

«Present challenges for security and resilience in The North European Area and The South of Norway.»

I am grateful to the organizers for establishing Security Forum South. This is a very timely initiative. Earlier this month, our prime minister told the Norwegian population that we have to be prepared for war. The Government also published a new national security strategy underlining that we now live in the most demanding security situation since the Second World War. Similar statements can be heard all over western Europe. This feeling of uncertainty and threat is also reflected in most of the population. Suspicion of sabotage and foreign interference in elections are daily news. Some claim that we live in a period of low scale war.

So, what is the basis for this pessimism and fear? I believe there are many factors which contribute. Russia and other authoritarian states have long challenged the existing international order. Russia today is very different from the Soviet Union in the past. Its population is about fifty percent of the Soviet population. The Warsaw Pact does not exist anymore. NATO has been expanded from 16 to 32 members. But the Russian partnership with China and other authoritarian states represents an important challenge.

The ongoing high intensity war in the heart of Europe is of course a major factor. This happens while most European countries have neglected their defense since the end of the cold war. The very mixed signals coming from the US government is another source of great concern. The Trump-administration is pursuing policies which could undermine the democratic values which have characterized the western world for decades. The trade policies and the tariffs introduced by the US government could lead to serious conflicts among the western countries. On top of this, the US government is threatening the territorial integrity of Denmark and Canada, two very close Allies. Since the second World War, we have considered the United States as the leader of the free world. In Europe we have relied on US military, political and economic strength to protect our territories and values. All of this is now called into question.

We must also understand the difficulties that the Americans face. Their budget deficit is alarming. They also need huge investments to maintain their dominant military position. Meanwhile China is building a formidable military force that could threaten US interest and US Allies in the Pacific area.

The cohesion and solidarity of the west is also challenged by strong nationalistic trends in many European countries. This could undermine efforts to maintain a united front against Russian aggression, and a common position against Chinese influence. In Europe we are facing the negative aspects of migration, organized crime, inequality and general distrust in elected governments. The internet is producing a lot of unverified information and conspirations. The optimism after the end of the cold war, and the

prospects for spread of democracy and rule of law, has been replaced by fear of war and disagreement in the west.

It will probably be even more difficult to maintain security in the south and eastern part of Europe. There is more political, economic and cultural diversity than in Northern Europe. We in Northern Europe also have a responsibility to support our Allies in the south. War in this part of Europe could easily spread to the north.

The most important factor will be western unity and solidarity. If that cohesion is withering away, any state in Europe will be vulnerable to threats or attack. The old slogan is still valid: If we don't hang together, we will hang separately.

The High North has been the focus for Norwegian defense and security policy. Clearly, the Northern Areas are most exposed to threats from Russia because Russia has many strategic bases close to the Norwegian border. It is in this area that Russia has access to the Atlantic. The Arctic is also proving to be of great economic value for Russia, and in the future, an important waterway to Asia.

Even so, if there is a threat to North Norway, it is also a threat to the rest of the country. An armed attack on North Norway is an attack on the whole country. We need to prepare for defense and deterrence in the South as well as in the North. If Russia prevails in Ukraine, they could be able to restore their armed forces relatively soon, perhaps in a period of 5-8 years, may be even earlier.

Almost all countries in Northern Europe are now investing in a much larger and more effective military force. But it will take many years to establish forces with necessary sustainability and readiness. All countries in Northern Europe plan to spend at least 3 % of GNP on defense. Perhaps this will be increased to 5 % at the upcoming NATO-summit in the Hague. This number will probably also include investment in defense industry, infrastructure and efforts to increase resilience both in military as well as in civilian sector.

I do not believe that The United States will withdraw from NATO. Too much is at stake, and there is an overwhelming majority in the US Congress who support NATO. The Trump administration has confirmed several times that their commitment to article 5 in the NATO-treaty remains valid. But The United States cannot continue to compensate for lacking European defense contributions.

South Norway is in many ways more important than before. Subsea cables and gas pipes from the North Sea and The Norwegian Sea provide enormous amount of electricity and energy to the continent and the UK. Supplies for military operations and civilian life must pass through South Norway or the adjacent ocean areas. If our Allies in The Baltic region are threatened, the southern areas of Sweden, and Norway, together with Denmark will provide basis for reinforcement and resupply.

