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Seduced and surrounded by security: A post-structuralist take on Norwegian High North securitizing discourses

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Abstract

Combining elements of the Copenhagen School's securitization theory with a Foucauldian discourse analysis, this article examines certain discursive processes that emerged in the wake of Norway's 2005 High North Initiative. The Norwegian government's explicit politicization of energy issues appears to have acted as door opener, letting 'security' in to colonize the High North discourses once more. Russia is again firmly positioned as the 'radical other', leaving the discursive field open to various forms of securitizing discourses. The post-2005 discursive field of the Northern areas is, in many ways, more open-ended, complex and confusing than ever. The opening up and expansion of the concept of High North security means that 'everything' is seen as having a security potential. What does seem clear is the increasing presence of security in primary texts and the media debate: entry to and credibility in the discourse depends on 'security speak' across an ever-widening array of thematic contexts. The article also argues that a combination of securitization theory and discourse analysis seems a fruitful way forward in shifting more focus towards the active and important role of the audience in securitizing processes.

Keywords

Discourse analysis, High North, post-structuralism, securitization, securitizing, security

Introduction

This article examines some discursive trends regarding security that emerged in the wake of Norway's 2005 High North Initiative. Elements of the Copenhagen School's securitization theory are combined with a Foucauldian discourse analysis of official and public discourse to investigate and unravel the phenomenon, seeking to shed light on certain discursive features arising from an ever-stronger focus on and ever-widening conception of 'security'. The article initially traces the gradual top-down discursive changes in Norway over the past decade. Data from the 1990s indicate a persistent effort by participants in official discourses to de-securitize and de-politicize energy and petroleum policy, thereby maintaining clear line of separation between them and security and foreign policy (Løkken, 2003: 53-54). Data reveals a widening of the conceptualization of security in Norway from around 2005 – intriguing in itself, irrespective of whatever the political

consequences of such a change in discourse might or might not be. The intention is to examine and discuss Norway's ambitious political undertaking of 2005, now known as the High North Initiative, and the activation of discursive processes whereby the security of the High North not only attracted greater attention, but became intrinsic to a widening array of policy issues. As concerns for energy as a strategic and scarce resource grew, the High North once again became a subject of high politics. This flew in the face of the stated objectives of Norway's post-Cold War security and foreign policy. The objective is to show how current security perceptions are coloured by the past, and that conceptions and understandings of security are relational and open to continual change. In a more practical sense, certain tendencies and developmental features indicated by the extensive empirical data are highlighted.

Background: The stabilization of the North, political renaissance, and energy security

Norway faces in the High North one of its most urgent national challenges in terms of interstate relations, sovereignty and resource management. These are not new challenges to Norway's foreign policy. Most of what counts as the High North has concerned security in its classic, stricter sense, the sense applied during the Cold War and late 1980s – even though the term 'policy on the High North' is rarely articulated in as many words. One of the mainstays of Norwegian policy on the High North – one which has remained consistent and stable since the Cold War – sought to ensure stability in northerly areas of crucial importance to Norway. Enabling de-securitization by means of de-militarization was, and still is, an explicit discursive component of Norway's security policy. A much-stated reason why Norway and Russian work together in the Barents region is precisely to offset military tensions, to counter the threats to the environment, and narrow the gap in living standards between the people living on the Nordic and the Russian sides of the region's borders (Holst, 1994: 11–12).

Since the turn of the millennium, the political significance of the High North has risen to heights unheard of since the Cold War. A High North inquiry was set up by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) in March 2003. Its findings were published as a White Paper – *Mot nord! (Northwards!)*, ECNA, 2003) – in December the same year. April 2005 saw the publication of the government's Green Paper *Muligheter og utfordringer i nord (Possibilities and Challenges in the North)*, MFA, 2005b). On taking office in 2005, the Red/Green coalition government gave top priority to the High North in its foreign policy agenda. Policy documents such as the *Soria Moria-erklæringen* (the *Soria Moria Declaration*, Office of the Prime Minister, 2005) and *Regjeringens nordområdestrategi* (the *Norwegian Government Strategy for the High North*, MFA, 2006) outlined what this political initiative meant in practice and provided a list of domestic and international steps and commitments. The possibilities and challenges in the High North, from the perspective of Norwegian foreign and security policy, largely centre on the area's reserves of scarce strategic resources – oil and gas – with a view eventually to supplying the international community. Thus it seems reasonable to read Norway's High North Initiative under an 'energy security' caption.

