Geopolitical *Geworfenheit*: Northern Europe After the Post-Cold War

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Abstract: The 'greater Nordic space' between Great Britain, Germany and Russia has over time varied with the balance of power. The Baltic States e.g. have been in and out of the space, rejoining by regaining sovereignty after the end of the Cold War. Russia's actions in Ukraine and beyond during 2014 mark the end of the Post-Cold War period and its aspiration to peaceful integration. The small states of the greater Nordic space are now rediscovering their inescapable geopolitical nearness to Russia. Drawing on RSCT and Nordic-Baltic integration literature, the article contributes to understanding the Northern European part of the Euro-Russian Regional Security Complex. Theoretically, the article links RSCT and integration logics through the twin concepts of a 'security region' (given outside-in as one part of a negatively defined RSC), and a 'political region' (created inside-out under the shield provided by the security region). To link the two concepts, Heidegger's idea of Geworfenheit, or thrownness, is employed to capture how the states of the greater Nordic space are always already subject to the dynamics underlying that space and how this condition affects the states' interpretation of their changing surroundings, including translation into political regionality. Empirically, the article therefore argues that Russia's new foreign policy has created a greater Nordic space 'security region' – supported by the United States – that is paving the way for new integration initiatives to a strengthened 'political region' inside the space, possibly as a 'greater Nordic region'.

Keywords: Europe-Russia relations, Nordic region, RSCT, geopolitics, integration, regions.

Introduction

Regions and the Greater Nordic Space

For centuries, the traditional great powers of Northern Europe – Great Britain, Germany, and Russia – left between them a dynamically evolving zone, the greater Nordic space. Relations among great powers still define this greater Nordic space, which the balance of power has kept open and in flux.[1] Inside the space, some of the nation-states that

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grew forth were given structural opportunity to prosper while others were not. Some of those that prospered after World War II did so in comparable ways and became known as *Norden* or the Nordic states. Some of those states that were not given the structural opportunity to prosper were instead swallowed by an external great power. Having emerged to sovereignty after the Cold War, the Baltic States have since established strong and formal relations with Nordic and European partner states through the European Union and NATO, through bilateral relations with the Nordic countries, and through international economic integration. The states of the greater Nordic space (a group that includes Poland as a special case) share the liberal democratic regime type, yet are divided by institutional affiliations (Norway and Iceland are not EU members; Finland and Sweden are not members of NATO), by language as a placemat for cultural heritage (the group contains Nordic/Germanic, Finno-Ugric and Slavic languages), and by socio-political models (extensive Nordic welfare states and various reformed economies with smaller social footprints). What unites them is instead a certain kind of inescapable spatial 'thrownness', exacerbated by the negatively defined greater Nordic space. Unrelated to the states' individual characteristics, this thrownness or *Geworfenheit* expresses the unavoidable relational character of their geopolitical situatedness in a space delineated more by the great powers outside it than by any endogenous effort.

During the two decades following the end of the Cold War, political leaders in the greater Nordic space mostly deemphasized the logic of great power relations. So did academia. Yet 2014 showed that great power politics is again clearly present in the greater Nordic space. Russia's intervention in Ukraine and other actions in particular over and near the Baltic Sea constitute a break with the established Post-Cold War order. That period is now over. Accordingly, these actions have changed security perceptions in the countries in the greater Nordic space, creating conditions for renewed political integration and the strengthening of a greater Nordic region. This article argues that one effect of the Russian destabilization of Ukraine is the creation of external conditions that are conducive to a strengthened sense of regionality in the greater Nordic space. The argument draws on two complimentary and related concepts of region, a 'security region', derived from Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) and a 'political region', derived from integration studies. A 'security region', the article argues, is a subset of a Regional Security Complex (RSC); it is shaped by external power relations and represents an exogenously given possibility for internal, regional cooperation. A 'political region', in contrast, is the exploitation of such a possibility and the space provided by a security region. It consists in the endogenously developed relations among states in a web of practices that, if sufficiently extensive, will amount to a region. Together, the two concepts express how states are always already 'thrown' into a geopolitical situation, and that this geopolitical *Geworfenheit* shapes the potential for regional cooperation.

The article is structured in three main sections. In the theory section extant Nordic integration and RSCT literature is employed to describe the two regional concepts, to discuss their relationship, and connect them in the concept of *Geworfenheit*. In the analysis section, these concepts are then applied to the situation in the greater Nordic

space including material changes behind Russian foreign policy and actions as well as the perceptions of these actions on the Northern part of the Euro-Russian RSC. The final section sums up the argument's theoretical and empirical ramifications and point to opportunities for further research.

