (Grønning, 2016; The Arctic, 2016). In other words, Russia is interested in ensuring that the Arctic remains shielded from negative spillover, and cultivating a “common understanding” among all Arctic states and governments that the disagreements on the international arena should not affect cooperation in the Arctic or create artificial dividing lines (Hannestad and Svendsen, 2016; RIA Novosti, 2016a). The continued dialogue in the BEAC also reflects a continued wish to maintain regional cooperation in the High North. Nevertheless, despite the Russian statements regarding the wish to keep the region shielded from increased tensions, Russia is simultaneously continuing to strengthen its military presence in the High North.

Furthermore, regardless of President Putin’s emphasis on the Arctic region as peaceful, relations with Russia’s Arctic neighbors have also been affected by the increased tensions. This has “… been reflected in forceful security rhetoric on the Arctic and references by Russian officials and the military to alleged security threats in the region” (Klimenko, 2016: 34). However, it should be mentioned that Russia has been a cooperative and responsible actor in the Arctic, committing to international legal frameworks and the development of rules for the region as a whole. It is largely in Russia’s interest to continue on this path as its commitment allows for increased Russian influence over the developments in the region and help strengthen Russia’s sovereignty in addition to ensuring Russia’s right to natural resources in the Arctic (Klimenko, 2016). However, Russia’s actions, particularly in Ukraine, have made the other Arctic states (including the Nordic countries) perceive Russian military build-up in the region with more suspicion and have increased insecurity regarding Russia’s intentions. Yet, despite spillover to the High North, there is some truth to Putin’s words that
the Arctic has remained somewhat shielded from spillover from conflicts taking place in other parts of the world. This is exemplified by continued cooperation both within the Arctic Council and the BEAC. It may also be exemplified by continued cooperation with High North neighbor Norway. The two countries have continued cooperation on search and rescue, the incidents at sea agreement, border guard cooperation and the hotline between Norway’s Joint Headquarters in Reitan and Russia’s Northern Fleet is kept open.

The situation has been more difficult in the Baltic sub-region, where the Ukraine crisis has (among other things) led to cancellations of the CBSS Ministerial Sessions. This is an important platform for Russia to develop multilateral cooperation in the Baltic Sea on equal terms and a platform that gives Russia more leeway to exercise its influence in the sub-region (Obzor, 2015: 94). Russia’s reaction to the cancellation is an example of Russia’s wish to go back to “business as usual” and continue cooperation as this is perceived as mitigating the risk of both political and military conflict. “Business as usual” also means implicit acceptance for Russia’s actions in Ukraine. Russia’s continued attempts to restore and maintain bilateral and regional cooperative frameworks may in this way also be perceived as a part of a larger strategy or game to “normalize” relations in the sub-region, and in this way, enhance Russian influence. In a meeting with his Finnish counterpart, Foreign Minister Lavrov also brought up the Russian concern about negative spillover to the Baltic sub-region in form of militarization and said that “… all issues of cooperation in the Baltic Sea area and in the north in general should be solved within the framework of the multilateral formats that have already been created” (TASS, 2016). These are frameworks where Russia sees itself as having more weight or where NATO, the US, and the EU not necessarily have the same possibility to influence the outcome of negotiations.

Russia is actively seeking to limit negative spillover from its actions in Ukraine to the Nordic region. The new constraints imposed on Russia means that it has to act more offensive and invite to various types of cooperation and emphasize areas in which cooperation are still ongoing. As such, this section concludes that Russia’s aim to maximize its influence in the Nordic region has not changed significantly, despite the fact that this has become more difficult.
4.2 Minimize Western influence

Russia’s second political end to minimize Western influence in the Nordic region is closely connected to the aforementioned end. Yet, where maximizing Russian influence does not necessarily imply a decrease of Western influence, this end focuses more implicitly on this. Minimize is here understood as Russia’s interest in limiting to the extent possible Western influence in the Nordic region. This category is understood as defensive to the extent that it is a reaction to increased Western influence. Furthermore, it is defensive because it relates to Russia’s interest in keeping the Nordic military-political status quo in the region. According to Ingmar Oldberg, “…Keeping the status quo if often seen as a defensive and peaceful undertaking, allowing for cooperation, but this may also take quite violent forms” (2016: 1).

In Russia’s latest Foreign Policy Concept, one of the initial statements reads “…[t]he capabilities of the historically established West to dominate the global economy and politics continue to decline.” (translation by Tsygankov, 2016: 238). Russia further calls for “increased responsibility for setting the international agenda” as well as an increased role in “shaping the [international] system” (Foreign Policy Concept, 2013). As such, Russia’s interest in limiting Western influence in the Nordic region may be seen in light of Russia’s overarching goal of regaining and maintaining its status as a great power. In other words, Russia wishes to secure its high standing in the international community and play a more active role in international affairs, something a decline in Western (and especially US) power may accommodate (Ibid; Monaghan, 2013).

When it comes to the Nordic region, Russia is interested in limiting closer collaboration both between the Nordic countries, but also with NATO, the US, and the EU. Russia is concerned that the “Euro-Atlantic solidarity” will decrease Russia’s ability to influence in the Nordic region. Or, as put by Foreign Minister Lavrov commenting on Norway-Russian relations: “…it is impossible to ignore the increased influence that external factors play on our cooperation. We assume it is a shared interest to avoid that the development in our cooperation suffers under unfavorable conjunctures…” (Aarstad Aase, 2014). Russia wishes to minimize the negative effect of these “external factors” (presumably the EU and NATO) because to Russia they are hampering what could be undisturbed and mutually beneficial relations with its Nordic neighbors. In other words, these “external factors” are seen as dangerous to Russia’s

---

22 The term “military-political status quo” was used by Russian ambassador to Sweden, Viktor Tatarintsev, when he was warning against Swedish and Finnish NATO-membership (Winiarski, 2014).
interests in the Nordic region, particularly when they are allowed such a degree of influence vis-à-vis the Nordic countries.

From a Russian perspective, keeping the military-political status quo mainly relates to keeping Sweden and Finland out of NATO (Winiarski, 2014). However, Russia also wants to limit Norway, Denmark, and Iceland from increasing their collaboration with NATO. As shown in the background chapter, this interest may be traced back to the Soviet era. Russia has also been wary of closer military cooperation between the Nordic countries, partly because Moscow sees this as bringing Sweden and Finland closer towards NATO, for example when they participate in military exercises hosted by one of the NATO-members Norway, Denmark, or Iceland. Before 2014, Russia has sought to limit closer Nordic security cooperation by improving bilateral defense ties between Russia and the Nordic countries (Stratfor, 2013). This may be exemplified by the growing military cooperation that took place between Russia and Norway who conducted several joint military exercises and prepared to enhance joint security agreements on exchange of classified information (Pettersen, 2013a). Russia’s Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu has also invited Finland to collaborate more closely in the defense sphere in the Arctic and suggested that Finland buy Russian military equipment as part of their military upgrade program (Stratfor, 2013).

However, after Russia’s intervention in Ukraine, all military cooperation between Russia and the Nordic neighbors has been frozen. Simultaneously, military cooperation between the Nordic countries as well as with the US and NATO has increased. This, however, has not lessened Russia’s interest in minimizing Western influence in the region (on the contrary, it is probably perceived as more important). Russia’s interest in keeping Sweden and Finland out of NATO can be traced through to the Soviet era, the Cold War and the 1990s, as well as in the 2000s (see Chapter 3). It may as such be perceived as a traditional Russian security interest in the Nordic region. When Russia no longer can increase bilateral defense ties with the Nordic countries in order to enhance trust and limit western influence or collaboration, other measures such as reassurance and threats are used (see Chapter 5).

Russia’s interest in limiting Western influence in her Northwestern neighborhood may also be tied to what Moscow perceive as the EU, the US, and NATO’s attempts to assert and increase their power vis-à-vis Russia. Russia argues that these actors attempt to spread fear and “anti-
Russian” sentiments in the Nordic region, as well as in Europe.23 Furthermore, with emerging threats and conflicts in other bordering regions, Russia is interested in preserving peace with its Nordic neighbors. Russia describes the Nordic region as being one of the most safe and stable in the world and sees NATO’s military activities in the region as jeopardizing this stability. (RUS MFA, 2014). Such statements are indicative of Russia’s interest in limiting Western influence, not only because Moscow see this as a “shortcut” to return to “business as usual”, but also as a way to preserve internal stability in the Nordic region.

As such, this section concludes that Russia’s aim to minimize Western influence in the Nordic region is a longstanding political end and that there are few indications that this has changed after 2014.

### 4.3 Counter an increase in Western military presence

Where the first two sections have focused on Russian political ends in the Nordic region, this security policy end is different insofar as it focuses more explicitly on the military aspect of Russia’s security policy. This end is offensive in the sense that it pertains to Russia’s interest in eliminating threats and actively counter an increase in Western military presence and activities in the Nordic region. In other words, it is a difference between the aim of limiting Western influence, for example by offering alternative (bilateral) security arrangements (prior to 2013) and reassuring the Nordic countries of Russia’s good intentions, and Russia’s aim to eliminating perceived threats by offensive means (if deemed necessary). The latter aim is not a new one in Russia’s security thinking about in the Nordic region. However, it has arguably become more visible after the Ukraine crisis due to an increase in NATO’s military presence. In the Nordic region, Russia is to a higher degree voicing its perception of the NATO alliance as an adversary and NATO enlargement and activities in the region as a threat to Russia’s national security (Winiarski, 2015; Dempsey, 2016; National Security Strategy, 2015).

Russia’s security policy end to counter and increase in Western military presence in the Nordic region should also be understood in the context of Russia’s strategic interests and assets in the region. Both the Kola Peninsula and the Kaliningrad enclave, located in the High North and the Baltic sub-regions respectively, hold important Russian assets that it is ready to protect. In an announcement made by Defense Minister Shoigu and Chief of the General Staff

---

23 See for example interview with Putin in Corriere della Sera, 2015.
Valery Gerasimov regarding the release of the latest Military Doctrine, the Crimean Peninsula, the Kaliningrad region, and the Arctic were pointed out as priority areas for military reinforcement in 2015 (RT, 2015). This announcement, in addition to signaling increased awareness of the new security environment in the Nordic region, furthermore point to the (renewed) strategic importance of the High North and Baltic sub-regions. Moreover, the region may be said to have experienced a revival of great power interests and “regained a significant geopolitical position”. Ann-Sofie Dahl ties this to the increased focus directed toward the Arctic region as well as Russia’s build-up in naval capacity and the construction of Russian pipelines crossing the Baltic Sea (2014: 67).

This policy end is defined as offensive due to Russia’s interest in actively seeking to counter Western military activities that Russia perceive as threatening, including military exercises close to Russia’s border and in the Nordic region as a whole. Russia does not want to become encircled, as highlighted by Russia’s ambassador to Sweden, Viktor Tatarintsev. In a 2014 interview, he was asked if Russia feels encircled and threatened: “Yes! At least encircled. And there do exist a threatening situation. What would your reaction be if the enemy came to your door? You would want more power to defend yourself” (Winiarski, 2014).

Russia does not see NATO enlargement as a means to create peace and stability in Europe. Instead, NATO is perceived as a Western tool to increase their power at the expense of Russia’s power and sovereignty. Foreign Minister Lavrov was cited in the Russian news agency TASS saying: “We do not hide our negative attitude toward NATO’s course on moving military infrastructure closer to our borders … Here Russia’s sovereign rights comes into force to ensure security by measures that are appropriate for current risks,” (cited in TASS, 2016).

Lavrov’s mention of sovereign rights refers to a strongly held notion in Russia that may be traced back to the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648. The notion includes, among other things, a “core principle of territority … and principle of non-interference in internal affairs” (Zysk, 2015: 92; Bershidsky, 2015). As such, every state has the right to choose, for example, their security architecture, something Russia also has mentioned with regard to her Nordic neighbors. However, if these choices imply increased Western military influence (read the US and NATO) close to Russia, it is forced to respond. Furthermore, when Russia is criticized for her military build-up or increased military exercises by the West it is viewed as an

24 Similar comment made by Foreign Minister Lavrov (RT, 2016)
25 See for example: RUS MFA, 2015; President of Russia, 2016a; TASS, 2016.
intrusion of what Russia perceive as internal matters (RUS MoD cited in RIA Novosti, 2015a).

The increased tensions in the Nordic region after the Ukraine crisis is in large tied to uncertainty regarding Russia’s intentions. Russia’s interventions in Ukraine in 2014 and its interventions in Georgia in 2008 has shown the extent to which Russia is willing to go in order to secure its interest. Furthermore, destabilizing these two strategically important countries (for Russia) prevents accession to both the EU and NATO (something both Georgia and Ukraine have sought). Russia’s end to counter Western military threats in the Nordic region has also brought back Cold War rhetoric on strategic balance and nuclear threats (RUS MFA, 2015c). This will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5, but it serves as a good example of the extent to which, rhetorically, Russia is willing to go in order to counter Western military threats, but also that such threats have returned to the Nordic theatre.

Consequently, the security policy end discussed in this section may be said to have become more prominent in face of increased tensions and Western military presence in the Nordic region. However, Russia’s interest in countering Western military presence may be traced back to earlier period and has as such not changed significantly.

4.4 Secure Russia’s military strategic depth

The final category concerns a traditional Russian military security concern, namely Russia’s interest in securing strategic depth. This concern is often explained by Russia’s historical experiences and insecurities regarding numerous invasions in the past, including from the West, e.g. from Poles, French, Swedes, the Napoleonic advances in 1812 and the German invasions during World War I and World War II (Nygaard and Hakvåg, 2013: 14; Khan, 2015; Sinovets and Renz, 2015: 3). This security policy end is defined as defensive in the sense that it pertains to Russia’s interest in defending its country and securing distance between itself and its opponents. In military terms, strategic depth refers to the “… distance from the frontline to its center of gravity or Heartland, its core population areas or important cities or industrial installations” (Kahn, 2015). Consequently, large areas of space may provide natural protection and enhance the capability to, for instance, slow down an enemy’s advances (Ibid.).
Russia, as the largest country in the world by area, has benefitted from its strategic depth as aptly demonstrated by the aforementioned examples. However, despite its vast territory, the strategic depth of Russia’s European part, with Moscow and especially St. Petersburg located close to the border with the EU and NATO, is today not considered very deep (Sinovets, 2016). Furthermore, technological military advances means that missiles may hit targets located very far away, something that also may contribute to reduce Russia’s (and other countries’) strategic depth. After the fall of the Soviet Union, Russia has hoped to create buffer zones through a system of relationships (e.g. economic) with post-Soviet states to ensure that these countries provide Russia the required strategic depth from the West, i.e. more territorial distance (Friedman, 2012; Khan, 2015; Sinovets, 2016). However, several of the post-Soviet states have sought alignment with the West through EU and NATO membership. As such, Russia views the EU and NATO enlargements as infringements into spheres that Russia perceives as of “vital interest” to the country, politically, economically, and militarily.

NATO’s enlargement remains a traditional thorn in Russia’s side. Russia’s National Security Strategy is one of the key official policy documents pertaining to Russian security priorities and strategies, both at home and abroad (President of Russia, 2015). The latest was released towards the end of 2015 and states that the continued enlargement of the alliance “… and the locations of its military infrastructure closer to Russian borders are creating a threat to national security” (2015).26 The Military Doctrine is another key security document focusing on Russia’s armed defense and armed protection (2014). This document also points to the deployment of military activity of foreign states (groups of states) in the territories that border Russia as one of the main external dangers to Russia. As for the Nordic region, Russia’s strategic depth has been challenged through several rounds of accessions of the various Nordic (and Baltic) countries into the EU and NATO. However, some strategic depth has remained through elaborated economic and regional cooperation, dialogue, relatively friendly relations and by the fact that Sweden and Finland have remained non-aligned. However, in light of increased tensions in the Nordic region, these “buffers” have been weakened.

Swedish and Finnish NATO membership would affect Russia’s strategic depth and remove what Russia perceive as an important non-aligned buffer in its northwestern neighborhood. (Åtland, 2016: 164). The terms “neighborhood”, “states bordering on the Russian

---

26 See also remark by President Putin in Corriere della Sera, 2015; Lund, 2016; President of Russia, 2016.
Federation”, and “adjacent waters” are used in various places in the latest Military Doctrine (2014). For instance, the Doctrine describes some of the military dangers and threats as coming from military exercises on bordering territories to Russia. Despite not explicitly stating who these neighboring countries are, this could also refer to the Nordic region. Russia’s concern with increased Western military presence and the willingness to defend its interests in the Nordic region is evident in the empirical material and will be analyzed further in Chapter 5.

This section concludes that Russia’s security policy end to secure its military strategic depth in general as well as in the Nordic region has not changed considerably when compared with earlier periods. Rather, the increased tensions in the Nordic region may have intensified Russia’s interest in maintaining the strategic Swedish-Finnish “buffer” between Russia and NATO.

### 4.5 Summary

The aim of this chapter has been to identify Russia’s security policy ends toward the Nordic region since 2014, building on the historical background chapter, the collected empirical data, and additional secondary literature. Russia’s security policy ends have been identified sorted, and divided in relation to the overarching political and military ends presented in table 2, maximize Russian influence and minimize Western influence, counter an increase of Western military presence and secure military strategic depth. The analysis has shown that no large discrepancies can be identified during the 2014-2016 period compared to earlier periods. This indicates a large degree of continuity in Russia’s security policy ends towards the Nordic region. In the next chapter, the analysis turns to identify and sort the means and ways used by Russia to achieve its security policy ends.
5 Russian security policy ways and means in the Nordic region: 2014-2016

Building on Chapter 4, this chapter will examine Russia’s available means and the ways Russia uses them to achieve its security policy ends in the Nordic region. First, the various ways will be examined, then the next section will present and discuss the means. Third, the various ways and means will be analyzed by connecting them to the four security policy ends presented in Chapter 4: maximize Russian influence, minimize Western influence, counter an increase of Western military presence, and secure military strategic depth.