Security as discourse

In relation to *security* in general, and the widening and deepening debate of the term in particular, the most distinct, interesting and debated contributions have come from the Copenhagen School, headed by Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver, and its concepts of *societal security* and *securitization* (Buzan and Hansen, 2009: 212). Fundamentally, securitization and de-securitization refer to processes that unfold when a theme or development is put on – or taken off – a security agenda. 'Securitization' articulates a certain political sector, a realm (Albert and Buzan, 2011), a social modality (Hansen, 2011), a phenomenon or the like in terms of a challenge to security in some form. Securitization rests on a discursive, subjective conception of security, as 'the "securitization" approach developed by Wæver made the definition of security dependent on its successful construction in discourse' (Buzan and Hansen, 2009: 213).

But what is discourse? Opinions are many and varied about what *discourse* is and should be. *Discourse* has become almost trendy, a concept to which people refer without necessarily defining or specifying what they mean by it. The result is a severely diluted concept. Different disciplines – linguistics, anthropology, psychology, sociology, political science etc. – apply the concept differently, but even within schools or traditions, it can be used and understood in various ways. Michel Foucault and his seminal work *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (Foucault, 1972) are the natural places to start in approaching the field. Foucault gives *discourse* a relatively wide definition, extending beyond speech, writing and text. Van Dijk (1988), Fairclough (1995), and Gee (2005), for instance, who are arguably far more text-centred in their methodologies and more ‘linguistic’ in their approaches than Foucault, advocate a more stringent view. For many, perhaps linguists in particular, ‘discourse’ has often been defined as ‘everything beyond the sentence’. For others, the study of discourses can quite fundamentally be defined and described as the ‘study of language in use’ (Schiffrin et al., 2003: 1). Discourse can also be understood as ‘a broad conglomeration of linguistic and non-linguistic social practices and ideological assumptions’ (Schiffrin et al., 2003: 1). In this article, discourse is viewed as being ‘an interrelated set of texts, and the practices of their production, dissemination, and reception, which brings an object into being’ (Parker, 1992: 3). Discourses exist and are enacted in many different texts: the crucial point is that the *discourse* lies ‘somewhere above’ the individual texts that comprise it. The individual texts, under a Foucauldian conception of discourse, are not analytically meaningful in and of themselves. They become meaningful, as Phillips and Hardy explain, only through their ‘interconnection with other texts, the different discourses on which they draw, and the nature of their production, dissemination, and consumption’ (Phillips and Hardy, 2002: 3–4). Discourse analysis offers a range of approaches to data – and, perhaps more importantly, an even wider range of theorizing around these data (Wetherell et al., 2001). Neumann sums it up nicely:

Because discourse maintains a degree of regularity in social relations, it produces preconditions for action. It constrains how the stuff that the world consists of is ordered, and so how people categorize and think about the world. It constrains what is thought of at all, what is thought of as possible, and what is thought of as the ‘natural thing’ to do in a given situation. But discourse cannot determine action completely. There will always be more than one possible outcome. Discourse analysis aims at specifying the bandwidth of possible outcomes (Neumann, 2008: 62).

The concept of discourse, applied here in its Foucauldian sense, represents the ‘totality of texts and practices’ (Skånland, 2010: 35) – in this case, such relating to security in the High North. By understanding and giving an event, phenomenon or policy-field status as a question of security, the path is open, according to the Copenhagen School, to ‘take politics beyond the established rules of the game’ and frame an issue either as a ‘special kind of politics’ or ultimately as ‘above politics’ (Buzan et al., 1998: 23). According to Albert and Buzan (2011: 423), ‘securitization may take place in other functionally differentiated realms, but then takes on an entirely different form specific to the given realm (i.e. ‘securitization’ within the economic system as a way of addressing credit)’. The important point is that securitization is something that takes place *within* and not outside of the political system. Here it might be appropriate to talk of an ‘energy realm’ in which various forms of security become increasingly relevant. Allied to Buzan and Wæver’s *sector*, and perhaps even more to Albert and Buzan’s ‘realm,’ the energy field in the Norwegian discourse on the High North can be understood as a *substantial modality*: a ‘societal sphere a security issue is said to be situated within’ (Hansen, 2011: 363). Echoing Buzan and Wæver’s securitization theory, Hansen (2011: 363) suggests that ‘an analysis of substantial modalities implies a concern with the wider public sphere within which securitizations – and their substantial modalities – are made and compete.’ It is precisely this wider public sphere that is the focus of analysis, represented by both official discourse in primary texts (Hansen, 2006) and public discourse in the printed media. Ole Wæver says it well, inspired by Hanna Arendt (1958, 1968, 2005), in pointing out that ‘politics is productive, irreducible and happens *among* people as an unpredictable chain of actions. Politics never takes the form of someone “capturing power” and “producing” an output from a plan – it is always about actions that relies on others’ actions before it generates some result, and therefore the “meaning:

and “goodness” of a particular act is never known beforehand but only as history is told afterwards’ (Wæver, 2011: 468). It is this unpredictability and the relational, discursive aspect that is emphasized in this article. Accordingly,, the above statement works just as well if we replace the word ‘politics’ with ‘discourse’, ‘security’ (as discourse) or even ‘securitization’ (as a discursive process).