Theorizing Nordic-Baltic Regional Cooperation: Security Regions and Political Regions

On a political atlas of Earth, the global surface is divided into dry and wet areas, land and sea. Each of the larger lumps is easily defined as a continent. The further division of the continents into territories marks the existence of states, with a mutually exclusive existence in space. Most states abut other states on land, creating the foundation for political, economic, and cultural intercourse, as well as relations that are about security and which may question even the very borders that define their relative territories. In everyday language, groups of countries that are geographically close and which share sufficient amounts of political, economic, cultural or positive security relations are described as regions. As regional status arises from political practice, it also serves political purposes. As opposed to the natural divisions on the atlas, regions are fundamentally political constructs. A distinction between the painting and its canvas is therefore necessary when discussing regional dynamics. Part of this means providing an improved theoretical understanding of how regions arise and in particular how external security dynamics shape and enable internal potential for increasing regionality. In this way, the relationship between regional security and political region-building emerges as an item of theoretical interest: it is this we capture below with the concept of *Geworfenheit*.

Inside the greater Nordic space, various geometries of Nordic-Baltic cooperation have received extensive attention since the end of the Cold War and the reemergence of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania as independent, sovereign states.[2] Indeed, the empirical subject of Nordic-Baltic cooperation has on several occasions served to further more theoretical discussions about the effects of international cooperation on regional groupings as well as on the conditions and limits of regional malleability.[3] Important contributions of a broadly constructivist or post-foundationalist perspective have made the case that regional groupings are essentially political (as opposed to natural) in character and that attention should be paid to how such groups are being promoted or constructed by various political agents. Especially the character of Norden and its potential inclusion of the Baltic States or the limits to its malleability has been a recurrent theme.[4] While the principle of regional malleability and the political character of creating regionality are well examined, this literature has paid less attention to external conditions that limit

2   See e.g. Hamilton *et al.* 2014; Dahl and Järvenpää 2014; Bergman 2006; Browning and Joenniemi 2004; Hubel 2004; Archer 1998; Wæver 1997; Neumann 1994; Wæver 1992.

3   Bergman 2006; Lagerspetz 2003; Jukarainen 1999.

4   Adler-Nissen and Gad 2014; Bergman 2006; Archer 1998; Neumann 1994; Wæver 1992.

and enable regionality. This is perhaps not surprising as constructivist perspectives have emphasized the political potential of change through new – bottom-up, non-state, and civil society – discursive practices. An interesting early example makes the case for a region-building approach that is explicitly tied to a normative goal of 'open(ing) the social field to new actors and new initiatives'.[5] This move is warranted and its utility proven by real-world developments as well as by the extensive subsequent literature.

By introducing a continuum of approaches to regional studies ranging from outside-in to inside-out, Neumann (1994) in the same study provides a first cut of understanding the dynamics that condition regionality. His outside-in perspective is close to geopolitics and focuses on great power relations, high-politics and the structural level of international relations. Regions are in this way conceived as a matter of balance of power issues, even if small state action may also affect outcomes. His inside-out perspective is closer to political sociology and focuses on intra-regional governmental and private actors, high and low politics and transnational relations. Regions are in this way the result of a thickness of relations of various kinds, often produced and reproduced in a complex pattern ranging from politics to economic issues to cultural and historical affinities. Applying both perspectives to Northern Europe in the post-Cold War years, Neumann shows how each enables a different narrative account as well as different conditions of possibility of political projects regarding regional political communities in the greater Nordic space. In his analysis, the outside-in structural conditions carry the day when it comes to understanding why there has been such a growth in both political projects and literature on cooperation in the greater Nordic space after the Cold War.

It is possible to attempt to understand regionality as a dynamic happening beyond security[6]. Yet even in Neumann's own account only the outside-in perspective convincingly explains how conditions changed after the end of the Cold War for politicians and academics alike to begin painting on a fresh canvas. To put it bluntly, it was the structural change of the end of bipolarity that enabled new political dynamics to grow forth. If we want to understand the recent regional-themed developments in the greater Nordic space it is therefore necessary to include the security dimension.

Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) is the most prominent attempt to systematize a security focus on regional dynamics.[7] Security relations that 'link together sufficiently closely that their securities cannot be considered separate from each other' are what define regions. In this way, regionality is created by the aggregate 'fears and aspirations of the separate units', and the regional perspective is in this way a necessary prism as both the 'security of the separate units and the process of global power intervention can be grasped only through understanding the regional security dynamics'.[8] As RSCT is attuned

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5   Neumann 1994, 74.

6   E.g. Browning and Joenniemi 2004.

7   Buzan and Wæver 2003; Buzan 1991.

8   Buzan and Wæver 2003, 43.

to structural historical changes, it recognizes particular opportunities for a regional perspective after the end of the Cold War as super power 'overlay' wanes from e.g. Europe allowing new regional dynamics to flourish.[9] Another advantage of RSCT is that it explains how enmity relations – a less emphasized dynamic in integration and security community theory – may create regionality as much as amity.[10] In this way, RSCT offers a systematic approach that enables an analysis of how events during 2014 have changed the potential for regionality in the greater Nordic space, and of how external security dynamics have shaped a new opportunity for political cooperation.

