

Cold Calculus

Norway's triad of deterrence, assurance, and reassurance in joint military exercises in the Arctic

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Abstract

States participate in joint military exercises for various reasons. These reasons are largely unexplored in existing literature. Military exercises, while serving a purpose in terms of advancing the military stature of a collective defense posture, simultaneously pose as a potentially provocative behavior igniting hostility and provoking responses from an adversary. Against this backdrop, why would a small state, bordering one of the most unpredictable and revisionist states on the world stage at the moment, participate in such exercises?

This puzzle led to the research question steering this thesis: why does Norway participate in joint military exercises in the Arctic? With the growing schism between the West and Russia, and the uncertain future stability of the Arctic region, this thesis will aim to understand how Norway balances its security posture in the Arctic.

To answer the aforementioned research question, this thesis employs a nuanced theoretical framework anchored in the three concepts of deterrence, assurance, and reassurance. By including the concept of assurance in the context of joint military exercises, this thesis illuminates unexplored dynamics within the Norwegian security posture in the Arctic.

This thesis presents five key findings derived from an analysis of Norwegian white papers. Firstly, Norway's participation in joint military exercises enhances collective deterring signals to the potential adversary. Secondly, joint military exercises function as a platform for Norway to be assured that allies are able and willing to extend their security guarantee to Norway. Thirdly, Norway's participation in joint military exercises in the Arctic is an opportunity for Norway to send signals of assurance to allies. Fourthly, the directly attributable costs to reassurance are considered low for Norway, and the other Russian military responses cannot be directly linked to Norwegian participation in exercises. These arguments illuminate the fifth finding in that Norway seems to value the associated deterrence and assurance benefits of joint military exercises as outweighing the costs to reassurance that they pose.

The findings of this thesis will have notable policy implications, providing valuable guidance to the Norwegian government in shaping future Arctic security policies. Furthermore, this thesis provides a framework for future studies on the dynamics behind the security posture of small states.

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Any mistakes remain entirely mine,

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1. Introduction

This thesis aims to explore why Norway participates in joint military exercises (henceforth JMEs) in the Arctic.

The Norwegian decision to participate in JMEs in the Arctic is a puzzle as there is potential for increased tensions. Norway has been engaged in a narrative that signals peacetime control and stability in the Arctic, large multinational military exercises may be perceived as contradicting this objective. Moreover, the fragile nature of the future stability of the Arctic and Russia's vocal opposition to these exercises further complicate the matter. Furthermore, the bilateral relationship between Russia and Norway is at an all-time low according to scholar Iver B. Neumann who recently stated the following: "The relationship between Norway and Russia ... we probably have to go back 100 years to the Russian Revolution, before it has been worse" (Ottesen et al., 2023). With this, the Norwegian ambition of being a predictable and transparent actor in the Arctic towards Russia is challenged, rendering JMEs increasingly provocative.

Despite these reasons and increased tension, Norway continues to participate in and hosts JMEs in the Arctic. The puzzle is thus how Norway is to be able to balance the policy objective of a "High North - low tension" paradigm while concurrently engaging in military exercises that arguably contradict this ambition. As stated in the High North policy document from 2011 one of the primary objectives of the Norwegian state in the region is: "To safeguard peace and stability and provide predictability" (Utenriksdepartementet, 2011, p. 20). The puzzle therefore remains: why does Norway engage with these exercises? This will be explored through the following research question:

Why does Norway participate in joint military exercises in the Arctic?

JMEs are multinational, large-scale military exercises with various participating states. In the last decade, the Arctic region has seen an increased presence of these types of exercises. Norway's strategic location in the region has been a driving factor in why several of NATO's largest JMEs take place on Norwegian territory.

There are numerous reasons why this topic is relevant to explore today. At an elevated level, the increasing schism between the West and Russia in the political, economic, and military

spheres signifies imminent volatility. Russia is an increasingly unpredictable actor on the world stage, with the recent invasion of Ukraine standing as a gruesome example. Additionally, the future stability of the Arctic is being disputed by scholars citing some of the upcoming challenges facing the region ranging from climate change and economic disputes to security concerns and the new addition of China as a self-acclaimed “near-Arctic” state. Furthermore, the future purpose of the Arctic Council, one of the only diplomatic platforms for Arctic states is dubious. This sets the scene for a new era in Norwegian security policy towards the region. A nuanced approach to understanding the driving motivating factors behind Norway’s given strategies in the military domain is therefore highly warranted. The particular focus on JMEs adds an essential layer to the analysis as it focuses on a highly frequent military phenomenon that has received scarce academic attention.

Through a content analysis of various strategy documents from the Norwegian government focusing on the High North from 2006 until today, this thesis will apply a nuanced theoretical framework to understand Norwegian security policies and the motivations behind them. The thesis departs from the traditional understanding of Norwegian security policy in the High North being rooted in a balance between deterrence and reassurance. This balance pertains to the objective of deterring potential Russian aggression while simultaneously signaling that Norway is not the base for a NATO attack on Russia. Nevertheless, this thesis argues that this framework misses a central dynamic. By including a conceptualization of assurance, this thesis refines the understanding of Norway’s security posture. The particular focus on JMEs allows for an analysis that sheds light on this exact dynamic.

This thesis argues that Norway values the benefits of JMEs as more important than the associated risks they pose to reassuring Russia. This argument builds on the benefits of both deterrence and assurance and the potential risks to reassurance that JMEs pose. By advancing the argument that Norway is balancing three, rather than two concepts, this thesis adds a valuable contribution to the understanding of Norway’s security posture in the Arctic region. The addition of assurance as an explanatory factor behind Norway’s participation in JMEs is a nuanced and original argument that existing literature has overlooked.

1.1. Academic and policy relevance

In general, the existing literature on JMEs is scarce. There exist few scholarly insights into this phenomenon despite its increased presence on the global scene. There is a particular lack of research on the motivations behind JMEs from a small-state perspective. The existing academic queries on JMEs tend to navigate towards the Korean Peninsula or the Baltic region in Europe. The primary aim of this thesis is, therefore, to fill this existing gap in the literature to both illuminate the logic behind small states' security posture, as well as a deep dive into the intricacies of the Arctic region concerning JMEs from the Norwegian perspective. The findings from this thesis may have applicability to other small states having to navigate between alliance commitments and potential powerful adversaries in close proximity. Furthermore, by applying a new theoretical framework to understanding the Norwegian motivations behind JMEs this thesis adds a new dimension to the understanding of a small state's ability to provide platforms for their own assurance as well as their ability to assure allies.

The findings from this thesis will also have relevant policy implications. Firstly, by clarifying the concepts and terminology of deterrence, assurance, and reassurance this thesis lays the groundwork for advancing the understanding of the Norwegian security posture. This may reduce the gap between policymakers and scholars and alleviate theoretical confusion about important concepts and terminology in the security politics sphere. Secondly, this thesis offers a comprehensive analysis of the benefits and potential risks associated with participating in JMEs from the Norwegian perspective. This may have policy implications for Norway in terms of its decision-making process regarding its involvement in military exercises in the future. Furthermore, with the addition of Sweden and Finland to NATO the Nordic security posture is altered. This new environment of additional members allows for potentially new deterrence strategies on the Northern Flank of NATO's area of defense, in which JMEs may play an important role. Furthermore, the Arctic is attracting attention from other powerful actors with China's self-acclaimed "near-Arctic" state status. These new additions point to an uncertain future of what has been perceived as a stable and peaceful region. With Norway taking over the chairmanship of the Arctic Council in May 2023, advancing and nuancing the understanding of Norway's security posture in the region is imminent.

1.2. Structure of the thesis

This thesis has six chapters. The first chapter is the introduction. Chapter 2 discusses the theoretical frameworks that will be applied to this case study. The theoretical framework presented in this chapter provides the analysis with various perspectives to understand the underlying motivations behind Norway's behavior. Chapter 3 is the methodology chapter and the subsequent methodological decisions done in terms of the analysis. This chapter focuses on being transparent about the choices made and how they have impacted the analysis. Chapter 4 is the analysis of Norway's incentives to participate in and host JMEs in the Arctic. There is no overarching theoretical framework that would be able to shed light on all the nuances of the motivations that this thesis aims to explore, there are therefore different strands of theoretical insights that are applied to this case. There are predominantly three lenses applied: deterrence, assurance, and reassurance. I illuminate how these three factors are all relevant to the Norwegian case, with a specific nuanced focus on assurance.

These are the five key findings regarding the motivations behind Norway's participation in JMEs in the Arctic: First, JMEs signal deterrence towards a shared adversary amongst the participating states. Secondly, JMEs provide an avenue for Norway to be assured by allies that they are both willing and able to extend their security guarantee. Thirdly, JMEs is moreover a way for Norway to signal assurance to allies through the military domain. Fourthly, the costs to reassurance by participating in these exercises despite Russia's opposition illuminate how these are probably either perceived as low risks by policymakers in Oslo, or as actions inherent in a larger Russian strategy that are not causally linked to Norway's engagement in JMEs. Fifthly, this analysis illustrates the notion that Norway weighs the benefits concerning deterrence and assurance through JMEs as more important than the associated risks of this behavior.

Chapter 5 concludes the thesis by elaborating on and discussing the key findings and their implications to highlight the academic and policy contribution of the thesis. Finally, the chapter discusses avenues for future research. Overall, this chapter aims to elaborate on the contribution of this thesis. Chapter 6 is the bibliography.

2. Theoretical Framework

In this chapter, I will lay out the theoretical underpinnings of this thesis. The first section will focus on the paradigm known as defensive realism. The second section will introduce the concept of deterrence and how it is understood by different scholars and its categorizations. Furthermore, some of the benefits associated with JMEs in relation to deterrence are also introduced. The third section will discuss assurance and how it differs from both deterrence and reassurance. The benefits of JMEs in conjunction with assurance are laid out. The fourth section will introduce the concept of reassurance and how this thesis will use the terminology, as well as the potential costs to reassurance that JMEs pose. The reason behind the separation of the three former concepts is that they should be understood independently and context-specific to derive a nuanced analysis of Norway's security posture and bilateral relationship with the US and other NATO allies. Consequently, I will have provided an essential theoretical framework for this thesis to explore the motivations behind Norway's engagement with military exercises in the Arctic.

Before delving into the analytical framework of the thesis, this next section will highlight the fundamental reason behind the chosen theoretical framework.

In Holst's influential book on Norway's security policy (*Norsk Sikkerhetspolitikk i Strategisk Perspektiv*) from 1967, Holst re-envisioned concepts relating to deterrence and reassurance. Most notably, Holst (1967) presented a strategic outlook on Norway's security policies, highlighting the need for a security approach rooted in political strategy. According to Holst (1967), effective Norwegian security policy must strike a balance between deterrence and reassurance. This involved rooting deterrence strategies in powerful bilateral relationships with allies and collective security alliances, while also reassuring Russia of Norway's non-hostile intentions given its proximity to Russia. This reassurance was primarily centered around convincing Russia that Norwegian territory would not be utilized in launching a potential attack on strategically important Russian military systems on the Kola peninsula (Friis, 2019). This understanding of Norway's political strategy in the High North remains central among Norwegian defense officials even today. Tamnes (1986) further conceptualized this framework by introducing the concepts of integration and screening to the Norwegian context. The argument is that Norway must integrate its policies with the larger collective defense posture, while also screening itself to maintain a diplomatic and reassuring dialogue with Russia in the

East (Tamnes, 1986). What this thesis aims to do is to elaborate on and nuance this existing framework. As the following theoretical chapter will illuminate, there is a central element of the Norwegian security posture that is lost when only discussing deterrence and reassurance. Through using JMEs as the focal point of the analysis, this thesis sheds light on one of the other dynamics that steer Norwegian policymaking, namely assurance.

Before the introduction of the theoretical lenses within deterrence, assurance, and reassurance, a discussion of defensive realism will situate Norway within an analytical puzzle in which the mere participation in JMEs contradicts the inherent logic of this school of thought.

2.1. Defensive realism

Defensive realism is a strain within the political school of thought known more broadly as Realism. The basic premise of Realism is that of anarchy and that there is no supreme authority above the state to govern (Mearsheimer, 1983). Inherent in this is the notion that a state can never be entirely confident as to the motives of other states (Rottem, 2007b). This stands in line with what Waltz (2000) argues: “In the absence of an external authority, a state cannot be sure that today’s friend will not be tomorrow’s enemy” (p.10). From the Realist perspective, fearing other states incentivizes states to enhance their position and take care of themselves through aggression to counteract a potential decline in their relative power (Waltz, 2000). Furthermore, it is this relative state power which predicts the behavior of states (Rottem, 2007b). The classical narrative around Realism has therefore been focused on ideas of anarchy, self-help, and power balancing. Nevertheless, alterations to this dominant narrative have been present in academia in recent years and the concept known as defensive realism has been a well-cited lens through which political scientists have explored the motivations behind state actors and their behavior.

Defensive realism in its simplest form can be understood as a way in which states are essentially “security seekers” (Åtland, 2014). A paradigm that implies that states are largely distrustful of other states’ intentions (Åtland, 2014). This means that states will act in a way that secures, rather than challenges the status quo and their position in the world system. In contrast to offensive realism, in which it is believed that states will always be wanting to climb the ladder of power dominance, defensive realists argue that states would rather exist and behave to keep their position and not seek to expand their status (Åtland, 2014). Essentially, if states were to

think strategically about their position in the world system and their chances of survival, states should adhere to a moderate and reserved role to delineate their benign intentions towards adversaries.

Defensive realism builds its understanding of international affairs on the well-known logic of the security dilemma (Montgomery, 2006). The basic premise for this theory is the notion that states are inherently inclined to make worst-case assumptions about other states in the world, particularly those that are perceived to be adversaries (Åtland, 2014). The security dilemma is a situation in which one state might attempt to advance and increase its security, yet this move appears threatening to others, which might provoke an unnecessary conflict (Montgomery, 2006). Thus, the defensive realist idea is that states should seek to conform to less aggressive expansionist security policies to not potentially trigger an unfavorable response from other states. When states engage in behavior that might be perceived as expansionist by others, this might unnecessarily lead to conflict escalation and increased tension.

Montgomery (2006) argues that the way in which states can escape the security dilemma, and evidently increase their security position is by decreasing their relative capabilities to communicate their benign motives. Such a move, reducing capabilities, will signal to an adversary that their security is not threatened, and they will therefore not have to progress with aggressive policies. Glaser (1997) argues a similar sentiment in that a significant, unilateral, and unreciprocated reduction in a state's capabilities can lead to an increase in its security, dependent on such a move being interpreted as a gesture of reassurance by others. Glaser (1997) emphasizes the importance of perceptions and how an act by a state is highly dependent on how such behavior is interpreted by an other state. The underlying argument of both Glaser (1997) and Montgomery (2006) is the fact that a state can secure its position, and national security, by fronting a more reductionist behavior that does not unnecessarily agitate and provoke a reaction from an adversary. This line of reasoning resonates well with the defensive realist school of thought in which states should adhere to policies that do not provoke an adversary as this will threaten the security of a state. Evidently, the participation in JMEs stands as a contradiction to the logic inherent in the defensive realist's school. The next section will introduce some of the existing studies on JMEs.

2.2. Joint military exercises

Though the literature on JMEs is sparse, there have been a few attempts at providing a framework for understanding this phenomenon. Snyder (1961) argues that JMEs can be understood as a deterring tool for states. According to Snyder (1961), military exercises can be used by two or more states to convince an adversary that the costs of a possible attack outweigh the benefits. Military exercises can demonstrate deterrence by either denial and/or punishment. The former is illustrated by showcasing the capabilities that would render an attack too costly for an adversary. The latter through performing the counterattack capabilities that would be evident in the event of a possible invasion. Thus, through this lens JMEs have traditionally been understood as an effective deterrence instrument demonstrating resolve to an opponent.

Wolfley (2021) presents a puzzle; with the end of the superpower rivalry post-Cold War there is no imminent need for elaborate military exercises rooted in deterrence, why then has the presence of these exercises surged in the last three decades? Wolfley (2021) notes the rise in strategic uncertainty as one of the main drivers of this. Instead of using exercises to threaten or prepare to use force, exercises today are more rooted in a need to alter the characteristics of and/or the relationship between militaries (Wolfley, 2021). Traditionally JMEs have been understood primarily as a foreign policy tool to deter adversaries, but Wolfley (2021) argues that they are increasingly now used as an instrument directed at influencing partners and allies. A similar sentiment is found in Kuo and Blankenship (2022) who argues that military exercises within an alliance function as a way for members to mitigate potential concerns as to the commitment and capabilities of the members. Essentially, the use of military exercises functions as a mechanism that can signal to members that a state is still committed, willing and able to protect an alliance, while simultaneously signaling the same to third parties and potential adversaries (Kuo & Blankenship, 2022). Thus, JMEs can be understood as a tool for states to illustrate commitment to allies, and this commitment can function as a signal of deterrence towards adversaries. Frazier and Hutto (2017) argues that military exercises can be tools for shaping the shared beliefs of coalition partners surrounding threats. JMEs are argued to be one of the factors which shape and influence doctrinal change and state socialization (Frazier & Hutto, 2017). Hence, the literature on the purpose and implications of JMEs has evolved and the sole focus is no longer on how it is used as an instrument of deterrence. Rather, as this thesis will also demonstrate, military exercises function beyond deterrence and can also be a form of commitment demonstration between allies.

2.3. Deterrence, assurance, and reassurance

This section of the theoretical framework will present the three concepts of deterrence, assurance, and reassurance used in the analysis. Even though scholars and policymakers at times refer to these concepts interchangeably, it is relevant to study the concepts separately to clarify the terminology because failure to do so misses some of the dynamics of Norway's security policies in the Arctic.

The expected finding is that there is a balancing act driving the policymakers in Oslo to value the benefits of JMEs as more important than the costs associated with these types of exercises. This can be visualized with the following equation:

$$\text{Benefits of Deterrence} + \text{Benefits of Assurance} > \text{Costs to Reassurance}$$

The next sections will present the theoretical framework of first deterrence, second assurance, and third reassurance. The addition of assurance as a concept to this context is a nuanced approach to investigating the motivations behind participating in JMEs.

2.3.1. Deterrence

Much of the existing discussions on deterrence remain characterized by claims in which no empirical base exists, unsupported assertions and few overall references to classical analyses (Mazarr, 2018). Furthermore, there is scarce research into what deterrence strategies mean today. Morgan (2012) highlights the inadequate attention devoted to exploring how deterrence as a resource in security affairs has changed since the Cold War. Criticism is particularly directed at the lack of scholarly insights into exploring alterations in collective and extended deterrence (Morgan, 2012). A traditional understanding of the concept of deterrence refers to the practice of discouraging or restraining someone, usually a state, from engaging in undesirable behavior and “using the threat of military response to prevent” such behavior (Mazarr, 2018, p. 4). Essentially, deterrence is about efforts to prevent a given action that one actor perceives as unwanted. Oftentimes this means efforts to discourage an actor from changing its behavior and thus avert conflict escalation. However, Mazarr (2018) argues that the elemental understanding of deterrence should place its focus on the effort made by a state to shape the thinking of an aggressor. Furthermore, the focus should shift from that of analyzing the action of the deterring state and rather on the effect such action might have on a potential aggressor. This is because the effect of a deterrence strategy is entirely dependent on how it is

perceived by the target (Mazarr, 2018). Danilovic (2001) holds a similar argument by stating that the crucial element for a deterrence strategy to be successful lies in the realm of intentions, and the fact that an adversary must be convinced that the given intentions hold credibility. Essentially, a deterrence strategy in itself is rather ineffective if one is not aware of how an adversary might interpret a given action.