Obviously, the infrastructure in these areas must be protected in crises and war. This is important for all Nordic and Baltic countries, and for other Allies with a defense commitment to this region.

There are many positive factors. All Nordic countries are now members of NATO, and we are all part of the same operational command. Norway which has been an island in NATO, is now almost surrounded by close Allies. The Nordic cooperation is very close. We consult and coordinate our positions on all matters relevant for security and defense of our region. We cooperate to let forces from other Allies have easy access through our countries. A strong Allied defense in Sweden and the Baltic Area will also provide protection for most of South Norway. Therefore, the strong Finnish defenses, the large modern military forces of Poland, the buildup of strong military forces in the three Baltic countries, the promise that Germany will establish the strongest army in Europe, the ambitious Swedish and Danish defense plans, show that we will be able to establish very strong military posture in Northern Europe. On top of this, we can rely on effective and rapid reinforcement from our partners in the UK, the Netherlands and France and I believe also from Canada and the United States depending on the developments in the Pacific region. The American, British, and French nuclear forces will also in the future be decisive for our ability to prevent war and deter our opponents.

Most of the Norwegian population live in the south, primarily in the coastal areas. This is where most of the critical infrastructure is located, including harbors, industry, communication hubs and population centers. In the current circumstances hybrid warfare, intelligence operations and sabotage represent a threat to such targets even in peacetime. A lot of grey zone activities all over Europe contributes to fear and uncertainties. Globalism with the almost free flow of goods, information and people make it difficult for our authorities to have adequate insight and control. Many firms, not least in shipping, rely on foreign manpower to conduct their business. We must assume that the widespread intelligence collection conducted in our country has revealed many of our vulnerabilities. These vulnerabilities will certainly be exploited in crises and war. Our defenses must include local regional and nation authorities, military and civilian assets, and robust legislation for crises and war. Our total defense needs update and reinforcement. Furthermore, we need to exercise these plans at the national, regional and local level. A recent report published by the National Audit Office concluded that we have not even decided which of our harbors are of critical importance. Furthermore, the local and regional authorities have not received satisfactory information from our military about the requirements in times of crises and war. This reflects in my opinion that our military forces do not have the manpower and organization needed to carry out a proper defense planning.

The home guard will be a most helpful instrument in the defense of South Norway. This force will be reinforced, not least here in this part of the country. Increase from 40000 to 45000 is welcome. I wish there would be even larger increases given the many and complicated tasks relating to surveillance and protection in Southern Norway. There is a lot of competence in our home guard personnel. The naval home guard does not exist anymore. I believe the home guard should be expanded to compensate for this loss. Our

coastal areas contain perhaps our most valuable infrastructure, and the importance of these areas must be reflected in our defense plans and priorities.

New technologies are introduced very rapidly in weapons systems and their use. There is a new revolution in warfare. The experiences from Ukraine demonstrate this. Long range precision guided weapons are also a threat to South Norway. If there is a conflict in the Baltic Sea Region or in the North, South Norway could be an important staging area for Allied operations. With this comes also a need for protection. Air defense has not been given priority in our defense budgets since the cold war. We need long range air defenses to protect our military and civilian infrastructure combined with sophisticated electronic warfare equipment.

The rapidly developing defense and security cooperation amongst the countries in Northern Europe, give hope for the establishment of a comprehensive regional air defense. This is possibly the most realistic long-term prospect also for the defense of Southern Norway.

Much will depend on our ability to recruit enough people to security and defense related jobs. There are shortages in all parts of our armed forces. This is also true for most of our Allies. Conscription gives us access to a lot of well qualified personnel. We need to recruit and retain many reserve personnel in the future for all services and for many support functions in our society. Personnel policy will be a key element in our efforts to build a credible defense and sufficient resilience.

In conclusion, I believe it is possible to maintain credible deterrence and thus to avoid the horror of war in our area also in the future. It will require large investments and full implementation of defense plans. Defense and resilience will take a more prominent role in public and private life. But the most important factor will be our ability to keep the solidarity and the cohesion amongst our Allies