In the European case, however, a major application of RSCT, Buzan and Wæver's *Regions and Powers* (2004) appears to have focused too little on the remaining superpower's continuous role in underpinning basic security structures through the balance of power. The United States in reality play a role akin to that of the Gulf Stream for Northern Europe: both are little noticed, but the absence of either would radically change the landscape. During both the Cold War, the post-Cold War period, and the new third phase, American extended deterrence is the crucial building block of European security. During the post-Cold War period, the 1990s reconfiguration of regional affiliations through NATO enlargement to include the Baltic States was a major geopolitical achievement. It was driven continuously and almost solely by the United States as described in the thorough account provided by a central located insider.[11] This article therefore adopts an RSC perspective that is more sensitive to the constitutive role of superpowers in RSCs (what the book pejoratively call 'penetration') while still acknowledging the role of small states in shaping RSC dynamics. It also draws on the softer integration or region-building approaches as it acknowledges the potential of political action. In consequence, the analysis below echoes Neumann in employing and exploring two complimentary concepts of region.

One of these regional concepts is concerned with external, hard security issues and begins with a modified RSC that gives due weight to the global distribution of power relations as well as the classical expression of this – military power – while also acknowledging the important role of relative distances and geography. In this RSC, state actors constitute a region together by sharing relative geography but also security relations, including with relevant outside powers. In the case of *negative* constitutive security relations, the RSC itself is typically divided into subsets. Shaped by their negative external relations to the other side of the RSC and possibly supported by external powers, these subsets are created outside in, leaving the resulting states in a shared structural condition. It is this condition that creates a geopolitical *Geworfenheit* for the states involved. These inescapable and exogenously given subsets of a modified RSC are labeled 'security regions'. Security regions are then building blocks of antagonistic RSCs.

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9   *Ibid.*, 17–18, 26.

10   Deutsch 1957, cf. also Adler and Barnett 1998.

11   Asmus 2002.

The other regional concept is concerned with regions ostentatiously shaped from the inside out, based on affinities in politics, history, culture, linguistics, and so on. In this kind of region, state actors create, sustain and change a region through political initiatives with reference to future utility and past commonality of various kinds. We call this kind of region a 'political region'. Such political regions may vary with regard to the depth of the community (or thickness of relations) and to the kinds of relations shared.

The relationship between security and political regions is an important dynamic in IR and in crucial to regional security. As the security region is shaped outside-in, the states involved are 'thrown' into their spatial context. It is an inescapable condition of their geopolitical being. But more than merely functioning as a set of shackles, this spatial and relational condition also always already imperceptibly affects their outlooks, including on potentials for regional political cooperation.

In Martin Heidegger's ontology, the concept of *Geworfenheit* or 'thrownness' plays a small but important role.[12] As a subset of the larger German hermeneutical tradition, Heidegger's complex ontology emphasizes the situatedness of being. Since existence (or *Dasein*) is that which understands being, sense making, for Heidegger, consists in 'thrown projection'. The two constituent parts of this 'thrown projection' show how sense making is fundamentally marked by 'both freedom and finitude'.[13] *Geworfenheit* is then akin to a finite conditioning, given by the concrete being-in-space-and-time as it expresses both the givenness of being 'in a world and amidst things' and a deeper, ontologically prior finitude that limits sense-making's account of itself since it is 'necessarily self-obscure'.[14] In geopolitical terms, it is of little surprise that states should be subject to both meanings of Heidegger's thrownness. States are after all practice-based human networks of sense making, continuously recalibrating their vision to their power politics context.[15] Like a prism bending light, geopolitical *Geworfenheit* affects the state's interpretation of its surroundings and indicates how adaptation to changed surroundings takes place over time as an interpretive activity, as geopolitical sense making.

Our two concepts of region differ by their mode of becoming (outside-in and inside-out) as well as by their status (the security region is necessarily also defined materially, whereas the political region's ultimate materiality is driven by ideas). The two concepts of region are related by the condition of *Geworfenheit*: Security regions, ontologically prior to political regions, will affect outlooks for political regionality. In this way, the main difference and link between the two kinds of regional concept hangs on the exogenous/endogenous distinction. A security region is exogenously *given* while the political region is endogenously *created*.[16] A political region does therefore not necessarily follow

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12   Heidegger 1962, 134–140; cf. also Withy 2011; Steiner 1991, 88–91.

13   Withy 2011, 61.

14   *Ibid.*, 79–80.

15   Bevir and Rhodes 2010.

16   Cf. the distinction between 'structure related' and 'actor related' factors in Archer 1999.

from a security region. Even if it does, endogenous efforts may or may not happen in explicit recognition of structural conditions given exogenously. If the political region, metaphorically speaking, is like a group of plants, setting roots and growing closer together, then the security region as a subset of a RSC is like the flower pot, defining the regional space from the outside in. As security is one of the kinds of relations that states may share in order to form a political region, it might be posited that security regions are always already political regions.

The creation of political dynamics can itself be a motif for action stemming from the antagonistic relations outside the security region. Political regions, moreover, do not necessarily have to fit to the geographical space created by security conditions, but can take alternate, smaller forms depending e.g. on the perceived potential and need for a political region.

In the end, the relationship is what links security dynamics – including the important regional ones – with those political regional constellations we refer to as regions in everyday language. Accordingly, while political regional integration may have centrifugal effects they are largely contingent upon the externally given structure determined by security relationships. The following section explores such a dynamic in the greater Nordic space from changes outside-in, to changes in perception as well as emerging policy initiatives that are strengthening the sense of regionality in the greater Nordic space.