Moreover, there are relevant distinctions when concerning deterrence strategies. This thesis will introduce the theoretical framework of four different typologies of deterrence: (1) deterrence by denial, (2) deterrence by punishment, (3) direct deterrence, and (4) extended deterrence.

Deterrence by denial

Deterrence by denial is by Mearsheimer (1983) defined as an act that: “requires convincing an opponent that he will not attain his goals on the battlefield” (p. 14-15). Thus, this type of deterrence strategy is to prevent your adversary from battlefield success (Borghard & Lonergan, 2021). Snyder (1961) builds an argument around deterrence by denial in a similar fashion to that of Mearsheimer (1983) in that such a strategy is aimed at targeting an adversary’s military capabilities and/or increasing one’s military defenses so that offensive operations are rendered to be too exceedingly costly. Thus, this deterrence strategy focuses on the target state’s military strategy through both targeting the military capabilities of your adversary and simultaneously building up your military capabilities. However, deterrence by denial should not be thought of as equivalent to that of military balances as this is not the sole capability that determines an effective deterrence of denial strategy.

Deterrence by punishment

Deterrence by punishment is a category that relates to threatening with severe penalties if aggression occurs. Such penalties can be the use of nuclear weapons or heavy economic sanctions to dissuade an adversary from aggressing (Mazarr, 2018). Essentially, an actor will present an unfavorable consequence in an attempt to raise the cost should an adversary initiate an attack. Even though this strategy might on paper sound rather effective, it has received backlash since this type of strategy is entirely dependent on the credibility of the threat. Should the adversary not fully trust the willingness and capability of the deterring actor to actually impose such penalties, the entire logic of the strategy fails.

Direct deterrence and extended deterrence

The third and fourth categorization of deterrence is that of direct and extended deterrence. Direct deterrence implies that an actor, usually a state, will attempt to prevent and deter an attack on its territory, within its state borders (Mazarr, 2018). On the other hand, extended deterrence is a strategy that aims to dissuade an attack on a third party. In a simple analogy, the difference between the two is best explained by looking at the deterrence strategies of the US during the Cold War. The US was actively trying to prevent an attack from the Soviet Union on its own territory, this would be categorized as a direct deterrence strategy (Mazarr, 2018). Additionally, the US was also trying to prevent an USSR-led attack on NATO members as this would invoke Article 5 and force the US into a conflict (Lee, 2021). This type of preventative strategy would be classed as an act of extended deterrence. In a similar line of reasoning, the US would today attempt to deter Russia from aggression towards Norway, both due to its close bilateral alliance and because Norway is a part of NATO.

From the US point of view, extended security commitments towards allies have been and continue to be a vital element of US foreign policies in an attempt to uphold and maintain international order and peace (Lee, 2021). The importance put on the US to be a deterring actor for allies gained prominence in Washington during the Cold War (Danilovic, 2001). The notion that the US had to stand firm against opponents in other regions of the world became a defining feature of US strategic thought. Inherent in this paradigm shift was the pressing question asking whether or not the US would be willing to trade Washington for Paris (Danilovic, 2001). Even though this was largely a rhetorical question, its premise turned into one of the central elements of security policies in the post-Cold War era. Through an active presence in various alliances and bilateral partnerships, the US has been at the forefront of advancing deterrence strategies against various adversaries such as the Soviet Union, and now more relevant Russia and China (Lee, 2021). The US has provided so-called security umbrellas for its allies, both onshore and offshore through various means, catering to the needs and circumstances of its allies (Lee, 2021).

Benefits of JMEs concerning deterrence

This section aims to elucidate the benefits of JMEs in relation to deterrence. Firstly, JMEs enhance the military potential of the participating states. Secondly, JMEs increase the interoperability between the allied forces which signals a credible collective deterrence.

One of the benefits of JMEs is related to the demonstration of capabilities which renders a potential “quick and easy” victory impossible for an adversary. Closely tied to the concept of deterrence by denial, participating in JMEs sends a signal to an adversary that they will most likely not attain their goals on the battlefield. Kubai (2022) argues that one of the imminent benefits of JMEs is the way in which they function as a platform for the participating states to enhance the armed forces’ combat capabilities. This relates to the way in which JMEs provide an opportunity for the advancement of tactical capabilities, which both strengthen the capabilities of the participating states, and simultaneously sends a message to a potential aggressor (Kubai, 2022). Even though Kubai (2022) argues that the primary purpose of JMEs is the mission of advancing the military potential of the participating states, this feeds into a larger objective of sending strategic signals to adversaries by demonstrating deterrence through these JMEs. One can therefore argue that one of the objectives of states engaging in JMEs is linked to deterrence and a demonstration of military capabilities which renders a “quick and easy” military victory for an adversary arduous.

Building on this, JMEs not only provide national forces of their own increased capability, but JMEs also increase interoperability between the participating states. JMEs provide ample opportunity for the participating states to enhance their ability to function effectively together in times of crisis. Closely in line with NATO’s commitment to enhance interoperability and alliance cohesion, JMEs provide a place for advancing an overall stronger deterrence strategy (Depledge, 2020). This adds an additional layer to a deterrence strategy. The previous benefit focused on how on a national level JMEs contribute to enhanced capabilities, while this dimension aims to illustrate that JMEs provide an opportunity for allies to improve their ability to fight together. This interoperability aspect of a deterrence strategy is also highlighted by Kubai (2022) as an important purpose of JMEs. From a small state perspective, training is important for deterrence as it is vital that there exists a credible threat of efficient allied reinforcements in case a transgression occurs. Evidently, the interoperability of allied forces can only hold a credible deterrence threat if such cohesion and interoperability have been visibly illustrated during an exercise.

This section has focused on the theoretical understandings that are evident in the literature on deterrence. Understanding this concept is imperative in a discussion surrounding the motivations Norway has for participating and oftentimes hosting JMEs. The final section

centered on the advantages of JMEs in the context of deterrence, and how this rationale may elucidate Norway's involvement. The next section on assurance is also imperative in understanding Norway's security posture in the Arctic.

2.3.2. Assurance

An area within political strategy that has received very little scholarly attention is the notion of assurance. Assurance has often been understood as a concept to be interlinked with deterrence: a deterrence strategy towards a shared adversary will simultaneously assure an ally. By contrast, this thesis makes an analytical distinction between the two because there are two different audiences. A military strategy can have many different consequences, it is therefore interesting to attempt to separate what it is that makes a certain action function as deterring towards someone, while simultaneously assuring to another. Another frequent confusion is the use of reassurance and assurance interchangeably by both scholars and policymakers. In recent years scholars have attempted to separate the two concepts. One of those attempts is Knopf (2012) who presents four variants of assurance; "(1) as a component of deterrence, (2) as a measure directed at allies, (3) as a strategy directed at potential adversaries, (4) as a tool for preventing nuclear proliferation" (p. 376). This thesis will discuss the three first categories. Arguing that assurance is to be understood as a part of deterrence lacks nuance and misses certain dynamics of a national security strategy. Furthermore, assurance directed at potential adversaries should not be considered a variant of assurance but should rather be termed reassurance as a separate concept. This thesis will apply the theoretical understanding of assurance as measures directed at allies. The following section will elaborate on this.

The inherent logic of assurance is based on making promises; declarations or signals conveyed to illustrate a commitment to either take or refrain from taking certain actions. Put more accurately, assurance strategies can be attempts at influencing "another actor's behavior by alleviating a perceived source of insecurity and/or giving the actor a greater sense of security" (Knopf, 2012, p. 378). Thus, assurance can broadly be understood as a tool for states to both target the presence of a threat as well as potentially increase a sense of security for a state. This is a conceptualization of assurance presented by Knopf (2012) which renders the concept of assurance applicable to both a strategy directed at allies and adversaries. This is a contestable pronouncement as this thesis will go on to demonstrate. The next section will discuss Knopf's (2012) operationalization of assurance as a component of deterrence.

As a component of deterrence

Assurance can be understood as a component of a deterrence strategy. By stating that a given action will get repercussions the promise to not punish if such action is taken must be credible (Knopf, 2012). Put bluntly, for a deterrence strategy to be effective the actor at which the strategy is aimed must believe that no costs will be imposed if no action is taken. Without this premise, the target state has no real incentive to not follow through with a given action if it is deemed beneficial to them. If the assurance part of a deterrence effort is not credible, there is no incentive for a state to oblige with the demands of the deterring actor. This operationalization of assurance is referred to as deterrence-related assurance (Knopf, 2012). Yost (2009) argues a similar sentiment in that assurance can be understood as a function of a perceived ability to deter. However, this conceptualization of assurance places the focus on actions that are to be perceived as credible by an adversary, rather than an ally. Furthermore, viewing assurance as an element of a deterrence strategy is useful for understanding how a deterring action can be most effective, but it does not leave room for exploring how assurance can be conceptualized. Thus, this thesis will argue that assurance should be a concept to be studied separately from that of a deterrence strategy.

As a measure directed at allies

This understanding of assurance relates to efforts aimed at protecting and communicating with allies. This type of assurance is often inconsistently used in conjunction with reassurance by policymakers and practitioners, leaving the conceptualization of assurance rather ambiguous (Knopf, 2012). During the Cold War when the concepts of deterrence and reassurance gained particular prominence, the reliability and credibility of the US security guarantee to allies were commonly referred to as reassurance (Yost, 2009). However, in recent years this element of the US defense posture is now regarded as assurance. According to Yost (2009), the shift in terminology from reassurance to assurance signals an alteration in terms of whom the strategies are aimed at and what function they aim to serve. Assurance can thus be understood as an effort to effectively communicate “a credible message of confidence in the dependability of its security commitments” (Yost, 2009, p. 755). This type of assurance is labelled alliance-related assurance by Knopf (2012) and this understanding of assurance relies on whether or not an ally feels sufficiently assured by another ally. This stands in contrast to the previous categorization as this strategy aims to assure allies, rather than as a part of a deterrence strategy and assuring adversaries about not imposing potential punishment. This understanding of assurance, as

policies aimed at allies, is an important element of foreign policy as fear of abandonment is a common concern for different alliance members (Snyder, 1984). This relates to one of the challenges highlighted by Yost (2009) in that allies of the US have historically raised concerns related to the possibility that the US could seek to fulfil its own security objectives and essentially neglect that of NATO allies in Europe. It has thus been imperative for allies of the US to be convinced that the US security umbrella extends to them. Allies have been adamant about finding ways in which the US can assure them that their security provisions and commitments are credible. While this conceptualization of assurance draws many parallels to extended deterrence as previously discussed, these are not identical strategies. Extended deterrence strategies seek to deter an adversary from transgressing on an ally and their effectiveness is based on whether or not the target state actually refrains from a given action. While this type of activity might indirectly result in assuring an ally of alliance commitments, it is not necessarily the primary objective of an extended deterrence strategy (Knopf, 2012). Thus, understanding assurance as a separate political tool for assuring allies is necessary. Yost (2009) argues that European allies of the US have historically held a lot of confidence in the reliability of the collective security umbrella of the US. Evidently, US military presence, through various means, has been perceived as an important indicator of Washington's security commitment to NATO allies in Europe. Despite dramatic reductions in the stationing of conventional military capabilities in Europe since the early 1990s, the deterrence role of US forces remains imminent evidence of US security guarantees on the European continent (Yost, 2009). Some European countries have even expressed more confidence in the security provisions of the US relative to European allies (Yost, 2009). This testifies to the position the US has had and continues to hold as a credible and reliable ally in Europe. This credible security of the US is arguably one of the cornerstones of how NATO has been able to uphold alliance cohesion and a shared security commitment.

Understanding assurance as a separate strategy aimed at allies leaves room for a nuanced discussion as to the potential risks and pitfalls of these types of policies. However, there exists scarce empirical research on the effectiveness of alliance-related assurance. One way in which a state can feel assured by an ally could be to allow the deployment of troops as tripwires in an attempt to deter an adversary. However, this does again render assurance as a component of a larger deterrence strategy, rather than a separate assuring strategy in itself. Furthermore, the military focus of stationing tripwires and military troops is not the sole way in which an ally

can feel assured by allies, rather, recent studies have found the various ways in which US allies feel assured through for instance joint planning and consultation opportunities (Yost, 2009). This leaves further room for an interpretation of assurance in which JMEs might be an effective way for allies to feel assured through hosting and initiating exercises that enhance perceptions of security.

Most of the existing literature on inter-alliance assurance tends to focus on how patrons can assure their allies. One of those studies is an article by Yarhi-Milo et al., (2016) which discusses “the patron’s dilemma” (p. 90) and the “strategic logic of arms transfers and alliances” (p. 90). The article discusses the conditions under which a great power offers client states arms and alliances. As a point of departure, the authors cite Snyder’s traditional alliance dilemma in which fears of abandonment and weak commitments are central theories. Furthermore, the article focuses on the decisions made by the patron in providing security guarantees to weaker allies. Interestingly, the article argues that two of the primary objectives of a patron to extend its security relates to deterrence and (re)assurance (Yarhi-Milo et al., 2016). The article argues that patrons extend their security to allies as this strengthens their deterrence and defense posture by aggregating capabilities towards a potential common adversary (Yarhi-Milo et al., 2016). The article conceptualizes reassurance as policies aimed at allies in signaling a commitment to their shared security posture. This contrasts with the way in which this thesis conceptualizes reassurance. Nevertheless, the focus of the Yarhi-Milo et al., (2016) article is primarily on the factors which make a patron provide security guarantees to smaller allies.

Continuing to draw on theoretical insights on assurance, Snyder (1984) argues that there are primarily two “bad” consequences of being in a security alliance. The first is abandonment and the second is entrapment. For this thesis, the primary concern relates to abandonment. In this concept, Snyder (1984) argues that members of an alliance will always have an inherent fear that an ally might defect from the alliance at any given time. In an attempt to outline the choices available for members of an alliance to escape both abandonment and entrapment, Snyder (1984) introduces various “determinants of choice” (Snyder, 1984, p. 471). The first determinant is coined dependence and relates to how much a state is dependent on an ally. Essentially, if one state is highly dependent on an ally, it is more likely to see the benefits of the alliance as outweighing the potential costs and risks, such as entrapment. The second determinant is the degree of strategic interest of the allied states to defend each other. This

relates to the need to block a potential increase in an adversary's power position. This means that there is an end goal of preventing an adversary from obtaining an ally's power resources. Snyder (1984) separates this from the former in that this determinant can be understood as "indirect dependence" (p. 472). The third determinant is that of explicitness and refers to the level of ambiguousness inherent in the agreement of the alliance. If an alliance agreement is rather vague, this tends to maximize the fears of abandonment. The fourth determinant is whether or not the allies share the same interests towards an adversary. If the allies share and value a similar interest towards an adversary, both fears of entrapment and abandonment are reduced. Snyder (1984) states that: "if a state feels highly dependent on its ally, directly or indirectly, if it perceives the ally as less dependent, if the alliance commitment is vague, and if the ally's recent behavior suggests doubtful loyalty, the state will fear abandonment more than entrapment" (p. 475). This implies there exist several scenarios in which a small state might fear that a more powerful ally might deflect from the alliance. All these factors do not have to be present at the same time for an ally to fear abandonment. This section has illuminated some of the dynamics that make assurance from allies an imperative aspect of alliance politics. The next section will place these findings into the context of JMEs.

Benefits of JMEs concerning assurance

This section will introduce some of the potential benefits associated with JMEs concerning assuring allies. Separating the benefits of JMEs in relation to deterrence and assurance extends our understanding of the merits of JMEs and subsequently why Norway participates in them.

The previously established interoperability aspect of JMEs can also be understood from an assurance perspective. Not only does increased interoperability between allied armed forces signal high resolve towards an adversary, but it also provides benefits in terms of assuring the member states that they can effectively work together during a crisis. An allied can feel assured that their collective defense is enhanced if there has been elaborate exercising during peacetime. As argued by McManus and Nieman (2019), JMEs are one of the most important indicators of a great power's overall support for its security allies. A small state like Norway would need rapid allied reinforcements in times of crisis, and it is thus elemental that the armed forces of allies can effectively work together (Depledge, 2020). Thus, the interoperability aspect of JMEs is not only for deterring purposes aimed at an adversary, but it is also perhaps

even more relevant for states like Norway to be assured that allies hold the right competence to be able to survive in the challenging climate and topography of the Arctic (Depledge, 2020).

Kubai (2022) briefly touches on the way in which JMEs function as an opportunity for the participating states to evaluate their readiness to contribute to a military operation. In this Kubai (2022) argues that exercises provide an opportunity for the political and military leadership to assess their national defense structure in functioning together with allies.

Furthermore, JMEs serve as a facilitating platform for integrating a shared idea of threat perceptions and potential aggressors. This shared threat perception is important for alliance cohesion following the military maxim of “train where you expect to fight” (Depledge, 2020, p. 289). JMEs signal to allies that they are willing to prioritize a given area as there is a shared understanding of the conflict potential of a given region. Furthermore, JMEs require a vast amount of resources, ranging from military equipment to manpower and logistical planning (Depledge, 2020). By participating in those exercises, allies can be further assured that their commitment to an alliance is not only present in various so-called “fantasy documents” of defense planning but that words are put into action. JMEs become one of the most potent and visible illustrations of alliance commitment and a shared defense posture (Depledge, 2020). Thus, JMEs provide allies with a unique opportunity to showcase their commitment to an alliance and assure allies of their priorities.

This section has introduced some of the existing literature on assurance. The main takeaway is that assurance relates to policies that are aimed at allies and attempts at convincing allies of commitment to a shared security posture. The final segment discussed the various ways in which participating in JMEs can be understood from an assurance point of view, illustrating the opportunity JMEs provide to allies in terms of proving alliance commitments.

2.3.3. Reassurance

Closely in line with the reasoning inherent in defensive realism is the concept of reassurance. Defensive realists will argue that there are less aggressive and offensive options available to states that still function to advance or maintain a stable and secure position. One of those policies is one rooted in reassurance. In its simplest form, reassurance can be understood as attempts by a state to convincingly persuade another state that no aggressive intentions are the cause of a given action (Knopf, 2012). This type of political strategy is often present when a

state tries to convince an adversary of benign intention in an attempt to keep tensions low and the risk of misunderstandings at a minimum. Thus, scholars point to the use of reassurance as a tool for states to escape from the infamous security dilemma (Montgomery, 2006). This idea is closely tied to the merits attached to reassurance strategies. When a state is engaged in what could be perceived as provocative behavior, it is arguably important for that state to signal to adversaries that the intentions behind the behavior are not to be followed by aggression. This is a central argument of Holst (1967) in that Norway has to balance efforts to prevent expansionist behavior of Russia in the north, yet also avoid potential provocations. Thus, reassurance strategies are often a way for states to reduce potential unintended conflict escalation.

Tang (2010) argues that states engaging with reassurance policies also tend to seek to build trust to enhance possibilities of cooperation. In accordance with Tang (2010) reassurance is closely tied to trust-building and cooperation, and the relationship between the concepts is to be understood as a feedback mechanism, rather than a one-way relationship. Stein (1991) argues that reassurance can take the form of informally developing norms of confidence-building to reduce uncertainty and thus reduce the likelihood of miscalculated war. This understanding of reassurance as a tool to minimize tension relates to one of the risks inherent in alliance commitments presented by Yost (2009). In an alliance with a major power, smaller member states have expressed concern about being drawn into a conflict, the fear of entrapment paradigm (Snyder, 1984). This is particularly potent amongst NATO members in which the fear of conflict escalation between the US and Russia is prominent. This implies that European allies have been forced to balance two important aspects of their security posture. On the one hand, they have to effectively demonstrate a collective security effort aligned with US interests against adversaries of the alliance (Yost, 2009). On the other hand, the allies have to make sure informal and formal arrangements are ingrained in policies that limit the possibility of increased tensions and conflict escalation (Holst, 1967). In this latter point the importance of effective reassurance policies comes into play. Having to balance a collective security posture with an alliance while simultaneously signaling to adversaries that the intentions behind given actions are limited to defensive purposes is challenging, yet imperative.