5.1 Russian ways

Both military and political-informational means may serve multiple ends. Building on the empirical data, this section will introduce an overview of the ways in which Russia has used its means. This section will remain relatively brief as various aspects are further elaborated upon in the next section where the various Russian ways are tied to the four security policy ends identified in chapter 4.

At the most elementary level, military resources may be used for defensive and offensive purposes, including to deter, threaten, or in more extreme cases, go to war. According to John Skogan, the most common form of military force in international relations is through either direct threat or more covert threats of military use (2011: 111). In Russia’s case, the threat of use of military force may include both the use of nuclear and non-nuclear (conventional) capabilities (Adamsky, 2015). This thesis will focus on two specific aspects of Russia’s use of military means. The first relates to the actual use of military resources to send a signal and communicate a message, and will in this thesis be exemplified by various Russian military exercises (ground, air, and naval exercises) in close proximity to the Nordic countries’ territories. Such exercises may be understood as offensive, defensive, as warnings, or provocations (i.e. when Russian military aircraft fly with their transponders turned off). The second must be seen in combination with the use of political-informational means through the threat of use of military means. The political-informational mean is aimed at the leadership of Russia’s adversaries and their populations in the hope that it may prevent perceived military aggression without having to use military force.
However, the political-informational means expands beyond just military threats and may also include various other “techniques” in order to convey a message to Russia’s opponents. Subsequently, the various ways that Russia is using its military and political-informational means in the Nordic region is divided into different categories. These are based on identification in the empirical material and secondary sources:

- **Threats**: these may be open threats stating clear intentions of use of force, also veiled warnings of use of forces in form of a more subtle intimidation. Threats may be understood as a response to what Russia perceive as Western threats directed against it and may be a way to deter, intimidate, scare, warn off, and coerce the opponent to comply with Russia’s wishes.

- **Disinformation**: This is a broad category that may have several goals. It may be seen as a complex “of interrelated moves conducted through diplomatic channels by the state and non-state mass media, leaks from command-and-control organs, and deceiving statements by the senior political and military leadership.” (Adamsky: 2015: 24). Disinformation may be used to *deceive* an international public by spreading inaccurate information or to “*undermine* the objectivity of Western media reporting and hence influence the information available to policy makers” (Giles, 2016: 33 [my italics]). It may be used to *deny* stories that do not fit into the Russian narrative, *manipulate* the Nordic countries’ or NATO’s perception of reality, *undermine credibility* by questioning and at times even *mocking* the Nordic countries’ perceptions of reality, and by *creating an alternative narrative* that is more favorable to Russia. The latter may also aim to *split unity* and Western coherence (both political and societies), also known as “divide and conquer”.

- **Reassure**: Russia is also trying to reassure its Nordic neighbors that its intentions are not harmful and that Russia is not planning to invade or attack anyone (as long as it is not provoked), hence a closer cooperation with NATO is unjustified. Another example may be the expressed willingness to continue cooperation on the basis of mutually beneficial partnerships. Attempts at reestablishing bilateral negotiations or various meetings on the sidelines of conferences, may as such also be attempts at reassuring its neighbors.
These categorizations are not mutually exclusive and may occur in combination. Rather they serve the purpose of systemizing some of the discussion and the examples provided in the following sections. Furthermore, the categories are not exhaustive as there may be additional nuances not picked up in the analysis of the empirical data. However, all the categories should be understood as ways to enhance Russia’s interests, even if it at times may seem counterintuitive.

Lastly, this thesis distinguishes between a quantitative and qualitative difference in how Russia is using its means. Quantitative reflects a numerical increase in, for example, the use of certain military equipment or an increase in the number of threats or warnings aimed at the Nordic countries. Qualitative may refer to Russian activity taking place in closer proximity to the Nordic countries, harder use of language or more sophisticated use of Russia’s means in order to convey Russian concerns and strategic interests.

5.2 Military, political, and informational means

A state has multiple instruments at its disposal in order to achieve its security policy ends. These include (but are not limited to) military, economic, political, cultural, and psychological means. In this thesis, the focus will be on political-informational and military means. Of course, Russia uses several other means to achieve its ends, but these are considered the two most important for this thesis. In Russian terminology, the combination of various “hard” (military) and “soft” (political informational) means is part of the concept of “New Generation Warfare” (voini novogo pokoleniya), a term pinpointed by the current Chief of the General Staff, Valery Gerasimov in 2013 (Adamsky, 2015: 22).27 Both Russia’s military and non-military means have become more sophisticated. Russia has upgraded its military technology and equipment and increased communication, response time, mobilization, and so on as part of its military modernization. The communication sphere in general has undergone rapid and expansive technological advances which means that there are more platforms to address both a domestic and foreign audience and information is spread more rapidly. The military and political-informational means are not isolated categories, but should be seen as utilized in combination in order to achieve maximum effect (Giles, 2016).

27 The term “New Generation Warfare” is, according to some researchers, a better description of Russia’s foreign and military policy, compared to the widely used Western term “hybrid warfare”. See for example Adamsky, 2015; Giles, 2016.
Political-informational means

On the one hand, political-informational means includes Russian attempts to encourage bilateral negotiations, economic and regional cooperation, and attempts to reassure its Nordic neighbors. On the other hand, the term includes both overt and covert attempts at spreading disinformation, threats, coerce and so on. This is thus a broad category constructed on the basis of empirical discoveries in the collected material. The term political-informational combines the idea of political means, public diplomacy and informational means. Examples of the first two could be Foreign Minister Lavrov giving an interview in a Nordic newspaper expressing a Russian narrative. The latter is a broad category comprising (but not excluded to) mass media and other sources of informational influence.

Put simply, in order to convey a Russian narrative or information campaigns in the Nordic region, Russia may use diplomats (such as ambassadors or spokespersons at various embassies, Foreign Minister), political and military officials, and activate various mass media sources. The political-informational category should be seen in combination with military means and is also one of the most “cost-effective tools” in Russia’s non-nuclear realm since it may “… produce strategic effects [desirable outcomes] without massive kinetic devastation” (Adamsky, 2015: 36).

Public diplomacy is an essential tool for a state to assert “soft power” which is “… getting others to want the outcomes that you want … rather than coerce them.” (Nye, 2008: 95). In other words, public diplomacy is a tool or a means, that governments may use in order to appeal to and influence a foreign public (and not only foreign governments), or in Russia’s case, to communicate an alternative narrative than the “Western” (Ibid; Hocking, 2005: 41). However, political-informational means also include the concept of “informational struggle”, defined as a combination of technological and psychological elements designed to manipulate the adversary’s picture of reality (Adamsky, 2015: 27). The aim is still to influence, but “information struggle” includes a coercive element which is important in order to analyze how Russia uses its means, and that is not covered by the concept of public diplomacy. Just as with public diplomacy, statements from Russian diplomats and officials and use of the media play a very important role in the information struggle. Furthermore, political and public statements from central Russian diplomats and officials have an important signaling effect and is a crucial tool for Russia.
One final note on public diplomacy is in order. In Russia’s latest Foreign Policy Concept, Russia’s public diplomacy is described as a way to ensure Russia’s “objective perception in the world” which may be done through influencing information available to foreign public opinions. The Concept also emphasized the importance of “strengthening the role of Russian mass media” in the international sphere, with state support if necessary. Information that could threaten Russia’s sovereignty and security should be countered with necessary means (2013). Russia has loyal state owned media machineries designed to serve Russia’s leadership, both at home and abroad. These vary from news agencies such as RT and TASS, which produces information and news to an English-speaking audience; to Sputnik (Sputnik International replaced Voice of Russia in November 2014) which also launched a Swedish language version in April 2015 that lasted until spring 2016, and all the way down to Russia’s “troll” armies that wage battles on various media fronts (Giles, 2016: 35; Adamsky, 2015: 27; Säkerhetspolisen, 2015)

**Military means**

Despite economic stagnation, collapsing oil prices, and Western sanctions, Russia’s has shown a remarkable ability to maintain the speed of the military modernization. The economy has contracted faster than expected and Russia has (at least for 2015) stayed “… among a very small group of countries to spend in excess of 5% of GDP on defence” (Zdanavičius, 2015; The Military Balance, 2016: 170). As pointed out by Susanne Oxenstierna (2016: 133):

> Since 2011 … economic growth has slowed down significantly, but the ambitious level of military spending has been maintained. This reflects the leadership’s commitment to the modernization of the Armed Forces and a more assertive security policy since 2012 when Vladimir Putin became Russia’s president for the third time.

The importance of Russia’s military force has, as described earlier, historical roots, and is to a high degree tied to Russia’s perception of security. President Putin highlighted this during the 2016 speech, calling Russia’s military forces a “… weighty argument against any provocation” (RT, 2016a). In this thesis, military means refer to the capabilities Russia has at its disposal in the Nordic region to meet its ends, including troops, military aircraft, naval capabilities, missiles, and so on. The following sections will bridge Russia’s security policy

28 “Troll” armies are generally known as people who are payed to infest comment threads in various (foreign) newspapers and “… denigrate in abusive terms anyone criticizing Russia or President Vladimir Putin”. (Elliott, 2014).
ends, ways, and means through looking at the various ways Russia is using its means to meet its interests.

5.3 Maximize Russian influence

In order to maximize Russia’s influence and interests in a more strained Nordic environment, Russia has sought to enhance its influence through the encouragement of bilateral dialogue and proceedings, either directly with the Nordic countries or in the context of conference diplomacy. This may be interpreted as Russia attempting to return to “business as usual”. However, this may also be an attempt to avoid negotiations in established frameworks (e.g. Russia-NATO Council) where Russia carries less weight and as an attempt to split the West. Furthermore, this sub-chapter identifies Russia’s active “denial and blame”-campaign regarding who is at fault for the deteriorating relations, and Russia’s offensive attacks on the Nordic media. All of these ways are here considered to serve Russia’s end to maximize Russia’s influence and promote the Russian narrative in the Nordic region. It should be noted however that these ways may also serve Russia’s other security policy ends.

Out of the five Nordic countries, relations between Russia and Finland has remained the strongest, in spite of the crisis. Russia primarily blames the EU for the temporary break in political dialogue with Finland, which was quickly resumed (Obzor, 2014; Obzor 2015). The first meeting took place in Sochi (Russia), in August 2014, and a schedule of regular meetings, visits, and dialogue on high political level have since been maintained (Obzor, 2014: 86). Representatives of the two foreign ministries have also met on the sidelines of the 2014 and 2015 UN’s General Assembly as well as several Ministerial Council meetings at the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in 2014 and 2015 (Obzor, 2014: 86; Obzor, 2015: 108). The latter meetings are examples of what is here referred to as “conference diplomacy”. According to Johan Kaufmann, one of the characteristics of conference diplomacy is that is generates opportunities for “back-channel” negotiations or contacts (1996: 4):

… the conference environment provides a psychological background which acts as an incentive towards more or less secret ‘back-channeling’. This is so because exhortations of other parties to have the conflict-parties engage in negotiation can be followed up fairly easily (in terms of logistics) if the representatives of these parties are both present at a specific
conference. If the conflict is essentially bilateral, the ‘logistical advantage’-situation is still there and will be seized by one or both of the conflicting parties.

Russia uses conferences as a platform to meet representatives of other governments, as the “psychological background” and “logistics” may help instigate dialogue between parties where bilateral relations are otherwise frozen. In the case of Finland, dialogue was quickly resumed. As for the other Nordic countries, relations have been more strained.

Although, political dialogue with Denmark remains scarce, in August 2015 the Danish Foreign Minister accepted an invitation from Russia to meet at the highest level. This was met with criticism from several Danish politicians, who warned that this could weaken EU solidarity and that it was important to not let Russia succeed at playing the EU up against each other (Kaae, Cordsen and Rytgaard, 2015). The meeting took place in 2016 on the sidelines of the 31st session of the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Council in Geneva. In a following press release, the Russian MFA claimed that the short meeting had taken place on the initiative of Denmark (RUS MFA, 2016b). This gives the impression that Denmark initiated political dialogue and not Russia, as originally stated by the Danish Foreign Minister. This may be an attempt from the Russian side to more covertly suggest that the “European solidarity” is not so strong and that, in this case, Nordic actors are willing to meet Russia despite the current freeze in relations. Consequently, this may be placed within the category of Russia’s attempt to split the West.

Among the Nordic countries, Russia sees Sweden as the most active supporter of the EU’s “anti-Russian” course and one of the most “russophobic” countries in Europe (Obzor, 2014: 87; Obzor, 2015: 109; Winiarski, 2015; Lund, 2016). Of particular interest in the 2014 and 2015 MFA reviews is a sentence that is worded to give the appearance that Sweden had already broken off relations with Russia in 2011. Stockholm’s decision to “roll up” all bilateral contacts on the level of ministries and departments from 2014 and onwards were therefore only a continuation of the break in the political dialogue on the state leadership level (Obzor, 2014: 87; Obzor, 2015: 109). Such wording implies that some event occurred 2011 that urged Sweden to break off political contact with Russia’s political leadership. Closer examination of this claim left no evidence of such an incident taking place and the 2012 and

---

29 The bilateral freeze between Sweden and Russia was also temporarily broken in 2014 when Foreign Minister Lavrov met with his Swedish counterpart on the sidelines of an OSCE Ministerial Council in December. However, this meeting did not result in a Russian press release.
2013 reviews did not mention any lack of political dialogue on state leadership level between Sweden and Russia. On the contrary, relations between Sweden and Russia in 2010-2011 were described as “better than ever” and former President Medvedev stated in an interview prior to signing a deal allowing Russia to construct the Nord Stream pipeline in the Baltic Sea, that “there are no problems [between Russia and Sweden]” (Melén, 2010). Furthermore, Prime Minister Putin visited Sweden in 2011 in order to sign various declarations of partnership and modernization (RIA Novosti, 2011). Consequently, it may indicate that Russia has chosen to highlight a period of less contact with Sweden in order to exaggerate Swedish “aggressive” stance towards Russia.

Various forms of political dialogue between Russia and Norway still continues, although relations have been negatively affected by the Ukraine crisis (Regjeringen, 2014). The Russian MFA reviews relate this to Norway’s participation in the “anti-Russian” EU sanctions and Oslo’s “non-constructive position” on the Ukraine crisis (Obzor, 2014; 87; Obzor, 2015: 109-110). One exception was a meeting in 2014 between Foreign Ministers Lavrov and Børge Brende in Finnmark during the 70th anniversary to commemorate the liberation of Northern Norway from Nazi Germany by Soviet soldiers.

Furthermore, dialogue and regional cooperation has continued within regional frameworks in the High North and the Arctic (Obzor, 2014: 88; The Barents Observer, 2015)\(^\text{30}\). For example, in 2015, within the framework of the BEAC, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Titov met with Brende and State Secretary Hattrem. For Russia, the BEAC is an important and highly valued platform and pretext to resume dialogue with her Nordic counterparts and maximize her influence in the region. The meeting with Norwegian representatives was part of a larger Nordic tour where Titov also met with State secretary of Sweden, Annika Söder, and several top Finnish diplomats ahead of the 2015 BEAC Summit. For Finland, these meetings were just a few of several talks preceding the meeting between Russian Foreign Minister, Sergey Lavrov and his Finnish counterpart during the UN General Assembly in New York (The Barents Observer, 2015; RUS MFA, 2015a; RUS MFA, 2015b).

The Russian Deputy Foreign Minister also travelled to Iceland in 2016 to hold meetings with the President of Iceland and Iceland’s Foreign Minister as well as consultations with the

---

\(^{30}\) See also 2014 interview with Foreign Minister Lavrov on Norwegian-Russian relations where he criticizes Norway for supporting the anti-Russian EU sanctions, but also highlights the extended cooperation between the two neighbors (Aarstad Aase, 2014).
Permanent Secretary of State. Relations between Russia and Iceland also took a toll as a result of Iceland’s support of the EU sanctions. However, the MFA reviews generally paint a softer picture of Russia Icelandic relations and some dialogue on a higher political level has been maintained (Obzor, 2015: 110). During the 2016 visit, the two parties also signaled interest in deepening cooperation within the framework of the Arctic Council, the BEAC, CBSS and the Northern Dimension (RUS MFA, 2016d).

The reviews and Russian MFA sources, in addition to describing relations and factual state of affairs, have a political agenda and could as such omit disadvantageous information or information that does not serve Russia’s interests. The visit of Titov to Iceland, and the following press release, paint a picture of active dialogue and relative ease in bilateral relations. However, at the same time, Iceland has directed criticism at Russia for increasing its military presence adjacent to Icelandic territory and maintains a firm position with regard to Russia’s actions in Ukraine. Thus, the reviews and the Russian MFA sources may be used to manipulate or adjust the Russian presentation of “reality”, i.e. enhance the Russian narrative.