Resurgent Russia and the Northern Subset of the European RSC

During 2014 it became very clear that European security is structured as a RSC, stretched between on the one side Russia (and CSTO member states) and on the other NATO member states including prominently the United States. In between are a number of states that are partly affiliated with NATO, from Finland and Sweden to Ukraine and Georgia, and others that while ostensibly and institutionally Western have for some years been on a path away from liberal democracy and perhaps even drifting toward the Russian orbit. While this RSC had been in the making for about a decade, only Russian actions and European perceptions and interpretations of their significance made this stand out clearly during 2014.

The greater Nordic space is a high-tension subset of the Euro-Russian RSC. This is evidenced by not only the pattern of Russian military exercises and bombing flight routes that echo practices from the Cold War, but also prominently the explicit nuclear threats leveled against Denmark and the Baltic States during the spring of 2015.[17] This section tracks how Russia's position with regard to the greater Nordic space including the security perceptions inside the space appeared from 2014 onward. It argues that in and

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17   Frear *et al.* 2014; Agence France Presse 2015; Hoyle and Evans 2015; see also the 2015 joint op-ed by the Nordic ministers of defence. More generally, Hubel 2004 also defines the Baltic 'subregion' as a subset of the European region.

by themselves changes in Russian foreign policy harden the space as a 'security region'. Even so, for the security region to substantialize, domestic perceptions need to change in accordance with the externally given shift. Such a substantialization, however, is likely to be mediated by the states' condition of *Geworfenheit* and the tracking therefore has to focus on the changing perceptions. The final part of the section explores possible future dynamics in the shape of how security perceptions can lead to more integration as a greater Nordic 'political region'.

Negative security relations are not just about perceptions, they are also about military capability. As both perceptions and capabilities matter, it is clear that Russia's actions of 2014 did not come out of the blue. Military reforms and increased defense budgets, changed politico-strategic outlooks and a string of in hindsight ominous incidents, most notably the 2008 invasion in Georgia, preceded them. Perceptions have clearly changed on the NATO and non-Russian side during 2014, but the material conditions for these perceptions were brought about in the preceding years.

The single largest factor behind the end of the post-Cold War period is Russian military modernization, fueled by a growing economy. Following Singer's classical definition of threat as capability plus intent, it is less important to discern which came first than to acknowledge that they are mutually dependent.[18] In 2008, Russia launched a wide-ranging and well-funded military reform. Between 2008 and 2013, the Russian defense budget grew from around USD43bn to 68bn according to numbers from the *Military Balance.* The defense reform comprised a reduced officers corps, enhanced NCO training, a simplified command structure and a decentralized, more mobile army structure (brigades over divisions) as well as a 10-year weapons modernization program aimed at nuclear and conventional weapons, including 'new planes, helicopters, ships, missiles, and submarines for the Ground Forces, Air Force, Navy, and other arms of service'.[19] The reforms were relatively quickly perceived as a success in spite of challenges to implementation. By 2012, the Swedish Defense Research Institute declared them to have had 'impressive results'. A year later they were judged to have 'already resulted in visible improvement',[20] and by 2014 the reforms 'aimed at developing better-trained, better-equipped and better-led smaller [21] and more mobile forces' could be said to be 'well under way in Russia', leading to a 'huge improvement over the state of affairs in the Russian military as recently as 10–15 years ago'.[22]

In absolute and abstract terms, Russian military growth might not in itself change things. But since security is relational, situated and ultimately geographic, RSCT helps explain why military might matters more the closer two states are to one another. Because of the

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18   Singer 1958.

19   Nichol 2011, 2; Järvenpää 2014.

20   Hedenskog and Vendil Pallin 2013.

21   Vendil Pallin 2013, 15.

22   Järvenpää 2014, 12, 2.

wars in Georgia and Ukraine, former Soviet states are vulnerable to Russian intervention, especially those like the Baltic States that have large Russian minorities. As the Baltic States are NATO members, the credibility of NATO as such comes under pressure if the Baltic States do – and here, military geography matters. Therefore, the salient comparison regarding the interpretation of the Russian military budget of about USD 68 billion may not be the United States' budget (around 600 billion), but those of the three Baltic States (combined around 1.2 billion).[23] When proximity matters, the actual practice – in the sense of both *sich zu üben* and deployment – of military capability is an important element in implementing and communicating modernization of armed forces.

