

Security and the Northern Region

Gunnar Sander, January 2012

1. Project/publication	<p>Diesen, S. (2008): Security and the Northern Region. In: Gottemoeller, R and Thamnes, R. (eds.): <i>High North: high stakes. Security, energy, transport, environment</i>. Bergen: Fagbokforlaget. ISBN 978-82-450-0832-6</p> <p>http://fagbokforlaget.no/?isbn=9788245008326</p>
2. Initiator	<p>The book in which the article is contained is based on presentations at the Norwegian Shipowner's Association's Forum for the High North, particularly their conference in September 2008.</p> <p>Sverre Diesen was Norwegian Chief of Defence 2005 – 2009.</p>
3. Objective	<p>The intention with the book was to disseminate the contributions to a wider public in order to stimulate a more informed debate about the Arctic.</p> <p>Sverre Diesen explained his task as providing a military assessment of the security dimension and the role of the military in the context of the new and comprehensive political Northern regional initiative. What, if anything, is the scope for the use of military force in support of political objectives in the Northern region in our time? Is open military conflict still possible in this part of the world, and if so, what would it be like?</p>
4. Geographical delimitation	<p>Mostly Diesen uses the expression "Northern region", without being very precise about the meaning of it.</p>
5. Time horizon	<p>No specific time horizon; this is an analysis of current trends and their implications for an unspecified future.</p>
6. Thematic focus	<p>The focus is on security and military conflicts.</p>
7. Images of the future	<p>Diesen provides an analysis that can be read as a kind of scenario for how he sees an eventual armed conflict in these regions. His starting point is the view that "inter-state, total or large-scale industrial war between developed nations has been relegated to the famous scrap heap of history because of its utter lack of political usefulness: it has been replaced by small intra-state wars and campaigns" ("war between the peoples as opposed to war amongst the people"). In this case, none of these categories apply; the question rather is whether a conventional but limited military conflict between two or more nations could still occur. If so, he argues, this would be a conflict about limited political issues, at least in terms of their significance for national survival. The use of force therefore needs to be limited in time, space and force levels. Failing to do that, we would be back in the old total war scenario.</p> <p>The normal or baseline situation is a permanent but essentially peaceful confrontation over strategic resources and access between different states. In military terms, this plays out as a sustained but low-profile military presence as a visible expression of national interests. Escalation to conflicts would essentially be about economic interests or possibly points of international law. The political objective would be about forcing a change in the policies of another state or forcing its compliance with specific demands. In military terms, this would mean an engagement at a tactical level. Limited use of planes and ships would be preferred as they can operate fast and flexible from international space as a military demonstration, and withdraw quickly to de-escalate the situation. The upper limit of the politically more serious and militarily more irreversible use of land forces, would be to accompany an air- or sea launched raid with special forces against an objective of</p>

	<p>military or economic value, and extract the forces as soon as the desired effect had been achieved.</p> <p>Thus, he concludes, “the utility of military force in this region has been narrowed down to a level where military strategic objectives would be served by tactical level engagements”. It would be “short, sharp and in essence punitive military actions, orchestrated in extremely close interaction with political initiatives and diplomacy.”</p> <p>From this analysis of the future, he finally presents his views on the design of armed forces (standing forces instead of mobilization, shift in balance towards air and sea forces, coordination between smaller countries), force posture (military presence for a small nation does not work in changing the perception of other states on the strategic and political realities of the region) and strategy.</p>
8. Key driving forces	<p>Diesen emphasizes that the challenges today are different from the Cold War. Today they mostly deal with scarce and hence strategic resources; directly in the sense of energy resources and food supplies being harvested in the region, indirectly in the sense that global warming is opening up new sea lanes of communication through which these and other goods may be transported in the future. These factors have throughout recorded history had an impact on strategic affairs. In addition, there is a residual military dimension since the region is also the home to the submarine-based nuclear deterrent of a great power, Russia, and its associated conventional capabilities. (p 48)</p>
9. Uncertainties / wildcards	<p>There are no particular “wildcards” as in the tradition of scenarios. Armed conflicts in general can be seen as wildcards in future images.</p>
10. Accomplishment and collaboration	<p>Expert-based.</p>
11. Method	<p>Qualitative.</p>
12. Sources of information	<p>No references apart from quotes in the text.</p>
13. Strengths	<p>His views about the issues at stake in the Arctic and what would be a military response seems rational and well rooted in developments in modern warfare. When “thinking the unthinkable”, that an armed conflict between states with an interest in the Arctic may occur, his scenario seems plausible.</p>
14. Weaknesses	<p>Diesen quotes Clausewitz’ thesis about war being the continuation of policy with other means. His analysis can be questioned when it comes to the underlying assumption of rational behavior of both political and military leaders. Thus the possibilities for other uses of force as well as other developments of armed conflict than the neat, surgical attack-and-retreat operations cannot be excluded.</p> <p>Further, there are other possible types of conflicts, like conflicts involving non-state actors and conflicts with origins outside the Arctic escalating into the Arctic. This is outside the scope Diesen defines for his analysis and as such not a criticism against it, but a part of a broader view on military security in the region.</p>
15. Attention and significance	<p>This is hard to judge.</p>
16. Relevance for the Fram Centre	<p>Diesen in his personal capacity is a resource person on military security issues.</p>