Russia’s interest in addressing the Nordic countries bilaterally or through conference diplomacy may be part of a larger tactic to avoid dealing with organizations such as NATO or the EU. Russia prefers bilateral negotiations where she carries more weight, such as the OSCE or the UN Security Council. This preference may be characterized as continuous, as it is a longstanding tradition and may be traced back to the Soviet era (see Chapter 3). For instance, in 2016 Russia sent out invitations to NATO countries Poland, Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia and non-aligned Sweden and Finland to what at first seemed like an invitation to a joint meeting to discuss security in the Baltic sub-region. However, as it turned out, these were separate invitations to bilateral meetings with Russia (Eriksson, 2016). The invitations were met with skepticism among the various countries. Estonia declined the invitation on the grounds that such military-political discussions should be reserved for the NATO-Russia Council and that Russia’s invitation was an attempt to “play” countries in the region (and NATO members) up against each other (Associated Press, 2016). Sweden and Finland also agreed that such negotiations should be on a wider scale and that a “united line” ought to be pursued when it came to contact with Russia (Staalesen, 2016). Swedish Defense Minister Hultquist said that it would have been natural for Russia to also invite Denmark for talks since part of the agenda of the meetings concerned aviation activity in the Baltic Sea (Eriksson, 2016).
Exactly why Denmark (and Germany) failed to receive invitations is unclear, but it could be part of a larger divide-and-conquer tactic in order to split an otherwise Western-oriented group of states. In addition to serving to maximize Russian influence, this approach may also be used in order to minimize Western influence in the Nordic region (see next section). Furthermore, Russian officials and diplomats are also touring Europe and meeting with countries bilaterally in order to, among others reasons, warn against NATO’s negative impact on their relations with Russia. For instance, in June 2016, Russian parliamentarian Konstantin Kosachov visited Norway as part of a larger tour of Western-Europe. Similar to the statements by Lavrov, Kosachov claimed that several European countries were now softening their stand against Russia and did not agree with the EU sanctions. He also remarked that relations between Norway and Russia probably would have been “super” had it not been for Norway’s membership in NATO: “Had Norway not been a member of NATO, sanctions between our two countries would probably not exist. Norway should be interested in normalizing relations with Russia, but refrains from this out of consideration of the US” (cited in Aale, 2016).

However, with military cooperation frozen (also within the NATO-Russia Council as a response to Russia’s actions in Ukraine), the bilateral meetings may also be an attempt from the Russian side to initiate discussion on how to alleviate tensions in the Baltic sub-region. It is also an indication that continued cooperation with its Nordic neighbors is important to Russia. Furthermore, the invitations could be a part of Russia’s attempt to return back to “business as usual”. This is problematic from a Western perspective as returning to “business as usual” implies acceptance of Russia’s actions in Ukraine and allowing Russia to change the “rules of the game”. The examples and suggestions above attempts to illustrate that Russia’s invitations to bilateral negotiations may be more complex than being merely an attempt to drive a wedge between countries in the region (and NATO members). That being said, Russia has made use of the divide-and-conquer tactic on other occasions in combination with other forms on disinformation.31

One form of this disinformation may be tied to, as already indicated, Russia’s constant denials of any blame related to the deterioration in Russia Nordic relations after 2014. Instead, Russia

31 For similar arguments, see de Jong, 2016; Nadeau, 2015; The Moscow Times, 2016.
blame this on the Nordic countries’ decision to join EU’s “anti-Russian” campaign.\(^{32}\) Furthermore, Russia presents itself as constantly trying to initiate contact and dialogue, but the Nordic countries are reluctant to accept such invitations, ergo being further responsible for lack of resolve in bilateral relations. This has particularly been repeated with regards to Sweden, for example by Foreign Minister Lavrov during an interview where he emphasized that the deteriorating relations: “did not happen on our initiative” (Winiarski, 2016). Norway and Denmark have also received similar comments.\(^{33}\) However, with regards to Finland and Iceland, the empirical data finds that Russia has been less vocal. For Finland, this may be explained by the fact that Russia sees relations as less damaged compared with the other Nordic countries. Even after the increase in tensions in the Nordic region, Russia still sees Finland as a “priority partner” (President of Russia, 2016a). The Russian MFA reviews did call on Iceland for joining the “anti-Russian” sanctions, but besides this, few direct statements blaming Iceland for the deteriorating relations is found. Nevertheless, Russia is fully aware of both Finland and Iceland’s close collaboration with the other Nordic countries and their ties with the EU, NATO, and the US, and as such they are indirectly blamed for worsening relations in the cases where Russia refers to the Nordic countries as a collective.\(^{34}\)

Furthermore, Russia has actively used its diplomats and officials to attack the Nordic media and blame them for contributing to the “fanning of anti-Russian hysteria” among the Nordic opinion (RUS MFA, 2015). In the following, Iceland and Sweden serves as examples. In September 2016, Icelandic authorities voiced concern after two Russian strategic bombers flew with their transponders off directly underneath an Icelandic passenger plane headed for Sweden\(^ {35}\). The Russian Embassy in Reykjavik quickly dismissed the allegations saying that the Icelandic media were dramatizing events and portraying the bombers as flying much closer than they in reality did. An embassy representative called the media hype an attempt to arouse fear of Russian and “… a pretext to re-opening a [US] military base in Keflavik” (Iceland Monitor, 2016). The re-opening of the military base refers to the US Navy’s plans to upgrade an aircraft hangar on Keflavik which would make it easier for the US to patrol the North Atlantic for Russian submarines. The base has historic and symbolic value as it served

\(^{32}\) The EU sanctions are mentioned several times in the data material, see for example Foreign Minister Lavrov sited in Aarstad Aase, 2014; Tallaksen, 2014; Trellevik, 2015; Winiarski, 2014; Winiarski 2016. This is also clearly stated in the Russian MFA Reviews, see Obzor 2014; Obzor, 2015.

\(^{33}\) For Norway, see Tallaksen, 2014; Trellevik, 2015; Aarstand Aase, 2014. For Denmark, see Hannestad, Petersen and Svendsen, 2016.

\(^{34}\) See RUS MFA, 2015; RUS MFA, 2016c.

\(^{35}\) Transponders are tracking devices used to help identify aircraft nearby and as such prevent aircraft colliding with each other.
a key strategic purpose during the Cold War due to Iceland’s geopolitical location in the North Atlantic and the Arctic (Beardsley, 2016; Bender, 2016; Haftendorn, 2011: 348). The Russian representative further stated that claims about Russia flying with transponders turned off was part of Western propaganda and that NATO aircraft were doing the same (Iceland Monitor, 2016).

The Swedish mass media has particularly received evolving and harsh criticism from Russia, particularly from the Russian ambassador, Viktor Tatarintsev, who on several occasions has criticized Swedish journalists’ inability to present both sides of the story (Winiarski, 2014). In 2015 he claimed that “…the Swedes are harboring anti-Russian fears and antipathy toward Russia on a larger scale than before. The explanation is the aggressive propaganda campaign led by the Swedish media.” (Winiarski, 2015). These accusations reached “its nadir” in 2016 when Tatarintsev proclaimed that Russia Swedish relations had reached an all-time low due to Swedish journalists’ and experts’ lacking grasp of reality and that this was only contributing to the fanning of “Russian hysteria”. The ambassador also addressed the Swedish public when he said: “… You believe it is so easy to trick the people and force a russophobic description of everything that’s happening onto them…” (Lund, 2016).

Russia has also on other occasions blamed the Nordic countries collectively for imposing “confrontational approaches on the public opinion” (RUS MFA, 2015 [my italics])36. Reference to manipulation of public awareness is likewise mentioned in the Russia’s National Security Strategy. Russia sees the growing confrontation as part of efforts by some countries to use information and communication technologies to achieve their geopolitical ambitions through manipulation of public awareness and by falsifying history (National Security Strategy, 2015). For Russia, then, the Swedish and Nordic media is presented as adhering to the overall tendency in Western media to present Russia as an aggressive state.37 It thus becomes important for Russia to produce a counternarrative to the Western, since the latter may threaten Russia’s interest in the Nordic region. For example, fear of – or at least negative attitudes towards – Russia may make it easier for the Nordic countries to justify closer engagement with NATO and the US and limit cooperation with Russia. In this regard, in order to maximize Russia’s influence in the Nordic region, Russia is using its political-informational means to promote itself as a peaceful and cooperative (yet powerful) neighbor.

36 See also comment by Russian MFA that Stockholm refuses to partake in constructive dialogue with Russia and instead prefer to make unfounded statements “…which are deluding its own population” (TASS, 2016a)
37 Same statement made about Norway, see Trellevik, 2015.
5.4 Minimize Western influence

Chapter 4 showed that Russia’s goal to minimize Western influence may be tied to Russia’s wish to limit security cooperation among the Nordic countries, limit further security rapprochement between the Nordic countries and the US and NATO, and maintain the military-political status quo in the Nordic region. This may be done through the use of threatening statements regarding the consequences of such rapprochement (politically, economically, militarily), by creating the impression that the Nordic countries are falling victim to US and NATO’s hegemonic interests (i.e. create distrust and discontent, split unity), by undermining the Nordic countries’ perceptions of reality, and by “denial and blame” campaigns. These ways can also serve other Russian security policy ends in the Nordic region.

Similar to Russia’s denial and blame campaigns aimed at the Nordic countries, President Putin blames the West for purposefully engineering what he perceives as a “staged coup d’état in Ukraine”, and then for continuing to escalate tensions in “other parts of the world, including Europe and the Baltic Sea region” (President of Russia, 2016a). Russia persistently blames the West, and particularly the US and NATO, for using the image of a threatening Russia as a pretext to increase their influence and military infrastructure in the region (TASS, 2016). Whenever asked about Russia’s responsibilities for increasing tension in the Nordic region, the immediate answer is always to point to NATO and US activities and state that their aggregate military spending is much higher than Russia’s. As such, Russia is painting a picture that its actions are merely a response to the emerging threats around it (Winiarski, 2014; Putin cited in Corriere della Sera, 2015).

As for the Nordic region, the heightened tension in the Nordic region has sparked a debate in Sweden and Finland about their non-aligned status. Although Sweden and Finland have increased their cooperation with NATO in recent years, membership is not a viable option nor a particularly popular idea for the time being (Kirk, 2016). Russia, however, has been very vocal about its opinion on the matter, even claiming that membership potentially could spark a Third World War (Winiarski, 2014; Benietz, 2015). Such statements, which may be categorized as a threat aiming to intimidate Sweden, Finland (as well as NATO), are on the far side of the spectrum of Russian comments on the matter and should be analyzed with care.

---

38 See for example Putin cited in Corriere della Sera, 2015; Winiarski, 2014.
However, such comments are aimed at intimidating Russia’s opponents and sends a warning that Russia would view such a development with great dissatisfaction. Furthermore, such statements are part of a broader Russian repertoire used to convey Russian interests which also include statements that Russia respects Sweden and Finland’s non-aligned status and that Russia would prefer to see a continuation of such a policy (Winiarski, 2014; President of Russia, 2016a). Furthermore, Foreign Minister Lavrov said during a meeting with his Finnish counterpart that he believed any reasonable and serious politician would understand that “Russia will never attack any member country of the North Atlantic Alliance” (TASS, 2016).

Russia’s ambassador to Sweden, Viktor Tatarintsev, likewise stated in an interview with the Swedish newspaper Dagens Nyheter that Russia is not planning on attacking Sweden (Winiarski, 2015). These more “mellow” statements may be seen as part of Russia’s aim to reassure her neighbors in order to keep the remaining channels of dialogue and cooperation open.

However, as part of Russia’s aim to minimize Western influence in the region, Russia has no interest in further military cooperation among the Nordic states or their rapprochement with NATO, the US, and the EU. This became evident when Denmark decided to join NATO’s missile defense system (BMD). In an opinion piece in the Danish newspaper Jyllands-Posten, Russian ambassador to Denmark, Mikhail Vanin warned that such an act would mean that Danish war ships would become a target for Russian nuclear missiles and that Denmark would be considered a threat to Russia (Vanin, 2015). The US led BMD is perceived by Russia as a threat to national security and defense capabilities, and accordingly, Russia would take necessary measures to restore safety in the event of escalating tensions. This was highlighted by spokesman for the Russian MFA, Alexander Lukashevich a few days later:

Russia has for years been highlighting the fact that the missile-defence architecture that is being put in place by Washington together with its NATO allies could pose a threat in the future of the Russian nuclear strategic forces … our attempts to persuade the US and its NATO allies to review their plans … led to nothing … If this system is established, including on Danish territory, then everyone should bear in mind that Russia has the capabilities to counter these plans. (RUS MFA, 2015c)

These statements, or threats, serve as serious warning to Denmark about the possible consequences of closer military collaboration with the US and NATO. As such, it may also serve as a warning to Norway, or other Nordic actors, considering participation in NATO’s
BMD system (Aftenposten, 2015). More subtle threats of nuclear deployment have also later been voiced by Russia\(^{39}\) and may serve as an example of the extent to which (at least rhetorically) Russia is willing to go in order to limit Western influence in the Nordic region and that acting contrary to Russia’s interest may have serious implication for smaller states, such as Denmark. Ambassador Vanin also lashed out at Denmark in 2016 when they decided to send 150 Danish soldiers were deployed to the Baltic states as part of a reinforcement of 5-6,000 already-stationed NATO troops. The decision was called a provocation and part of a Danish anti-Russian campaign. Vanin said that Denmark was part of a club of countries that acted with hostility to Russia in multilateral organizations and that the decision would be met with reactions: “... we will reinforce our defense capabilities because of this” (Hannestad, Petersen and Svendsen, 2016). However, despite the dramatic effect of threatening with nuclear weapons, Russia’s reaction can also be understood as part of Russia’s insecurity and perceived vulnerability when it comes to the US’ or NATO’s intentions of placing such systems in Europe. As will be discussed further in the section on “securing Russian strategic depth”, Russia believes that the deployment of BDM systems in Europe are aimed at weakening Russia’s strategic capabilities (Military Doctrine, 2014; National Security Strategy, 2015; Nygaard and Hakvåg, 2013). However, Russia’s willingness to activate a nuclear attack on her Nordic neighbors is questionable and threats of such use should probably be considered to be more of an extreme political tool (with great intimidation and shocking effects).

Norway also received harsh criticism from Russia following its decision to allow 330 US Marine soldiers to be stationed in central Norway on a rotational – de facto permanent – basis. The decision was called incomprehensible as it contradicted earlier policy on deployment of foreign military bases on Norwegian soil during peacetime (Jentoft, 2016; Russian Embassy in Norway, 2016). Russia perceived the decision as part of an increase in US-led military preparation against the backdrop of increased “anti-Russian hysteria” and said that this would in no way “… help maintain stability and security in Europe’s North” nor would it improve Russia Norwegian relations (RUS MFA, 2016e; Jentoft, 2016). Spokeswomen for the Russian MFA also implied that the Norwegian decision most likely would lead the Russian military to implement necessary counter-measures (Jentoft, 2016). Russia also referred to the implications that Norway’s decision may have for Norwegian-Russian economic relations,

---

\(^{39}\) See for example reference to a new generation missiles that NATO would not be able to intercept which could be deployed to Russia’s northern regions should Sweden decide to join NATO (RIA Novosti, 2016)
presenting a veiled threat of both the military and economic consequences of Norway’s increased military cooperation with the US.

Russia interprets closer Nordic-Western collaboration as a result of growing anti-Russian sentiments and “hysteria” in the Nordic region. A result of this, Russia make use of every opportunity to point out that the Nordic countries are “in the pocket” of the US and that this does not serve their interest. For instance, in his opinion piece warning Danes of the dangers of joining the US led BMD, the Russian ambassador to Denmark addressed the Danish public when he asked: “To what extent are the perceived threats real? And, how much are the Danish taxpayers ready to pay for this project that the U.S with great energy is promoting?” (Vanin, 2015). The ambassador indicated that US led BMD, in addition to reducing Danes’ security, also would not serve their interest as it would cost the Danish people money⁴⁰. Foreign Minister Lavrov has also indicated that the Nordic countries are subordinate to the interests of the US and quoted Obama during a press conference in Belarus:

> Your question reminded me of a recent situation where the heads of the Nordic countries came to Washington to meet with President Obama. Their meeting was broadcast on television. During one of them, President Obama said that they think completely alike, maybe even more than required. We, in the Union State, don’t use sticks to maintain discipline. (RUS MFA, 2016c [my italics])

Similar comments from Russian officials and diplomats are regularly voiced to convey the message that after the fall of the Soviet Union, the US needed a “new mission” in Europe, “as the United States was not planning at all to let Europeans float freely in the security issues.” (Lavrov cited in TASS, 2016).⁴¹ Lavrov later reiterated that representatives of countries that were members of NATO and the EU “admit in private conversations that they cannot make any significant decision without the approval of Washington or Brussels.” (Lavrov, 2016). These statements may serve as examples of Russia’s distaste for the current influence of Western powers, here the US and the EU, in the Nordic region and Europe, but may also be considered as part of a larger tactic to spread distrust regarding the intentions of these actors as well as spread discontent among countries that are “being subordinated” to their ideas and influence. In this way, such statements may be considered to be part of a divide-and-conquer

⁴⁰ A similar reference to taxes was made by the Russian MFA during the 2015 Swedish submarine hunt in the Stockholm archipelago. The Russian MFA called the hunt a “…mindless waste of Swedish taxpayer money” (RUS MFA, 2015e; Hirst, 2015).

⁴¹ See Aarstad Aase, 2014; Corriere della Sera, 2015; and Vanin, 2015.
tactic. The excerpt could also serve the first section as an example of Russia’s aim to increase her influence in the region by arranging private conversations with individual countries in an attempt to disentangle Western solidarity.