There has been and still is criticism aimed at developing, refining and/or critically engaging with securitization theory (Gad and Petersen, 2011: 316) from various angles and platforms, including but not limited to Huysmans (1998, 2011), Hansen (2000), Williams (2003), Balzac (2005), Yilmaz and Bilgin (2005), Stritzel (2007, 2011), Wilkinson (2007), McDonald (2008), Salter (2008), Trombetta (2008) and Guzzini (2011). The contribution of this article to these debates lies in agreeing with, and expanding on, Lene Hansen’s (2011) claims that a post-structuralist approach to understanding and using securitization seems a fruitful path forward. Such a view is also in line with Buzan and Wæver’s ‘discursive, post-structuralist assumptions’ (Hansen, 2011: 367) in relation to securitization as an analytical concept. Hansen is followed in trudging ‘one of the ancestral trails that has remained virtually non-travelled in the past decade’s concern with expanding the range and depth of securitization theory, namely that of post-structuralism’ (Hansen, 2011: 366–367). In that sense, it is to be hoped that this article may also be read as a modest contribution to a ‘post-structuralist attempt at deepening *securitization*’ (Hansen, 2011: 366–367).

The data: A corpus of official and public texts

According to the Copenhagen School, ‘the obvious choice of method is discourse analysis’ (Buzan et al., 1998: 176) because the ‘defining criterion of security is textual (..) [and] has to be located in discourse’ (Buzan et al., 1998: 176). To apprise as much as possible of the ‘collective’ perception of security in the North, the analysis is based on empirical data derived from Norwegian primary texts (Hansen, 2006) and Norwegian media through a large data set totalling 1,133 newspaper articles containing variants of both the search terms ‘High North’ and ‘Security’.

Discourse analysis gives epistemological and methodological priority to the study of primary texts (Hansen, 2006) like presidential statements and official policy documents. These ‘monuments’ (Neumann, 2001) or primary texts are often created in the context of an on-going discursive battle and have (at least in theory) formed, absorbed and grasped the strongest representations (Jensen and Skedsmo, 2010). Given my ‘Foucauldian’ vantage point, the approach of Buzan and colleagues is also adopted in choosing not to use any ‘sophisticated linguistic or quantitative techniques. What follows is discourse analysis simply in the sense that discourse is studied as a subject in its own right, not as an indicator of something else’ (Buzan et al., 1998: 176). There has been a systematic, chronological, and qualitative readings of the documents and the author has drawn upon respective ‘cultural competence’ (Neumann, 2001, 2008) to look for the basic discourses (Hansen, 2006), story lines (Hajer, 1995), and national identities on which the narratives around security in the High North are based. There has been no attempt to look for, nor could there have been looked for, ‘underlying motives, hidden agendas, or such’. The purpose of discourse analysis, as Buzan et al. (1998: 176–177) note, ‘is not to get at something else’, because discourses themselves produce reality. It is therefore meaningful and relevant to study them as preconditions for actions¹. A broad selection of primary texts from 1998 to 2010 are relied upon to shed light on and document Norwegian discourses linked to security in the High North and the emergence of energy as a central platform in security thinking. Such texts comprise first of all documents including all 11 national budgets (always presented to the Parliament as *Report no. 1*), in the analytical period, along with central defence-related White Papers and official documents from the Ministry of Defence (1998, 2001, 2004a, 2004b, 2007, 2008). The author has examined the 11 annual statements made by the Minister of Foreign Affairs to the Parliament between 2000 and 2010; and the 11 annual lectures held by the Defence Minister at the Oslo Military Society (Oslo Militære Samfund). The analysis showed that these various statements, speeches and lectures provided valuable insight into Norwegian contemporary foreign relations and security perceptions and assessments, in

addition to the concrete priorities of military policy². As the speeches by the foreign and defence ministers were all held at the start of the respective years, they abound in inter-textual and directly inter-discursive references to the past year, indicating what was considered important then, as well as references to the coming year, indicating what are considered likely issues for the immediate future.

As in Jensen (2007), Hønneland and Jensen (2008), Jensen and Hønneland (2011) and Jensen (2012), which discuss other aspects of the Norwegian High North, this article draws on Retriever's Atekst database³ for information on the 'public discourse' on the High North. The four newspapers are also the same as in these other studies: *Aftenposten*, *Dagens Næringsliv*, *Klassekampen* and *Nordlys*. *Aftenposten* is the main 'national newspaper'. *Dagens Næringsliv* is directed at the business community. *Nordlys* is the main paper for Northern Norway. Lastly, *Klassekampen* is the radical leftist newspaper. It is particularly interesting to assess how much and in what manner the debates in these papers echoed or took issue with the ministers' attempts at defining reality and determining the political agenda. The media debate can also be read as an attempt at incorporating the Copenhagen School's 'audience' into the analysis, and showing that it participates actively in the securitizing discursive processes, cultivating, shaping and even expanding on the official discourse (in turn changing the official discourse).