Reassuring strategies are arguably particularly potent for states that seek to deter an aggressive adversary (Stein, 1991). This illuminates how the concept of deterrence and reassurance are

closely linked. A reassurance policy can be understood as a strategy employed in an attempt at reducing the risks of deterrence according to Stein (1991). This assumes that a deterrence strategy can provoke rather than prevent an adversary from acting out of threat and fear. A deterrence strategy can also fail if an action is misunderstood by an adversary. Hence, it is possible to understand deterrence and reassurance as two interlinked concepts in which deterring actions should be followed by effective reassurance policies to limit the possibility of increased tensions and the potential spiral of a security dilemma. Nonetheless, reassurance should be conceptually understood as a strategy that is not embedded in a deterrence strategy, but rather as a separate tool for policymakers.

Stein (1991) argues that one of the variants of reassurance that is available for states to use is that of exercising restraint. By conforming to a strategy of restraint, a state can effectively reduce some of the evident risks and dangers inherent in deterrence. “The exercise of restraint, both in the language leaders use and in the deployment of military forces, can reduce the risk of provocation” (Stein, 1991, p. 433). A state can effectively be engaged in deterrence strategies as long as some type of restraint is employed to reassure an adversary of the limits of their intentions. This communication of benign intention can either be communicated directly to an adversary or through a third party. If a platform for bilateral communication exists it is arguably the most effective way to reassure an adversary. Reassurance has been an important element of foreign policy for various states to keep a channel of communication with adversaries and limit the room for miscalculations and misunderstandings.

Costs of JMEs concerning reassurance

The sections on deterrence and assurance have focused on the dimensions within these categories that point to some of the inherent benefits of JMEs. This section will approach the costs to reassurance of an adversary that are potentially present when engaging in JMEs.

One of the potential costs of not reassuring an adversary amid a JME relates to the possible hostile reactions they can trigger. The JMEs on the Korean peninsula between the US and South Korea have received some scholarly attention due to the reactions they have received from North Korea. Though scholars seem to disagree as to the nature of North Korean reactions, Bernhardt and Sukin (2021) find that the JMEs between South Korea and the US have resulted in hostile responses from North Korea. The main finding is that North Korea has for a long

time voiced its concern and dissatisfaction with these exercises with statements urging the US and South Korea to behave with discretion (KCNA, 2012). Furthermore, the Central Association of Korean Nationals in Russia voiced their dissatisfaction by stating that “those who are fond of playing with fire are destined to perish” in the aftermath of exercises (KCNA, 2012). Bernhardt and Sukin (2021) find an evident relationship between the JMEs and the responsive actions from North Korea, implying that North Korea takes seriously the threat JMEs pose them. Additionally, North Korea is more likely to produce and distribute threatening propaganda and carry out military provocations such as missile tests and nuclear tests in response to US and South Korean exercises. The JMEs in the Korean Peninsula are argued to foster a hostile security environment which motivates North Korea to respond by demonstrating resolve. Though scarcely studied, Ploom et al., (2020) explore the reactions NATO-led military exercises in the Baltic provoke from the Kremlin. In their research, they explore whether or not these types of exercises either result in a notion of a credible deterrence or if they lead to a provocation that can have escalatory potential. As highlighted by Ploom et al., (2020) there is an inherent paradox in the fact that what NATO considers to be defensive acts of deterrence, Russia interprets as aggressive and threatening behavior. Statements from Russian elites, such as Dmitry Peskov, the Press Secretary for the President of Russia and the Foreign Minister Lavrov, testify to the way in which Western-led military exercises are argued to potentially lead to an undesired arms race and consequently significantly increasing the risk of escalation and potential conflict (Ploom et al., 2020). In the Baltic Sea, Russia opposes Western military exercises as they infringe on a Russian perception of the region as their “near-abroad.”

This brings us to the second cost related to the potential security dilemma JMEs can foster. JMEs could lead to increased military build-up and demonstrations of military capabilities along the borders of the adversaries to respond to perceived hostile behavior. As seen on the Korean peninsula, JMEs warrant responses from the adversary which leads to increased tension and an arms race to demonstrate their capabilities. Kuo and Blankenship (2022) investigate the presence of JMEs and their potential escalatory effect. As motivation for the research, they cite the example of how a military exercise in Georgia called Sea Breeze in 2008 arguably provoked a Russian-led invasion. The military exercise with sixteen participating states, of whom five were NATO members, resulted in a military invasion close to one-month post-exercise and the culmination of military incursions and open warfare that followed (Kuo & Blankenship, 2022). Without implying a causal mechanism between those two incidents, the article points to the

potential escalatory implication military exercises can have in already tense regions (Kuo & Blankenship, 2022). The article further argues that the threat landscape is a defining feature of whether two adversaries might become trapped in a dynamic and complex upward spiral of military brinkmanship. The article points to how JMEs can have an escalatory effect in the military domain concerning the potential risks to reassurance they pose.

To sum up this section on reassurance, it is possible to understand from a theoretical perspective how JMEs can lead to increased tension and arms races between adversaries. It is therefore important to introduce the risks a country runs when engaging with these exercises as part of its foreign policy.

2.4. Concluding remarks on the theoretical framework

This thesis will separate deterrence, assurance, and reassurance to illuminate some of the unexplored dynamics of Norway's motivations behind engaging with JMEs in the Arctic. The previous sections have provided the theoretical underpinnings of the three concepts and how they can be understood together, but also how they can be explored as unique strategies for a state to preserve or enhance its security position. To summarize, this thesis will henceforth have assurance conceptualized as efforts to bolster the confidence in allies and their commitment to a given alliance or partnership. Reassurance is understood as efforts directed at adversaries by demonstrating benign intentions.

3. Methodology

This chapter will focus on the methods that are used in this thesis. Having a methodologically sound approach to research is imperative for having valid and reliable results. The following chapter will discuss the methodological choices that have steered this thesis. This is done in an attempt to keep the thesis transparent as to the methods employed, and potential limitations. By outlining the choices in terms of case selection, data collection and sources, this chapter will point to both the validity and reliability of the results.

3.1. The case study design

According to Gerring (2017), there are two ways to learn about a subject. One way is to explore multiple examples at once and single out a few dimensions, the other option is to study one particular example more extensively, through a case study design. Bryman (2016) argues that the basic case study design is a detailed and intensive analysis of a given case. A case is defined as “a spatially and temporally delimited phenomenon of theoretical significance” (Gerring, 2017, p. 27). Thus, a case can be understood as a state. Even though a case study design can take on both a quantitative and a qualitative approach, this thesis will be qualitative, a common and highly influential method within political science (Gerring, 2017). According to Quintao et al., (2020), a qualitative research method seeks to “capture the subjective dimension of a social phenomenon” (p. 265). This thesis adheres to a congruence approach in which the aim is to find a relationship between empirical observations and abstract concepts. This is done to find a connection between empirical cases and existing theories (Blatter & Haverland, 2012). This is therefore a deductive case study which seeks to explore the relationship between theory and social research by drawing on what is known about a certain domain and existing theoretical ideas and applying it to a given empirical phenomenon (Bryman, 2016). This allows for an analysis that seeks to explore and understand the complexity of a case at a deeper level.

Due to the inherent merits of the case study research design in which various lenses are applied to one case, one can elaborately explore and understand different contextual factors. Even though theoretical concepts are oftentimes challenging to measure, a case study design allows for a deeper understanding of context-specific factors which help illuminate potentially useful policy-relevant theories for policymakers (Bennet & George, 2005). Hence, through the case study design, this thesis will be able to shed light on the specific and nuanced reasons why Norway chooses to participate in JMEs.

3.2. Selecting the case

There are numerous reasons for choosing to study Norway's security posture in the Arctic with a special focus on JMEs. The first section will outline the inherent limitations in choosing to conduct a case study. The second section will discuss the reasons for choosing Norway in the Arctic as a case study. The third section will explain why JMEs are used as the analytical focus and as one of the manifestations of Norway's security policies in the Arctic.

3.3. Internal and external validity

Before delving into the justifications for choosing Norway as the case study, a short overview of some of the limitations of the chosen research design is imperative. As previously stated, one of the undisputable benefits of focusing on a single case is the extensive and in-depth analysis the chosen design allows (Halperin & Heath, 2020). This implies that a case study design often has high internal validity, in that there is a high rigor in attempting to explore various explanations within a given case. Furthermore, by adhering to a congruence approach this case study's internal validity is enhanced. However, the external validity, namely the case study's ability to explain cases outside of the given context might be a more challenging endeavor. This is the balancing act a researcher has to deal with when choosing to adhere to a case study design. A case study design, like this thesis, will have high internal validity, but it cannot aim to make robust generalizations (Halperin & Heath, 2020).

One of the central limitations of a deductive approach is how the researcher might, sometimes unconsciously, place an increased emphasis on data that supports a given theory leading to biased findings. This thesis aims to be transparent about some of the challenges with the chosen methodology and this is one of the pressing limitations that have made drawing causal inferences difficult.

3.4. Why Norway in the Arctic

The case explored in this thesis is Norway in the time period from 2006 until 2023. This is because the first official "High North" policy document was released by the Norwegian government in 2006 and is often marked as the year Norway put the Arctic on its agenda as one of the first Arctic states to do so (Østhagen, 2021). The case study of Norway in the Arctic is unique due to the role Norway has in the Arctic compared to other Arctic states. One-third of Norway's territory and 80% of its maritime area are found within the Arctic region, as well as almost half a million in population (Østhagen, 2021). The Arctic is therefore an extremely

important region for Norway with recent official statements testifying to the volatility of the region. At a recent conference in Kirkenes, the foreign minister of Norway Anniken Huitfeldt stated: “I am convinced that the last year has given the whole country an important reminder of the value of a military presence here on the border with our neighbor to the east.” (Huitfeldt, 2023). This testifies to the importance placed on the High North aligning with a larger focus on the region as the most important strategic area for Norway. The added element of a military presence also testifies to the change in the security environment in the region. Similar views on the Arctic are found in the recently published strategy for the Arctic region from the US in which one of the pillars of the strategy relates to security: “We will deter threats to the U.S homeland and our allies by enhancing the capabilities required to defend our interests in the Arctic ...” (The White House, 2022). It is thus imminent that the Arctic is also a strategically important region for the US. It is furthermore evident that the Arctic is becoming increasingly important for the other Arctic states which have all adopted region-specific strategies focusing on the emerging security challenges of the region (Åtland, 2014). Despite historically being a region of low tension and stability, the recent developments testify to its increased militarization. The region is not exempt from the larger geopolitical tensions elsewhere in the world and the future stability of the region is being questioned by scholars (Østhagen, 2021).

Despite the interest in the Arctic from various Arctic states this thesis has chosen to focus on Norway due to how language knowledge allows for an analysis of a small state’s military strategy which according to Saxi and Stai (2020) is often deficient. Small states are often argued to be merely copying the actions of their great power allies, however, recent insights have argued that is not always possible (Saxi & Stai, 2020). Hence, an analysis of the Norwegian security strategy is warranted to nuance the defense posture of smaller states in an alliance with great powers. Although I could have written about Sweden, I intended to concentrate on a presently recognized member state of NATO. Furthermore, Sweden does not share a land border or coastline with Russia which implies that the military threat from a traditional lens is different from that of Norway. Another option was Iceland which has also been an active proponent of military exercises in the Arctic (Depledge, 2020). However, the language barrier is imminent and thus limits the potential data material. A similar assessment was made concerning Finland in which both the language barrier and the non-NATO membership during the time of thesis composition were factors that excluded it from interest.

Furthermore, the case of Norway as an Arctic state is an analytically highly interesting one. Bordering along almost 200 km with Russia in the North while simultaneously being a member of the NATO alliance calls for a carefully carried out balancing act (Møller, 2019). A balancing act that Norway has been rather successful at. As argued by Rottem (2007a) Norway's military posture in the High North does not have a sufficient deterring effect towards Russia. A small state like Norway would never be able to mobilize enough resources to have a deterring military strategy on its own. A cornerstone of Norwegian security policy has thus been the alliance with NATO and the bilateral relationship with the US. Despite Norway's historical ambivalence to the alliance, Norway has been an active actor in NATO since the Cold War and has for instance participated in international operations in efforts to stabilize the Balkans and fight terrorism in the Middle East (Rottem, 2007a). However, even though Norway has historically been viewed as a good ally welcoming allied exercises and intelligence gathering, they have also screened themselves from military integration due to their base policy (Pettersson & Saxi, 2013). Testifying to the careful balancing act Norway has been engaged in with Russia on the one hand and the US and NATO allies on the other.

Additionally, Norway has been one of the few Arctic, Western states to be able to keep a peaceful and stable dialogue with Russia despite both the 2008 invasion of Georgia and the annexation of Crimea in 2014 (Østhagen, 2021). For instance, the end of the Barents Sea border dispute in 2011 is considered a breakthrough in the relationship between Norway and Russia (Staalesen, 2016). Even though the mood soured significantly between the West and Russia following 2014, Norway has been able to keep a running dialogue with Russia on important, yet largely civilian, matters in the Arctic rooted in an attempt to reassure and upkeep a diplomatic dialogue with Russia. Trust-building and diplomatic negotiations were taking place despite the political freeze, such as the agreement which enables seismic vessels to map joint border areas in the Barents Sea (Staalesen, 2016). Norway has been attempting to keep diplomatic efforts with Russia through various means. Another element of this posture has been reassuring Russia through self-imposed restrictions that have aimed to convince Russia that no hostile intentions are inherent in the behavior of Norway. There are predominantly three sets of self-imposed restrictions on allied activity in Norway. The first relates to the ban on foreign military bases on Norwegian soil during peacetime when Norway is not under an attack or threat of attack (Pettersson & Saxi, 2013). The second restriction is the prohibition of any storage of nuclear weapons in Norway during peacetime (Pettersson & Saxi, 2013). The third restriction is the limitations placed on the geographical location of allied military exercises.

These are not allowed to take place in the North-East parts of Norwegian territory as it was argued to be too close to the Russian border and the city of Murmansk by Soviet leaders in the 1980s (Heier, 2018). Thus, restrictions were placed on exercises which banned exercises from taking place east of the 24th longitude in the Barents Sea, as well as in all of Finnmark county, and on Svalbard and Jan Mayen Islands (Heier, 2018; Petersson & Saxi, 2013). The Norwegian government's delicate balancing act between alliance commitments to Western states and simultaneously reassuring Russia through various means provides a compelling backdrop for analyzing Norwegian security policies in the Arctic.

3.5. Why the focus on JMEs

As the focus of this thesis is on Norway's security posture in the Arctic, I have chosen to focus on the phenomena of JMEs. As previously stated, due to the inherent merits of the case study research design in which various lenses are applied to one case, one can elaborately explore and understand different contextual factors. By focusing on JMEs this thesis can elaborate on the Norwegian understanding of this phenomenon. The engagement in JMEs does also illuminate a puzzle in the Norwegian security posture due to its conflicting stature concerning reassuring Russia (Friis, 2019). This focus on JMEs will highlight some of the priorities that have been made by policymakers in Norway in terms of balancing different foreign policy goals.

The focus of the thesis is on military exercises with several participating states. This is done as this allows for an analysis that draws on theoretical frameworks derived from alliance politics. If the thesis was to focus on national exercises which do not include foreign states, the perspective of intrastate cooperation and alliance commitments would be missed. Another assumption is that such exercises would not necessarily warrant major responses from the Russian government. Russia tends to be more concerned with larger exercises in which Western alliance commitments demonstrate a collective resolve, rather than the limited national capabilities of the Norwegian armed forces.

The case of allied military exercises in Norway is further interesting as a revised long-term plan for the Norwegian Armed Forces has been requested and is due to be presented in 2024 (Brende, 2022). With the changed security situation in Europe, many countries, Norway included, have significantly increased their focus on military capabilities. By focusing on JMEs this thesis aims to explore one of the central elements of the Norwegian Armed Forces as the

participation and hosting of allied exercises are argued to be one of the central pillars of enhancing the military capabilities of the forces.

However, there are some evident limitations inherent in choosing to adhere to a qualitative case study in terms of generalization. When deciding to adopt a case study approach this thesis runs the risk of low external validity. According to Gerring (2017), the broader applicability of a case study is an important aspect of a solid research design. Since a case study design, by definition, is an in-depth study of a single case, it is challenging to argue that the findings of this thesis apply to other contexts. Consequently, the unique circumstances that fall behind the motivations of Norway's Arctic security policies may not be entirely applicable to other states. Still, there is potential that the key insights gleaned from the study on the capacity of small states to find opportunities for assuring signals from a patron may have relevance for other small states.

3.6. The data collection process

According to Bratberg (2021), a source is a concrete text or object which is often referred to as data material in the social sciences. The quality of a source has two dimensions; an internal and an external element (Bratberg, 2021). The internal quality of a source is dependent on predominantly three aspects: (1) the origin of the source, (2) its content, and (3) its usefulness (Bratberg, 2021). The first relates to the person or the entity behind the source illuminating potential bias, which will have implications for the credibility of the source (Bratberg, 2021). The second element indicates the actual content of the source (Bratberg, 2021). The third builds on the second by contending the usefulness of the source in answering a given research question (Bratberg, 2021).

The external examination element of a source relates to the larger context the source fits into. This element questions whether or not the information inherent in the source is aligned with a larger, established context (Bratberg, 2021).

The primary source of data collection is white papers from the Norwegian government. These include strategy documents and official reports. The primary data is collected from the long-term plans of the Norwegian Armed Forces. Yet, I have also chosen strategy documents that focus specifically on the High North on an elevated level in which the sole focus is not militarily. A complete list of the chosen documents is the following:

1. December 1, 2006: “Regjeringens nordområdestrategi / The Norwegian Government’s Strategy for the High North”
2. March 28, 2008: “Et forsvar til vern om Norges sikkerhet, interesser og verdier / A defense for the protection of Norway’s security, interests and values”
3. March 23, 2012: “Et forsvar for vår tid / A defense for our time”
4. June 17, 2016: “Kampkraft og bærekraft. Langtidsplan for forsvarssektoren / Combat power and sustainability. Long-term plan for the defense sector”
5. April 21, 2017: “Veivalg i norsk utenriks- og sikkerhetspolitikk / Choices in Norwegian foreign and security policy”
6. January 8, 2020: “Mennesker, muligheter og norske interesser i nord / People, opportunities and Norwegian interests in the High North”
7. October 16, 2020: “Evne til forsvar - vilje til beredskap. Langtidsplan for forsvarssektoren / Ability to defend – willingness to prepare. Long-term plan for the defense sector”
8. April 8, 2022: “Prioriterte endringer, status og tiltak i forsvarssektoren / Prioritized changes, status, and measures in the defense sector”

Since 2005 there have been three different government coalitions in Norway. From 2005-2013 the Prime Minister was Jens Stoltenberg from the Labour Party, in a majority coalition with other “Red-Green” parties. From 2013-2021 the leader of the Conservative Party Erna Solberg was the Norwegian Prime Minister, with an informally labelled “Blue-Blue Cabinet”. The current Prime Minister is Jonas Gahr Støre from the Labour Party again in a “Red-Green” coalition. Despite the changes in government, the High North policy stature has remained rather consistent. This enhances the internal validity of the thesis in that the potential changes in the Norwegian High North policy are not rooted in changing cabinets, but rather in external sources of insecurity such as the 2014 Crimea annexation and alterations to the command structure of NATO. Thus, the change in governments in the chosen time period will not be a considerable limitation of the research. However, as Yin (2015) has argued all documents have been written for a specific purpose, and for an audience that is not the researcher of the case study. Therefore, this needs to be taken into consideration. As these documents are written for the public, there might be certain nuances inherent in the decision-making phase that are not extensively included in the strategy documents. These documents are part of a larger strategy of how the government wants to present a given case. Consequently, the chosen documents might only

present a partial picture of the decision-making process and how Norway weighs different foreign policy objectives. Nonetheless, the strategy documents still serve a function as they testify to the basic logic of the security defense posture of Norway, even though some of the dynamics and practicalities are exempt from the public eye. Furthermore, there is often a discrepancy between how scholars and policymakers refer to and understand different concepts. For instance, as previously mentioned, policymakers and politicians have been using concepts like assurance and reassurance interchangeably which testifies to the way in which scholars and politicians use theoretical concepts and terminology differently. For that reason, it might be that policymakers use theoretical concepts with a different intention than how scholars would use the same word when investigating a phenomenon. However, this does not present a significant challenge since this thesis aims to examine the Norwegian government's rationale for participating in JMEs, and the Norwegian government is made up of policymakers and politicians.