The empirical data also finds that Russia persistently is questioning the Nordic countries’ (and other Western actors’) perceptions of reality. This way is defined as more defensive because it is an attempt to undermine Western influence and often come as a response to, what Russia argues are, unwarranted accusations. For example, when Icelandic authorities voiced concern about the previously mentioned passenger plane incident, Russian MoD responded to the accusations by claiming that the Icelandic authorities had a “lively imagination” (“lichnoy fantaziey”). The Russian MoD spokesman also “mocked” the pilot of the passenger plane for his inability to distinguish between a Tu-160 and a Tu-22M3, questioning the professionalism of the pilot and furthermore indicating that the pilot either did not see anything or reported unverified information (Rossiyskaya Gazeta, 2016; Rossiyskaya Gazeta, 2016a). In December 2014, a Russian reconnaissance aircraft flying with its transponder turned off came close to a passenger plane flying from Copenhagen to Stockholm. The Swedish MD Peter Hultquist called the incident very serious and dangerous (Oliphant, 2014). Spokesperson of the Russian MoD, Major General, Igor Konashenkov retorted to Hultquist’s statement and called it a “deception”, and claimed that NATO aircraft also fly in the region without their transponders turned on (cited in RT, 2014). Russia’s ambassador to Denmark, Mikhail Vanin, furthermore suggested that Swedish authorities perhaps had been smoking too much cannabis. He first drew parallels to the Swedish hunt for foreign submarines in the Swedish archipelagos in October 2014: “The Swedish authorities also recently said there was a submarine in their waters. There wasn’t … Now they say again that they have seen something. I’m afraid the Swedes visit Pusher Street very often.” [an area in Copenhagen famous for cannabis sales – the author’s comment] (Berlingske, 2014; The Local, 2014).

The statement by the Danish ambassador is unusual, but falls into the broader category of Russia’s discretization of her Nordic neighbors. For example, spokesman for the Russian MFA, Alexander Lukashevich, commented on Norway’s reaction to a highly disputed visit by Deputy Prime Minister Rogozin to Svalbard in April 2015. Lukashevich called Norway’s reaction “inexplicable and absurd” and ended his comment with: “We regret Norway’s

---

42 Icelandic MFA’s critique came in addition to several filed reports to “… Russian authorities with regards to the flight of unmarked Russian planes around Iceland in recent years” (Iceland Monitor, 2016).

43 Russian military aircraft.
decision to join the anti-Russian EU sanctions, which spells negative consequences for Russian-Norwegian relations and … *also distorts our Norwegian neighbours’ perception of reality*” (RUS MFA, 2015d [my italics]). Such statements create the image that Russia’s Nordic neighbors live in an alternative reality and do not always base their judgment on a rational basis.44

### 5.5 Counter an increase in Western military presence

In this thesis, Russian military exercises are divided into three categories. The first two build on Johan Norberg’s distinction between annual strategic exercises and surprise inspections conducted on Russian territory and will be discussed in section 5.6. The third category pertains to smaller Russian military exercise activities, but also routine missions, in the Nordic region. It is the latter that will be discussed in this section. In addition to improving Russia’s military capabilities, military exercises also contain an inherent *strategic communicative element*. This implies that military exercises and activities may be used to send a message to both a domestic audience as well as potential adversaries (Dyner, 2014). It is not always easy to distinguish between when Russian military exercises and activities serve an offensive or defensive purpose, mainly because such activities may contain elements of both.

This sub-chapter will examine the ways that Russia is attempting to counter an increase in Western military presence in the Nordic region. It will first look at statements from Russian actors expressing the possible implications of an increased Western military presence, before turning the focus to Russian military activities in the Nordic region and provide empirical evidence of close military encounters between Russia and its Nordic neighbors. The Russian military activities included in this sub-chapter is categorized as mainly offensive, e.g. operating in close proximity to the Nordic countries’ borders (occasionally violating their territories).

When the Nordic countries signaled increased military cooperation due to a more assertive Russia in the Norwegian newspaper *Aftenposten*, the Russian MFA voiced a particular concern with what it perceived as “… increasing efforts of Finland and Sweden, whose official policy is military non-alignment, to ensure rapprochement with the NATO military

44 For more examples, see also: RUS MFA 2014a; RUS MFA, 2015; Vanin, 2015; Corriere della Sera, 2015; RT, 2016b; Lund, 2016.
bloc” (RUS MFA, 2015). Russia has made it clear to both Sweden and Finland that it would have to respond on a military level, including reorganizing forces and missiles, should they decide to join NATO. President Putin shared his concern regarding Finnish NATO membership during the 2016 press conference with his Finnish counterpart: “Imagine if Finland joins NATO. In this case the Finnish troops will cease to be fully independent or sovereign. They will become part of NATO’s military infrastructure, which will emerge overnight on the borders of the Russian Federation.” (President of Russia, 2016a). Putin further indicated that Finnish membership would compromise the current decision to station Russian armed forces 1,500 km away from Finland’s border (Ibid; Bentzrød, 2015).

Foreign Minister Lavrov also commented on the consequences in an interview with the Swedish newspaper Dagens Nyheter: 45

If Sweden decides to join NATO, we won’t think that it intends to attack Russia. I can say this for certain. But, since the Swedish military infrastructure in this situation will report to the NATO headquarters, we will have to take the necessary defence measures on our northern borders, based on the fact that there is a military political bloc across the border, which regards Russia a threat and intends to deter it (RUS MFA, 2016a; Winiarski, 2016).

The promise of reinforcement through military-technical measures is also mentioned by Russian envoy to NATO, Aleksandr Grushko, commenting on NATO exercises in the Baltic sub-region:

… I would not say that this is any direct danger for the Russian Federation, but it is still obvious that such moves create serious risks, because we see a completely new military reality taking shape along our borders … The developments on NATO’s eastern borders will not be left without our military-technical and political response. As everyone knows, Russia can be very effective in securing its safety” (cited in RT, 2016b).

Three months earlier, Grushko also promised that Russia will respond “totally asymmetrically” to reinforced NATO presence in the Nordic region which he argues is unjustifiable (cited in RT, 2016d). However, Shortly after Foreign Minister Lavrov’s interview with the Swedish newspaper, debates begun on what the phrase: “military-technical measures” implied. Some Russian experts believed it was referring to a strengthening of Russian troops sizes in Russia’s northwestern territory, redeployment of tactical systems such

---

45 For a similar statement made by Russia’s ambassador to Sweden, Viktor Tatarintsev, see Winiarski, 2015.
as the “Iskander-M” close to the Swedish border and arming ships and submarines on the Baltic Fleet with “Kalibr” cruise missiles. Both missile systems are nuclear-capable, i.e. they can be armed with nuclear warheads. (Reuters, 2016; RIA Novosti, 2016).46

Iskander-M missiles are already permanently stationed in Kaliningrad and may be used as both a defensive and offensive weapon. Similarly, the Kalibr cruise missiles, despite having a considerably longer flight range than the Iskander-M (exceeding 1,500 km), may also serve both defensive and offensive purposes. Kalibr cruise missiles were currently (2016) deployed to Kaliningrad, a move that caused worry among Russia’s neighbors in the sub-region and beyond. Nevertheless, both missile types may serve as tools to deter and pressure the NATO alliance to change their policy in the region.

Elaborating further on Lavrov’s statement, Evgeny Serebrennikov, senator and first deputy chairman of the Federal Council Committee on Defense and Security (Komiteta soveta federatsii po oborone i bezopasnosti) commented that: “We [Russia] are talking not only about some technical measures, we are talking numbers as well. Russia will increase the strength of its military forces on the northern and northwestern borders if Sweden becomes a NATO member, this also includes the Northern Fleet” (cited in RT, 2016c). The senator highlighted that Russia was completing a new generation of missiles that NATO would not be able to intercept and that these could be deployed to Russia’s northern regions if Sweden decided to join NATO (RIA Novosti, 2016). Russia has earlier warned another Nordic country, Denmark, that their warships would become targets for Russian (nuclear) missiles, should the country contribute to the US led BMD in Europe.47

In addition to the he various threats of military implications, Russia is also stating that it has no intentions of attacking neither the Nordic nations nor NATO.48 Furthermore, Russia is claiming that its actions and statements are defensive measures and a reaction to NATO’s military “build-up” in the Nordic region. By doing this, Russia is attempting to put the blame on the West without making a connection to Ukraine, and in this way attempt to confuse and divide the public opinion on the security issues in the Nordic region. By extension, this may also serve Russia’s end of countering an increase in Western military presence as well as Russia’s other security policy ends.

46 The Kalibr cruise missile is a supersonic missile with a flight range exceeding 1,500 km. The flight range means that is can be used as a strategic weapon if armed with a nuclear warhead (Nilsen, 2012).
47 See RUS MFA, 2015c; Vanin, 2015.
48 For similar examples, see: Corriere della Serra, 2015; Winiarski, 2015; Trellevik, 2015, TASS, 2016.
In the following, the focus will turn to Russia’s military activities. Military exercises do not have to be large scale in order to send a message or provoke. As an extension of military exercises, this section will present a more elaborate overview of Russia’s aviation and maritime activity in the Nordic region. This mainly pertains to Russian military activity in international airspace and maritime domain in the region, but also adjacent to the territories of its Nordic neighbors (including territorial violations). As discussed in Chapter 3, Russia has also conducted provocative air missions in the Nordic region prior to 2014.49 However, 2014 marked a change in how Russia’s activities were perceived by its Nordic neighbors and an increase in reported incidents involving Russian aircraft and submarines.

In 2014, around the same time as the outbreak of the Ukrainian crisis, the Baltic Sea region experienced a vast increase in Russian military flight activity. According to the Danish Intelligence Service, this increased intensity primarily resulted from a large scale Russian aviation exercise, the largest since 1991. Although it consisted mostly of familiar flight patterns, some of the activity had an offensive nature not seen in many years, including simulations of missile attacks with tactical aircrafts on Danish territory (Forsvarets Efterretningstjeneste, 2014: 15). NATO sources reported 400 conducted interceptions of Russian warplanes in 2014, 150 of which were conducted by the Baltic Air Policing. Compared to 2013, this represented an increase in interceptions by a factor of four (NATO, 2015a). Norwegian Intelligence Service could also report about increased Russian military activity in the High North area and the Arctic, but did not perceive this officially as a threat (Mogen, 2016).

In a report produced by the European Leadership Network (ELN), close military encounters between Russia and the West between March 2014 and March 2015 was examined.50 The report covers a large geographical area and includes several countries. The data presented in table 3 is however focusing on identified Russian encounters with the Nordic countries in the High North and Baltic sub-regions. The ELN report does not cover the entire focus period of this thesis (2014-2016), but provides valuable insight into the Russian activity level in the year following the Ukraine crisis. In order to extend the timeline, table 4 is included in the analysis and covers the time period March 2015 – October 2016. Table 4 is based on my own

49 See also Conley and Rohloff, 2015: 12.
50 In the text, only one report is mentioned. However, the original report was published by Frear, Kulesa, and Kearns (2014) and covered only incidents taking place in 2014. An addition to the report, extending the time period up until March 2015, was later published by Frear, 2015a. In the following, both sources will be used, but they are considered as part of the same report.
research, but builds on the framework of the ELN report (see Attachment 1). Table 4 only includes collected data on two sub-regions and incidents where Russia and the Nordic countries are involved. Neither of the tables include exhaustive lists of incidents as they both rely on open sources and focus on larger military encounters. Furthermore, tables 3 and 4 only cover encounters and incidents at air. Maritime activities are presented in table 5.

**Russian aviation activity (March 2014 – October 2016)**

The ELN report argues that there has been a significant increase in “the intensity and gravity of incidents involving Russian and Western militaries and security agencies” following the Russian annexation of Crimea (Frear, Kulesa, and Kearns, 2014). The ELN report divides the various military encounters in three categories based on the seriousness of the incidents (2014: 2-3, 6):

- **High risk incidents**: those incidents with a high probability of causing casualties or a direct military confrontation between Russia and Western states.

- **Serious incidents with escalation risk**: go beyond the previously established pattern of interaction and the near routine cases … and involve close encounters of a more aggressive or unusually provocative nature. As such this category of incident brings a higher level of risk of escalation.

- **Near routine incidents**: Such incidents generally fit into the previously-established pattern of interactions between Russian and Western militaries and as long as these incidents do not differ significantly from the previous mode of behavior, they are not likely to lead to escalations.

When elaborating on the near routine category, the authors warn that despite not necessarily posing an escalation threat, they may add to “…an atmosphere of tension which is putting pressure on the militaries involved” (Ibid.).
Table 3. Military aviation encounters in the High North and Baltic sub-regions (March 2014 – March 2015)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Baltic sub-region</th>
<th>Incidents by category (Nordic countries)</th>
<th>Incident by country (Nordic countries)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Total: 17</td>
<td>• Total: 17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• High risk: 2</td>
<td>• Sweden: 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Serious risk: 8</td>
<td>• Finland: 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Near routine: 7</td>
<td>• Denmark: 3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Frear, 2015a.

Table 4. Military aviation encounters in the High North and Baltic sub-regions (March 2015 – October 2016)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Baltic sub-region</th>
<th>Incident by category (Nordic countries)</th>
<th>Incident by country (Nordic countries)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Total: 9</td>
<td>• Total: 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• High risk: 0</td>
<td>• Sweden: 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Serious risk: 3</td>
<td>• Finland: 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Near routine: 6</td>
<td>• Denmark: 1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: The author’s own research (see Attachment 1 for details).

* The incident total for the Baltic sub-region includes two serious military encounters between Russia and the US where Russia’s behavior was strongly condemned.

Table 3, covering the period March 2014 – March 2015 shows a significant difference in Russian aviation activities in the two sub-regions as well as in the individual Nordic
countries. In total, most incidents in the Nordic region have taken place between Sweden and Russia (12) followed by Finland and Norway (5), Denmark (3) and Iceland (0).\(^{51}\) As for the two sub-regions, 17 incidents were identified in the Baltic sub-region compared to only 5 in the High North. There were also clearly a larger number of high risk and serious risk incidents in the Baltic sub-region than in the High North. An example of a “serious risk” incident involved Russian aircraft in June 2014 simulating an attack on the Danish island, Bornholm, during an event in which most of Denmark’s politicians and journalists were present. Danish Intelligence Service labeled the incident as one of the most offensive observed in recent years (Attachment 1). Finland likewise voiced serious concern after Russian planes were suspected of flying over the Gulf of Finland without authorization in May 2014 and entering Finnish airspace three times in one week without authorization in August 2014 (Conley and Rohloff, 2015: 12-13).\(^{52}\)

Table 4, covering the period March 2015 – October 2016, shows a similar pattern, albeit at a lower frequency. Russia has continued to be more active in the Baltic sub-region as compared to the High North. Furthermore, Sweden is still the Nordic country with most military encounters with Russia. Iceland is on the list in connection with the previously mentioned incident involving a Russian fighter flying underneath an Icelandic passenger plane headed for Sweden (Iceland Monitor, 2016). The decrease in the number of military encounters shown in table 4. adheres to an interesting trend in Russian aviation activity in the Nordic region, observed from the end of 2015 and continuing in 2016. This trend may be exemplified by Denmark. From 2012 to 2014, Danish scrambles doubled from 21 to 38 (per September 2014) and most of the scrambles were tied to Russian aircraft (Bæksgaard and Kildegaard Sørensen, 2014). However, in 2016 the Danish Defence Command (Værnsfælles Forsvarskommando) reported that only one denial scramble had been activated between January and March 2016 in addition to only five such incidents taking place in the past five months (since October 2015). This is a drastic change compared to the 98 times the Danish aircraft were activated in 2014 and 2015, mostly due to Russian aircraft (Vest Jensen and Kildegaard Sørensen, 2016). This trend is also noticed by the Norwegian Armed Forces who

\(^{51}\) However, there was an incident on February 18\(^{th}\), 2015, that was not reported in the ELN report, involving Iceland and two Russian Tu-95 long-range bombers. The aircraft was observed flying 26 nautical miles (approximately 48 km) from Icelandic coastline. The incident was undramatic, but worried Icelandic authorities as it was the first time since the US military left the Keflavik airbase in 2006 that Russian bombers were observed flying so close to Iceland territory (Iceland MFA, 2015).

\(^{52}\) Russia was also accused of violating Finnish airspace in early October, 2016. The Russian Defense Ministry refuted these allegations (TASS, 2016b).
described 2014 as a peak year in Russian aviation activity, with a decrease in 2015 and 2016 (Mogen, 2016). Furthermore, NATO sources confirmed that: “So far this year [March 2016] there has been significantly less NATO-activations tied to Russian air activities in the Baltic region and the Barents Sea, compared to 2015” (Vest Jensen and Kildegaard Sørensen, 2016).

To many, this decrease in activity is explained by Russia’s military offensive in Syria that began in 2015 with resources being transferred accordingly (Ibid; Mogen, 2016).

Table 3 indicates that there has been a quantitative change in in the Nordic region between March 2014 – March 2015. There has been an increase in the number of aggressive and dangerous aviation conducts by Russian military aircraft in all three categories (high risk, serious and near routine incidents), most of which have been observed in the Baltic sub-region. The table also indicates a qualitative change insofar as the incidents take place closer to the borders of the Nordic countries, sometimes even violating their airspace, and in general represent a more aggressive behavior than that observed prior to 2014. These changes are discernable for March 2015 – October 2016 as well, but to a lesser extent as Russian activity levels have decreased. However, as it will be discussed in the last section of this chapter, the decrease in activities is not necessarily accompanied by a decrease in tensions or a change in Russia’s security policy ends in relation to the Nordic region.