Russia's considerably increased activity in military exercises in the vicinity of the greater Nordic space is an example of this. Over the years 2010–2012, Russian military exercise activity increased substantially, from three over eight to 11 ground force exercises in the Western military district alone.[24] In terms of the character and scope of the increased activity, a form of readiness exercise not seen in the post-Cold War period was reintroduced in the same period.[25] Most notably, the size of these exercises grew substantially too. The Zapad-2013 exercise was held in September 2013 as part of an annual geographically rotated exercise. The predecessor, Zapad-2009, comprised around 20,000 troops. In official reporting to the OSCE as well as in a notification to the NATO-Russia Council, the 2013-version would cover around 22,000 troops. Yet this number was 'just the tip of the iceberg'.[26] As the reported number referred to only ground troops, the inclusion of also participating air and naval forces, various staff and logistics units, Ministry of Interior troops and civil defense units instead made the total run to between 70,000 and 90,000 depending on whether a parallel Ministry of Interior exercise was included.[27]

Russian modernization of its armed forces as well as the practical training of the resulting capabilities in major exercises is a major change in the material facts of the greater Nordic space. Even so, both in the classical unitary concept of threat as well as in the relational RSC perspective, such capability needs to be paired with another element in order to become a security issue, namely either intent or that it be perceived as a security issue. In terms of intent, Russian formal foreign policy statements have in fact shown a 'more assertive Russia focusing on its own path' and one that, based on an analysis of content and trends in formal policy documents, institutional decision-making structures and policy speeches' will continue for years to come'.[28] This hardened security policy stance was accentuated after domestic Russian protests in 2011 and 2012[29], emphasizing the

23   *Military Balance* 2013.

24   Hedenskog and Vendil Pallin 2013, 46–48.

25   Järvenpää 2014, 5–8.

26   *Ibid., 8.*

27   *Ibid.*

28   Persson 2013, 84

29   Allison 2014; Persson 2013.

regime's distancing itself from liberal democracy and civil rights as exemplified in the international spat over gay rights legislation during the 2014 Olympic Winter Games in Sochi, Russia.

Adding to this, the changed Russian foreign policy behavior more directly contributes to the interpretation of both capability and intent. The annexation of Crimea and the thinly veiled, but persistent hybrid warfare efforts to destabilize Ukraine and install breakout republics in its eastern provinces dramatically changed Russia's relations with its neighbors during 2014. In this way, the annexation and the 'attempts to further dismember the Ukrainian state' pose a challenge 'potentially for the wider European security order of a greater magnitude than anything since the end of the Cold War'.[30] Following in the footsteps of the 2008 war with Georgia, Russian changing foreign policy amounts to a challenge to fundamental principles of the European security architecture since the end of World War II, including respect for established borders. President Putin's public embrace of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact is a deeply symbolic gesture, symbolic of a will to go beyond the Post-Cold War security architecture.[31] To this may be added the aggressive bomber flights near or into national airspaces from the Arctic to Portugal.[32] While this analysis of the structural changes in principle can stand on its own, the important thing in an RSCT perspective is to link such material changes to the perceptions that drive foreign policy and thus make up the other half of those security relations that are constitutive of the RSC. Before, however, moving to perceptions, it is useful to briefly recapture the way *Regions and Powers* described respectively the Cold War and the post-Cold War RSC situation in the Greater Nordic space.

According to the applied RSC analysis in *Regions and Powers*, during the Cold War, the security situation in Europe was overlaid by the superpower confrontation to a degree where there was no 'European' RSC to speak of. Paradoxically, in this perspective, neither *Ostpolitik*, the peace movements, the transatlantic disagreements over deterrence, nor indeed the particular self-perception of Nordic cooperation can really be considered examples of regional security dynamics during the Cold War. As the Cold War and superpower confrontation ended, *Regions and Powers* proposes that two RSCs emerged in the greater European space: a 'European RSC' centered on the European Union and a 'Post-Soviet RSC' centered on Russia. Notably, the Baltic States appear here inside the Post-Soviet RSC. Being marked as 'insulators', they also constituted the 'biggest problem' for the interrelationship between these two RSCs.[33] The binary logic of RSCs means that either the two RSCs are parallel with not too significant 'biggest problems', or they must be seen as fused into one single RSC. As for the period following the Cold War, the picture painted necessitates an understanding of the role of the remaining superpower as very limited and not decisive in upholding security architecture. Overall, it seems that the two

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30   Allison 2014, 1255.

31   Snyder 2014.

32   Frear 2014.

33   Buzan and Wæver 2003, 350, 374, 414-416.

phases as described by *Regions and Powers* in fact both misestimate the actual role of the United States in providing European security: in the first phase the total character of the overlay is overestimated, and in the second phase, the reach of the American extended deterrence security umbrella including its role in enabling diplomacy is underestimated.[34]

The impression that the *Regions and Powers* reading of the European security structure was tenuous at the time of publication certainly is not weakened after a decade of Russian rearmament. The material changes behind the new Russian foreign policy as well as the resulting Russian foreign policy have in fact affected the perceptions of political leaders in a way that highlights the geopolitical *Geworfenheit* of the greater Nordic space. The duo of Russian capability plus intent had alarmed the Baltic States and Poland sufficiently that by the Chicago Summit 2012, a particular track of reassurance in a 'Defence and Deterrence Posture Review' was issued in parallel to the main Summit Declaration.[35] At a lower level, that duo also concerned policymakers in the Nordic countries enough to affect defense planning (Denmark being a notable exception). Even so, the United States' promotion of a 'reset with Russia' from 2009 meant that Russia's Georgian invasion in 2008 was given a tentative interpretation as an aberration rather than a new yardstick by the Obama administration. Pressure from the eastern countries behind the 2012 'Defence and Deterrence Posture Review' went together with a renewed emphasis inside the White House and State Department on the 'Nordic-Baltic 8' group of countries, resulting in president Obama's visit to Sweden and Estonia in September 2013. As part of his visit to Stockholm, president Obama, together with his counterparts from Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden, launched a US-Nordic Security dialogue with annual meetings, focused 'primarily on issues arising in the United Nations.'[36] Even if the initiative in this way was not explicitly grounded in immediate concerns about security issues around the greater Nordic space, the declaration of the heads of government nevertheless also noted that: 'Recognizing that we still have work to do closer to home, we agree on our mutual commitment to deepening regional cooperation and continuing to pursue our common vision of a Europe whole, free, and at peace.'[37]