The High North and the evolution of the concept of security 2000–2005: Uncertainty and insecurity

Of particular interest are the following lines from the 1998 Green Paper, 'Guidelines for the Armed Forces and Development in the Years Ahead 1999–2002':

Over the longer term the danger of invasion cannot be ruled out. A major military attack would most likely not extend across more than one region of the country, but it could be supported by limited actions against the rest of the country. The government therefore seeks to maintain a capacity to repel invasions over a limited time in one region of the country at a time (Ministry of Defence, 1998).

This could be read as a map of current thinking in Norway on what should be the principal mission of the Armed Forces – and was in fact was throughout the 1990s. Right up until the end of the decade, Norway's Armed Forces were configured to resist attack from the East. The defence of the country was characterized by cognitive lag or, perhaps, echoes of the Cold War era (Rottem, 2008: 20).

However, fundamental change was in the air, accompanied by a widespread sense of uncertainty. The fluid security situation in the High North at the start of the new millennium was articulated by the then defence minister Eldbjørg Løwer in the annual address to Oslo Military Society, January 2000.

The effective defence of Norway [is] still [...] of crucial importance, but it needs to be adapted to a radically changed international situation. In the 1990s, Norway, we said, no longer faced a military threat, but developments in security policy are informed by uncertainty. The general direction of security policy today is unpredictable, but it could be just as 'dangerous' as the confrontations between superpowers during the Cold War. Russia's constrained economic and social situation has gone, however, hand in hand with other dangers and risks to security in the North. The destruction of the environment, social misery, organized criminality are prevalent on the Russian side of the border; they could destroy the social fabric and destabilize Norway's immediate neighbourhood (Ministry of Defence, 2000).

This general sense of uncertainty was evident in the media debate as well. Some were convinced that the Cold War was still very much alive, now fought with different weapons. Some were convinced that Norway was facing a completely new, unpredictable situation. The excerpt below from a text written by a central participant in the Norwegian debate gives a sense of the uncertainty and, indeed, as we shall see, a foretaste of what was to accelerate into a clearly articulated expansion of the concept of security.

There are at least three good reasons for maintaining the Armed Forces and even strengthening them, naturally in a process of change and modernization. The first is relations between neighbours. Internationalization has its limits, especially in the High North, where the 'old fashioned' exercise of

sovereignty at sea and on land is still a necessity. Russia is still where it was, and while the threat assessment has changed since the Cold War, uncertainty is just as intense, if not more so. The new threat is not of invasion, but of uncertainty caused by widespread poverty, major environmental risks, insecure storage of nuclear waste, just to mention the most important. The Kola Peninsula is less stable than before; in other words, there is more uncertainty. The mechanisms here are the positive ones. To help reduce the gap in living standards between Norway and Russia and secure nuclear waste. But it is also absolutely necessary to secure Norwegian borders and Norwegian sovereignty as firmly as possible. The positive mechanisms are not incompatible with a need to retain a strong defensive force in the North (Professor Janne Haaland Matlary, *Aftenposten*, 22 November 2000).

The central defence policy document 'Restructuring the Armed Forces, 2002–2005' invokes Norwegian oil and gas reserves, elevating them to a key role in the official High North security discourse. '[O]ur strategic position is enhanced by the natural resources we manage. Oil and gas on the Norwegian continental shelf are of major strategic importance to other states' (Ministry of Defence, 2001).

The excerpts can be read as the beginning of the end of the hegemonic discourse on the threat of invasion in Norwegian security thinking, and as the lowly beginnings of the expansion of the security concept in the Norwegian High North debate. And as the collective Norwegian mind grew increasingly aware of the extent of oil and gas deposits in the North, perceptions of the challenges and threats in the immediate vicinity also changed. The initial enthusiasm for moving ahead and exploiting the petro-reserves in the North brought completely new questions and unusual scenarios, some of which cast opponents and indeed Norway's national identity itself in a totally different light.