**Russian maritime activity in the Nordic region (March 2014 – October 2016)**

When it comes to Russia’s maritime activities in the Nordic region, incidents that are known in the open sources are fewer and further apart. Despite the economic downturn and cuts in certain areas of the military budget, Russia has continued to prioritize the maritime sector (Hicks et al., 2016: 2). Russia sees the navy as a main component in its foreign and defense policy, particularly due to its nuclear deterrence capabilities. The navy is also an important tool to highlight Russia’s ambitions and international visibility (Zysk, 2016).

In a 2015 address to President Putin, Deputy Prime minister Dmitry Rogozin stated that the new Marine Doctrine would focus on two areas: The Arctic and the Atlantic (President of Russia, 2015a). The emphasis on the Atlantic was due to the increase in NATO’s activities adjacent to Russia’s territory, a development Russia had to respond to (Ibid.). References to the Arctic mainly focused on the importance of the Northern Sea Route, access to the Atlantic

---

53 At least from a Western perspective, which, ultimately these tables are based on as far as the incident categorizations go.
and Pacific Oceans, and economic resources in the area (see table 6) (Ibid.). According to Katarzyna Zysk, the focus on these two areas reflects Russia’s uncertainties regarding the “Atlantic regional direction” (Zysk, 2016). Russia is worried about NATO’s strengthened presence as reassurance measures to its Eastern European members and as a result, Russia has increased its naval presence in the northern European waters (Ibid.). The new maritime doctrine was announced by President Putin and Deputy Prime Minister Rogozin at a ceremony in Baltiysk, a major naval base in Kaliningrad. This may be indicative of the increased importance of the Kaliningrad enclave and the Baltic Fleet in the new and tense situation in the region. (BBC, 2015).

Table 5 follows the same ELN report framework, but instead of covering two time periods (like tables 3 and 4), the table shows an aggregate for the entire period March 2014 – October 2016. This is due to the fact that most of the data for the period is covered by the ELN report with only one identified incident added by the author of this thesis after March 2015.

Table 5. Military maritime encounters in the High North and Baltic sub-regions (March 2014 – September 2016)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region and country/Category</th>
<th>High risk</th>
<th>Serious risk</th>
<th>Near routine</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Baltic sub-region</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High North sub-region</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iceland</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others*</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>1</strong></td>
<td><strong>1</strong></td>
<td><strong>8</strong></td>
<td><strong>10</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ELN report, and additional data collected by author (see Attachment 1).
*Note: “Others” pertain to non-Nordic countries included in the ELN report that had incidents with Russia (the Baltic countries, the UK, the US, Italia etc.). Non-Nordic countries are not included in data collected after March 2015.

Table 5 shows similar variations in the number of identified incidents in the Baltic and High North sub-regions, with the number of incidents being higher in the former. This trend is identified despite the fact that Russia’s largest naval base and fleet is located in the High North.

As for the Nordic countries, Sweden and Finland both experienced two incidents. The “near routine” incident involving Finland is the only additional incident added to the ELN-list and took place in late April 2015, when Finnish navy vessels fired handheld underwater depth
charges towards foreign underwater targets in Finnish territorial waters (Attachment 1).\textsuperscript{54} Finnish authorities have not confirmed that these were Russian targets. However, a report published by the Center for Strategic and International Studies in 2016 stated that unofficial reports confirmed the presence of Russian submarines (Hicks et al., 2016: 3-4). The only registered “high risk” incident in Table 5 occurred in October 2014 and involved reports of “underwater activities” in the Stockholm archipelago. This prompted the largest anti-submarine operation in Sweden since the Cold War. The Swedish military emphasized that they were prepared to use “armed force” if necessary in order to bring the foreign vessel to the surface. Despite being unable to confirm (at least officially) that the observed underwater activity was Russian, Swedish Armed Forces confirmed without a doubt that Sweden’s internal waters had been violated with at least one unidentified vessel involved (Attachment 1).

Just as with the Finnish example, Russian authorities denied all accusations of Russian presence in the Stockholm archipelago, calling the hunt a “… mindless waste of Swedish taxpayer money” before further insinuating that the hunt was part of a scheme to “… promote anti-Russian hysteria and propaganda, pumping the myth of the military threat from the East” (RUS MFA, 2015e). However, the submarine hunt, as put by Frear, Kulesa and Kearns, “… may have confirmed beyond doubt more aggressive Russian surveillance / probing operations against Sweden in breach of international law” (2014). The incident brought back memories to the Cold War and the famous “Whiskey on the Rocks” incident where a Soviet Whiskey-class diesel electric submarine was stranded inside Swedish territorial waters (Mizokami, 2016). The 2014 incident may also be seen as a Russian response to Sweden signing a host-nation support agreement with NATO during the 2014 NATO summit in Wales, forging closer ties with the alliance. In this regard, the alleged Russian provocation matches Russia’s rhetorical statements, warning of “adequate responses” to Sweden’s “flirt” with NATO. The incident, combined with increased concern over Russian military resurgence due to several airspace violations by Russian jets in 2014, the Swedish government announced a $722 million increase in defense spending for the period 2016 to 2020 (Ibid; Attachment 1).

The two incidents in table 5 taking place in the High North did not involve Norway and Iceland. The “serious risk” incidents included a Lithuanian vessel that was detained by Russia in international waters in the Barents Sea. The “near routine” incident involved Russian anti-

\textsuperscript{54} Underwater depth charges are used for warning purposes and not to attack.
submarine forces expelling an alleged US submarine from the Barents Sea. The data points in table 5 should not be seen as indicating actual Russian maritime activity. According to NATO reports, Russian operational submarine activities in the North Atlantic have returned to Cold War levels and Russia’s submarine capabilities are at a level not seen before. Furthermore, in the course of a month (October-early November 2016), several observations of foreign vessels alongside the Norwegian coast have been reported, but without leading to any official identifications (de Larrinaga, 2016; Lysvold and Thonhaugen, 2016; Ødegård, 2016).

Compared to the tables for Russian aviation activity, Russian maritime activities are harder to describe with certainty. For most of the incidents, confirmations of Russian presence are not available and Russia has categorically denied, or not responded to, such accusations. However, the available data points match the observed trends in aviation activities, with clearly more reported incidents in the Baltic sub-region than in the High North. Similar to tables 3, 4, and 5 show that more incidents have involved Sweden and Finland, compared to the other Nordic countries. As such, Russian maritime activities resemble observed trends in Russian aviation activities.

### 5.6 Secure Russia’s military strategic depth

This sub-chapter focuses on the defensive element of Russia’s security policy end to secure its military strategic depth. As discussed in the previous sections, Russia’s means can usually serve both defensive and offensive purposes, and the distinction between the two terms is not always clear. Consequently, several of the means highlighted in the abovementioned sections, may also fit into this category, e.g. the Iskander-M and Kalibr cruise missiles. In order to avoid too much repetition, the first part of this section briefly discusses some statements by Russian officials that may be considered more defensive in nature. The next section devotes more space to examining larger Russian military exercises conducted on Russia’s Western territory. These may be divided into two categories: Annual strategic exercises and surprise inspections. The examples provided in this section are by no means exhaustive, but are included because they are considered to be relevant for the Nordic region.\(^{55}\)

On various occasions in the collected data, President Putin and Foreign Minister Lavrov have referenced the former Prime Minister of Prussia and the founder and first chancellor of the

\(^{55}\) Russia conducts several thousands of different military exercises each year.
German Empire, Otto von Bismarck. In a 2015 interview with an Italian magazine, President Putin said: “Russia does not speak with anyone in a contentious tone, and in such matters, to quote a political figure from the past, Otto von Bismarck, it is not discussions but the potential that counts” (Corriere della Sera, 2015). In an interview with the Swedish newspaper Dagens Nyheter, Foreign Minister Lavrov also referred to Bismarck and said that in military matters, the intentions play no role, the important thing is the potential (Winiarski, 2016). In other words, Russia argues that it is forced to increase its defense capabilities because it does not (or at least chooses not to) believe NATO when it says that it does not intend to reduce Russia’s security. If there were no intentions “then why place military infrastructure next to our borders?” (Lavrov sited in Winiarski, 2016). Russia’s uncertainty and suspicion vis-à-vis the West has historical roots and may be tied to the numerous invasions of Russia’s territory (see Chapter 4). Subsequently, Russia sees an increased Western military presence in the Nordic region as decreasing Russia’s capability to defend itself and as an attempt by NATO to encircle Russia. According to Julie Wilhelmsen, the continued presentation of the West, the US, or NATO as an enemy or aggressor may also be explained as a way for Russian authorities to ensure domestic unity and continued legitimacy for the current regime (2015).

The examples above show that Russia often uses the military potential of the US and NATO to legitimize their own military presence in the Nordic region. The Russian MFA explains Russian exercises as a necessity in today’s security environment: “Exercises and surprise checks of the Russian army’s combat readiness have been a forced measure and a reaction to NATO’s multifold increase of military activities, including in the Baltic Sea” (TASS, 2016), and in the Northern direction (RIA Novosti, 2015). Similarly, the reimbursement of Russian military infrastructure in the Arctic is, according to Defense Minister Shoigu, part of a response to a “broad spectrum of potential challenges and threats to [Russia’s] national security” (cited in Bender, 2015). The potential challenges and threats may, according to Russia, also come from the other Arctic states (Ibid.). Russia has also stated that it is well aware of US nuclear submarines located in the High North with missiles capable of reaching Moscow in a mere 16-17 minutes (Putin cited in Corriere della Sera, 2015; Interfax, 2013). Defense Minister Shoigu furthermore stressed during a 2016 session of the Russian Defense

56 Their reference is based on the quote: It is not by speeches and majority resolutions that the great questions of the time are decided . . . but by iron and blood” (Barkin, 2016).
57 See Winiarski, 2014; RUS MFA, 2014.
Ministry Board (which consist of the top military command in Russia) that NATO activity had “more than doubled” and that the “military and political situation near the western borders of the state [Russia] remained unstable” (RUS MoD, 2016). It is thus important for Russia to strengthen its military and defense capabilities (i.e. early warning radar systems) in order to secure Russian territorial integrity. The strengthening of Russia’s military and defense capabilities may also serve Russia’s aim to counter an increase in Western military presence. Furthermore, such improvements can contribute to Russia’s aim of maximizing its (military) influence in the Nordic region as it provides more credible threats.

**Russian military exercises in the Western Direction**

The last part of this sub-chapter will turn to examine Russian annual strategic exercises and surprise inspections. The former is carefully planned in order to ensure the maximum effectiveness of the training whereas the latter is subject to “checking and developing combat readiness” and is meant to ensure momentarily reactions to threats (Norberg, 2015: 5; RIA Novosti, 2015a). Put differently, surprise exercises check the Russian Armed Forces’ “ability to switch from peacetime activities to war … when the political decision to do so has been made” (Norberg, 2015: 24). Snap drills, or, surprise inspections were reintroduced in 2013, 20 years after the last one took place in the early 1990s. This is due to Russia’s focus on increasing reaction time, which is one of the key goals of Russia’s military modernization (in addition to joint operations, enhanced communication, strategic mobility etc.).

Russia’s annual strategic exercises are usually conducted in September and serve an important function for the various defense departments to co-train their divisions, test new material, tactics and procedures (Nordberg, 2015: 23). They also send an important message to the outside world about the status of Russia’s military progress. For example, the Zapad-2013 (“West-2013”) strategic exercise showed considerable improvement from Zapad-2009 when it came to moving large number of troops (70,000-90,000) and equipment over long distances (Lucas, 2015: 9; Järvenpää, 2014: 8). The increase in scale and magnitude of the Zapad-2013 exercise marked a new trend in Russian military exercises. The fact that the exercise included simultaneous exercises in Belarus, Kaliningrad, and the Northern Fleet, has led analysts to conclude that the exercise scenario included a possible regional war with

---

58 Russia originally reported to OSCE that 12,000 soldiers would take part in the exercise conducted in Belarus and 9,400 in the part conducted in Kaliningrad (Järvenpää, 2014: 8)
NATO in the Western direction, escalating into using the Northern Fleet’s nuclear weapons (Norberg, 2015: 38).

Nuclear weapons are an important part of Russia’s defense strategy and a considerable amount of Russia’s strategic nuclear assets, particularly the Northern Fleet’s nuclear submarine forces, are located in the High North (Klimentko, 2016: 19). As for the Nordic region, the Zapad-2013 exercise and the parallel exercises demonstrated that Russia has the ability to implement large-scale and complex military operation in its adjacent areas, including its northwestern neighborhood as well as the ability to coordinate such exercises with operations in other areas (Neretnieks, 2013). The Norwegian Intelligence Service analyzed the exercise as a clear message to Russia’s neighbors and NATO about Russia’s capabilities (Etterretningstjenesten, 2014). Furthermore, the exercise involved forces from the Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation (FSB), the interior ministry, civil defense, police and local authorities. This combination indicates that the exercise falls under the category of total defense (Zdanavičius and Czekaj, 2015: 6). Despite the fact that Zapad-13 included a strategic communicative element aimed at (among others) the West, the annual exercise is understood here as mostly defensive in nature.

However, the proceeding Vostok-2014 (“East-2014”) strategic exercise serves as an example that Russia’s large scale military exercises can also be used offensively, i.e. as a cover for operations outside Russia’s border. Russia’s intervention in Ukraine may therefore indicate that Russia to a larger extent is willing to use military power against a neighboring state in order to protect Russia’s national security. This has not gone unnoticed in the Nordic region and, for example, both the Norwegian and Danish intelligence services wrote in their annual security reports that the Ukraine crisis shows that Russia’s authorities view the modernized Russian military as a source of available power to support foreign policy and strategic goals (Etterretningstjenesten, 2015: 8; Forsvarets Etterretningstjeneste, 2015: 17).

Russia has increased the number of surprise inspections adjacent to the Nordic region, partly in response to a need to improve the military’s preparedness, and partly due to Russia’s perception of an increased threat alongside its border and adjacent areas (Norberg, 2015). Instead of participating in military exercises in the Nordic region (a common occurrence prior to the Ukraine crisis), Russia is today mostly shut out from military cooperation in the region that it used to be a part of (see Chapter 3). The use of snap exercises may serve as warnings of Russia’s combat readiness and also be used as “adequate” responses to what she perceives as
increased military activity close to her border, particularly military activity that Russia is shut out from. Some of the surprise military exercises conducted in the Western direction after 2014 have been analyzed as being more threatening, signaling that Russia is prepared to go to war in the Western direction if deemed necessary (Norberg, 2015: 50).  

As for the Baltic sub-region, the Russian exclave Kaliningrad has hosted several military exercises which have been perceived as threatening to her Baltic Sea neighbors. The increased NATO activity in the Baltic sub-region in response to Russia’s actions in Ukraine, has led to an increase in Russia’s activities in the region (Oldberg, 2015: 8; Wesolowsky, 2015). Consequently, since the outbreak of the Ukrainian crisis, Kaliningrad’s military importance has increased as a result of the growing tensions between Russia and the West (Oldberg, 2015: 3).

However, Russia is also using military exercises as a way to respond to similar exercises conducted by the Nordic countries or by NATO. For example, in response to the exercises NATO’s Saber Strike 2014 (where Finland, Norway, and Denmark participated) and the BALTOPS 2014 exercise (where Finland, Denmark, and Sweden participated) conducted in June 2014, Russia responded with exercise maneuvers that included both the Baltic Fleet and airborne troops in Kaliningrad. Western sources reported that these maneuvers probably included the use of Iskander-M systems (Dyner, 2014). On June 20th, 2014, Russia also initiated a massive surprise inspection in its Central Military District, including some 65,000 troops. Another good example is Russia’s “response” to Norway’s 2015 military exercise, Joint Viking. The Norwegian exercise was the largest since the Cold War and was conducted in Finnmark county, which borders Russia and the Kola Peninsula in the High North (Forsvaret, 2015; Nilsen, 2015). Despite being planned before the outbreak of the Ukraine crisis, the Norwegian Armed Forces confirmed that the current security situation in Europe made such exercises highly relevant. Lieutenant General Morten Haga Lunde further stressed that: “a firm and visible military presence in Norway’s areas of responsibility is important … Military presence in the High North has a stabilizing effect ensuring that the region remains an area of low tension.” (Forsvaret, 2015).

59 For example, a large-scale military exercise conducted towards the end of February, 2014. The surprise inspection included 150,000 servicemen and included both the Northern and Baltic fleets (RUS MoD, 2014a; RUS MoD, 2014b; Kulesa, 2016: 42).
60 US Army Europe, 2014.
However, Russia did not view this as a measure to ensure low tensions in the High North. As the Joint Viking exercise was opening, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov was in Spain meeting his Spanish counterpart. During a Q&A he said:

… We have discussed the situation in Europe and issues pertaining to current Russia-EU and Russia-NATO relations. We reaffirmed our position that increased military activity near Russia’s borders will not help restore confidence in the Euro-Atlantic region. We will have to take adequate measures in response to these developments. We are convinced that problems should be addressed through dialogue based on equality and mutual respect and aimed at implementing the principle of indivisible security, where one’s own security does not come at the expense of others. Our NATO partners have been avoiding the codification of this political principle for many years (RUS MFA, 2015f).

In an interview with Russian news agency TASS some days later, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Alexey Mashkov said that Moscow is concerned with the increase in number of military exercises near Russia’s northwestern border:

Russia is deeply concerned about the growing number of NATO drills near our borders. It is especially surprising that this is happening in north-eastern Europe, which is the most stable region not only on our continent, but also maybe in the whole world … Such NATO actions lead to destabilization of the situation and increasing tensions in north-eastern Europe (TASS, 2015).