By 2014, however, the triangle of Russian capabilities, (declared) intent and actual pattern of actions meant that policy leaders came to privilege the pattern over the unique in their interpretations of the situation. In consequence, the symbolic dual declarations of the Chicago Summit were replaced by a single declaration at the Wales Summit in 2014, marking an increasingly shared set of concerns among heads of state and government.[38] Even earlier than the Wales Summit in September, Western governments had responded to Russian actions throughout 2014 with an increased tempo and scope of military exercises

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34   Cf. Asmus 2002; Zakheim 1999.

35   NATO Heads of State and Government, 2012.

36   White House 2013.

37   *Ibid.*

38   NATO Heads of State and Government. 2014.

in the Baltic Sea area, notably including the United States.[39] At the Wales Summit, NATO (and thus including the United States) governments stood up new initiatives as the declaration stated that 'Russia's aggressive actions against Ukraine have fundamentally challenged our vision of a Europe whole, free, and at peace'. In order to reassure the Baltic and eastern European states, the declaration also announced the creation of a 'Very High Readiness Joint Task Force' able to deploy within 2–5 days to 'challenges that arise, particularly at the periphery of NATO's territory'.[40] NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen was no less clear about the character of the challenge:

> 'We have tried long and hard to build a partnership with Russia. In a way that respects Russia's security concerns, and based on international rules and norms. (…) Regrettably, Russia has rejected our efforts to engage. Instead, Russia considers NATO, and the West more broadly, as an adversary. Russia has trampled all the rules and commitments that have kept peace in Europe and beyond since the end of the Cold War. The pattern is clear. From Moldova to Georgia, and now in Ukraine, Russia has used economic pressure and military actions to produce instability. To manufacture conflicts. And to diminish the independence of its neighbors'.[41]

The fact that NATO was the source of early strategic statements, the go-to framework for international decisions as through the Summit, and the central frame of reference even for non-members such as Sweden and Finland or for the European Union, is an important clue. NATO is the primary means of United States involvement in European security matters. When NATO is central it means both that the United States is involved and that the remainder of the member states find this forum to be important.

In the United Kingdom, another of the Western powers constitutive of the greater Nordic space, Prime Minister David Cameron too emphasized the rupture with the existing greater European order, caused by changes affected by Russia:

> "After the long years of the Cold War, the vision of a Europe whole, free and at peace seemed within our grasp. Yet today the protection and security that NATO provides is as vital to our future as it has ever been in our past. (…) Russia is ripping up the rulebook with its annexation of Crimea and its troops on sovereign soil in Ukraine".[42]

Cameron added that Britain does not see it to be in its interest to have a return to 'another Cold War'. Even so, the changes perceived are of such a magnitude that the Prime Minister warned that Moscow's relationship with the rest of the world will be "radically different" in the absence of an altered behavior.

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39   Belkin *et al.* 2014.

40   NATO Heads of State and Government 2014.

41   Rasmussen 2014.

42   Cameron 2014.

As an expression of renewed and shared threat perception among the states in the greater Nordic region, high-level representatives from twelve countries including eight Ministers of Defense (from Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Sweden and Great Britain) joined up in Oslo, on November 12–13, 2014 in order to 'stand together for stability in the Northern Europe'. In a press release, Norway's Minister of Defense noted how the 'illegal Russian annexation of the Crimea Peninsula and its aggression against Ukraine' had 'brought huge change to the security situation in Europe' including 'Northern Europe'. In consequence, the countries had gathered to discuss the security situation, how to respond to increased Russian activity, and to explore new areas of security cooperation. The meeting was conducted in three formal settings – a 'Nordic', a 'Nordic-Baltic' and a 'Northern group' format, going from five, to eight, to twelve countries in the last case. These groupings reflect traditional regional forums including the Northern group promoted by the United Kingdom since 2009, but their concomitance also signal fluidity from the Nordic-Baltic core up to the constitutive external partners of the greater Nordic space. The meeting including its variable geometry was itself a symbolic political gesture, aimed at demonstrating solidarity among the participating states, a unity grounded in their concern with the changed security situation in relation to the greater Nordic space.

Coming together shortly after the Wales Summit in a configuration of less than NATO 28, as the states located in the greater Nordic space plus interested parties, including the two great powers defining the edge of the space, the United Kingdom and Germany, is a strong example of how the material change of the third defining great power, Russia, has changed and made security perceptions converge across the space.