Other than the fact that policy and strategy documents on national defense are limited in terms of not wanting to share vulnerabilities with adversaries, there is no imminent bias nor elements of suppression in the publication of strategy documents from the Norwegian government. The quotes used in the analysis have been translated by the author. As the material is easily available it enhances the replicability of the thesis as future enquiries can make use of the same sources and data material.

3.7. Coding scheme for deterrence and assurance

When analyzing the documents, it is important to look for the actual and observable content, treating the document as a text which encompasses observable meanings (Bratberg, 2021). As opposed to an analysis that aims to interpret discourse and rhetoric, this thesis aims to systematize and operationalize theoretical concepts in the Norwegian security posture. By having a coding scheme, it was possible to systematically analyze how the Norwegian government's understanding of JMEs relates to and matches the different theories on deterrence and assurance. The different keywords used for deterrence and assurance are outlined in the table below.

Table 1

	Deterrence	Assurance
Keyword(s)	“Avskrekking/Deterrence” “Avskrekknings evne/ Deterrence capability” “Kollektiv forsvar/Collective Defense” “Interoperabilitet/ Interoperability” “Kredibilitet/Credibility”	“Samarbeid/Cooperation” “Samvirke/Collaboration” “Alliert (støtte)/Allied (Support)” “Interoperabilitet/ Interoperability” “Evaluering/Evaluation” “Byrde-fordeling/Burden-sharing” “Bevissthet/Awareness”

One of the challenges of this thesis is being able to differentiate between deterrence and assurance in the analysis. One argument favoring participating in JMEs relates to the concepts of interoperability (in Norwegian “interoperabilitet”). As the table above illuminates, this concept can be both understood as an argument for deterrence and assurance. Therefore, the coding scheme is to function as a framework for the analysis rather than a strict dichotomy. The words concerning allied support focus on sections of the strategy documents that orient around the need for allied reinforcements and being able to incorporate allied forces rapidly in times of crisis. Furthermore, the coding scheme does not determine the results of the analysis. It will be imperative to analyze the context of the words, such as the section in which the word is present, the overall purpose of the strategy document, and the rest of the sentence, to mention a few of the factors. The coding scheme is largely used to systemize the findings and be able to identify some of the themes for the analysis. The coding scheme is a tool for categorizing the strategy documents and provided insights in terms of the frequency of some of the central words for the analysis.

To analyze the potential reactions from the Russians and the costs to reassurance, the thesis will look at different media outlets. A coding scheme is not applied to this section of the analysis. This thesis looks through different media during and in the aftermath of an exercise to look for negative Russian reactions. Data will be collected from news sources in Norwegian

and English due to language knowledge. Newspapers like Aftenposten, NRK, Dagbladet, The Barents Observer and High North News. To explore the potential military build-up of the Russian posture in the Arctic, this thesis will synthesize findings and data from various reputable think tanks such as the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI), as well as the Norwegian Institute for International Affairs (NUPI), Institute for Defence Studies (IFS) and Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO). The annual open-access report from the Norwegian Intelligence Service “Focus” is also used to examine elements of the Norwegian threat perception concerning the military capabilities of Russia in the Arctic. In order to minimize potential bias this thesis has been cross-checking across the different sources.

4. Norway's motivations behind JMEs in the Arctic

In this chapter, the aim is to apply the theoretical framework introduced in chapter 2 in an attempt to understand the underlying motivations behind Norway's participation in JMEs in the Arctic. The theoretical insights from deterrence are largely present in the Norwegian case in relation to interoperability and demonstration of military capabilities. Furthermore, the following analysis will illuminate how assurance plays a large role in motivating Norway's participation in JMEs. The theories around reassurance are applicable to the Norwegian case to various degrees.

The overarching finding from the analysis is that Norway values the cumulative benefits of deterrence with allies and assurance from and to allies as more important than the potential negative responses they might provoke from Russia. The Norwegian government is likely aware of the negative reactions JMEs produce from Russia, but the benefits JMEs provide for the national security of Norway is perceived as more important. A brief overview of the key findings will be presented next.

First, I find that the Norwegian government through white papers since 2006 have demonstrated an increased focus on deterrence. JMEs are often portrayed to have important implications for the larger deterrence signals of NATO and its allies. Interoperability and cooperation of allied forces are argued to be imperative for the alliance in terms of deterrence. This is in the analysis tied specifically to the concept of deterrence by denial. Thus, deterrence through JMEs is featured as an increasingly important aspect of the Norwegian security posture through the chosen white papers.

Second, the long-term strategy documents point to an additional layer in Norway's defense policies concerning assurance. While it might not always be clearly stated, it is evident that assurance is an important aspect of Norway's motivations behind participating in and hosting JMEs. While aspects of assurance can be understood as a feature or an element within a larger deterrence strategy, this thesis separates the two concepts to shed light on additional benefits of JMEs that are often ignored in the existing literature. Norway's participation in JMEs serves as a platform for Norway to be assured of NATO and the US commitment to defending Norwegian interests and enhancing stability in the region. This is possible through three dynamics of interoperability, evaluation, and shared threat perceptions. Additionally, JMEs provide a platform for Norway to send signals of assurance to the NATO alliance despite not

meeting the 2% GDP spending requirement. Therefore, assurance as a concept is featured as a means for allies to assure Norway, and for Norway to provide assurance to allies.

Third, I find that the Norwegian government is aware of the potential negative impact of these exercises in terms of increased tensions and hostility it might spur from our Eastern neighbors. Through increased hostile tensions and rhetoric, the Norwegian government is aware of Russia's opposition to these types of exercises. Despite increased hostile tensions and low-scale disruptions to exercises, there are no signs that Russia is increasing its permanent military posture in the region. The modernizations and alterations of its Arctic military posture are likely part of a larger military, political, and economic strategy. Due to this, one cannot attribute this behavior to a Russian response to Norwegian JMEs in the Arctic.

4.1. Descriptive overview of JMEs in the Arctic

According to Depledge (2020), the presence of Western-led military exercises in the High North has increased since 2006. In the new Arctic Military Exercise (ArcMilEx) dataset, Depledge (2020) illuminates the trend in which Western states have increased their military presence in the Arctic region in response to predominantly two factors. The first is how smaller states, such as Norway and Iceland, have called for allies to enhance their military capabilities and presence in the region. The second factor is cited as being NATO's renewed interest in deterrence and territorial defense in Europe (Depledge, 2020). Both these factors can be tied to a growing concern amongst Western states that Russia is expanding its interest in the region for strategic reasons. As a result, Western and non-Arctic states have in the last couple of years ramped up their participation in military exercises to enhance their capabilities to contribute to a more effective and credible collective defense posture to deter potential adversaries. The very fact that military exercises have increased since 2006 is a puzzle as the general narrative of the region has been one in which stability and peace have been the common denominator in the official discourse from the Arctic countries (Depledge, 2020). The general trend has been one in which the Arctic's potential for armed conflict has been deemed rather implausible.

Even though the Arctic is a notoriously difficult area to define for a variety of reasons, this thesis will focus on exercises that have taken place either partly or fully above the Arctic Circle (at 66°33'47.8 North). As argued by Depledge (2020) even though some of the exercises, like Dynamic Mongoose, an Anti-Submarine Warfare exercise taking place in the Northern Atlantic, only sporadically cross the official border of the Arctic circle, the exercise is still

inherently focusing on potential threats originating from the Arctic. This illuminates the fact that JMEs like this one, despite not being fully situated within the official parameters of the Arctic Circle, still aim to increase the military presence of non-Arctic and Arctic states in the region in an attempt to deter adversaries.

The next section will provide a descriptive overview of some of the notable military exercises that have taken place in the Arctic in recent years.

Cold Response

In 2006 Norway invited its non-Arctic allies to participate in a major JME, named Cold Response (EXCR). This exercise has taken place in 2006, 2007, 2009, 2010, 2012, 2014, 2016, 2020 (had to be stopped approximately a week in due to increased spreading of COVID-19), and 2022. Since its establishment, these exercises have been oriented around crisis response operations aligning with a fictive UN mandate. Since the first exercise in 2006, the number of participating non-Arctic states has increased significantly. Despite most allies being occupied in military operations in the Middle East, non-Arctic allies accepted the invitation to train in the Arctic region as Russia's increasingly expansionist narrative began worrying Western states (Depledge, 2020). The EXCR was seen as a golden opportunity for allies to enhance military capabilities and operative competence in a challenging cold weather climate with mountainous terrain (Depledge & Dodds, 2012). The exercise focuses on increasing the interoperability of the armed forces as well as illustrating a commitment to the collective defense posture in the High North. According to a press release from NATO, the EXCR 2022 brings together around 30,000 troops from 27 countries in Europe and North America (NATO, 2022). This illustrated the sheer size of the exercise and how it gathers allies beyond Arctic states. Depledge (2020) states that the main priority of the Norwegian government in hosting EXCR was to signal to the world that Norway's allies hold the necessary capabilities and competence to come to the defense of Norway and simultaneously send deterring signals to adversaries.

Trident Juncture 2018

This JME gathered all NATO countries and some external partners in an exercise in 2018 which was the largest exercise in the Northern region of the alliance. This was one of the largest NATO exercises ever since the end of the Cold War (Depledge, 2020). With around 50,000 participants from 31 countries, 250 aircraft, 65 ships, and up to 10,000 vehicles this exercise took place from the 25th of October to the 7th of November 2018 (NATO, 2018). This exercise

was under joint NATO command as opposed to Cold Response which is Norway-led. Nevertheless, the exercise took place primarily on Norwegian territory. Part of the exercise also took place in the northern areas of Sweden, Iceland, and Finland (Rempfer, 2018). Without specifically mentioning Russia by name, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg stated that the exercise demonstrated the alliance's adaptation to the altered security environment in Europe, yet defensive in nature (Jozwiak, 2018). This exercise was framed as an important opportunity for NATO to demonstrate resolve and deterrence by displaying the capabilities and interoperability of armed forces. Furthermore, this exercise was designed specifically around a scenario in which a member state was attacked by a foreign state, and the exercise was an opportunity to demonstrate the capabilities of the alliance to plan and conduct a major collective defense operation (Rempfer, 2018). Additionally, the exercise aimed to train troops on the tactical level, as well as enhance the ability of the NATO force to command larger maneuvers (Rempfer, 2018).

This exercise was particularly controversial. Moscow dubbed the exercise as anti-Russian and was loudly and visibly unhappy with this exercise (Ploom et al., 2020). In response to the exercise Russia launched various missiles, as well as jamming GPS location signals over both Finnish and Norwegian territory in the High North (Ploom et al., 2020).

This exercise is not to be confused with Trident Juncture 15 which took place in Spain, Portugal, and Italy in 2015.

Arctic Challenge

This multinational exercise has been hosted by Norway, Sweden, and Finland every other year since 2013 (Møller, 2019). The Arctic Challenge Exercise (ACE) has various objectives in terms of enhancing interoperability between the participating states. One of the central aims of the exercise was to improve communication between the participating units (Møller, 2019). An inherent factor in effective cooperation, both during an exercise and an actual crisis, is the ability of the units to communicate with each other. This was therefore one of the central goals of this exercise according to Møller (2019). The standardization of using English as the operating language was a key pillar of the exercise as Finland and Sweden, due to not officially being NATO members, had not integrated the English language into parts of its operative aspects. Interestingly, this exercise illuminated some of the shortcomings of not having established English as the working language of the forces for Sweden and Finland (Møller,

2019). On the individual level, there were some misunderstandings due to lacking English skills among some personnel (Møller, 2019). This stood in contrast to Norway which has since NATO's establishment been operating with the English language through JMEs (Møller, 2019). Evidently, this exercise stands as an example to how they provide small states with the opportunity to enhance communication channels and effective communication between individuals.

Joint Viking

This is another biannual exercise that takes place in Norway. In March 2023 the winter exercise took place in Northern Norway with 10,000 Norwegian and allied soldiers (Bye, 2023). This exercise aims to increase “allied cohesion and the ability and willingness to defend NATO territory” according to Master Sergeant Rolf Ytterstad, the spokesperson in the Norwegian Army concerning the Joint Viking Exercise 2023 (Bye, 2023). The exercise takes place primarily in Troms county in Northern Norway. Joint Viking focuses on warfare training on land, as opposed to other military exercises like Joint Warrior which is a British-led exercise taking place at sea (Nilsen, 2023). In 2015 parts of the exercise took place in Finnmark county which was especially potent as this maneuver breached one of the self-imposed restrictions of Norway's defense posture in relation to reassuring Russia (Moe & Andreassen, 2015). This exercise was considered by scholar Jakub Godzimirski at the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI) to be a response to Russia's annexation of Crimea (Moe & Andreassen, 2015). Furthermore, this was an exercise that aimed to signal that it was more important for Norway to assure its allies who are concerned about Russia, rather than reassure Russia.

4.2. Benefits of JMEs in terms of deterrence

The overarching focus on deterrence as a foreign policy objective of the Norwegian government is evident in all of the documents analyzed. The mere objective increase in the use of the word “deterrence” since 2006 testify to an enhanced focus on this concept within the Norwegian security posture. By comparing the first (2008) and the last (2020) long-term plan of the Norwegian Armed Forces, one apparent difference stands out; the use of the word “deterrence” has been multiplied by 10. This is visible in the figure included below.

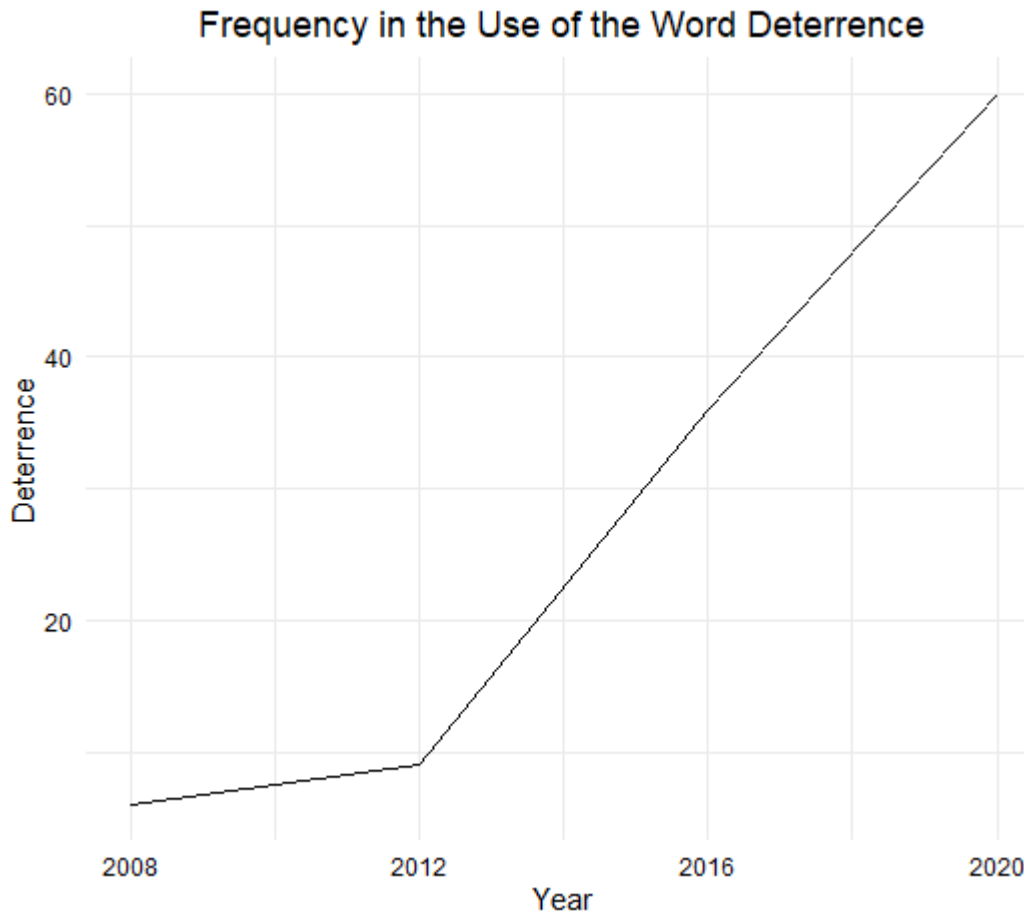


Figure 1: A line-graph of the surge in the use of the word “deterrence” in the long-term strategy documents of the Norwegian Armed Forces.

As the following section will illuminate, deterrence towards Russia is an essential element of Norway’s motivations behind JMEs.

As a starting point, the following statement from former Norwegian Prime Minister Solberg testifies to the role of deterrence in JMEs when stating that the whole point of the Cold Response exercise in 2016 was “to signify deterrence” (Lynum, 2016). Similarly, during the Cold Response exercise in 2021, former Norwegian Defense Minister Frank Bakke-Jensen stated that this military exercise was: “... deterrence in action” (Nilsen, 2021 a). Similar findings are evident on an elevated level as well. The general security environment in Europe has been altered following Russian acts of aggression on the continent. For instance, the Obama Administration introduced the “European Reassurance Initiative” in 2014 which focused on assuring US allies in Europe (Doubleday, 2017). However, the effort changed its name under the Trump Administration to the “European Deterrence Initiative” which increasingly focuses

on funding American troop presence, Western military exercises, and enhancing the military infrastructure on the continent (Doubleday, 2017). This illuminates a changed discourse on the European level in terms of the pressing security concerns, and how recent trends testify to an increased focus on deterrence and resolve. The next section will delve into this narrative further and divide the argument into two dynamics of the deterrence aspect and how this is linked to Norway's own motivations behind participating in JMEs to deter Russian aggression.

4.2.1. Interoperability as deterrence

JMEs provide allies with an opportunity to increase interoperability between forces which enhances alliance cohesion and evidently sends deterring signals to potential adversaries. As argued by Møller (2019) the concept of interoperability is contested and with no universally agreed-upon definition, it might be difficult to confidently apply the concept to a military context. However, this thesis will adhere to a definition of interoperability laid out by the US Department of Defense: "the ability of systems, units, or forces to provide services to and accept services from other systems, units, or forces, and to use services so exchanged to enable them to operate effectively together" (Ford et al. 2009, p. 18). This conceptualization allows for an analysis in which all levels of a military force are included and not only the ability of forces to operate effectively together at a unit level. This aspect of interoperability is relevant as a deterring signal as it illustrates effective and efficient cooperation between armed forces. Essentially, a deterring signal of an alliance is more credible to an adversary if the forces can effectively demonstrate their interoperability.