Furthermore, in an article published by another Russian state owned news agency, RIA Novosti, commentator Alexandr Khrolenko claimed that the exercise in Finnmark was a provocation against Russia and that Norway is clearly increasing their activities in the High North after instructions from NATO. Khrolenko, a loyal Putin supporter, claimed that the exercise was conducted in order to collect intelligence on Russia. The stationing of the Thor Heyerdahl frigate also posed a threat to Russia’s Northern Fleet as it carried missiles capable of reaching Severomorsk, which is the location of the Northern Fleet’s headquarters (Khrolenko, 2015).

The “adequate measures” promised by Foreign Minister Lavrov during the press conference may have been what some days later turned into a massive surprise inspection ordered by President Putin to check the combat readiness of the Northern Fleet and individual units of the Western Military District, in addition to airborne troops. Official sources initially informed
that some 38,000 troops were involved (RUS MoD, 2015) but it later turned out that the number of servicemen totaled closer to 80,000, including 12,000 pieces of heavy armament, 65 warships, 15 submarines, and over 220 military aircraft (RUS MoD, 2015b; Frear, 2015). There is of course no way to know for sure that the massive surprise inspection was ordered as a response to the Norwegian exercise. The strategic importance of the bases in Russia’s High North also mean that several military exercises, including surprise inspections, are conducted in the area on a regular basis (Norberg, 2015). However, the reactions from the Russian diplomats as well as the timing of the massive snap exercise mean that the possibility of this being a response to the Norwegian exercise should not be excluded.

The massive surprise inspection not only surpassed the exercise in Finnmark in numbers (5000 soldiers), but furthermore expanded to cover other parts of the Nordic region, including the Baltic sub-region. According to an analysis by Stratfor, the large surprise exercise was a preparation for territorial defense of Russia’s outlying regions, including the Kola Peninsula, the Arctic isles, and the Kaliningrad exclave. Such a large-scale exercise focusing on the area “… stretching from Norway to the Baltics through Poland and into Crimea” is most likely a scenario simulating a war with the United States and/or NATO (Stratfor, 2015). It was also the first exercise where Russia’s new Arctic brigade participated (RIA Novosti, 2015). Of particular interest regarding the Baltic sub-region was the deployment of the Iskander-M mobile theater ballistic missiles system (Stratfor, 2015). Iskander-M missiles have also been included in earlier rapid deployment exercises on Kaliningrad (RT, 2014a). As mentioned earlier, the deployment of Iskander missiles is seen as defensive, rather than offensive move, due to the relatively short range of the missiles.

Furthermore, according to a study conducted by the Center for European Policy Analysis, during the large snap drill, 33,000 soldiers responded to a scenario involving an attempt by the West to start a “Maidan” uprising in Moscow: “The scenario included the speedy seizure of Northern Norway, the Åland Islands (demilitarized Finnish territory, populated by Swedish-speakers), the Swedish island of Gotland and the Danish island of Bornholm”. The report stated that had such a scenario been executed successfully, the Baltic states would have been completely shut off from NATO allies’ assistance (Lucas, 2015). When asked in an interview about Western worries regarding such large-scale exercises, the Russian MoD responded saying that such exercises were an internal matter. Russia’s DM Shoigu further commented “… new challenges and threats against the military security demands that the
Armed Forces further increase their military combat capabilities” and that special attention would be given to the new strategic formations in the Northern direction (RIA Novosti, 2015).

A last example is an exercise that took place in 2015, parallel to the Norwegian-led military exercise *Arctic Challenge*62. The exercise is a biennial event operated under the Nordic military cooperation umbrella between Sweden, Finland and Norway and numbered 3,600 troops (O’Dwyer, 2015; Conley and Rohloff, 2015) The Norwegian-led exercise counted 3,600 troops. Russia initiated an unannounced snap exercise on the same day as the kick-off for *Arctic Challenge*, including approximately 12,000 troops and units from Russia’s central, western and southern military districts. In addition to “long-range and transport aviation”, the exercise furthermore included “training launches of cruise missiles by long-range aviation” (Kulesa, 2016: 43). The decision to launch the large-scale exercise took NATO and Sweden and Finland by surprise and caused serious concern. The exercise is believed to have been Russia’s method of showing its unease with the deepened partnership between Sweden, Finland and NATO. In this case, the exercise may be seen in light of Russia’s security policy ends pertaining to minimize Western influence and counter threatening Western military build-up in the Nordic region (O’Dwyer, 2015; Vedomosti, 2015).

Russia uses her modernized military power to maximize its influence in the region and assert its position as a great power. Russia’s military forces and massive exercises also serve the purpose of securing Russian territorial integrity and eliminating threats against Russian interests as a response to the military build-up in the Nordic region. This was highlighted by Defense Minister Shoigu during an interview in August 2016 in which he stated that the aim of the massive Russian exercises was to train Russian troops to “defend Russia’s interests amid emerging security threats” in, according to the news agency, Russia’s west and southwest. Similar to another example, the Defense Minister also confirmed that the large military exercises were a response to the build-up of NATO’s war games close to Russia’s border, which left Russia with no other choice than to act accordingly (RT, 2016e). As such, the massive exercises may also be seen to serve as a strategic communicative mean to warn its Nordic neighbors, as well as NATO, that Russia has the ability and intent to protect its interests on short notice and if necessary with force. It may also reflect insecurity about her neighbors’ military intentions as Russia today is excluded from the military cooperation and

---

62 For more examples of conducted Russian exercises in the Nordic region in 2015, see Kulesa, 2016, Freeman et al., 2015; Brekke and Tjørhom, 2015.
exercises she used to take part in prior to 2014. As such, Russia is more prone to perceive the Western military exercises in the Nordic region as threatening. This may be exemplified by Danish ambassador Mikhail Vanin’s comment on Danish participation in BALTOPS 2016. The ambassador called the exercise a “provocation” and said that “… Denmark should not take part in this anti-Russian show” (Damkjær, 2016).

The Russian practice of calling snap exercises has concerned the Nordic countries who in turn have increased their military cooperation (Persen, 2016). NATO claims that Russia’s behavior makes “the Euro-Atlantic security environment less stable and predictable, in particular its practice of calling snap exercises, deploying near NATO borders, conducting advanced training, and exercises and violating Allied airspace” (NATO, 2016a). To this the Russian MoD has stated that Russia conducts her exercises in accordance with international agreements and treaties and that their foreign colleagues ignore this and instead choose “to play their anti-Russian part” (RT, 2016f). Russia wishes to secure its territorial integrity and defense capabilities, for example in Kaliningrad, through extensive military reinforcement and exercises. Furthermore, military exercises can be used to deter Russia’s opponents by signaling that Russia has modernized its military and is able to use it effectively and efficiently.

5.7 Summary

In this chapter, the aim has been to examine and analyze Russia’s means and the various ways they have been used after 2014 in order to reach Russia’s security policy ends in the Nordic region. First, the Chapter focused on two categories of available means: military and political-informational. The military category adheres to a more traditional understanding of security policy, but was here broadened to include political and informational means, due to empirical discoveries in the collected data and Russia’s increased focus on combining military and non-military means. As discussed, the means available to Russia are to a large extent the same, although they have undergone a process of sophistication in the face of a more modernized and mobile Russian military and through rapid and expansive technological advances in the communication sphere.

Second, the various ways were examined and connected to the four security policy ends identified in Chapter 4. The analysis found that there has been both a qualitative and
quantitative change in the way Russia uses its means towards the Nordic region between 2014-2016. The change is described as qualitative in the sense that Russian statements have become more aggressive and threatening. Russian air and naval activities have become more provoking, flying closer and more aggressively in the Nordic countries’ immediate proximity, occasionally violating their territorial borders. The quantitative change refers especially to the numerical increase in Russian flights and close military encounters between Russia and the Nordic countries (tables 3, 4, and 5). This implies that there have been changes regarding how Russia has chosen to utilize her means (both military and political-informational) in order to secure its security policy ends in a time of heightened tensions in the Nordic region.

Lastly, the analysis in Chapter 4 and 5 have provided indications that Russia approaches the Nordic region in in various ways. These various approaches, diversified, partly-diversified, and unified, will be addressed and explained in more detail in Chapter 6 together with the identified continuity and change in Russia’s security policy towards the Nordic region.
6 Explaining: Russia’s security policy towards the Nordic region

This chapter will seek to explain the key findings in Chapter 4 and 5 by connecting them to the theoretical frameworks presented in Chapter 2. The first section will discuss and explain continuity and change in Russia’s security policy towards the Nordic region, building on Gustavsson’s model and Hermann’s typology on graduated levels of foreign policy change. The second section will examine and explain the variations identified in the empirical material regarding Russia’s approaches towards the Nordic region and whether they adhere to a diversified, partly diversified or unified approach.

6.1 Explaining continuity and change

Research questions 1 and 2 allowed for a closer and systematic inspection of Russia’s security policy ends, ways, and means toward the Nordic region in the time period 2014-2016. The material was contextualized through a review on Russia in the Nordic region in a historical context, and a more thorough examination of the “situation” in the Nordic region two years prior to the 2014 Ukraine crisis. This was done in order to enable discussion of continuity and change in Russia’s security policy towards the Nordic region.

In Gustavsson’s model on foreign policy change, various levels of change were introduced through Hermann’s four-level typology on graduated change (Gustavsson, 1999; Hermann, 1990). The first and last levels, adjustment changes and international orientation changes respectively, will not be discussed here as the first only represents minor levels of effort put into a policy and the last includes a complete overhaul of foreign policy priorities. Rather, emphasis will be placed on level two, program changes, and level three, problem/goal changes. These two levels parallel the strategy concepts of ends, ways, and means which are utilized in this thesis. Thus, program changes represent what in research question one is called security policy ends and problem/goal changes represent what is in research question two is called security policy ways and means.

In chapter 4, the collected empirical data was systemized and combined with historical reviews and secondary literature in order to identify Russian security policy ends in the Nordic region. This process resulted in four categories, two political and two military, which
again were divided into defensive and offensive sections. It was then argued that despite the increased tensions in the Nordic region after 2014, Russia’s overall goals of 1) maximizing its political influence, 2) minimizing Western influence, 3) countering an increase of Western military activity and, 4) securing military strategic depth, have remained fairly constant. If anything, the negative spillover from the Ukraine crisis actualized Russia’s security policy concerns in the Nordic region. As such, the empirical material has not identified changes in Hermann’s problem/goal-level and thus concludes that Russia’s security policy ends in the region are characterized by strong patterns of continuity rather than change.

Chapter 5 focused on Russian security policy ways and means. These two factors were also measures up against available material on previous Russian behavior in the region. Regarding means, Russia has spent considerable resources in particular in the past seven to eight years on modernizing her military. This has resulted in an upgrade in military capabilities (in e.g. new equipment, changes in personnel structure, reaction time, communication, strategic mobility) and a more sophisticated integration of military and civil tools (e.g. information campaigns, use of media, disinformation) in Russia’s overall foreign and military strategy. Similar upgrades have taken place in the Nordic region, but the means may be said to have remained fairly stable. In contrast, the ways Russia uses its available means in the Nordic region has changed since 2014. A quantitative measure of this was provided in tables 3, 4, and 5, showing an increase in military encounters between Russia and its Nordic neighbors at air and sea, combined with reports from all the Nordic countries of increased Russian presence in their adjacent areas. This increase was particularly apparent in 2014, but decreased somewhat after the first quarter of 2015, something that has been ascribed to resource transfers to Russia’s military interventions in Syria. Qualitatively, the material indicates that Russia is acting more aggressively and provocatively close to the borders of its Nordic neighbors, occasionally even violating Sweden and Finland’s air and (presumably) maritime boarders. Moreover, there is a qualitative change in the coordinated aggressive rhetorical approach towards the Nordic countries through the use of Russian embassy personnel, diplomats, and officials and media outlets (both Russian and Nordic). These rhetorical approaches include elements of disinformation, mockery and threats, in addition to attempts to reassure the Nordic countries that Russia has no harmful intentions, in order to preserve stability and cooperation in the Nordic region.
Thus, returning back to Hermann’s typology, it is in the second level that changes in Russia’s security policy towards the Nordic region are identified. This identification seems to follow Hermann’s argument that “…program changes will be easier to adopt than goal/problem changes, which in turn will be easier to achieve than reorientation changes in policy.” (1990: 8). The combination of relatively stable threat perceptions when it comes to the West and the fact that foreign and security policy objectives (ends) usually have a more overarching and encompassing characteristic, may indicate that this level takes more time to change (Tsygankov, 2016; Vendil Pallin, 2009). Also, the fact that the situation in the Nordic region so far has been characterized by increased military and political tensions and not a crisis, could indicate that President Putin and Russia’s top political leadership perceived a changing atmosphere in the region and altered their reaction to fit the situation (Gustavsson, 1999: 84).

The Ukraine crisis has as such crystalized Russia’s security policy ends in the Nordic region, but not introduced any new security threats per se. Thus, the first step has been to modify the use of Russia’s available means in order to increase its own influence and warn the Nordic countries and the West that Russia is ready to defend its interests in the region, while at the same time sending signals that Russia is interested in the region remaining stable. The latter point is important because Russia today faces more pressing issues, such as the ongoing war in Ukraine and offensives in Syria, and it is not interested in dramatic changes on its Northwestern borders.

However, the Ukraine crisis may be said to have opened the “window of opportunity” for an increased Russian military presence in the Nordic region. For the Nordic countries, Russia’s actions in Ukraine have induced a sense of fear and uncertainty regarding their great neighbor in the East. Russia, which to a large extent is trying to blame the West for the Ukraine crisis and increased tensions in the Nordic region, feels urged to take action in the region. This is both due to increased uncertainty and expressed discontent with NATO’s increased military presence closer to Russia’s border and the Nordic countries’ willingness to deepen their cooperation with the EU, the US, and NATO as well as among themselves. Western (political and military) presence in the Nordic region is perceived by Russia as a threat to the stability of the region and to Russia’s national interests. This is a longstanding Russian perception and is tied to Russia’s security policy ends. However, in the new security environment, the western presence and increased uncertainty may lead Russia to behave in a manner that show Russian capacity and capability to strike back in the Nordic region if necessary. Furthermore, due to the character of Russia’s political and decision-making system, it may be reasonable to
believe that despite the fact that the Nordic region probably is not highest on the agenda of Russia’s top political leadership, the observed changes in Russia’s security policy are directed from the top.63

6.2 Explaining regional and intra-regional variation

In the pursuit of identifying and explaining Russian security policy behavior towards the Nordic region, the empirical material indicates that Russia at times pursues a unified approach toward the region, but mostly prefers a diversified or partly diversified approach. These variations in Russia’s behavior will be explained with reference to Russia’s interest in the Nordic region, the patterns of amity and enmity forming Russia’s relationship with the various Nordic countries and its perception of the region as a whole, and by mapping geopolitical interests and vulnerabilities.

In the empirical material, Russia has referred to the Nordic region “…as an island of stability and security” and “…the world’s most stable region” (RUS MFA, 2014). Russia shares different historical ties with the various Nordic countries, yet its perception of the region since the end of the Cold war is characterized more by amity than enmity. This does not mean amity in its pure form, as described by Buzan (1991: 189-190), but rather by generally “good neighborly” relations, with only a “sprinkle” of suspicion and fear (the characteristics of enmity). After the Ukraine crisis, however, the Nordic region has experienced increased uncertainty and Russia’s actions have “… sparked growing concerns about Russia’s intentions vis-à-vis its [Nordic] neighbors” (Åtland, 2016: 163). Russia, on its side, has blamed NATO for attempting to destabilize one of the most stable regions of the world and voiced discontent with the Nordic countries decisions to “…align their defensive strategies against Russia” (RUS MFA, 2015).

The latter quote is an example of Russia addressing the Nordic countries in a unified manner, or as a unified collective. However, the full comment from the Russian MFA also point to the fact that Russia, at least in security terms, views the Nordic region in terms of an aligned/non-aligned constellation. The comment, after warning that Nordic alignment may undermine the

63 The system is described as top-down, with President Putin on the top, surrounded by a small circle of trustees, exercising nearly full control over, for example, the civil (and military) bureaucracy, the media, civil society, and the army (Åtland, 2016; Gabuev, 2015). Furthermore, the system is characterized by a high degree of elite consolidation (forced or actual) on how the country’s foreign and security policy is formed and run (Ven Bruusgaard, 2014; Snetkov, 2015: 8; Koltsova, 2006).
“… positive and constructive regional cooperation in the North”, singled out Finland and Sweden and their official policy as military non-aligned (RUS MFA, 2015). Their increased efforts, in Russia’s eyes, to seek rapprochement with NATO was highlighted as of “particular concern” (Ibid.) Similarly, this aligned/non-aligned division was touched upon by Foreign Minister Lavrov’s in a 2016 interview with the Swedish newspaper Dagens Nyheter: “It is one thing when one’s northern neighbours are neutral states, and it is something else entirely when they are members of the North Atlantic Alliance … which has in the recent period unambiguously declared deterrence of Russia as its objective and called Russia a “major threat.”” (RUS MFA, 2016a). This division or distinction may be seen as an example of Russia approaching the Nordic region in a partly diversified manner. It is partly diversified because by directing warnings and threats, such as “…Swedish NATO-membership would change the geostrategic military-political status quo, not only in the Nordic region but also in Europe”, Russia is simultaneously sending out a warning to non-aligned Sweden and Finland and the Nordic region (and NATO) collectively about the “consequences” of such a decision (Winiarski, 2015). Consequently, Russia’s partly diversified approach may serve multiple purposes. First, Sweden and Finland’s non-aligned status make them more vulnerable as they are not covered by NATO’s collective defense Article (5), i.e. they are not guaranteed help should they be attacked. Russia is aware of this, but attempts to convey the message that they (and the Nordic region in general) are safer if their non-aligned status is maintained. The provocative behavior and aggressive rhetoric may thus be understood as Russia showing what it is capable of, should they decide to join NATO. Second, such a partly-diversified approach may serve to discourage closer Western military cooperation with Sweden and Finland because it is uncertain how Russia will react or what the overall consequences may be.