Following up on the Summit declaration, the defense ministers in Oslo agreed to 'further develop our training and exercise cooperation with Sweden and Finland', including opening up the weekly cross-border training among Norwegian, Swedish and Finnish fighter squadrons to the 'entire Nordic airspace'. Interestingly, the national airspaces – including the two non-NATO-members Sweden and Finland – are here subsumed under the regional category as an almost natural unit, the Nordic airspace.[43]

In April 2015, as outcome of a regular series of meetings of Nordic defense ministers, the five representatives together authored an op-ed in the Norwegian newspaper *Aftenposten*. Restating the same concerns about Russian behavior and the need for further intra-Nordic cooperation on defense matters as was expressed at the Oslo meeting, the ministers also announced progress on deepening defense cooperation among the Nordic countries, grounded specifically in the externally generated changes to the greater Nordic space:

> 'Russian actions are the greatest challenge to European security. (…) Russian exercise and intelligence activity is increasing in the area near us. This is clearly felt in the Baltic Sea. Russian propaganda and political maneuvering is contributing to sow discord among the countries and

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43   Norway's Ministry of Defence 2014.

in organizations like NATO and the EU. (…) The Nordic countries will meet this situation with solidarity and deepened cooperation.'[44]

Preceding the op-ed in 2015 and the meeting in Oslo in 2014, alliance relationships and security cooperation had taken center stage in forums normally reserved for other purposes. The op-ed thus announced further cooperation within an already established framework. Perhaps reflecting the changing duo of Russian capability plus intent – and the Russian invasion of Georgia in 2008 – the 2009 Stoltenberg report to the Nordic Council of Ministers led to the introduction of a security dimension to otherwise low-politics Nordic cooperation activities.[45] The resulting creation of the Nordic Defence Cooperation (NORDEFCO) as a stand-alone framework meant that the Nordics came to spearhead the form of subregional defense cooperation later supported by NATO.[46]

In another example, the Northern Forum, an annual one-day summit, organized since 2010 for the heads of government of the Nordic-Baltic eight and the United Kingdom was also in 2014 partly appropriated by the security agenda. Hosted by Finland, the theme of the 2014 meeting on November 6 was ostensibly 'innovative business activity and reform education systems'.[47] Having United Kingdom Prime Minister Cameron in Helsinki, however, also provided an opportunity to focus on shaping common reactions to the Russian produced regional insecurity with the UK in a leading role as an 'essential player in formulating Europe's policy towards Russia'. In this way, the Finnish perception was that the Ukraine crisis appeared as an opportunity to show how the 'EU is much stronger when its members work together'.[48] The Northern Forum, dating back almost as long as NORDEFCO, then also became a low-profile framework for addressing geopolitical issues in the company of one of the great powers constituting the edge of the greater Nordic space.

These multilateral meetings are examples of how a greater Nordic security region can be said to exist as the Northern European subset of the Euro-Russian RSC,which is now the structure of European security. In particular, it is interesting to note the presence of the United Kingdom in the group, as one of the external, constitutive great powers, just like the American presence has been sought after and felt in the areas of military exercises and NATO initiatives. The Nordic security region is not, as has sometimes been a theme in greater Nordic regionalist integration literature, a region outside of power politics. It is instead, and has always been, a space that is conditioned by the existence of greater powers outside the space. The space itself has always been subject to great power relations and their respective reach: Hence its variable geometry, as for example its enlargement after the end of bipolarity.

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44   Nordic Ministers of Defense 2015.

45   Stoltenberg 2009.

46   Dahl 2014; Breitenbauch 2014.

47   Cf. http://nff2014.government.fi

48   Tisdall 2014.

A strong example of a particular country perspective comes from Sweden, which during 2014 published two major reviews of its security policy, a defense commission report and an inquiry into Swedish international security cooperation.[49] Sweden is of particular interest because while is not a member of NATO, its close Cold War relationship with the United States was well-known in spite of a then formal status of non-aligned. More recently, the adoption of the international solidarity clause in 2009 has been followed by relatively constant soul searching in terms of how to fit Sweden's security policy into a changing international context. While NATO-membership has been increasingly debated in Swedish domestic politics, and in spite of a poll showing for the first time a majority for such membership in October 2014, the current focus of Swedish policy makers is a continued exploration of the possibilities of less radical shifts in the forms of cooperation in the greater Nordic region.

In fact, the defense commission's report straightforwardly argues that Sweden should 'seek to promote closer political, economic and military integration between the Nordic and Baltic countries and Germany and Poland. We are all neighbors in a common security policy environment around the Baltic Sea.'[50] The inquiry, published in October 2014, on its side noticed the rosier environment at the time of the adoption of the solidarity clause, and then the subsequent shift:

> 'War in Europe appeared, if not inconceivable, at least extremely unlikely, even if there was no lack of warning signs. The uncertainty surrounding the meaning of the Swedish declaration of solidarity and the low level of awareness of its content abroad can be at least partly explained by relatively optimistic assumptions about the future. This year, 2014, has changed all that. Following the Russian attack on Ukraine, our Baltic neighbors and Poland have become a focal point for NATO's reassurance policy. The Baltic Sea region has become an arena for revived antagonisms between Europe and Russia.'[51]

This consistent emphasis on a break with the post-Cold War situation is a reflection of a structural change with a material basis, and as such point to the increased 'security regionality' of the greater Nordic space. But as the reflection is always already also a perception, the security region gives rise to new political possibilities. As reflected in practitioners' tales as well as extant analysis, the structural level conditions the limits and new avenues of action, but individual nations including smaller states influence the agenda and can shift the logic, character, and scope of the subsequent cooperation to construct more of a political Greater Nordic region.[52]

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49   Ministry of Defence/Defence Commission 2014; Bertelman 2014.