JMEs function as a way for Norway's allies to train their forces to operate effectively together. The very opportunity to come together to exercise is imperative for increasing the ability to cooperate in a crisis. The added element of these exercises taking place in a region that has an especially challenging climate and topography further enhances this argument. The challenging climate in the High North allows the allied forces to train their soldiers and systems to effectively operate together should a crisis materialize in this unique region. In the absence of joint exercises, the allied forces are not able to visibly demonstrate this ability, which could render the larger deterrence strategy of the alliance less credible. If a potential adversary doubts the level of interoperability between allied forces, the overall credibility of the alliances' defense posture might be rendered insignificant. The frequency of JMEs in this region further increases the needed competence of the region, which further increases the credible deterrence strategy.

Norway's role in enhancing the credibility of NATO's deterrence posture through interoperability is frequently featured in the chosen documents of analysis. For instance, in the long-term plan of the Norwegian Armed Forces from 2012 the ability of the Armed Forces to effectively operate together to enhance the collective defense posture was stated:

“In the context of collective defense, significant emphasis is placed on the coordination and interoperability with allied and partner forces.” (Forsvarsdepartementet, 2012, p. 34).

This statement is present in a section of the document that focuses on allied military exercises and regular allied presence on Norwegian territory as part of a larger collective defense posture of the NATO alliance. In this statement, the interoperability of armed forces is an important aspect of a credible defense alliance from the Norwegian perspective. Collective defense is dependent on strong cooperation between the parties to avoid risks that could hinder the attainment of some given objectives. In the absence of effective cooperation, risks like miscommunication and misunderstandings inside an alliance could make it impossible to meet intended objectives. If an alliance is not able to visibly demonstrate its ability to cooperate effectively together, the inherent logic of conventional deterrence will be weakened. Norway seeks a security alliance that can effectively demonstrate its interoperability. The link between effective collective deterrence and JMEs is further established in the long-term plan from 2016:

"Close relationships with key allies, interoperability, exercises and training, presence, and allied support on Norwegian territory or in our immediate vicinity are important for our deterrence capability and for Norwegian and allied defense capabilities in peacetime, crisis, and armed conflict." (Forsvarsdepartementet, 2016, p. 18).

Here the focus is on Norway's credible deterrence strategy, yet this is understood as adhering to the larger deterrence strategy of NATO as previously outlined. Norway does not have enough military capabilities to possess a credible deterrent posture towards Russia. Thus, “our deterrence capability” can be understood as a collective deterrence with allies. The deterrence towards Russia is dependent on credible interoperability with allied forces. JMEs are argued to increase the interoperability of the allied armed forces which sends a deterring signal to potential adversaries. “Close relationships with key allies” can imply close alliance cohesion which has important implications for deterrence. JMEs provide a platform for allies to show

collective strength which serves as a deterrent to potential adversaries. The link between JMEs, interoperability and deterrence is further elaborated on in the following statement:

“Regular allied activity, exercises, and training on Norwegian territory are relevant for deterrence and collective defense. This will be the framework when Norway hosts NATO's High Visibility Exercise, Trident Juncture 18 in 2018.” (Forsvarsdepartementet, 2016, p. 21).

In this remark specific focus is attributed to the JME coined “Trident Juncture 18”. In this quote, it is evident that military exercises are deemed as important for deterrence and collective defense. It was stated that deterrence and collective defense was to be the framework of the exercise. This pertains to the way exercises like this allow the participating states to enhance their opportunity to effectively operate together. This is a feature of the alliance that Norway is reliant on for its own security. Similar sentiments are found in the long-term plan from 2012: “Credible deterrence must therefore be based on more allied exercise and training in peacetime, the ability to receive allied support, and involving allies as early as possible in a possible crisis.” (Forsvarsdepartementet, 2012, p. 18). This quote directly links credible deterrence with exercises and interoperability. In this the importance is placed on the ability to receive allied support, functioning as a deterring signal to adversaries. This quote illuminates the need for countries like Norway to have a stable and necessary infrastructure to support the arrival and deployment of allied forces in the event of a crisis for a credible deterrence towards adversaries. This given quote also illuminates another element of Norway’s security policy in that the integration of allies in a crisis has a time aspect to it. Norway relies on timely reinforcements from allies, and this must be trained beforehand to meet the objective of allies to be involved “as early as possible.” Evidently, JMEs enable Norway to efficiently integrate allied forces in times of crisis. Nonetheless, this interoperability is increasingly challenged in an environment like that of the High North (Depledge, 2020). JMEs in the High North are therefore particularly important for NATO’s larger deterrence strategy; firstly, the allied forces must demonstrate interoperability, and secondly, they have to demonstrate high military capabilities operating in the challenging climate of the High North. These are two different arguments in that the first implies that the forces must operate effectively together. In the absence of exercises the allied forces are not able to visibly demonstrate this interoperability, which could render the larger deterrence strategy of the alliance less credible (Depledge, 2020). The second relates to how the High North demands military competencies that are unique to this region. The demanding environmental conditions and terrain in the Arctic present an opportunity for the allied forces

to train their soldiers and systems to efficiently function in a region that requires distinct military expertise (Depledge, 2020). This brings the analysis to the second argument concerning the deterrence related benefits of JMEs in the Arctic.

4.2.2. Deterrence by illustrating high military capability

JMEs provide the participating states with an opportunity to demonstrate not only interoperability but also high levels of military capabilities. It is not enough for a credible deterrence strategy that the forces are quickly interoperable in times of crisis. The climate in the High North demands that the allied forces are aware of specific necessary skills to be durable in a conflict scenario. Evidently, JMEs in this region provide the allies, and Norwegian Armed Forces with an opportunity to learn about and exercise these skills both on land and at sea. Norway and its allies must display to adversaries that they can operate in the Arctic should a conflict situation materialize in the region. This is an objective of the Norwegian state, and it is found in the long-term plan from 2016 in the following passage:

“It is a goal of the government to facilitate exercises and training for allies and partners in Norway. In this way, Norway contributes to allies' ability to operate under Norwegian climatic and geographical conditions, thereby increasing credibility in the collective defense guarantees in times of crisis or armed conflict.” (Forsvarsdepartementet, 2016, p. 23).

In this quote, it is evident that the Norwegian government recognizes the role it can play in facilitating allied exercises in the region and how this will enhance the overall credibility of the NATO alliance. Disregarding for a moment the need for the allied forces to be interoperable, this quote testifies to the importance placed on allied forces in being capable of operating in this climate for deterrence. Separating these two arguments is important because it is not only about the allied forces effectively operating together which sends a credible deterrent signal, but it is also essential that the allied forces are provided with an opportunity to demonstrate their continued interest in enhancing their military capabilities to survive in the Arctic climate. Similar understandings of the role Norway can play in increasing the capabilities necessary for the Arctic can be found in the first strategy document on the High North from 2006:

“For many years we have been cooperating closely with allied countries on military activities in the North, mainly in the form of joint exercises and training. These are valuable because

they make our allies familiar with the conditions in the north...” (Utenriksdepartementet, 2006, p. 20).

This quote illuminates how the Northern territory of Norway is an ideal area for allied troops to train and exercise to familiarize themselves with the challenging conditions in the High North. JMEs provide allies with an opportunity to enhance their military capabilities which plays into a larger, and more credible deterrence. By actively participating in JMEs the participating states can effectively demonstrate to an adversary that they possess the necessary capabilities that would make a victory for them challenging. As Norway is dependent on an effective alliance for its security, the allied states must carry the right military expertise so that an adversary does not question the military capabilities of the allied forces. One can therefore argue that a motivation for Norway behind JMEs is making sure that allies possess the relevant and necessary military capabilities which will send deterring signals to a potential adversary. This sentiment is present in the following passage as well:

“A threshold is given increased credibility through activities that demonstrate military capabilities in practice.” (Forsvarsdepartementet, 2012, p. 48)

This quote from the long-term plan from 2012 illustrates the function JMEs serve in terms of increasing the credibility of a defense posture. By demonstrating military capabilities in practice during JMEs the participating states send a credible deterrence signal to adversaries. The idea of a threshold is more credible if it is backed up by the demonstration of actual military capabilities. The adversary might take the threat of military retaliation in response to potential aggression more seriously and therefore avoid crossing a certain threshold.

4.2.3. Conclusion on the deterrence arguments

These two arguments can be taken together to illustrate how JMEs function as a platform for Norway and its allies to demonstrate NATO’s collective resolve and deterrence by denial.

Norway is not able to adhere to a credible deterrence strategy rooted in a tripwire due to self-imposed restrictions of not allowing allies to have permanently stationed troops along the border with Russia (Friis, 2019). One could argue that an ideal deterrence by tripwire strategy in the High North would be allowing American forces to be permanently stationed in Finnmark, but this would breach one of the central restrictions in the Norwegian reassurance scheme and

be considered very provocative from the Russians. Therefore, deterrence by denial is a strategy that fits with the larger security objectives of the Norwegian state. In this strategy, the inherent logic is that Norway, together with allies, aims to credibly convince an adversary that they will not be able to attain their goals on the battlefield. This is possible through JMEs that illustrate; 1) the interoperability of the allied forces and 2) the necessary military capabilities to operate in the Arctic climate. Furthermore, specifically in the Norwegian context, it is important to delineate what potential scenario Norway attempts to deter through these exercises. A realistic scenario would be one in which Russia engages an Anti-Access/Area Denial (A2/AD) defense concept to establish the bastion defense concept (Friis, 2019). The underlying logic of this strategy is to hinder the ability of the adversary to deploy troops in a conflict zone (Frühling & Lasconjarias, 2016). In the context of the Arctic, Norway, and Russia this would imply that Russia would seize areas within the Norwegian territory in the High North in a crisis to secure and protect its strategic military capabilities on its Northern Fleet (Behrmann et al., 2022). With extensive participation in JMEs with allies, Norway can signal to Russia that such an operation will not be feasible because of rapid and effective allied reinforcements. Evidently, Norway is motivated to participate and host JMEs on their territory because it enhances the credibility of the deterrence strategy of the alliance that they are entirely dependent on for its national security.

4.3. JMEs increase Norway's perceptions of assurance

In the chosen strategy documents from the Norwegian Armed Forces and Norwegian government the benefits associated with JMEs in relation to assurance are distinct in four ways. Firstly, JMEs increase the interoperability of the allied forces on two levels which has an assuring role for Norway. Secondly, JMEs provide Norway with an opportunity to evaluate its capabilities and potential vulnerabilities. Thirdly, JMEs demonstrate a willingness of allies to come to the defense of Norway through a shared threat perception which again functions to assure Norway. These three factors all function to limit the fear of abandonment and enhance perceptions of assurance for Norway, closely in line with Knopf's (2012) alliance related-assurance. The assurance argument can also be understood from another angle. Norway initiates and hosts JMEs as a way to assure allies of their commitment to the security alliance. Norway hosts JMEs to signal to allies that they are still a committed member despite not meeting one of the central and visible requirements of the NATO alliance, namely the 2% spending of GDP goal.

Before investigating the dynamics of JME's assuring role for Norway and its allies, the next section will set the scene for the analysis. The use of the word "allies" is more than doubled when comparing the long-term plan from 2008 (162) to 2020 (334). This in itself is an indicator of the important role Norway puts on allies in its defense posture, and how reliance on these states has gained a renewed importance in these strategy documents. In the most recent long-term plan of the Norwegian Armed Forces from 2020 it is stated that:

"It is becoming increasingly important for Norway to be able to operate with allied forces in our immediate areas" (Forsvarsdepartementet, 2020, p. 94).

This testifies to the general trend observed in the strategy documents, both the ones that are specifically militarily focused and also the broader strategy documents for the High North. In stating that it is increasingly important for Norway to operate with allied forces, the passage illuminates how this allied partnership is a stated objective in the national security of Norway. Norway's dependency on allies, particularly that of the US, has become increasingly evident in the security posture of Norway. Since the early 1990s, the Norwegian Armed Forces has been extensively reformed from that of a large, conscription-based force focusing on territorial defense, to a smaller more skilled and flexible armed forces (Bogen & Håkenstad, 2017). In line with these larger structural reforms has it become evident that Norway is increasingly dependent on allied reinforcements in the potential scenario of an adversary aggressing. For instance, the focus on the increased dependency on allied presence and reinforcements is illuminated in the most recent strategy document from the defense sector:

"At the same time, we are more dependent on allied support and cooperation" (Forsvarsdepartementet, 2022, p. 19).

This quote points to how it is recognized that the defense and stability of Norway is increasingly dependent on allies. The "more" aspect of the sentence testifies to how there was a time when Norway considered itself less dependent on allied support. This has several explanatory factors, both internal to the structure of the allied forces as previously outlined, but also larger geopolitical stability and aggressive behavior of adversaries. Norway's dependency on allied support is not immune to larger geopolitical trends and these will undoubtedly affect Norway's perceived and actual dependency on allied support. In the same document, it is stated that "the security challenges Norway faces will surpass that of Norway's capacity to handle over time,

they have to be solved with others.” (Forsvarsdepartementet, 2022, p. 18). This sets the scene in terms of how Norway is dependent on allies. However, this dependability illuminates a vulnerability in the Norwegian defense posture, namely that Norway is dependent on allies, and Norway is therefore also dependent on being sufficiently assured by allies that they are both able and willing to come to the defense of Norway should that be necessary. NATO allies were criticized under former US President Trump for not contributing enough to the security alliance (Doubleday, 2017). President Trump hinted on several occasions that the extended security guarantee of the US was not given if allies did not meet the financial obligations of the alliance (Doubleday, 2017). This illuminated how Norway’s security guarantee largely rooted in the US might not be as stable as one might hope for. The so-called fear of abandonment and recognition of high dependability might be pressing on Oslo and the need to find opportunities for Norway to be assured of the US’ extended security has therefore increased. The role JMEs play in assuring Norway of allies’ extended security posture is therefore of vital importance in an analysis of the motivations behind Norway’s security policies. While one can argue that deterrence strategies deter an adversary and simultaneously assures allies, this conceptualization misses some nuances that this thesis deems necessary. Though the two concepts are highly linked, this text will make them analytically distinct to break down an intricate phenomenon as well as help avoid conceptual confusion and misunderstandings. In the next section, this thesis will illuminate, drawing on three factors, how JMEs function as a platform for Norway to be assured of NATO and the US security commitment to Norway, as well as one factor which illuminates how Norway can assure allies through JMEs.

4.3.1. Increased interoperability as assurance

The strategy documents illuminate how the Norwegian government find JMEs to signal assurance through interoperable allied forces. The analyzed strategy documents point to the importance of training in the challenging climate and topography of the High North. This argument can be construed at two levels. Firstly, allied forces must be able to collaborate effectively at a systematic level. Secondly, individual soldiers must possess the necessary knowledge and skills to endure and perform in the Arctic environment. In contrast to conventional understandings of interoperability as a means of sending a deterrence message to an adversary, this interoperability aspect of JMEs also serves to provide Norway with the assurance that allied forces possess the necessary competencies to defend Norwegian interests. JMEs with allies serve a purpose for Norway in that they provide allies with the needed skills

to effectively operate alongside Norwegian Armed Forces in the High North. This operative aspect of motivations behind JMEs is further stressed in the strategy document from 2008:

“The motives behind the cooperation can be of both economic, operative, and political character. Especially for smaller states like Norway, it is increasingly challenging within a purely national framework to maintain the necessary arsenal of military capabilities ... Increased operative requirements imply that units that are to operate together must be interoperable prior to a potential incident” (Forsvarsdepartementet, 2008, p. 31)

In this statement, the argument is taken one step further in drawing attention to the importance of interoperable forces from a small-state perspective. This quote does again recognize how Norway is not able to meet the security challenges of the 21st century alone and is therefore dependent on foreign military units being interoperable. The crux of this section of the strategy document is the recognition that cooperation is increasingly crucial for the NATO alliance. Specifically, the document argues that exercises are one of the manifestations of cooperation within the alliance. Similar findings are evident in more recent strategy documents, like the long-term plan from 2016:

“It is a goal for the government to facilitate exercises and training for allies and partners in Norway. In this way, Norway contributes to the strengthening of allies’ ability to operate under Norwegian climatic and geographical conditions, thereby increasing the credibility of the collective defense guarantees ...” (Forsvarsdepartementet, 2016, p. 83).

This quote attests to the role of military exercises as a means for Norway to enhance its confidence in the collective security guarantee of its allies at an elevated level. By aiming to strengthen the abilities of allies to operate in the High North, Norway is assured that the allied forces hold the right competencies to defend Norway. The focus of this quote is not on the deterring effect such alliance cohesion sends to adversaries, but rather on the benefits of JMEs in relation to assuring a small state like Norway which is dependent on the extended security of more powerful allies.

The second aspect regarding the benefits of interoperability pertains to the individual level. Specifically, the interoperability features of JMEs can also be regarded as a factor at the individual level. It has been posited that exercises serve as a platform for soldiers to enhance

their competency in operating under cold weather conditions. This is illuminated in the strategy document from 2008:

“... must ensure that personnel are trained and exercised on the entire spectrum, from the basics of individual skills to cooperation in larger units ...” (Forsvarsdepartementet, 2008, p. 67)

In this quote the element of exercising to advance operative capabilities on two different levels is present. On the basic individual level, the exercises are argued to provide soldiers with necessary, and oftentimes lifesaving, competence to survive in the demanding conditions of the High North. According to the Norwegian Armed Forces this knowledge includes training on avalanche buddy rescues, smart clothing, use of stoves, cold weather injuries such as frostbite and how to address a potential encounter with reindeers (Forsvaret, 2022).

Interoperability on the individual level is also related to human variations which might make cooperation in a crisis challenging. Thus, by exercising together these variations may be limited (Møller, 2019). This dimension of increased human interoperability through exercises points to the importance of soldiers being able to effectively communicate and understand each other which is important to avoid misunderstandings during a potential crisis. By participating in JMEs the participating units and soldiers can learn about each other's working language and terminology which makes cooperation during a crisis easier (Møller, 2019). This has an assuring role towards Norway in that JMEs provide individual soldiers with an opportunity to build professional relationships which makes cooperation easier. This aspect of effective communication is very important in enhancing interoperability and is imperative for cooperation between armed forces. This implies that a central motivation behind Norway's participation in JMEs relates to how they provide individual soldiers with both the lifesaving competencies to survive in the Arctic climate, and also the relational capabilities to effectively communicate with other allied soldiers. Put bluntly, JMEs ensure that allied soldiers do not die within the first couple of hours during an operation and this has an assuring role for Norway and can thus be understood as a driving motivator for participating in these exercises. While JMEs might not entirely eliminate the risk of casualties during military operations, they help reduce it by improving the preparedness of soldiers to operate in a challenging climate. Hence, making sure that allied forces have the right competencies is an important factor in assuring Norway that the allied troops will be a resource during a crisis and not an obstacle in the potential scenario where Norwegian territory must be defended.

4.3.2. Opportunity for evaluation of own forces

JMEs, due to their collaborative nature, are designed to simulate real-world military scenarios which aim to test the readiness, effectiveness, and coordination of military forces (Kubai, 2022). Due to this, they provide ample opportunities for the participating states to evaluate their military posture and potential vulnerabilities. The baseline for this argument is that Norway recognizes the importance of having the right competencies in its armed forces to be interoperable with allies. In the first High North strategy document the following passage testifies to the importance placed on having the necessary competencies in the Norwegian Armed Forces to receive allied support:

“In the Long-term Plan for the Norwegian Armed Forces, emphasis is placed on enhancing the military’s capability to plan for, receive, and operate jointly with allied forces in the North.” (Utenriksdepartementet, 2006, p. 20).