The empirical material provides other examples of Russia referring to the Nordic region, or the Nordic countries, in a unified way. In an opening speech by Foreign Minister Lavrov at an international conference in Moscow in 2016, he highlighted that Russia persistently works to make sure that “Northern Europe” remains a space of “…neighborliness, partnership and mutually beneficial cooperation” (RUS MFA, 2016). However, with a clear nudge to the current situation, he added towards the end of his speech that “…[t]his region has no need of dividing lines and artificial fanning of tensions” (Ibid.). The Foreign Minister also commented on the visit of the Nordic heads of state to Washington in May 2016, indicating that the Nordic countries were “forced” to abide by the same rules and perceptions as the United States. The latter example was in Chapter 5 identified as an attempt by Russia to “divide and
conquer”. A general observation regarding the examples where Russia addresses the Nordic region or Nordic countries in a more unified manner is that these usually are more negative. Russia is skeptic and negative to increased Nordic military cooperation, rapprochement with the US and NATO, and wish to limit “fanning of tensions”. An explanation for this may be found by looking at Russia’s interests and the relative balance of power in the Nordic region.

When looking at Russia and the Nordic countries isolated, Russia is a great power and the Nordic countries are considered small states, at least when comparing in terms of military power. In bilateral terms, this may imply that Russia’s interests to a larger degree controls the “substance and output” of relations and negotiations. In other words, Russia has more leeway when approaching the Nordic countries in a diversified manner, i.e. one country, one approach. Individually, the Nordic countries are more vulnerable to Russian threats and pressures, and addressing them individually may in this way have a stronger effect or induce a stronger sense of fear. For example, when Russia warns Norway that closer military collaboration with the US may be met with military countermeasures, this has a stronger effect and induces more uncertainty compared to a similar threat aimed at NATO (which Norway is a member of, but is militarily much stronger). As such, a diversified approach is a more efficient way to deter the smaller Nordic actors from engaging in activities and collaborations with the US and NATO that Russia deem threatening to its interests.

However, as shown, the Nordic region is not isolated and the Nordic countries are to varying degrees politically, economically, and militarily connected to NATO, the EU, and the US. These “connections” help level out some of the asymmetry in the power relations between Russia and its Nordic neighbors. Consequently, and especially when it comes to security matters, Russia risks having to deal with a strong and unified military organization such as NATO, rather than individual (and weaker) countries. Since this decreases Russia’s leverage and influence, Russia will avoid approaching the Nordic region or the Nordic countries in a unified manner. This, unless it is within frameworks where Russia see itself as having equal or more influence, such as the BEAC or the Northern Dimension. Consequently, when Russia is referring to the Nordic region collectively (and with reference to NATO, the EU or NATO), as shown above, it is usually in the context of showing discontent with what Russia perceives as unwarranted military-political behavior. This is also supported by observations in Chapter

---

64 This does not mean that Russia is ruthless in her bilateral dealings with her Nordic neighbors. Rather, Russia has generally sought pragmatic solutions and shown interest in enhancing regional cooperation.
4 and 5. In other words, Russia as a rational actor prefers a diversified or partly diversified approach because this is perceived as the best way to ensure its security interests in the Nordic region.

Chapter 5 showed that Russia uses various military and political-informational means towards the Nordic countries. The various statements are usually tied directly to a specific country and specific incidents and have included everything from threats (open or veiled), denials, mockery, disinformation, attempts to influence public opinion, and reassurances. However, regardless of the fact that these rhetorical statements are aimed at the Nordic countries individually and that some countries, such as Sweden, seem to be a larger victim of certain Russian rhetorical advances, this observed behavior may still be categorized as a partly diversified approach. Russia may be addressing countries individually and with various degrees of aggression/reassurance, but it makes use of similar arguments and similar threats. This may indicate that Russia sees the utility of using its weight as a big power to address the smaller Nordic countries individually, but at the same time seeks to use its means in a more coordinated and collective manner, since to do so bolsters the Russian narrative in the Nordic region as a whole.

The most diversified approach towards the Nordic region was identified when comparing Russia’s air and military activities in the High North and Baltic sub-regions. However, before this is discussed in detail, the focus first turns to geopolitical features of Russia’s presence in the region which may help explain some of the differences seen in the two sub-regions. Table 6 provides an overview of some of Russia’s strategic assets in the High North and Baltic sub-region. The list is not exhaustive, but aims to present a general picture of the key strategic factors highlighted in Chapter 2, section 2.4.3. Furthermore, all the details in the table will not be elaborated on, but instead the main focus will be on referencing and including the various categories in a broader manner in the following discussion.
### Table 6. Russian strategic assets in the High North and Baltic sub-regions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Geography</th>
<th>The Baltic sub-region</th>
<th>The High North sub-region</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Densely populated, Baltic Sea mainly land-locked and heavily trafficked.</td>
<td>Sparsely populated, open ocean and sea area.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Main military bases                                                       | Kaliningrad, Baltiysk: Headquarters of the Baltic Fleet | Severomorsk: Headquarters of the Northern Fleet. |
|                                                                           | Kronstadt/St. Petersburg: Second operational base and includes the 6<sup>th</sup> Army | Air bases: Severomorsk 1 and 3 and Olenegorsk (Kipelevo) |
|                                                                           | Chernyakhovsky: 152<sup>nd</sup> Guard Missile brigade | Ground force bases: |
|                                                                           | Ostrov: Air Base, Pskov Oblast                         | - Zapolyarny: 61<sup>st</sup> Independent Naval Infantry Regiment |
|                                                                           |                                                      | - Pechenga: 200<sup>th</sup> Independent Infantry Brigade, Sputnik base |
|                                                                           |                                                      | - Alakurtti: 80<sup>th</sup> Arctic Brigade |

| Access to oceans                                                          | the North Sea, the Atlantic Ocean, the English Channel – opens access to the Mediterranean Sea. | the Atlantic Ocean, the Arctic Ocean, the Pacific Ocean. |

| Primary ports                                                             | St. Petersburg, Kaliningrad (Primorsk) | Murmansk |

| Sea lines of communications (SLOCs)*                                      | Navigation line between Kronstadt and Kaliningrad. | Northern Sea Route: Destinational shipping for natural resources from the Russian Arctic; potentially strategically important maritime connection between Europe and Asia. |
|                                                                           | Transport routes for oil and gas to the Baltic states and to Western Europe. | SLOC chokepoints: Norwegian cost |
|                                                                           | SLOC chokepoint: Danish Straits            |

| Borders with NATO                                                        | Estonia, Latvia | Norway |
|                                                                           | Kaliningrad: Poland and Lithuania | Iceland |
|                                                                           | Denmark          |

| Military district                                                        | Western military district | Western Military district |
|                                                                           | HQ Baltic              | Arctic Joint Strategic Command |

| Nuclear capability                                                       | NO | YES |
| (But, Iskander-missiles and Kalibr missiles, both able to carry nuclear warheads are now deployed on Kaliningrad) | Including: SSBNs, SSGNs, Delta IV submarines, Borey-class submarines, Yasen class submarines. | |

| Anti-access and areas denial capabilities                                 | YES |

| Strategic economic interests                                             | The Baltic sea routes are very important for transportation and trade to Western Europe. | Maritime shipping, transportation of national resources, fish |
|                                                                           | Oil and gas transportation from the Primorsk and Ust-Luga terminals, located near St. Petersburg. | Vast amount of Russian gas and oil are located in the Arctic and approx. 66.5 percent of the Arctic energy resources on the continental shelf are located in the Barents Sea and the Kara Sea. |
|                                                                           | Nord Stream gas pipeline. |

**Sources:** Aleklett, 2014; Jones, 2014; Staun, 2015; Zysk, 2015a, Wesolowsky, 2015; Oldberg, 2015; Klimenko, 2016; Stoicescu and Praks, 2016; Volkov and Brichevsky, 2016.

* SLOCs: may refer to primary maritime routes between ports, used for trade, logistics and naval forces. It is a term generally used in reference to naval operations, where the aim is to ensure that SLOCs are open, or in times of war, to be able to close them.

** SSBN: Nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarines; SSGNs: Nuclear-powered guided-missile submarines
The military development trends observed in tables 3, 4, and 5 in Chapter 5 indicate that Russia’s air and naval activity has been considerably higher in the Baltic sub-region when compared to the High North. In the Baltic sub-region, and overall, Sweden and Finland have experienced the highest degree of provocations, including violations of air and (presumably) maritime borders. In the High North, Iceland is the country with least reported incidents, while most of them include Norway. That said, the Russian air and naval behavior in the Barents Sea region have remained fairly stable, more predictable, and less provoking compared to the Baltic sub-region.

When it comes to the High North, the lower incident numbers could have various explanations. First of all, it is an area where Russia has considerable military capabilities, including nuclear capabilities, that is sparsely populated and where Russia has easy access to open waters (see table 6 and map 1) Norway is the only neighbor bordering Russia in the region and, despite being a member of NATO, relations have historically remained peaceful. The two countries have never been at war with each other, and the Soviet army liberated and withdrew from northern Norway in 1944. Cross-border relations in the North have steadily developed and improved after the fall of the Soviet Union and furthermore, the 2010 agreement of maritime delimitation in the Barents Sea resolved the “… main unresolved issue in the bilateral relationship between the two countries … in the form of a negotiated compromise solution in 2010” (Átland, 2016: 168).

Relations between Iceland (also a NATO member) and Russia have also generally remained peaceful. The low number of incidents adjacent to Icelandic territory may be a result of geographical distance and Iceland’s decreased geostrategic importance after the end of the Cold War and US military withdrawal from the island in 2006. However, as indicated in Chapter 5, this may change in the future, considering Russia’s increased naval presence in the North Atlantic and the decision to re-open the US military base (Ingimundarson, 2009: 74; Beardsley, 2016; Bender, 2016). Nevertheless, despite the increased tensions in the Nordic region, the negative spillover from the Ukraine crisis have to date remained as it is a region where Russia for the moment faces less geopolitical vulnerability vis-à-vis the US and NATO.

---

65 The alleged violations have not been confirmed, but strong indications have been made that these were, in fact, Russian submarines.

66 The low incident numbers should not be mistaken with low military activity in the region, which is at its highest since the fall of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War.
In the Baltic sub-region, the situation is somewhat different. As indicated in table 6, besides Sweden and Finland, the Baltic Sea rim-states are all members of NATO. Furthermore, it is a smaller area that is heavily populated and trafficked. This means less room for maneuver, but also easier access to neighboring countries. Furthermore, access to open waters is limited and Russia has an enclave in the sub-region that can only be reached either by sea, or by land through other (NATO) countries (the enclave is landlocked between Lithuania and Poland). NATO country Denmark’s geographical position in the region is strategically important due to the “Danish straits”, the narrow gateway wedged between Denmark and Sweden that connects the Baltic Sea to the North Sea through the Kattegat and Skagerrak Seas (Coffey and Kochis, 2016). While Russia’s relations with Denmark have generally remained peaceful, Chapter 5 also showed, however, that Denmark’s decision to contribute to NATO’s missile defense shield invoked strong reactions from Russia and threats that Denmark would become target for Russia’s nuclear missiles.67

Historically, Sweden and Finland share different ties with Russia, but since the fall of the Soviet Union, Russia’s relations with both countries have remained relatively cooperative and stable. As indicated earlier, Russia perceive Finland as the most reliable partner in the Nordic region, while relations with Sweden are more strained due to Sweden’s vocally expressed critical stance towards Russian politics (both domestic and international). Importantly, both countries have provided Russia with an important “neutral” buffer zone between Russia and NATO in the Nordic region. Thus, should Finland decide to join NATO, an additional 1,300 km of NATO border would be added to Russia’s territory, and NATO would have access to the strategically located Åland Islands in the Baltic Sea. Should Sweden also decide to join, the strategically placed Gotland Island would also become accessible to NATO commanders. Both scenarios would have implications for Russia’s anti-access and area-denial strategy in the sub-region (Kristoffersen, 2002: 516; Coffey and Kochis, 2016). Kaliningrad serves a key function in Russia’s anti-access and area denial strategies. The enclave is home to, among other, around 25,000 Russian troops, the Baltic fleet, an advanced S400 air defense system, Iskander missiles, and now also presumably Kalibr missiles (Coffey and Kochis, 2016). As such, if deemed necessary, the enclave may be used to prevent Nordic/NATO military forces from moving and operating within the Baltic sub-region theatre (anti-access) or deny

67 Denmark was also part of the Soviet Union’s nuclear strategy during the Cold War, where released documents revealed Soviet plans of nuclear attacks against Denmark in case of an East-West conflict (Dahl, 2014: 70).
Nordic/NATO forces to make use of strategic facilities, including bases and the like (area denial) and prevent them from getting control of the region (Permal, 2014: 18).

Thus, Russia’s diversified approach towards the High North and the Baltic sub-regions respectively, may be explained in terms of Russia geopolitically being more vulnerable in the Baltic sub-region. It is also an area where NATO is more consolidated and where NATO to a larger extent has increased its military activities after the Ukraine crisis. Furthermore, it is ultimately the sub-region where the military-political status quo is most vulnerable. As such, it is thus in Russia’s interest to increase its capabilities, show strength, and mark its presence in the area. The Russian air and naval provocations toward Sweden, Finland, and Denmark may thus be understood as part of Russia testing preparedness and mapping strategic locations, but also as sending a clear signal that Russia is paying close attention to developments in the region and is against in NATO advancements.

**6.3 Summary**

The aim of this chapter has been to explain the key findings in this thesis. In the first section, it was identified that since 2014, little change has taken place in Hermann’s second typology level, problem/goal-level. In other words, Russia’s security policy in the Nordic region is characterized by continuity. This may be explained with reference to the “slowness” of comprehensive goals, i.e. ends are usually more stable and take longer to change. It may also be a result of stable threat perceptions, i.e. the threats have not changed, but rather have become more visible in the face of increased tensions. This means that Russia does not have to change its ends, but rather seek alternative ways to reach them. Lastly, continuity in Russia’s security policy ends may also be a result of 1) Russia’s wish to maintain stability in the Nordic region, and 2) more pressing issues taking place in other regions, e.g. the ongoing conflict in Ukraine and Russian operations in Syria.

However, changes have taken place in Hermann’s third typology level, program changes. In other words, the ways Russia uses its means to achieve her ends have changed. This may be explained by the fact that such changes are easier to implement. Furthermore, if Russia’s interests and threat perceptions (ends) have remained relatively stable despite increased tensions, this may indicate that Russia sees it as more fitting to use its means differently (in this case more aggressively) in order to convey a message to is Nordic neighbors. This
message is that Russia is paying attention in the region and is ready to react. As such, the identified changes could be a result of Russia seeing the Western solidarity as a larger threat to its interests in the Nordic region after 2014 and this warrants a Russian reaction.

The second section of this chapter takes a closer examination of the identified variations in the empirical material regarding Russia’s approaches towards the Nordic region and whether they adhere to a diversified, partly diversified or unified approach. The empirical data revealed that in security matters Russia prefers a diversified, or partly-diversified approach, where it can address the Nordic countries, or constellations of countries, individually rather than as a collective whole. A diversified approach allows Russia more leeway in negotiations and it is a more effective way for Russia to convey its interests. Russia does also address the Nordic countries in a unified way, but then usually to signal dismay. Collectively, the Nordic countries are stronger and have more influence. Furthermore, for Russia, closer Nordic military cooperation is perceived as Swedish and Finnish rapprochement with NATO.

Organizations such as the EU and NATO, and countries such as the US, diminish the asymmetrical power relations between Russia and the smaller, Nordic countries. This is contrary to Russia’s interests, and Russia will therefore attempt to “divide and conquer” and meet further Western collaboration with critique and concern. On the sub-regional level, the diversified approach is explained with Russia’s interests, relations with the Nordic countries, and vulnerabilities in the respective areas. As such, the large discrepancies in Russia’s military behavior in the High North and the Baltic sub-regions may be a result of Russia being more vulnerable in the Baltic sub-region due to geographical factors (see table 6), a higher NATO presence, the location of – and access to - strategic infrastructure, the implications of a change in the military-political status quo (Sweden and Finland joining NATO), and so on, and therefore will be more prone to actively defend its interests.
7 Conclusion and implications of the research findings

The aim of this thesis has been to contextualize, analyze, and explain Russian security policy in the Nordic region with a particular focus on developments that have taken place since the Russian annexation of Crimea until October 2016. This aim was pursued by answering the three research questions presented in the introduction, which are: 1) What security policy ends does Russia have in the Nordic region, 2) What ways and means does Russia use, or is Russia ready to use, to achieve her ends, and 3) How can Russia’s security policy towards the Nordic region be explained?

The answer to the first question has been pursued through a combination of the collected empirical data (Chapter 2) and the contextualization provided by the historical background chapter (Chapter 3). The research question sets out to map Russia’s interests and goals in the Nordic region and identifies two political and two military security policy end categories, each with an offensive and defensive element: to maximize Russian influence, minimize Western influence, counter an increase in Western military presence, and secure military strategic depth. These categories are then analyzed closely and the chapter concludes that Russia’s security policy ends in the Nordic region are characterized by strong patterns of continuity, especially when compared to earlier periods.