These discourses did not take place in a vacuum, of course. The unprecedented events of '9/11' in the USA spurred many to revisit security thinking, in relation to the High North as well. The 'terror term' soon became naturalized in Norwegian security discourses on the High North. Minister of Defence Kristin Krohn Devold opened her 2002 address to the Oslo Military Society by proclaiming:

The ripple effects of the terrorist attack have spread around the globe. The USA is leading the world in a new war against terrorism, in which Norway is also participating. [...] We went to the ballot on September 10 to elect a new parliament. A few hours later, the political agenda changed beyond recognition. [...] September 11 presents us with numerous challenges on how we configure and use our Armed Forces. [...] In the present security situation today, there is little cause for Norway to see Russia as a likely threat. [...] Continued stable development in our neighbour and increased readiness to work together after September 11 will benefit Norway's security interests (Ministry of Defence, 2002).

The shock waves produced by the terrorist attacks in the USA seem to have manifested themselves in the security dimension of Norwegian High North discourses in increasingly creative and inclusive ways of thinking about vulnerability and security. So much can be gathered not least from the new, sweeping concepts of what could be called security or a security dimension. Concurrent with the emergence of new ideas on social and human security in response to the nightmarish reminder of human brutality and vulnerability represented by 9/11, there came a pull in the opposite direction: state centrism became 're-instated' as a political concept and idea. By taking part in the 'war on terror', the state of Norway, de facto and almost overnight, helped to expand the concept of security by joining others in declaring war on an abstraction ('terror'). The result of this focus on the state on the one hand, and the wholesale expansion of the concept of security in relation to the High North, on the other, was a confused mix which, in the data, comes across as uncertainty.

In the years between 9/11 and 2005, the prevailing concern, especially within the MFA in Oslo, remained the old problem of the 1990s: nuclear waste in North-West Russia.

There exists in our immediate vicinity nuclear energy along with a great number of demobilized nuclear submarines, large stocks of spent reactor fuel and radioactive waste in solid and liquid form. There are hundreds of lighthouses along the coast of the Kola Peninsula run by inadequately secured and highly radioactive sources. We are confronted by a threat to the environment and security; it is obviously in our interests therefore to help solve the problems (MFA, 2004).

That said, lines were being drawn with increasing urgency between threats to the environment and security. Traditional security thinking was slowly but surely being challenged in speeches and

government documents, being gradually replaced by a wider perception of security where allusions to particular sectors gained in strength and frequency.

Norway's security situation is characterized by a broader and more complex risk assessment, in which a comprehensive existential threat has been supplanted by uncertainty and unpredictability about the security challenges we could face. This also applies to potential security challenges in Norway's immediate vicinity, where the strategic importance of the High North and resource management over immense stretches of sea provided central parameters for Norwegian security and defence policy (Ministry of Defence, 2004a).

So far, then, we have looked at some main features of the security dynamics of the High North in the years between 2000 and first half of 2005. But it was in 2005 that, according to the textual evidence, official Norwegian security thinking on the High North underwent a substantial change, with 'security talk' becoming a normalized and necessary ingredient of the High North discourse.

Gorbachev, then Støre: Widening perspectives 2005–2010 as energy becomes a matter of high politics

In his article 'Mikhail Gorbachev, the Murmansk Initiative, and the 'Desecuritization of Interstate Relations in the Arctic', Kristian Åtland (2008) analyses the speech that can be said to have kick-started the new approach to interstate relations later enshrined in the Kirkenes Declaration of 11 January 1993. The Euro-Arctic Barents Region,⁴ to use the official nomenclature, gave its name to the geographical area known today as the Barents Region. It also became a symbol of the new climate of openness between East and West following the fall of the Berlin Wall. The Murmansk speech, given by the then-General Secretary of the Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachev, in October 1987 sowed these seeds of partnership. It is a key discursive point of reference and stands as an epochal event in Norway's understanding of the High North. The initiative and forcefulness of this charismatic and visionary man from the East is to posterity – Norwegian posterity at least – a sort of embodiment of the start of the de-securitization of the most important area in Norway's immediate vicinity. The easing of relations in the High North came from the Soviet Union. As Åtland (2008: 2909) notes, Gorbachev's focus on non-military ('soft') issues associated with security in the region relieved some of the tensions that military ('hard') security rhetoric tended to recycle. 'De-securitization in non-military (social, economic, environmental) sectors was, in other words, highly instrumental in realizing the de-securitization of the military sector' (Åtland, 2008: 2909). Åtland's article makes it tempting to draw some tentative parallels between former Soviet Secretary General Gorbachev and Norway's current Foreign Minister Jonas Gahr Støre, the 'charismatic and visionary man from the West', who in Norway at least is considered to embody the renaissance of interest in the High North.

Since the Government took office on 17 October 2005, Støre has campaigned on behalf of the High North. The speech he held in Tromsø a month later, 10 November, stands scrutiny to this day. The important thing here is to say that the High North in every way would have been in a weaker position without Støre's personal advocacy over three years. He is the ideologue, and he is the driving force urging Norway to live up to its ideal as a prudent administrator of resources and environment in the High North (*Nordlys*, 5 July 2008).