This quote illuminates the need for continuously updating and training the Norwegian Armed Forces to be able to operate with allied forces. In a capability-building process, avenues for evaluation must exist to identify vulnerabilities and shortcomings. JMEs can be such an avenue in that they allow the participating states to identify areas for improvement that could have materialized during a conflict and could have had a detrimental impact. This logic is present in the long-term plan from 2008:

“The operative status of the various units of the defense structure can be evaluated through exercises.” (Forsvarsdepartementet, 2008, p. 67).

JMEs provide a good opportunity for evaluation of Norway’s military posture and its ability to rapidly integrate allied forces in a crisis scenario. As Norway is dependent on the security guarantee of allies, this provides a platform for them to be made aware of areas in which improvements might be necessary to increase their defensive posture. For instance, as pointed out in the most recent strategy document from 2022, Trident Juncture provided the Norwegian Armed forces with some very valuable insights into its readiness to receive allied support:

“The importance of the total defense concept has been further emphasized in recent years through exercises such as Trident Juncture. Cross-sector collaboration is essential to be able to

manage receiving allied forces during a conflict situation” (Forsvarsdepartementet, 2022, p. 40).

In the Trident Juncture 18 exercise the Norwegian Armed Forces identified shortcomings in their existing structure in terms of receiving allied reinforcements. This exercise emphasized the need for the so-called total defense concept (in Norwegian “totalforsvarskonseptet”), in which cooperation across the civilian and military sector is imperative for the national defense of Norway. The total defense concept gained increased prominence in the defense sector in 2016 and emphasizes the role of various military and non-military entities in contributing to the peace and stability of Norway. JMEs, like that of Trident Juncture 18, are hence able to shed light on important areas of improvement to advance the effectiveness of the total defense concept. Having a stable and effective total defense concept is in the interest of the Norwegian state. Even though the total defense concept also highlights the need to operate alongside allies, there is another motivation for participating in JMEs because they also illuminate how Norway can advance its domestic defense posture and cooperation with domestic entities for defense. The evaluation of the Norwegian infrastructure in terms of receiving allies is present in a strategy document from 2020:

“The plans that were developed prior to the exercise and the experiences gained during the exercise have enabled the Armed Forces to be better prepared to receive and support allied reinforcements.” (Utenriksdepartementet, 2020, p. 78)

This statement illuminates the role JMEs have in providing opportunities for Norway to tackle their vulnerabilities that would make interoperability in times of crisis potentially difficult. JMEs are therefore important for Norway in that they provide the Armed Forces with valuable experiences that make them better prepared for allied support before a conflict situation. Bringing these two arguments of evaluation opportunities together sheds light on two nuances of the total defense concept. Firstly, Norway is through evaluation of JMEs assured that their own total defense concept is continuously developed domestically with military and non-military entities to enhance the domestic total defense concept. Secondly, Norway is through evaluation of JMEs assured that the total defense concept is sufficient in receiving allied support. Evidently, JMEs function to assure Norway that its infrastructure is sufficient in integrating allied forces during a potential crisis.

4.3.3. Shared threat perception - keeping the Arctic on the agenda

By participating in JMEs Norway is assured that its allies keep the Arctic on its agenda. This argument can be construed in two ways. Firstly, when allies come to Norway to train it illustrates a willingness to prioritize the region. Secondly, allies participating in JMEs in the Arctic demonstrate that there is a shared threat perception and situational awareness of the region. This line of reasoning ties well in with the military maxim of train where you expect to fight. Put simply, JMEs assure Norway that allies and partners prioritize this region and have the region on their agenda.

In the first long-term plan from 2008 the word “exercise” in relation to allies was mentioned 58 times, which stand in contrast to the frequency of the word in the following long-term plans. This can be understood as a reflection of the Norwegian government in terms of a growing concern and frustration that the High North was seemingly forgotten from NATO’s sphere of interest (Friis, 2019). NATO’s focus was largely on “out-of-area” operations in the Middle East, rather than focusing on territorial defense of its Northern Flank. Thus, the Norwegian Armed Forces highlighted the need for a renewed interest in the region and increased military presence through exercises. Evidently, Oslo argued that JMEs are a way for allies and partners to direct their attention to the High North and thus share a similar threat perception of the region. After NATO’s command structure was updated in 2011 the Norwegian Armed Forces’ long-term plan did not mention exercises with the same frequency (Heier, 2018). The updated command structure from 2011 shifted the focus from an arguably one-sided emphasis on leading international operations, to one in which exercises and planning for a collective defense gained prominence (Heier, 2018). This revised NATO command structure, with a greater emphasis on allied exercises, can be argued to have mitigated concerns among Norwegian defense officials (Heier, 2018). This was reflected already in the 2012 long-term plan, which demonstrated a reduction in the frequency of the word “exercise” with allies. Specifically, the frequency decreased from the 2008 level by over 50%, to a mere 26 occurrences. In the 2016 long-term plan the frequency was down to 20.

Norway recognizes that participating in JMEs requires vast resources in terms of personnel, material, and time from allies. By allocating resources to these military exercises the allied states illuminate a willingness to engage with defensive measures in this part of the world. This commitment does not render an extended security guarantee as some vague and ambiguous

agreement in a fantasy document. In one of the Norwegian strategy documents from 2017, the US role in extending its security guarantee to Norway is illuminated:

“Norway and other allies cannot take for granted that the US military interest and engagement in Europe will continue at its current level. In American public discourse, investments in European security are weighed against other priorities.” (Utenriksdepartementet, 2017, p.11)

This quote underscores the significance of the expenses and investments that the US must allocate towards their extended security guarantee to European allies. It also acknowledges that this commitment cannot be taken for granted. Moreover, the quote references the ongoing domestic public discussion in the US concerning the utilization of taxpayer funds to provide security assurances to European allies. Evidently, JMEs are costly and by choosing to participate, Norway is assured that allies like the US are willing to prioritize this region. This brings us to the second point in terms of how JMEs illuminate a shared interest towards a potential adversary which functions to assure allies.

As discussed in the theory section, one of the determinants of choice pertains to having a shared interest towards an adversary as a potential factor that might reduce fear of abandonment issues in an alliance (Snyder, 1984). The very existence of military exercises in a given region testifies to a shared security challenge amongst allies. JMEs can be understood as a manifestation of a shared threat perception. As previously discussed, the very fact that allies participate in these exercises signifies a great willingness to use a vast amount of resources on the defense of a given region. While this in itself assures a small state like Norway, the argument can be taken one step further. JMEs due to the commitment it demands from allies, illuminate how the Arctic is kept on the agenda amongst allies. Following the military maxim of train where you expect to fight (Depledge, 2020), JMEs in the Arctic assure Norway that it shares an understanding of a potential threat in the region with allies. If Norway was to doubt allies' commitment to this shared interest in the region, fears over potential defection might be more pressing on Oslo. These sentiments can be observed in the documents analyzed. In the long-term plan from 2008, the following passage illuminates this aspect of the motivations behind military exercises:

“The challenges in our neighboring areas emphasize the importance of linking Norway's defense to a larger community with an anchoring in the West. Therefore, we must contribute to strengthening NATO's connection to our region through amongst other things, regular allied

exercises and training on Norwegian soil, permanent allied presence, credible host nation and reception arrangements for allied forces ...” (Forsvarsdepartementet, 2008, p. 41).

This quote illuminates the wish of Norwegian policymakers that Norway is to be linked to a larger collective defense posture. The notion that NATO has to strengthen its connection to the High North through military exercises illuminates two interesting things. Firstly, in 2008 there was a wish amongst Norwegian policymakers in the defense sector that NATO allies had to enhance their ties to the High North. Secondly, this was argued to be possible through regular allied exercises. Consequently, this passage illuminates both how Norway wishes to draw the allies’ attention to the North, and that this can be done through military exercises. Similar findings are evident in most recent long-term plans as well. In the following extract, there is a particular focus on the US.

“In recent years, there has been an increased American awareness towards the security policy aspect of the Arctic region. This is evidenced by the US's participation in various types of exercises. Norwegian facilitation of such participation is therefore important, and Norway maintains a close bilateral dialogue with our allies regarding the implementation of allied military activities in the North.” (Forsvarsdepartementet, 2020, p. 25).

In this statement, it is evident that US presence through military exercises is viewed as an indication that the US puts the Arctic on the agenda from a security policy perspective. While the end goal of this American presence might arguably be for deterring purposes towards an increasingly aggressive Russia, it nevertheless points to how Norway views exercises as a platform for establishing a shared understanding of the security situation in the Arctic. This further reinforces the notion that one action can have different effects on different audiences. While this might be perceived as deterrence towards Russia, it is also understood as assurance from the Norwegian perspective. Furthermore, the Norwegian government recognizes the non-military value of having these exercises through their ability to increase alliance cohesion:

“Beyond the direct military utility, the shared experiences gained and the networks established are also part of the glue that binds the alliance together.” (Forsvarsdepartementet, 2012, p. 57).

This quote points to how JMEs are important for building relationships between the members of the alliance. Beyond the purely tactical advantages of JMEs, the collective experiences can

foster a sense of unity and mutual understanding. This goes on both a systematic level as well as on an individual level. By participating in the JMEs the participating states create a shared understanding of the security situation of the region on a state level which enhances the alliance cohesion. Furthermore, JMEs provide the participating states with an opportunity to establish networks such as channels of communication that aim to facilitate the sharing of intelligence and expertise. This enhances a shared threat perception amongst the participating states. On the individual level, these exercises expose the individuals from different nations to each other's cultures, languages, and customs. These shared experiences can create a sense of camaraderie and mutual respect. Evidently, this implies that the motivations for participating in JMEs are not purely militarily focused. Alliance cohesion through JMEs and fostering a shared sense of threat understanding is essential for building relationships and fostering a sense of community amongst the member states. A motivation for Norway to host and participate in JMEs in the Arctic is therefore to make sure that allies keep the region on the agenda and recognize the security challenges in the region.

4.3.4. Sending signals of assurance to NATO

There is an alternative way of understanding assurance in this context: Norway is motivated to participate in and host JMEs in the Arctic because it is an opportunity for them to send assuring signals to the NATO alliance that they are a committed member of the alliance. NATO member states are expected to contribute at least 2% of their GDP towards defense spending. This is a guideline that was established by the member states in 2014 (Techau, 2015). It was then expected that the members who had not already reached this goal had to be there within the next decade, ergo 2024 (Techau, 2015). Despite criticisms of the merit in this metric, it fits into the larger burden-sharing framework of the alliance in which it is expected that all member states contribute financially to upholding the alliance. Norway does not meet the 2% of GDP spent on defense as stated in the alliance (Buchholz, 2022). In recent years, the percentage has hovered around 1.7% (Buchholz, 2022). Norway recognizes the pressure to increase its GDP spending, and this has been a theme in several of the long-term plans from the Norwegian Armed Forces. The following quote testifies to this:

“... Norway, like most other allies, is encouraged to increase its efforts to reach the common allied goal of allocating a certain percentage of their GDP for defense purposes.” (Forsvarsdepartementet, 2008, p. 35).

Despite this pressure to increase financial contributions to NATO's burden-sharing posture, Norway has not reached the 2% goal. Evidently, Norway aims to demonstrate its commitment to the alliance through alternative means. Furthermore, Norway recognizes that there are alternative ways for a small state to increase their burden-sharing without necessarily increasing the GDP expenditure. In the long-term plan from 2008, Norway points to how participating in operations abroad as well as purchasing missile defense capabilities are avenues in which Norway can demonstrate its commitment to the alliance as well as contribute to the burden-sharing (Forsvarsdepartementet, 2008). Similar understandings are present in the strategy document on the High North from 2020 in which it is stated that Norwegian investments in F-35 fighter jets, P-8 maritime patrol aircraft and new submarines are important procurements to the collective defense posture (Utenriksdepartementet, 2020). Another way for Norway to contribute to the alliance is by hosting JMEs in the High North. This assertion reframes the assurance narrative by arguing that Norway is motivated to participate in JMEs as a means of assuring allies in the alliance of its commitment to the collective defense posture, despite falling short of the 2% spending goal. In contrast to the other arguments around assurance, this element of the analysis posits that JMEs function as a way for Norway to send signals of assurance to allies.

This aspect of the analysis relates to how Snyder (1984) argues that if the nature of an alliance agreement is vague, this will lead to fears of abandonment as deflecting is arguably easier for a patron. Building on this line of reasoning, a small state might fear abandonment by a patron if it is not able to meet a given strict requirements of an alliance. One can argue that several of NATO's requirements and rules for its members are rather vague. Nevertheless, one of the less ambiguous requirements relates to the 2% contribution goal GDP. NATO's 2% commitment expectation is arguably the most visible metric used in measuring the economic commitment of the allies to burden-sharing in the alliance. As this is a feasible and well-known requirement, it becomes rather noticeable when certain states do not meet this goal. This has on multiple occasions been brought up in the alliance and Norway has, amongst other members, received criticism due to their lacking contribution to the budgetary burden sharing. In the long-term plan for the Norwegian Armed Forces from 2012 the following was stated:

“NATO and European allies are central to American security policy, but the economic challenges facing the US have led to increased demands from the American side for a more equitable burden-sharing in the alliance” (Forsvarsdepartementet, 2012, p.25).

This narrative around an unfair burden-sharing in the alliance was especially pressing on the allies during the financial crisis in the US (Techau, 2015). The US expressed a need for allies to step up their financial contribution to the alliance's defense efforts. Similar sentiments were expressed during the Trump Administration, and this has put pressure on the NATO allies to increase their financial support to the security alliance (Techau, 2015). This concern of unequal burden-sharing was also a theme in the most recent long-term plan of the Armed Forces: "Burden sharing remains a critical and challenging issue that touches the core of the transatlantic relationship. There is bipartisan consensus in the US that allies in both Europe and Asia must contribute more financially." (Forsvarsdepartementet, 2020, p. 37). Yet, Norway is today still among the member states not meeting the 2% goal (Buchholz, 2022). For this reason, in recognition of the contentious issue of inadequate financial contributions, Norway may seek alternative avenues to demonstrate its commitment to the alliance and assure its allies. This issue is contextualized within the framework of collective defense in the 2008 long-term plan: "Collective defense today is largely a question of burden sharing" (Forsvarsdepartementet, 2008, p. 40). In recognizing this, Norway must identify alternative methods through which it can make a valuable contribution to the alliance, and thereby assure its allies of its continued commitment to maintaining a robust defense alliance.

The long-term plan from 2016 points to how Norway can contribute to the operative readiness of NATO. In a section of the strategy document in which the burden-sharing aspect of the alliance is emphasized, the document brings in the merit of hosting military exercises. There is a paragraph devoted to how the Trident Juncture Exercise in 2018 is an arena for advancing the operative capabilities of NATO's collective deterrence posture. The section's subheading is "Strengthening NATO's collective defense" (Forsvarsdepartementet, 2016, p. 20). In this section, the following excerpt illuminates the importance of burden-sharing in the alliance:

"The security environment underscores the significance of a more robust transatlantic burden-sharing framework, one that encompasses political, military, and economic domains. To this end, European nations are expected to augment their defense budgets and provide relevant capabilities to effectively tackle military challenges within and beyond the confines of the alliance." (Forsvarsdepartementet, 2016, p. 20).

In this segment of the strategy document, the Norwegian Armed Forces point to how an increased defense budget is presented in parallel with providing relevant capabilities as an initiative to contribute to the burden-sharing of the alliance. It does not single out the GDP goal and economic domains as the only way in which a state can contribute to the burden-sharing of the defense alliance. Rather, the economic domain is regarded as one of three spheres in which a state can contribute to the alliance. Therefore, one of the ways in which Norway can contribute to the collective defense is by hosting JMEs in the Arctic which falls under the military domain. Assuring NATO that Norway is a committed member is a policy objective of the Norwegian state. Thus, hosting and participating in JMEs function as a way for Norway to contribute to the alliance without necessarily meeting some of the requirements of the alliance agreement.

4.3.5. Concluding remarks on assurance arguments

The chosen strategy documents point to several interesting findings in terms of assurance. Firstly, Norway is assured by allies through JMEs because they provide an opportunity for allied forces to increase interoperability. In relation to assurance, this signifies that Norway is assured allied forces possess the necessary competencies to defend Norwegian interests. While this argument can be understood as an element within a larger deterrence strategy there is merit in separating the two concepts. If an analysis of Norway's motivations to participate in JMEs were solely focused on its deterring effect towards Russia, it would not be able to outline the extended lists of benefits Norway truly envisions when deciding to engage in these types of exercises. Secondly, Norway wishes to participate in JMEs because it is an opportunity for the Norwegian defense sector to evaluate its capabilities and infrastructure to receive allied forces during a crisis. In the total defense concept, the Norwegian Armed Forces must be able to receive allied forces, but also to cooperate with civilian partners in Norway. Thirdly, when allies participate in JMEs this assures Norway that they prioritize the region. When allies prioritize training in the Arctic, it necessitates a significant allocation of resources, which serve as a conspicuous and palpable manifestation of their commitment to the region. Furthermore, JMEs assure Norway that it has established a shared understanding of the threat potential of the region. Fourthly and lastly, hosting JMEs provide Norway with an opportunity to signal assurance to its allies despite not meeting certain requirements of the NATO alliance. Ultimately, the three first arguments illuminate how JMEs function to assure Norway, while the last argues that Norway is also able to assure allies through JMEs.

4.4. Costs to reassurance: what does Norway risk?

The escalatory potential of JMEs is present in the Arctic. Russia has demonstrated increasing opposition to Western-led exercises in the Arctic, illuminating the potential of provoking a serious conflict (Depledge, 2020). The Norwegian posture regarding JMEs has been predicated on the principle that such exercises may be conducted if they are both predictable and transparent, thereby maintaining the reassurance aspect vis-à-vis Russia. Nevertheless, with the recent suspension of nearly all bilateral cooperation between Norway and Russia this has become increasingly challenging. Nonetheless, Norway continues to participate in and host JMEs on their territory in the High North, and negative responses from Russia are expected from policymakers in Oslo. This section of the analysis will focus on three distinct manners in which Russia has demonstrated their dislike and disapproval of these types of exercises that Norway risks provoking when engaging in Western JMEs. This section seeks to illustrate the risks to reassurance that Norway encounters participating in JMEs in the Arctic, the other side of the equation of the balancing act.

The analysis of Russia's reactions to JMEs in the Arctic region point to three interesting findings. Firstly, Russia tends to vocally express their dissatisfaction with JMEs in this region, which leads to increased hostile tensions between the West and Russia. Secondly, Russia attempts to show opposition to Western-led JMEs by engaging in gray-zone aggressions during Western JMEs in the region. Thirdly, Russia does not seek to enhance its permanent military build-up in the Arctic region as a response to Norway's participation in JMEs. What this implies is that the two first negative reactions are deemed as rather low costs for Norway. Given the lack of sufficient and credible evidence that Russia would be increasing its permanent military posture around Norway in the Arctic, Norway lacks compelling reasons to abstain from participating in JMEs.