50   Ministry of Defence/Defence Commission 2014, 19.

51   Bertelman 2014, 68.

52   Zakheim 1998; Asmus 2002; Archer 1999.

Conclusion

Toward a Greater Nordic Region?

Geopolitically speaking, the greater Nordic space is an unusual area as it on the one hand contains political region-making yet on the other hand is almost completely negatively defined when it comes to security. Linking the two kinds of regionality – security regions, given outside-in and political regions, created inside-out – is key to understanding the dynamics of regionality in the greater Nordic space. Russian driven security dynamics around the greater Nordic space have notably affected security perceptions among political leaders in this high-tension part of the Euro-Russian Regional Security Complex. While political leaders have already announced increased security cooperation as a result of the changed perceptions – including notably among NATO and non-NATO members – the longer-term enabling effects of the external changes with regard to further political region-building are likely to be mediated by the states' geopolitical *Geworfenheit*. The states will continuously rediscover the inescapability of their geopolitical situation. They will do interpretive work in order to literally come to terms with the changing conditions of the greater Nordic space. Ensuing policy initiatives are likely to reflect an increasingly attractive status for enhancing regionality among the small states of the space.

Theoretically, this article offers a way to connect RSCT and integration literature, in particular that on Nordic, Nordic-Baltic and greater Nordic cooperation since the Cold War through the reconstruction of a distinction between 'security regions' and 'political regions'. A security region is a subset of an RSC joined together by negative security relations. As such it is given outside-in by structural factors, and enables the shaping of a political region through new integrative initiatives, which is then created inside-out. The complexity of such substantialization from external conditions to internal action we have captured with the concept of *Geworfenheit*, pointing to both the strong spatiality of states' existence as an element in their sense-making as well as to its hermeneutical, processual character.

The greater Nordic space is dependent upon the configuration of great and super powers outside it, which delimit its immediate borders, and whose mutual balance of power has historically defined the space's particular size and location. While being occasionally, but literally, cut to size by interventions – such as when Great Britain destroyed Denmark's navy in 1807 in a preventive gesture aimed at Russia – this group of countries were allowed a continued existence by the balance of power. Serving as a sort of buffer zone between the Great Powers, they even developed an international relations doctrine of neutrality that corresponded to their structural condition. In the decades after WWII, some of them built up a pioneering framework for international cooperation and openness across their respective borders through the Nordic Council. Yet the rest of the states in the greater Nordic space were not so lucky. 'Ach, Polen is noch verloren' is the well-known refrain about the continued fate of one of these buffer states.

Recent Russian actions have recreated awareness of the greater Nordic space as a security region. In the end, the effect of these new structural conditions could be a greater Nordic region or at the least a strengthened regional sense of geopolitical fate, grounded in the geographical *thrownness* of the states in the space. If the security situation in the greater Nordic space is under continuous evolvement, it seems equally clear that the structural changes identified above as well as the perceptions of change and the concomitant incipient political initiatives coalescing around a greater Nordic region are useful markers for what will follow in the future.

More research, of course, is needed in order to substantiate the story sketched here, to examine the relationship between the international and proper regional (European as in NATO or the European Union) levels and the level of the Nordic space, to examine stories of how particular agents helped shape the agenda made possible by the structural change, and of how the logic of increased regionality in the greater Nordic space joins up with a probable double-sided strategy of containment and engagement with Russia. Studies applying RSCT, moreover, could carefully revisit the theoretically argued balance between purely regional logics and the 'penetrative' character of superpower influence. Without it, RSCT risks becoming a geographically oriented politics without geopolitics.

Russian actions during 2014 have taken many, but not all analysts and politicians by surprise. By its aggression in Ukraine, Russia has changed security perceptions and forged a strengthened sense of shared structural conditions among policy elites in the greater Nordic space. Somewhat ironically, Russia's actions to impose its will has brought renewed attention to a greater Nordic security region, resulting in more convergent security perceptions among leaders in the greater Nordic space. Russian actions thus create the conditions for further political integration among these states. The shift and strong convergence in security perceptions across the greater Nordic space is an immediate and tangible outcome that will continue to shape possibilities for political cooperation including on security in the region. If Swedish and Finnish NATO-membership were to become a reality before 2020, the changes in European geopolitics wreaked in Ukraine during 2014 will have had a lot to do with it. The effects of using force can be discrete, conceptual and highly influential in also unintended ways. Because of Russia, the greater Nordic space may move closer to a greater Nordic region.

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