'The High North campaign is Jonas Gahr Støre's prestige project' (*Aftenposten*, 26 August 2008). True enough, the speech he held in Tromsø on 10 November 2005, 'An Ocean of Possibilities – A Responsible Policy for the High North' (MFA, 2005a), or the 'Tromsø speech', can hardly be said to herald as strong a change in Norway's Arctic policy as Gorbachev's on East–West relations 18 years before. All the same, it remains central to Norway's thinking on and conceptualization of the High North and is a powerful symbolic point of reference in the country's High North policy. Like its predecessor, it stresses de-militarization.

Let me begin with the perspective. We are not starting from scratch. Since the Cold War's demise, the position of the High North and its neighbourhood have climbed ever higher on the political agenda. We have seen the perspective change in leaps and bounds. What used to be a region characterized by Cold War, by tense relations between East and West, and hardly any human contact across the borders, has

grown into a more and more open region where new challenges and possibilities are emerging.

The period of Cold War, maintains Støre, has become a sort of historical parenthesis, and it will be good to get back to a 'normal state of affairs'. 'It is about consolidating a new perspective, for the High North obviously, but also for Norway and the whole of Northern Europe. It is about new and exciting conditions for people's lives and growth. Nothing less' (MFA, 2005a).

It used to be the case that security policy and strategic military balance pushed every other approach to the side. But historically we ought perhaps to think of the Cold War as a parenthesis, for the Iron Curtain in the North stands in contrast to commercial and social relations down the centuries (MFA, 2005a).

Moreover, it is precisely in this speech that Gahr Støre goes on to speak of energy and security as two sides of the same coin in a classic, realistic sense:

Today, it is the energy question that is pressing all other issues to one side, altering the perspectives – not only those of Norway and our Russian neighbours, but of anyone with an interest in energy production, supply security and climate and environmental challenges.

Governments have responded positively to Norway's invitations to participate in what we have called *High North dialogues*. They know that energy security is changing how the concept of geopolitics is understood. An industrial country which is unable to secure for itself a steady supply of energy will face considerable problems.

If the development of a predictable framework around energy development fails, this region will lose its main assets, stability, transparency and peaceful progress (All excerpts from MFA, 2005a).

These perspectives are underlined and expanded in Defence Minister Anne-Grete Strøm-Erichsen's January 2006 lecture as well as in other policy documents that followed in its wake:

The world is changing [...] [The Government] wants to direct attention to the High North. This is Norway's most important strategic priority in the years to come. [Globalization is] one of the most important aspects of our time. The Government is well aware of its possible consequences for security and defence policy [...] The challenges in the High North are not first and foremost about military power. The key areas are energy extraction, transportation, environment and good management of important marine resources. But the Armed Forces have a central role to play in all this, both in terms of security and the wider society. [...] Some have asked what our High North commitment entails. Presence does not mean militarization or confrontation (Ministry of Defence, 2006).

The guidelines on Norwegian oil and gas policy are well established. At the same time, Norway must be capable of understanding and dealing with the more central position of energy-related questions in the exercise of our foreign and security policy (MFA, 2006: 10).

Here we must bear in mind that everything that smacks of 'security' acquires a very particular status in Norwegian discourses on the High North. Discourses are wrapped in history, and here in the North, close to Russia, discursive fragments from the Cold War continue to ring like echoes from the past (Jensen and Hønneland 2011). Græger (2011: 16), notes that 'great power rivalry for resources and positions seems to be supporting representations, practices and identity that are well established within the Norwegian defence discourse, notably those of national territorial defence' [i.e. security understood in a classical realist sense where the state is the clear object of reference].

The sustainability of the petroleum sector is more fragile than ever, and the impact of even minor interruptions will affect not only the economy but security as well (Ministry of Defence, 2008).

When even the Norwegian state machinery marshals, naturalizes and re-introduces security discourses centred on the North, it re-activates latent notions and discourses which are quickly mustered into service across a wide field:

Here [in connection with the exercise of Norway's sovereignty in the High North], political figures in Norway are playing military arm wrestling, a pursuit in which we have few traditions and not much practice. Although Foreign Minister Jonas Gahr Støre has stopped calling Norway a small country, noting instead that we are the fifteenth biggest country on the planet – if we include the seabed – it would not be prudent of us to highlight the military aspects of the North. Is a solitary Norway preparing to fire the first shot? (*Aftenposten*, 10 November 2007).