Before the analysis of Russian reactions, it is essential to understand why such responses would be likely to originate from the Kremlin, as well as how reassurance of Russia has been conceptualized in various strategy documents from the Norwegian government. First, the Arctic region is imperative for the Russian defense posture and its importance differs from that of for instance the Baltic region. As discussed in the theoretical chapter, the Kremlin voiced opposition to Western-led military exercises like "Defender 2020" in the Baltic region as this exercise took place on what Russia perceives to be former Soviet territory, coining the region as its "near abroad" (Ploom et al., 2020). When NATO held such a massive military exercise

in the region, it infringed on Russia's post-Soviet neo-imperial ambitions and was largely perceived as an act of aggression by the Kremlin (Ploom et al., 2020). The Arctic holds a different significance to the Russian military posture. The Arctic is an essential part of the Russian military strategy for various reasons. Firstly, the region is essential for Russian ballistic missile nuclear submarines (SSBNs) and a vast majority of Russia's nuclear submarines operate from the Kola Peninsula (Åtland, 2011). This region is thus a cornerstone of Russia's ability to be a major global nuclear power (Østhagen, 2021). Secondly, the region is essential for Russia's second-strike capabilities (Andersen, 2022). Thirdly, the bastion defense concept, though disputed in its effectiveness, was in 2008 re-established in the region (Andersen, 2022). For these reasons, amongst other non-military objectives, the Arctic plays a significant role in Russian strategy, which differs from that of the Baltic region. Due to the strategic importance placed on this region, it is safe to state that a Western military presence here will not go unnoticed by the Kremlin. There exist very few scholarly insights on Russian responses to Western JMEs in the Arctic region. Therefore, this section of the analysis will attempt to find sources that testify to how Russia tends to react and respond to these exercises through open-source media. There are predominantly three ways in which Russia tends to respond, which is an important factor for Norwegian policymakers to be aware of when weighing the benefits over the escalatory potential of JMEs in this region.

Reassurance is by the Norwegian government operationalized through various tools. One of those is how Norway has been attempting to upkeep an effective and credible bilateral dialogue with Russia. This diplomatic dialogue has primarily been concerned with civilian rescue and search efforts in the Arctic region. In the first High North strategy document from 2006, the bilateral relationship with Russia was highlighted as an imperative aspect of Norway's engagement in the region (Utenriksdepartementet, 2006). The section on cooperation with Russia highlights the importance of engaging in exercises with Russia such as the "Barents Rescue 2006" (Utenriksdepartementet, 2006). Nevertheless, the overall finding from the chosen strategy documents is that the word "reassurance" is sparsely used. This in itself is an interesting find as policymakers, politicians, and scholars continue to be rather adamant about the Norwegian security posture being rooted in a balance between deterrence and reassurance (Østhagen, 2021). This is not to say that this posture is not being challenged. Both Oma (2022) and Bjur (2022) illuminate the shortcomings of understanding the Norwegian security posture through this lens today. Diesen (2021) even goes as far as to argue that the whole notion of Norway reassuring Russia is logically flawed. He argues that Russia does not fear an act of

aggression from Norwegian territory, so to say that Norway must balance its security policies between deterrence and reassurance is inaccurate. From the analysis of the chosen documents of this thesis, it seems as though a more fitting understanding of Norway's stance towards Russia is an increased focus on being "predictable". This word is frequently used when discussing Norway's desired security policies towards Russia. This is not the focal point of analysis of this thesis, but it does illuminate an interesting finding in that the Norwegian government might be moving towards a defense posture that increasingly focuses on a predictable deterrence and resolve posture, rather than on reassuring our neighbors in the East. This line of reasoning is similar to that of Diesen (2021), and it sheds light on how the reassurance concept might not sufficiently explain the Norwegian security posture. Nevertheless, the Norwegian government does not disregard the reassurance aspect of its defense policies in the Arctic. In the most recent long-term plan from the Norwegian Armed Forces the following was stated: "In the current security political situation, deterrence and reassurance remain crucial for Norway." (Forsvarsdepartementet, 2020, p. 22). The Norwegian government recognizes the increased necessity of reassuring Russia through dialogue, diplomacy, and transparency. Furthermore, the Norwegian government does also point to the importance of allied activity in the High North being transparent and predictable towards Russia in minimizing the potential for escalation: "The overarching allied activity in the North during peacetime must be clear, yet coordinated and predictable so as to minimize the risk of unintended misunderstandings, undesirable incidents, and escalation." (Forsvarsdepartementet, 2022, p. 20). The Norwegian Ministry of Defense testifies here to being aware of the provocative potential of allied activities in the Arctic region, and evidently the need to be predictable and transparent to minimize escalation. The next section will therefore illuminate the costs to reassurance that Norway risks when engaging in JMEs in the Arctic. The section is structured to present the risks in ascending order, starting with the lowest and progressing to the potential highest risks for Norway.

4.4.1. Hostile rhetoric and tensions

Norway can expect Russia to react negatively to JMEs in the High North through negative statements and aggressive rhetoric. This hostile tension through rhetoric is a larger characteristic of Russian foreign policy towards the West. Threatening statements to respond to what they perceive as aggressive and provocative Western behavior is commonplace (Ploom et al., 2020). For instance, when Russia was accused of interrupting the GPS signals during the Trident Juncture exercise Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov stated that the accusations

fitted “a trend to blame all mortal sins on Russia” (Batchelor, 2018). This feeds into a larger narrative in which Russia argues that the West and NATO use any opportunity to blame Russia and portray Russia as an aggressive state with hostile intentions.

This feeds into a larger tension between the West and Russia. Russia has almost always been invited to observe NATO exercises in Norway as a reassurance measure from Norway. During the 2022 Cold Response exercise Russia declined to show up as an observer (Jonassen, 2022). This decision falls in line with the increased tension and hostile rhetoric between Western states and Russia. Inviting Russia as an observer to NATO exercises is a significant measure in the pursuit of fostering trust-building initiatives between the West and Russia. When Russia decides to not partake as observers, this sends a signal to Western allies and extends the already materializing schism between Russia and the West. During a press conference in 2021, Maria Zakharova expressed fury over the increased US military presence in Norway:

“Oslo’s deliberate and destructive line towards aggravating tensions in the Euro-Arctic region and destroying Russian-Norwegian relations” (Nilsen, 2021b).

This statement came as a response to a general increase in the presence of particularly American military units, yet also pointed to the growing trend of military exercises in the High North. The hostile rhetoric blaming Norway for ruining the relationship with Russia increases hostile tensions and makes cooperation increasingly challenging. Nevertheless, the hostile tension and aggressive rhetoric are in itself not sufficient factors that would dissuade Norway from participating in JMEs. Hostile rhetoric is not a high risk for Norway, though it does foster an unfavorable environment for maintaining a diplomatic bilateral partnership. Nonetheless, the deterioration in the bilateral relationship with Russia has not been due to Norway participating in JMEs but rather primarily as a response to Russia’s aggressive behavior towards Ukraine, Georgia, and Syria.

4.4.2. Russian gray-zone aggressions during exercises

Russia displays opposition to JMEs in the Arctic through acts of so-called gray-zone aggressions, which serve as subtle yet significant indicators of disapproval. In this thesis, gray-zone aggressions refer to actions by Russia that are below the given military threshold which does not invoke Article 5 yet pose as significant military actions by Russia against Norway. During the Trident Juncture exercise in 2018, Russia was accused of jamming GPS signals

across the Northern territories of both Norway and Finland (France-Pressé, 2018). Russia denied all responsibility and called the accusations absurd (Staalesen, 2018). Maria Zakharova, the former press spokeswoman for the Russian Foreign Ministry, argued that Norway was inventing these accusations to distract attention from the Helge Ingstad scandal (Staalesen, 2018). Nevertheless, the Ministry of Defense in Oslo confidently asserted that the jamming originated from Russian military sources on the Kola Peninsula (Nilsen, 2019b). The absence of prior notification regarding the GPS signal interferences is a cause of concern that goes beyond the military domain and the direct implications for the participating states during the exercise. The implications of this jamming were felt by civilians as well (Staalesen, 2018). The disruptions to GPS signals had adverse effects on civilian aircraft like Widerø and SAS (Nilsen, 2019b). In addition, the disruptions to GPS signals led to a situation in which an ambulance-plane was unable to land (Nilsen, 2019b). Moreover, the local police in Norway's most northern region expressed concern about relying on GPS signals that are unstable as a major potential vulnerability in their efforts of emergency rescues on land, at sea and in the air (Nilsen, 2019a). This has important implications for the bilateral relationship between Russia and Norway as well. After the 2014 annexation of Crimea and the 2021 invasion of Ukraine, Norway has suspended nearly all forms of bilateral cooperation with Russia, except for search and rescue missions in the Arctic. In the High North policy document from 2017, it is stated:

“Russia’s violation of international law in Ukraine has also affected security and defense cooperation in the North. As a result, Norway has suspended much of its military bilateral cooperation with Russia. However, bilateral cooperation on border security, search and rescue, incidents and accident altering and handling at seas (Incidents at Sea) continues.” (Utenriksdepartementet, 2017, p. 20).

The types of rescue missions are also impacted by unstable GPS signals and will have an impact on the political relationship between Norway and Russia. Disrupting one of the few remaining arenas of bilateral cooperation between Norway and Russia would serve as a political signal to Norway that Russia cannot be considered a reliable and predictable partner.

A recent investigation by journalists in Norway, Sweden, and Denmark illuminated another Russian action that can be linked to responding to military exercises. This investigation revealed how Russian fishing ships might be linked to spy operations and intelligence collection on Norwegian infrastructure and critical locations (Hou et al., 2023). The so-called

spy ships might be operating in the Nordic water to facilitate a program aimed at potentially sabotaging underwater cables and wind farms in the area (Hou et al., 2023). The inquiry by the journalists utilized data analysis, intercepted radio communications, and intelligence sources to demonstrate how approximately 50 sea vessels have been collecting intelligence in the past 10 years outside Norway. This type of activity has been specifically linked to military exercises as well. For instance, a Russian fishing vessel by the name of Taurus has been observed in atypical locations and travelling in areas near military bases where all naval traffic is prohibited (Hou et al., 2023). According to NRK, one of the most notable instances was when Taurus was found to have deviated from its usual fishing operations and navigated directly to Ålesund where a NATO military exercise was taking place (Pettersen et al., 2023). Furthermore, other fishing vessels have been observed near military exercise areas such as a base in Andenes in Nordland, which often hosts NATO allies during JMEs in the Arctic. This might be an attempt by Russia to demonstrate its involvement as a key player in the region and to signal that they are closely monitoring the actions of its Western adversaries.

Russia has decided to conduct military drills during different Western-led JMEs in the Arctic. While the Trident Juncture Exercise was underway in 2018, Moscow decided to conduct missile drills in international waters near the periphery of Norwegian territory (Woody, 2018b). The decision to hold missile tests during the largest NATO exercise in decades is a deliberate show of strength from Russia. This missile test can be understood as an attempt by Russia to assert its military dominance in the region and to counterbalance the growing presence of Western allies. The missile tests took place in an area that overlapped with the zone in which certain maritime and air operations of the allied forces were taking place (Woody, 2018a). Even though these tests were communicated to NATO beforehand, the alliance expressed that they would monitor the drills closely (Woody, 2018a). This is not the only time that Russia has decided to show military muscle during a NATO exercise. In February 2020 during the NATO Cold Response exercise, Russia wanted to “express its dissatisfaction with this winter’s NATO exercise in Norway” according to the former Head of the military intelligence services, Lieutenant-General Morten Haga Lunde (Tømmerbakke, 2020). This dissatisfaction was manifested as missile tests in international waters, yet close to the Aasta Hansteen oil production platform outside Nordland county (Tømmerbakke, 2020). In an annual defense speech in January 2020, Haakon Bruun-Hanssen, the former Chief of Defense in Norway, expressed concern about the fact that Russia has been enhancing its bastion defense concept in the Norwegian Sea, while simultaneously also engaging in practicing closing off access to the

Baltic and Norwegian Seas (Tømmerbakke, 2020). In the High North strategy document from 2017, the following is stated:

“In connection with exercises in Norway’s neighboring areas and operations in Ukraine and Syria, Russia has demonstrated its use of conventional long-range precision weapons and the ability to conduct denial operations and secure airspace control.” (Utenriksdepartementet, 2017, p. 14).

This passage illuminates that Norwegian policymakers recognize the provocative potential of JMEs. Stating that Russia demonstrates military capabilities in connection with military exercises that take place in Norway’s neighboring areas, testifies to the fact that Norway is well aware of the escalatory potential of these exercises. Nevertheless, the decision to test missiles during the Trident Juncture and Cold Response exercise does not inherently indicate that an arms race is emerging in the region. Yet, it does suggest a heightened militarization in the area, where various actors aim to demonstrate their military capabilities against their perceived adversaries.

These actions from Russia can be understood as part of a larger military strategy that is not direct responses to Norwegian participation in JMEs. It is difficult to confidently assert that these disruptions are causally connected to JMEs and that they would not take place if Norway was not engaged in JMEs in the High North. For instance, instances of GPS disruptions have occurred in Norway in the absence of JMEs as well. Furthermore, while there have been instances of sea vessels travelling close to areas where military exercises are taking or have taken place, their suspicious activity has also been observed outside the scope of military exercises. For instance, there have been multiple instances of these types of vessels travelling near sea cables in Svalbard (Hou et al., 2023). It can be argued that these vessels are not solely focused on collecting intelligence on military exercises, but rather on mapping the critical infrastructure in the Nordic waters as part of a larger Russian military strategy. Similarly, missile tests and practicing the bastion defense posture, and the use of long-range precision weapons are military activities that one can expect to take place within the framework of a larger military strategy. In addition, the included passage from the 2017 High North strategy document points to how allied operations in Ukraine and Syria are also important factors that influence the Russian decision to demonstrate military capabilities. This reinforces the notion that Russian tests of military capabilities are not a response solely to Western JMEs in the

Arctic. Furthermore, most of the Russian reactions like the ones outlined above, were in response to Trident Juncture in 2018 which was the largest NATO exercise since the Cold War, it would have been unusual if Russia did not attempt to counterbalance this show of force. Moreover, these Russian actions are low-level disruptions that do not pose as a significant threat to Norwegian interests. Evidently, policymakers in Oslo may therefore believe that these gray-zone activities would essentially take place irrespective of the presence of JMEs, thereby rendering it an imprudent decision to discontinue participating in these exercises.

4.4.3. Military build-up and modernizations as a response to Western exercises

The Arctic is essential to Russia's national defense and its investment in military capabilities in the region testify to this. However, the question is whether these investments are; 1) a response to Western JMEs in the region, 2) an indication of a new permanent military stance and 3) alter the security environment for Norway. If all these three factors are possible to prove, this would make the decision to engage in JMEs more difficult for Norway. However, as this section will argue, the Russian investments in military capabilities in the High North cannot be confidently linked to these three factors.

Russia responds to Western JMEs in the region with military exercises. One of the infamous Russian military exercises is the one coined "Zapad" (Ventsel et al., 2021). This is one amongst other exercises that Russia holds regularly. The exercise takes place every four years. Nevertheless, this exercise, which translates directly to "West" holds a different strategic significance (Ventsel et al., 2021). The very name of the exercise falls in line with a larger propaganda campaign from the Kremlin in which NATO and the West is often figured as a central threat to Russia. This exercise stands as a visible reflection of Moscow's resentment towards the increased NATO presence and arguably existence. The Zapad exercise has been argued to have been centered around a scenario of a potential war with NATO, and a central pillar of the exercise was to train for a major information operation against the West (Ventsel et al., 2021). The Zapad exercises have predominantly taken place in Eastern Europe and Belarus, yet parts of the exercise have also taken place in the High North on the Northern Fleet. Nevertheless, none of the military exercises Russia engages in has Norway as a central threat factor. This means that Norway is perceived as a part of a larger Western security alliance that Russia fears, not that Norway is an actor that Russia orients a military exercise around. This sentiment is present in the long-term plan from the Norwegian Armed Forces from 2016: "Russian military activity in Norway's neighboring areas is not considered to be directed

towards Norway” (Forsvarsdepartementet, 2016, p. 30). This is not to say that Norway is not regarded as a relevant actor in Russia's threat perception of the West. In 2017 Russian bombers were observed flying tactical flights towards an intelligence service installation in Vardø (Nilsen, 2018). This is an American-funded radar that is operated by Norwegian military intelligence, and it is situated in an area that provides ample opportunity for the allies to keep an eye on Russia’s nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarines (Nilsen, 2018). This is an important intelligence collector to increase the situational awareness of the region for NATO. The Russian bombers were part of a larger exercise where they simulated an attack on strategic targets located in the northern areas of Norwegian territory. Evidently, Norway due to its alliance with the US and membership in NATO, is part of a larger alliance that Russia orients exercises around. However, such maneuvers by the Russian armed forces do not constitute a high risk for Norway. Moreover, it is anticipated that a state like Russia would engage in military exercises, and it would be considered abnormal if it did not. Based on this, Norway does not have an incentive to stop participating in JMEs.

Russia is modernizing its military capabilities, by advancing certain weapons systems such as the infamous Russian “super-weapon”, the Poseidon 2M39 torpedo (Walsh, 2021). In January 2023 an unidentified source from the defense sector in Russia stated that the first set of Poseidons had been manufactured and that the marine sector of the Russian defense was to receive them in the near future (Faulconbridge, 2023). This type of weapon was by Western defense officials argued to be a new category of retaliatory weapons as it can trigger radioactive ocean swells, which would inevitably render cities along the coast uninhabitable (Faulconbridge, 2023). Even though these types of modernizations and additions to the Russian defense posture serve as a prominent new threat to Western adversaries, they cannot be causally linked as a response to Norway’s participation in Western JMEs. Russia is increasing its military capabilities and modernizing its weapons systems for a variety of other reasons that are not linked to Norway’s participation and hosting of JMEs in the Arctic. Russia has its own motivations in the Arctic. One pressing factor relates to controlling the Northern Sea Route for international shipping. The Arctic functions as a staging ground for Russian power projection into the North Atlantic Ocean through the Greenland-Iceland-UK (GIUK) gap (Wall & Wegge, 2023). Furthermore, Russia has an objective of asserting power dominance in the region vis-à-vis the US. These are two factors that influence the Russian decision-making process in the Arctic military posture. This aspect is also relevant when looking at where in the Arctic some of the more extensive modernizations are taking place. According to a report from Funaoile et

al., (2021) at the CSIS based on satellite imagery, Russia has been refurbishing Soviet-era bases and airfields. A base that has received special attention is the Rogachevo Airbase on the Novaya Zemlya archipelago. This is an area that is not close to Norway. Nevertheless, Russia has recently been deploying MiG-31BM interceptors, which are supersonic, long-range aircraft with the ability to destroy targets both in the air and on the ground (Funaoile et al., 2021). Even though these types of weapons are arguably still in the experimental phase of production and utility, they would significantly increase Russia's capabilities in the Arctic and have implications for the US and NATO allies. However, this modernization testifies to the fact that Russia is not solely modernizing military capabilities that have implications for the Norwegian security environment. These are modernizations that threaten the US and the collective NATO. Essentially, Norway's participation in JMEs is not a primary impetus for Russia's military modernization efforts. Policymakers in Oslo are probably aware of this, and as a result, it would be illogical for Norway to discontinue its engagement in JMEs based on the threat of Russia modernizing its defense posture.