The second research question set out to identify and analyze the ways and means that Russia has at its disposal to achieve its ends. This thesis keeps with a traditional understanding of security policy by focusing on military means, but it also broadens the concept to include political and informational means based on evidence derived from the empirical data and the increase in combined use of military and non-military means which reflect on Russian strategic thinking. The various ways that Russia is using its means are sorted and analyzed in accordance with the security policy ends categories (although it is emphasized that Russia’s means could be used in various ways to serve several ends). The analysis is built on the collected empirical data and research I have collected on my own (Attachment 1). The chapter concluded that despite technological advances and sophistication, Russia’s means have remained relatively stable. On the other hand, the various ways Russia is using her means (including to a larger extent combining military and non-military means), have changed both quantitatively (e.g. frequency) and qualitatively (e.g. more aggressively, closer proximity to
opponents’ boarders). Furthermore, the analysis identifies variations in Russia’s security policy approach towards the Nordic region.

The third research question sets out to explain the findings and tendencies identified in the analytical chapters dedicated to answering the first two research questions. These findings and tendencies were explained with reference to the theoretical frameworks presented in Chapter 2. The first interesting discovery is the remarkable degree of continuity in Russian security policy ends in the Nordic region. This can be explained by the fact that ends are usually comprehensive and take longer to change. It may also be tied to the fact that Russia’s threat perceptions and interests in the Nordic region have remained constant, even after increased tensions (tensions have increased). Instead, Russia perceives an intensification in the existing threats to its interests. Consequently, drastic changes in goals and objectives may not be necessary and the threats can be met with less drastic adjustments. Moreover, continuity in Russia’s security policy ends may also be a result of Russia’s unwillingness to allow the Nordic region to become an unstable region. Russia still has to show strength in the region, but would prefer not to drastically change her overall security policy ends 1) towards a region that Russia considers peaceful and stable, and has interests in keeping it this way and, 2) because more pressing issues are competing for Russia’s attention, i.e. the ongoing war in Ukraine and Russia’s military operations in Syria.

The second interesting discovery is tied to the observed changes in the ways Russia uses its means to meet its ends in the Nordic region. The increase in tensions in the Nordic region may not be characterized as a crisis per se, however, increased uncertainty tied to the intentions of other actors in the region has warranted a change in Russia’s behavior in order to convey a message to the Nordic countries and their Western allies alike, which is that Russia is ready and willing to defend its interests in the region if deemed necessary. The increased sophistication in Russia’s use of military and non-military means further allows Russia to approach the Nordic region more effectively. As such, the observed changes in ways may be a result of Russia applying a more sophisticated set of measures in order to achieve its otherwise stable ends.

The third observation related to the various ways Russia approaches the Nordic region are defined as; diversified, partly-diversified, or unified. It has been concluded that Russia prefers a diversified or partly diversified approach, rather than a unified, since the latter gives Russia less leeway to meet and pursue its security interests in the Nordic region.
context (see Chapter 3), this observation is not new and may be traced back as far as the Soviet era. Consequently, Russia’s preferred approach towards the Nordic region is characterized by continuity. However, in order to explain the diversified approach pursued by Russia in the High North and the Baltic sub-regions respectively (as identified in Chapter 5, see tables), a broader set of measures are employed in order to explain the differences. These include taking a more thorough review of various geopolitical considerations and Russia’s interests and vulnerabilities in the sub-regions.

What then, are the implications of these findings? Continuity in Russia’s security policy ends are helpful as this indicates what Russia’s interests and threat perceptions in the Nordic region are, and thus allows for a better understanding of why Russia acts and reacts the way it does. If Russia’s (incl. the Soviet Union) interests for the past 80 or so years have been to increase its own influence in the region, prevent increased Western solidarity and influence both politically and militarily, while maintaining Sweden and Finland as buffer zones, then it becomes more predictable how Russia will react when these interests are challenged. In other words, if it is known what Russia’s security interests are, and if it is also known that these have remained remarkably stable, then Russia’s behavior after 2014 becomes easier to understand and contextualize. Furthermore, if we assume that the lack of overarching changes in Russia’s security policy towards the Nordic region is partly due to Russia’s interest in the region remaining stable and peaceful, then it could enable a peaceful solution to the increased tension. Similarly, if we know that Russia prefers to approach the Nordic region in a diversified/partly diversified manner, we may assume that Russia will react more defensively when the Nordic countries forge closer military ties (both among themselves or with actors such as the US, NATO, and the EU).

On the other hand, the observed changes in Russia’s security policy ways and means imply that is necessary to view Russia as an actor who is able to use its means in a more sophisticated way to achieve it ends. Furthermore, Russia is willing to use its means more aggressively when faced with perceived (founded or unfounded) threats. Russia may simulate mock attacks on Sweden one day, and the next deny all accusations of provocative behavior through an effective (dis)information mobilization of Russian officials and diplomats and the media. Moreover, the overall deterioration in Russia Western relations after the Ukraine crisis may have led to an increased need to show Russian strength in the Nordic region. President Putin must convey a message domestically that Russia will not allow the West to dominate or
threaten Russia’s interests. In other words, it is not an entirely new Russia that has emerged after 2014, but it is a Russia which is to a larger extent willing to act aggressively (both militarily and rhetorically), which has implications for the Nordic region and makes Russia a less reliable actor.

By pursuing the aim to contextualize, analyze, and explain Russian security policy in the Nordic region, this thesis allows for a comprehensive study of Russia’s security policy in the Nordic region and contributes both empirically and theoretically to the field of Russian security studies. It contributes empirically by relaying research that has been conducted within a relevant and current time frame and in a field where literature and empirical contributions remain relatively scarce. This contribution may therefore help to increase our understanding of Russian security policy towards the Nordic region and nuances therein. The study has contributed theoretically in the sense that it has strived to explain continuity and change in Russia’s security policy towards the region. As such, this thesis has contributed to increased knowledge on Russian security policy which could also be applied to other regions.

Russia’s perception, whether founded or unfounded, is that a NATO build-up in the Nordic region is a threat to its security and that the Nordic countries’ close cooperation and solidarity with NATO, the EU, and the US is unfavorable to Russia’s interests. Consequently, a study of Russia’s security policy in the Nordic region should include these three pillars. Especially considering that what for a Western audience may seem like irrational Russian behavior (nuclear threats, violations of territorial borders, simulated attacks, mocking statements and so on) should on the contrary be understood as behavior that Russia deems as rational and “satisfying” in order to reach her ends. This has implications for the smaller Nordic countries whose security and defense cooperation is increasingly oriented towards each other and larger Western actors. Such moves may be perceived by Russia as a provocation threat, especially in a post-Ukraine context. It is therefore important to maintain dialogue with Russia and attempt to understand its way of thinking, since misinterpreting Russia’s security policy rationale in the Nordic region may lead to increased uncertainty and unnecessary provocations (from both sides).

This study has only focused on two aspects of Russia’s security policy means in the region; military and political-informational. Further research may broaden and deepen the analysis by including and studying a more comprehensive set of means, such as Russian cyber capabilities and intelligence gathering. Further research may also deepen the analysis by
closer examining Russia’s relations with the various Nordic actors to gain a better understanding of Russia’s approach vis-à-vis the actors individually and how this may affect Russia’s approach towards the Nordic region generally. This entails examining their relations over time and taking a closer look at historical factors. The research may also be deepened by including the Nordic countries as formal actors and by examining their perceptions of the new security situation as well as their understanding of Russia. Moreover, this thesis is mainly focused on external factors as a way to explain Russia’s security policy approaches toward the region. Further research may to a larger extend examine domestic political policy factors to gain a deeper understanding of Russia’s choices and way of thinking.
Literature


Retrieved from <https://fe-ddis.dk>.

Retrieved from <https://fe-ddis.dk>.


RUS MFA (2016a). “Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov’s interview with Swedish newspaper Dagens Nyheter, Moscow, April, 28, 2016”, April 28


RUS MFA (2016c). “Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov’s remarks and answers to media questions at a joint news conference following talks with Belarusian Foreign Minister Vladimir Makei, Minsk, May 16, 2016”, May 16


The Local (2014). “Russia on ‘near miss’: Swedes high on pot”, December 17


Attachments

Attachment 1 - Russian Air and Maritime activity aimed at the Nordic Region March 2015 – October 2016

Russian aircraft activity in the High North and Baltic sub-regions:

1. Russian fighter jets flew over the Baltic Sea with their transponders turned off
   Date: March 24th, 2015
   States involved: Sweden, Russia and other nations
   Geographical region: Baltic
   Incident details: Swedish military aircraft identified two Russian bombers (TU-22M “Backfire” escorted by two Su-27 flankers flying with their transponders turned off across the Baltic Sea
   Category: Near routine. The Swedish military said in their incident publication that the “threat level to Sweden has not increased, but the Swedish armed forces track, as always, … the increased activity in our neighborhood” (Reuter, 2015 ii). The incident took place without any violations, but takes place among increased tension between Russia and the West. Furthermore, the Swedish Foreign Minister, Margot Wallström, critiqued the incident demanding respect for the existing international rules: “We are tired of having to constantly protest these rule violations” (Sveriges radio, 2015 iii).

2. Russian military jet fires flares toward Swedish aircraft
   Date: June 10th, 2015
   States involved: Sweden, Finland
   Geographical region: Baltic
   Incident details: The Russian jet ejected flares toward the aircraft. Such flares are usually used to divert heat seeking robots.
   Category: Near routine. Swedish Armed forces stated that such behavior deviated from international codes that exist for how to behave when two government airplanes meet up in the air. It is not the first time this has happened, although no information about how often is public.

3. Russia Air Force transport plane violated Finnish airspace for nearly a minute
   Date: June 26th, 2015
   States involved: Finland, Russia
   Geographical Region: Baltic region, Finnish airspace.
   Incident details: A Russian Air Force transport plane violated Finnish airspace for nearly a minute on June 26th and penetrated 1.15 km into Finnish territory. Hornet fighter jets were sent to identify the Russian aircraft. The aircraft case west from Russia through international airspace and has his transmitter on but did not reply to Finnish officials’ request to leave.
**Category:** Near routine. Despite being a violation of Finnish airspace, the incident passed without further drama. This is allegedly the 6th instruction of Finnish airspace in a year (from May 2014).

4. **Heavy Russian TU-22 bombers flew towards Blekinge and Karlskrona, Sweden**.
   - **Date:** July 4th, 2015
   - **States involved:** Sweden, Russia
   - **Geographic Region:** Baltic
   - **Incident details:** Heavy Russian bombers flew towards Blekinge and Karlskrona followed by two Swedish Gripen aircraft. The Russian aircraft changed direction right before they reached Swedish airspace and then continued flying past Gotland where a conference discussing security policy and the NATO question was held.
   - **Category:** Serious. The Russian planes, that can carry nuclear weapons, have increasingly been flying and conducting exercises in the Baltic Sea. The routes of the planes may indicate that they were simulating attacks on targets in Blekinge or Karlskrona. Despite not violation Swedish territory, the planes flew unnecessarily close. Karlskrona is the HQ of the Navy whereas Blekinge holds an airbase with three Gripen aircraft. The flight was similar to the 28th of March 2013-flights. The incident was described as a provocation.

5. **Swedish aircraft identified and followed Russian aircraft, two TU-22 escorted by two SU-27**.
   - **Date:** August 31st, 2015.
   - **States involved:** Sweden, Russia.
   - **Geographical region:** Baltic (southern parts of the Baltic Sea and east of Gotland).
   - **Incident details:** Swedish jets followed and identified two Russian TU-22, escorted by two SU-27.
   - **Category:** Near routine.

6. **Russian bomber aircraft near Danish territorial airspace**.
   - **Date:** September 12th, 2015
   - **States involved:** Denmark, Russia.
   - **Geographic location:** Baltic
   - **Incident details:** Two Danish fighter jets were scrambled to intercept two Russian Tupolev TU-22M bombers approaching Denmark’s territorial airspace over the Baltic.
   - **Category:** Near routine: The planes never added Danish airspace and the incident was not dramatic. However, the activity is seen as part of the growing military activity in the Baltic Sea region.

7. **Sweden aircraft scrambled to identify Russian aircraft**
   - **Date:** October 27th, 2015
   - **States involved:** Sweden, Russia and an unknown number of other states
   - **Geographical Region:** Southeastern parts of the Baltic Sea
   - **Incident details:** Swedish aircraft identified a Russian TU-134 UBL bomber.
   - **Category:** Near routine. No violation of airspace.
8. **Russian aircraft chased Swedish aircraft across the Baltic Sea.**
   - **Date:** 15th of January, 2016
   - **States involved:** Sweden, Russia
   - **Geographic region:** Baltic region, close to the Danish island Bornholm.
   - **Incident details:** The Russian aircraft continued pursuit of the Swedish aircraft after the identification was over. Two Swedish Jas Gripen-aircraft quickly scrambled to assist.
   - **Category:** Serious. The incident was described as divergent from normal Russian aircraft behavior. The Swedish Armed Forces placed the incident on a level that warranted publicity. According to Sweden, the Russian behavior has become more provocative and increased the risk for incidents.

9. **Russian Sukhoi jet flew less than 50 feet (15 meters) from a US destroyer**
   - **Date:** April 12th, 2016
   - **States involved:** US, Poland, Russia
   - **Geographic location:** Baltic sea
   - **Incident details:** Two unarmed Russia fighter jets flew very close to a USSS Donald Cook while it was sailing in the Baltic Sea. According to US sources, the planes flew approximately 15 meters from the ship. The ship, an Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer was conducting routine training.
   - **Category:** Serious. According to European Command the Cook “…. Encountered multiple, aggressive flight maneuvers by Russian aircraft … We have deep concerns about the unsafe and unprofessional Russian flight maneuvers. Furthermore, according to a US official the aircraft was flying in a manner that resembled an attack. The incident is categorized as serious as it could have ended in an accident that could have escalated tension between the US and Russia and the overall tension in the region.

10. **Russian fighter did barrel roll over a US reconnaissance plane**
    - **Date:** 29th of April, 2016
    - **States involved:** US, Russia
    - **Geographical region:** Baltic
    - **Incident details:** The US Air Force RC-135 plane was flying a routine route in international airspace when it was intercepted by the Russian SU-27 fighter. The aircraft was at the closest only 30 meters from the American plane and performed a dangerous, high-speed maneuver.
    - **Category:** Serious. The air intercept was described as unsafe and unprofessional and had the potential to cause serious harm and injury to all aircrews involved. Such actions also have the potential to unnecessarily escalate tensions between countries.

11. **Russian aircraft able to carry nuclear weapons flew alongside the Norwegian cost**
    - **Date:** September 22nd, 2016
    - **States Involved:** Norway, the U.K., Russia
    - **Graphical Region:** High North, Norwegian Sea
    - **Incident details:** Media spokesperson at the Norwegian Joint Headquarters (Forsvarets Operative Hovedkvarter), Brynjar Stordal calls the incident “undramatic” and that the Norwegian aircraft shadowing the Russian planes were routine (Quick Reaction Alert-mission). The Russian Tupolev or TU-160 “Blackjack”, was frequently seen alongside the
Norwegian cost during the Cold War. These aircraft have the ability to carry nuclear weapons, but it was unclear if they did. The Russian aircraft flew only in international airspace. Stordal said that the Norwegian Air Defense have had 12 scrambles so far this year (with NATO-aircraft) and has identified 17 Russian aircraft so far this year. The unusual thing here, however, was that the Russian aircraft are flying so far south. Usually they fly in the Barents Sea and down towards the Norwegian cost.

**Category:** Near-routine. The Norwegian aircraft were superseded by British aircraft when they got close to Scottish airspace.

12. **Two Russian supersonic bombers flew underneath a passenger plane flying from Iceland to Sweden.**

   **Date:** September 22nd, 2016.
   **States involved:** Iceland, Sweden, Russia.
   **Geographic location:** Icelandic airspace (High North?)
   **Incident details:** The incident involved three Russian Blackjack Tu-160. The aircraft flew in Icelandic airspace and later beneath a passenger plane flying from Keflavik towards Stockholm.
   **Category:** Serious: Despite the Russian actions keeping within international regulations such behavior includes a good amount of risk. The pilot of the plane reacted to the turned off transponders as this means that there will be no warning should the plane come too close. This could lead to a collision. The Icelandic Foreign Ministry will contact Russian authorities to protest against what they perceive as “dangerous flights”.

13. **Two Russian fighters are suspected to have violated Finnish airspace twice in one day.**

   **Date:** October 6th, 2016.
   **States involved:** Finland and Russia
   **Geographic location:** The Baltic sub-region, south of the Finnish Gulf.
   **Incident details:** Two Russian SU-27 fighters were detected, possibly violating Finnish airspace in the Gulf of Finland south of Porvoo.
   **Category:** Serious: The incident, if true, deviates from usual Russian aviation conduct close to Finland’s borders. Furthermore, the incident takes place the same day as the Deputy US Defense Minister, Robert Work visits Finland to sign a deal on closer military cooperation.

**Russian maritime activity in the High North and Baltic sub-regions:**

1. **Finnish Navy detected possible underwater target in territorial waters off Helsinki.**

   **Date:** April 27th-28th, 2015
   **States Involved:** Finland, Russia(?)
   **Geographical Region:** Baltic, Finnish territorial waters.
   **Incident details:** Possible targets were located close to the limit of territorial waters of Helsinki. A search was conducted by surface vessels on the 27th. A new detection was made
in the search area on Tuesday 28th and navy vessels fired handheld underwater depth charges as a warning.

Category: Near routine. The incident was not dramatic. Despite the Finnish military being very cautious with provided information, the use of small charges is a sign that foreign submarines most likely were detected.

SOURCES