When authoritative (primary) texts give various versions of our ‘vital national interests’ and the like, it does not take long before they are picked up, highlighted and extended in scope by a wider public discourse on the High North. ‘Energy supplies and energy security have become security policy, which explains why increasing international interest in the High North as an emerging energy region should come as no surprise’ (Defence Minister Strøm Erichsen, *Nordlys*, 26 September 2007). Or:

Popular ideas and interests are important and timely. Norway is a very small country with enormous natural resources in the form of energy and fish off our coasts. There does not appear today to be any reasonable balance between the Norway’s considerable interests and the means by which Norwegian authorities seek to ensure these interests. As a small state with all these energy resources, Norway – whether we like it or not – is enmeshed in global energy politics. We need to get our house in order to avoid others feeling tempted or forced to use military force to protect their own interests in Norwegian territories (Civil engineer Erik Otto Evenstad, *Nordlys*, 19 December 2007).

In the foreseeable future, Norway could face an extremely serious challenge to its security, related among other things to increasing rivalry caused by the meltdown of the American economy and energy problems. Russia’s advance as a great European power sets fresh challenges. It is not difficult to envisage Norway’s security policy being tested to the hilt, if, for example, rivalry between great powers over the High North and Arctic Ocean develops in an aggravated and, as far as Norway is concerned, negative direction (*Klassekampen*, 15 August 2008).

Thus the discourse progresses, creating space for other conceptions of Norway, the High North, and Norway in the High North. By introducing a variant of security at the top of the agenda, the machinery of power seems to have re-naturalized security discourses, forcing us to ‘speak security’ to gain entry to the High North discourses. The increasing ‘security talk’ again in relation to the High North across a wide front, appears in turn to have made the very concept of High North security more inclusive. This conceptual widening of security is particularly evident in my data, in texts from the corridors of power and the media. In the former, state security, national security, human security, energy security, environmental security are discussed interchangeably:

Current challenges in the North are qualitatively different, but not necessarily less demanding than those facing us during the Cold War. Today’s challenges are related to resource management, unresolved jurisdictional questions and the environment, all of which affect societal security. We cannot, however, disregard situations likely to entail challenges also in respect of state security (Ministry of Defence 2008).

Security appears in many guises when the subject is the High North, and the Armed Forces are given relevance in areas that used to be the preserve of civilians. With the disappearance of a threat of invasion, the need for an invasion defence disappeared as well. A central, painful and difficult debate is now underway on the uses to which Norway’s Armed Forces can be put and what can legitimize them. We should also look at what is happening in the most important areas in the immediate vicinity where Norway no longer has a ‘natural enemy’. Legitimizing the Armed Forces in their original form has become a more demanding discursive task as Norway’s natural enemies are not so clearly delineated and the borders between civil and military matters seem more blurred than ever.

The shackles of language: When safety becomes security

In Norwegian, the expansion of the concept of *security* acquires an added dimension because of what we can term the poverty of the language. There is no natural way in Norwegian to distinguish between what in English is ‘security’ (in the classic sense) and ‘safety’ (in the sense of search and rescue, etc.). ‘The challenge is security, in which, among other things, search and rescue criteria need to be in place’ (Jonas Gahr Støre, *Dagens Næringsliv*, 3 May 2010). English, then, has two words whose customary connotations are ‘hard’ (military) and ‘soft’ (civilian) respectively. A pattern appears to emerge from the data, caused perhaps precisely by this lack of linguistic nuancing in Norwegian. The pattern is interesting also in terms of theory, from the perspective of discourse analysis. To gain a hearing within a given discourse, one needs to follow a set of rules and norms. In the public post-2005 High North discourse, it has become increasingly difficult to be heard

unless the word ‘security’ is uttered in the course of one’s reasoning and argumentation. Moving into the period under analysis here, and especially after the 2005 expansion of the security concept, we find ‘security talk’ increasingly accommodated in the discourse by what we more precisely should term ‘safety’ rather than ‘security’. Thus a wider security focus seems to have developed even though the main thrusts in the debates were often quite unrelated to security issues, or at least both optimistic and ‘soft’ from a security point of view. On the other hand, there seems to be a clear difference between the official discourse (primary texts) and public discourse, i.e. what can be gleaned from the four selected newspapers, even if the statements came from official actors.

...by and large, nearly every section of the military is involved somehow or other in the daily handling of Norwegian security, broadly defined. As levels of activity have increased in step with the receding polar ice cap, so has the need for surveillance, search and rescue, oil spill contingency and military presence. We need to see all our resources as an integrated whole. The essential aspects here are the administration of the fisheries as much as the energy resources (Espen Barth Eide, State Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Nordlys*, 29 January 2009).

Speaking at a NATO meeting of parliamentarians yesterday, [Foreign Minister] Støre again put the High North on the agenda. ... ‘The challenges in the High North are of vital concern to NATO members’, said the Foreign Minister, exemplifying his case with the climate, energy and maritime safety (*Aftenposten*, 25 May 2009).