If Russia was to build up a permanent military presence along its border with Norway as a response to Western JMEs, this would potentially affect Norway's incentives to engage in such exercises. This is perhaps one of the only "high risks" that policymakers in Norway must discuss as a pressing concern in relation to JMEs. If it was substantiated that Russia increased its permanent military presence along its border with Norway due to Norway participating in Western JMEs this would likely influence the decision to join such exercises. Such a finding would complicate the equation between weighing the benefits against the costs. Russia has in recent years been updating its military and civilian infrastructure in the Arctic according to Konyshov and Sergunin (2014). However, the interesting aspect of this is examining the reasons why Russia might be increasing its permanent military posture in the Arctic. In comparison to NATO, and Norway, Russia has its largest permanent fleet located in the Arctic Ocean that holds the nuclear-powered strategic ballistic missile submarines. According to Wall and Wegge (2023), the Northern Fleets hosts eight of Russia's ballistic missile submarines of the Delta IV and Borei classes. These have the strategic purpose of maintaining Russia's retaliatory nuclear strike capability. This is not a new feature of Russia's military posture, and protecting these strategic submarines is one of the primary priorities of the Russian state. One of the ways in which these submarines are protected is through the bastion defense concept which includes both air defense and sea denial systems (Wall & Wegge, 2023). The bastion defense concept is a central feature of Russia's protection of the strategic submarines on the

Northern Flank and the investments in modernizing and advancing this system reflect the importance the Kremlin places on this region. Norway's participation in JMEs is not an isolated factor that drives this decision.

Though it is early to speculate on the impact the Ukrainian war has had and continues to have on Russian military capabilities, it is interesting to note that many of the Russian Arctic units have remained intact (Wall & Wegge, 2023). The most notable report concerns the deterioration in the Russian Arctic ground forces (Wall & Wegge, 2023). However, Russia's ground capabilities in the Arctic were limited even before the war broke out according to the Royal United Services Institute (Kaushal et al., 2022). The preservation of essential defensive capabilities in the Arctic, including air and submarine capabilities, despite the conflict in Ukraine, may indicate the significant value Russia places on the region. The CSIS report from 2023 confidently asserts that "Russia's capacity to project power into the North Atlantic Ocean from the Arctic seems unchanged" (Wall & Wegge, 2023, p. 9). The 2023 report from the Norwegian Intelligence Services "Focus" discuss the development in the Russian military posture in the wake of the Ukraine war. This unclassified report testifies to elements of the Norwegian government's understanding of the threat situation in the Arctic and its implications for Norway. In this report, it is stated that: "With weakened conventional capabilities, the significance of nuclear weapons has substantially increased for Russia. As a result, the Russian strategic and regional deterrence forces have become increasingly important for the Russian military power." (Etterretningstjenesten, 2023, p. 21). The report further emphasizes the importance placed on Russia's ability to protect the northern bastion defense concept and access and control over regions of the Barents Sea. Furthermore, it is stated that as of the 16th of February 2023, the Norwegian Intelligence Services have not observed any alterations in the armament of Russian surface combatants on the Northern Fleet (Etterretningstjenesten, 2023, p. 21). The "Focus 2023" report further states that the new Russian maritime doctrine published in the summer of 2022 illuminates their ambitions to increase their military presence in the Arctic. This underscores the strategic importance of the region for Russia and how unlikely it is that Norway's participation in JMEs would be a motivator for Russia to enhance this posture.

Nonetheless, Norway is part of NATO, so to entirely disregard the actions of Norway would also lack nuance. Norway is part of a collective defense posture that Russia views as an adversary. This does not render Norway's behavior insignificant. Up until recently when Finland and Sweden sought NATO membership, Norway was the only NATO country

bordering Russia in the Arctic, so this adds a dimension to Norway's position from the Russian perspective as well. This is reflected in a recent brief from CSIS, where Wall and Wegge (2023) argue that Norway is one of the countries in the Arctic that has observed multiple hybrid threats recently. In the fall of 2022, there were numerous unidentified instances of drones flying in the immediate vicinity of crucial Norwegian infrastructure such as airports, military facilities, and oil and gas facilities (Wall & Wegge, 2023). Furthermore, there have been several instances of Russian citizens engaging in suspicious photography that has resulted in their arrest (Hou et al., 2023). These instances illuminate how Norway is perceived to be an important player in the NATO alliance and that Russia is keeping an eye on Norway. Another relevant factor is the positioning of one of the Russian Arctic Brigades. The infantry units at Pechenga and Alakurtti are near the Norwegian border with the former being located only 15 kilometers from the Norwegian border (Oldberg, 2022). During the Zapad military exercise in 2017 the missile system, coined Iskander, was transferred to the Pechenga Valley. This deployment did raise concern amongst defense officials in Norway as this system has a range of around 500 kilometers where large parts of Northern Norway would fall under the range of these missiles (Nilsen, 2018). Furthermore, the missile system has a nuclear capability (Friis, 2019). However, this was not a permanent move and was done in 2016 as well during another Russian military exercise (Nilsen, 2018). Furthermore, it is also difficult to confidently assert that such moves are a direct response to Norway's participation in JMEs. The bastion defense concept and the protection of the permanent fleet of strategic submarines on the Kola peninsula is one of the highest priorities for the Russian defense posture, and it is therefore not logical to argue that they are directly linked to a response from the Kremlin in terms of Norwegian participation in JMEs in the region. Put bluntly, alterations and modernizations in Russia's defense posture in the Arctic are not inherently linked to Norway's decision to participate in JMEs in the Arctic. Nevertheless, even though Russia's military capabilities in the Arctic and potential modernizations and alterations cannot be solely linked to Norway's decisions to participate in JMEs, this is one of the factors that influence this Russian decision. The increased military presence by NATO and the West in the Arctic is argued by Russia to be unnecessary and provocative and Norway is one of the players in this.

To sum up this argument, it is difficult to confidently assert that Russia is militarily responding directly to Norwegian decisions to engage in JMEs. The presence of military exercises in the Arctic by the Russians is a predicted behavior that falls in line with the expectations of a large military power like Russia. However, Norway's participation in JMEs and membership in

NATO does not go unnoticed by Russia. The Norwegian participation in JMEs in the Arctic contributes to the perception of an enhanced Western military presence in the region which Russia feels threatened by. This is for instance likely the reason why the intelligence radars in Vardø were targeted in one military exercise. Nevertheless, these Russian gray-zone aggressions do not pose as existential threats to Norway and will therefore not stand as imminent reasons to discontinue an activity which yields other important benefits. Furthermore, the Russian efforts to modernize its armed forces are not directly a response to Norway's participation in JMEs but are rather likely a part of Russia's economic, political, and military ambitions for the region. Finally, Russia has not altered its permanent military build-up in the Arctic as a response to Norway participating in JMEs. Rather, any permanent alterations are likely linked to protecting the strategic importance of the Kola peninsula.

4.4.5. Synthesizing the findings

This analysis points to various interesting findings in terms of understanding the motivations inherent in Norway's decision to participate in and host JMEs in the Arctic. The overarching argument can be illustrated like this:

$$\text{Benefits of Deterrence} + \text{Benefits of Assurance} > \text{Costs to Reassurance}$$

What this equation aims to delineate is how Norwegian policymakers have weighed the benefits of both deterrence and assurance concerning JMEs as more important for reaching certain policy objectives, compared to the potential risks of not reassuring Russia enough. The list of added benefits inherent in the participation in JMEs in relation to deterrence and assurance is of central importance to Norway. The risks with participating in JMEs cannot be confidently linked to Norway's participation in JMEs nor do they stand as so-called high-level risks, such as a permanent military build-up along the Norwegian border. Due to this, Norway does not have a pressing incentive to discontinue participating in and hosting JMEs. In broad terms, it is, therefore, evident that the expected findings from the theoretical framework were present in the study on the motivations behind Norway's participation in JMEs.

5. Conclusion

This thesis has presented the motivations behind Norway's participation in JMEs in the Arctic. The thesis introduced the puzzle behind Norway's participation in these exercises and proceeded to explore the underlying motivations by examining their benefits through the theoretical lenses of deterrence and assurance. The analysis then extended to illuminate the associated risks in relation to reassuring Russia when Norway decides to engage in such exercises. This was done to posit the argument that Norwegian policymakers weigh the benefits of JMEs as more imperative for reaching security policy objectives, than the risks of JMEs in terms of potentially provoking Russia.

This chapter will present the five key findings from the analysis, followed by a discussion of their implications. Lastly, this concluding chapter will point towards potential avenues for future research.

5.1. Key findings

The first and foremost overarching finding from the thesis is presented in the following equation:

$$\text{Benefits of Deterrence} + \text{Benefits of Assurance} > \text{Costs to Reassurance}$$

This equation is a result of the delineation of the different benefits the Norwegian government has pointed to in the chosen strategy documents. The added benefits of deterrence and assurance outweigh the costs of JMEs in terms of reassuring Russia. This thesis has discussed two of the benefits in terms of deterrence, and four benefits in terms of the assurance arguments. Evidently, the thesis construed six benefits of JMEs that explain one side of the equation. The other side, the costs to reassurance side, explored three potential risks for Norway when engaging in these exercises. These will be summarized below.

Firstly, JMEs in the Arctic increase the interoperability between allied forces as well as signaling high military capability that deters Russia. A realistic threat scenario for the Norwegian High North is Russia deploying an A2/AD strategy if it feels its strategic military capabilities on its Northern Fleet are threatened. Engaging in visible, high-scale military exercises with powerful patrons in the High North is therefore a signal to Russia that the interoperable allied forces and necessary military competencies render a "quick and easy"

claim of Norwegian territory infeasible as allied and effective reinforcements will be integrated swiftly.

Secondly, JMEs provide Norway with a platform to be assured by allies. This argument was construed in three ways. First, Norway is assured by allies through JMEs because they increase interoperability between the armed forces. This is relevant as it assured Norway that individual soldiers, as well as military units of the allied forces, hold the necessary competencies to survive in the Arctic climate and therefore be a resource for the Norwegian forces in a crisis, rather than an obstacle and hinder. Second, JMEs provide the Norwegian Armed Forces with a valuable opportunity for evaluating their own infrastructure and readiness to receive allied reinforcements and improve the total defense concept for that purpose. Third, due to the allies allocating resources and time for these exercises, Norway is assured that the Arctic and its territory in the High North are kept on the agenda and that the allies share a similar threat perception.

Thirdly, JMEs are an opportunity for Norway to send signals of assurance to allies in the NATO alliance despite not meeting the 2% GDP spending goal as required by the alliance. This argument expands on the logic of Snyder's conceptualization of small states fearing a patron's deflection if not begin able to meet certain alliance requirements. As a strong NATO alliance is argued to be the cornerstone of Norwegian defence, it is in the interest of the Norwegian government to contribute to upholding the alliance and signaling commitment.

Fourthly, the costs to reassurance in terms of engaging in JMEs are either regarded as low costs, such as increased hostile tensions, or they are perceived to be behavior that take place irrespective of Norway's participation in JMEs. Evidently, Russia hosting its own military exercises and modernizing its military capabilities in the region are largely the results of a grand military strategy that cannot be causally linked as a response to Norwegian participation in Western JMEs in the Arctic. Furthermore, by synthesizing the findings from internationally acclaimed think tanks as well as the Norwegian Intelligence Service, there are no indications that Russia is enhancing its permanent military posture along the border with Norway as a response to Norwegian participation in JMEs.

The previous equation thus serves as the fifth key finding, representing the Norwegian balancing act between three concepts, rather than just the two which has been the traditional

understanding. The equation is included once more, with a visualization of the benefits and risks that are associated with each dynamic for clarity.

Benefits of Deterrence	+	Benefits of Assurance	>	Costs to Reassurance
<i>Interoperability</i>		<i>Interoperability</i>		<i>Gray-zone aggressions</i>
<i>High military capabilities</i>		<i>Opportunity for evaluation</i>		<i>Increase hostile tensions</i>
		<i>Shared threat perception</i>		<i>Military advancements</i>
		<i>Assuring allies</i>		

As the theoretical framework suggested, all three dynamics were present in an analysis of the balancing act that Norway engages in concerning JMEs. As a motivating factor, deterrence is present when discussing the incentives Norway has for engaging in JMEs. The analysis further established the need for adding assurance as a theoretical lens to explore the motivations behind participating in JMEs from the Norwegian perspective. The theoretical framework was relevant to various degrees in the Norwegian case. The concept of assurance was expanded and nuanced compared to the framework, and the addition of evaluation for assurance purposes is new. Furthermore, the risks to reassurance concerning the Russia-Norway relationship are also present in this case study as the theoretical framework would suggest. Nevertheless, it is evident that Norway does not perceive these risks as sufficiently threatening to the stability of Norway to withdraw from participating in Western JMEs in the Arctic.

5.2. Limitations

One of the central limitations of this thesis is its applicability. This is a thesis that aims to in-depth explore the intricacies of the Norwegian security posture in terms of JMEs in the Arctic. As discussed in the methodology chapter, the Norwegian context in the Arctic is unique due to the established balancing act in Norway’s security policy, having to navigate between Russia and the US. It is therefore difficult to apply the same analytical framework to another region of the world where the same understanding of reassurance might not be pressing, such as the Baltic states. Nevertheless, as illuminated in the policy implications, the thesis will have relevant findings for countries like Sweden and Finland now that the Nordic security posture is altered as a result of the recent NATO memberships.

The word interoperability was used ambiguously in the chosen strategy documents. In certain elements of the chosen strategy documents, it was challenging to confidently gauge the purpose of the concept in that given context. For instance, interoperability is often used as a concept to testify to the importance of allied forces being able to cooperate for deterring purposes. Nevertheless, this thesis also argued that at various points in the strategy documents, it was evident that this interoperability was important for Norway because it assured them that the allies can operate with the Norwegian forces. This ties in with one of the limitations that was discussed in the methods chapter concerning reliance on government documents where different concepts are used without necessarily being clear on their meaning. While this presented a challenge as two different arguments were construed around the same word, this was not a critical limitation of the thesis. Rather what this testifies to is the fact that one concept can have more than one outcome. This is one of the cornerstones of this thesis, namely that one action can have different effects on different audiences. The interoperability aspect of JMEs serves a dual purpose, conveying a message of deterrence to Russia while simultaneously signaling assurance to Norway. Nevertheless, the use of the word interoperability stands as an example of how challenging it can be to analyze and interpret the meaning behind policy documents.

Furthermore, in the reassurance section of the analysis, there was one inherent limitation relating to the impossibility of confidently asserting a link between Russian behavior as a response to Norwegian participation in JMEs. As the section discussed it was difficult to tie Russian military activities to Norwegian behavior. Most of the modernizations and military build-ups in the Arctic can either be linked to a larger strategy of the region or the protection of the Northern Fleet, rather than responses to Norwegian participation in Western JMEs. Nevertheless, to completely disregard the role Norway plays in the Russian threat perception is also faulty. Essentially, even though Norway's participation in Western JMEs is not *the* reason why Russia is updating its military posture in the region, Norway is still part of a larger Western collective military stature that Russia deems as threatening.

5.3. Implications

The broader implication of this thesis is the way in which it nuances our understanding of the motivations behind Norway's participation in JMEs. This may have specific consequences for Norway's future long-term plans for the Armed Forces and the bilateral relationship with Russia. The next section will present the five key implications of this thesis.

Firstly, this thesis has implications for policymakers in Oslo as it highlights an extended list of the merits of JMEs. By going beyond the deterrence-related advantages traditionally attributed to JMEs, this study has operationalized the existence of assurance dynamics within such exercises. Consequently, it has uncovered additional benefits of JMEs that are not explicitly articulated in current strategy documents or public discourse. This may prompt policymakers to consider the increased incorporation of assurance aspects in future long-term plans.

Secondly, the recent addition of Sweden and Finland to NATO the future of JMEs in the Arctic might be altered. The mere expansion of potential areal for JMEs in the High North alters the necessity of Norway to host these types of exercises alone. On one hand, this might lessen the pressure on Norway in having to alone reassure Russia of benign intention. This responsibility will now potentially be divided between Norway, Sweden, and Finland. On the other hand, with the inclusion of both Sweden and Finland this might increasingly provoke Russia as the West is arguably moving too close to its border. In any case, the future of the Norwegian reassurance posture towards Russia will be altered with the inclusion of Sweden and Finland to NATO. These new additions will also likely alter the scope and scale of JMEs in the Arctic which also has an implication of Norway's reassurance policies towards Russia.

Thirdly, this thesis shed light on new ways to communicate the merit of military exercises to a domestic audience in Norway. The narrative tends to revolve around the need for military exercises for deterring Russia. Nevertheless, as this thesis has argued, the objective is also largely about assurance. Currently, there is no widespread disapproval of these exercises in Norway other than the agricultural sector at times complaining about ruined crop fields due to military equipment running over their crops in the winter. Nevertheless, as tensions rise between the West and Russia, some might question the necessity of potentially provocative exercises. This thesis offers a new perspective on the benefits of such exercises and how their merit can be communicated to a domestic audience. It highlights their value in not just deterring Russia, but also ensuring Norway's extended security guarantees from its allies.

Fourthly, NATO exercises on Norwegian territory are an avenue for Norway to signal assurance to allies in the alliance. While the emphasis in the current narrative has been on Norway's demonstration of alliance commitment through measures such as the acquisition of F-35s, intelligence gathering in the High North, and the procurement of other advanced weapons systems, greater attention can be attributed to highlighting the significant role of

Norway in hosting allied exercises as a means of advancing the collective defense posture of NATO. In political discussions with allies, greater emphasis could be placed on hosting and organizing JMEs in Norway as a visible manifestation of Norway's commitment to the alliance.

Fifthly, given that the bilateral relationship between Norway and Russia is currently at an all-time low, it may be necessary to reconsider the balance between the merits and the risks inherent in participating in JMEs. The current weighing between the benefits and the cost of JMEs has been premeditated on the premise that a bilateral relationship rooted in diplomatic efforts between Russia and Norway exists. Avenues to reassure and be transparent vis-à-vis Russia do not exist in the same way they did when the most recent long-term plan (2020) from the Armed Forces was released. The current security environment in the Arctic region, as well as the bilateral relationship between Russia and Norway, has been drastically altered following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022. This implies that the basis of the evaluation has changed, and the Norwegian objective of being transparent and predictable towards Russia is increasingly challenging. As tensions rise and the schism materializes further, Norway might have to increasingly find avenues to reassure Russia of benign intentions to avoid potential escalation.

5.4. Future studies

The findings of this thesis provide avenues for multiple future studies. The first suggestion involves advancing the domain of scholarly insights on JMEs in general, as this is currently lacking. The second suggestion relates to exploring the motivations behind a small state's decision to engage in these types of exercises in other contexts as well. This thesis has provided a solid framework for continuing to expand on the understanding of the balancing act that small states have to navigate when engaged in a security alliance. For instance, applying the same theoretical framework of deterrence, assurance, and reassurance to Finland and Sweden will be highly interesting. If the same methodology is applied this will enhance the generalizability of the findings from this thesis and potentially refine the framework. Furthermore, a comparative case study of Norway and Sweden could be interesting as this would illuminate the role reassurance of Russia plays in the Swedish context. Though the findings of this thesis illuminate some of the broad motivations for participation in JMEs, particularities of the Norwegian case might be present. For instance, the Swedish case might operationalize the balancing act between alliance commitments and reassuring Russia differently due to various factors. Sweden's historical absence from NATO membership and a lack of a solid bilateral

relationship with the US in the military domain may result in different approaches to this balancing act. Furthermore, the Sweden-Russia relationship differs from that of Norway, in which the absence of a shared land or sea border is one of the most prominent differences. An investigation of how these factors may influence the motivations behind Swedish participation in Western JMEs would be highly interesting.

On the other hand, a potential future study could elaborate more extensively on Russian responses to these types of exercises. In this thesis, it was difficult to confidently assert a causal relationship between Norwegian participation in JMEs and Russian actions, nevertheless, this is not impossible through a qualitative case study. A more rigid triangulation of data from Russian sources might be able to shed light on causal relationships.

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