Government documents are also busily expanding the concept of security, though the dividing line between classic security and widened security still seems relatively clear. All the same, the increasingly complicated concept of security in authoritative texts seems to have unleashed a surge of creativity, resulting in a loss of meaning or substance as the concept is used in the public discourse, leaving an unclear remnant which is difficult to follow. In this sense, then, the evolution of the concept of security as applied to the High North after 2005 has led to more uncertainty in the shape of a fragmented, incoherent debate in which ‘everything’ is security.

Security animates at the top and alienates at the bottom: High politics and Norway’s North–South divide

If we see energy security as the dominant new representation of a Norwegian commitment to the High North, we would have the evidence on our side insofar as everything remotely redolent of security creates a sense of concern and urgency in domestic as much as foreign corridors of power:

In the space of a very short time, energy security has become a leading policy issue. The need to ensure long-term, stable energy supplies is of vital concern to many countries. Norway’s position as a major and reliable exporter of power increases the international importance of Norway and contiguous areas. The Government will engage in a long-term policy to ensure internationally stable energy supplies and safe transport routes (Ministry of Defence, 2007).

Anything that smacks of security to nation states, whether it is related to energy supplies, terrorism or some other contemporary security issue, seems to evoke immediate and powerful discursively resonant associations. In turn, these associations fall neatly into place in a well-established conceptual system closely linked to the state as concept and political entity. The existence of another, wider and often softer form of security than the Hobbesian state-centred one seems unimportant.

If we adopt a perspective aimed more at domestic policy, this focus on security seems, intriguingly, to have had the converse effect on interest and participation on the ground. Indeed, the evidence of my media material indicates that this was what happened precisely in the North – i.e., in Northern Norway. A ‘lukewarmness’ unfolds, and partly co-exists with, an increasingly strong focus on security in one sense or another whenever the High North is discussed and opinions are expressed – even when the thrust of the communication may not be security at all. Engagement from the bottom and up appears, then, to decline whenever security (in whatever guise) is made the main or attendant topic of interest, so as to engineer its inclusion within a given High North discourse of current interest. And this all proceeds in harmony with familiar North Norwegian discourses on ‘power’, ‘power executives in the South’ and ‘Southerners’ – discourses which can

quickly can be dusted off and brought into service (see also Hønneland and Jensen, 2008) along classic centre–periphery, North–South cleavages. Representations of the High North initiative as a centralized concept from the South, far from the realities of Northern Norway in form and substance, appear to find further confirmation in the ever-strengthening focus on security combined with the absence, so far at least, of stories of success ‘on the ground’ in the North. The discursive-analytical point is that security dominates again (albeit in more and different ways than before) in the debates and deliberations on Norway’s most critical neighbourhood, thereby indirectly trivializing and directly supplanting most other debates – national, regional or even local.

Closing remarks

If we look at the wider official High North discourse, it is tempting to characterize the signals transmitted by the mainstream thought as somewhat mixed. On the one side we can note the stabilization mode, which dominates spatially and conceptually. On the other, there is this new ‘high politics’ problem of ‘energy security’, which occurs with increasing frequency in connection with the High North. Quite contrary to established political conventions in Norway, energy becomes part of a politicized, even securitized, discourse. The data underpinning this article reveal the rapid broadening of the general understanding of security. At the same time, the emphasis on the importance of energy and Norway’s role as an energy superpower also contributes to the increasingly sweeping and escalating dynamics of the media debate. A growing multitude of themes develop into realms (Alberts and Buzan, 2011) or social modalities (Hansen, 2011) that become discursive arenas for ‘securitizing discursive processes’ by means, for example, of the increasingly widespread use in public documents of terms like ‘human security’, ‘societal security’, ‘energy security’, ‘environmental security’ in relation to the High North. After 2005, the very concept of ‘security’ is negotiated and stretched like never before, resulting in an unclear remnant which is difficult to follow.

At the same time, ‘security’ seems crucial as a ‘password’ which needs to be uttered to ‘gain access’ to the central discourses on the High North. This is not to say that ‘state security’ is necessarily under threat as the main security concept, but that the different forms of security seems to feed off each other, again upholding security as an important ingredient in any High North discourse after 2005 – even without the presence of a perceived existential threat from the East. The opening up and expansion of the concept of High North security means that ‘everything’ becomes a potential security issue, not least via the safety dimension, and at least partly through linguistic poverty. It would be interesting to explore this further to see whether it reflects a tendency within a wider security discourse in Norway or even Scandinavia, or is limited to the High North.

To gain entry to and credibility in the discourse, one must now ‘speak security’ across an ever-widening array of thematic contexts. The politicization of energy has acted as a door opener, letting ‘security’ in to colonize the discourses once again. The increasing concern for security, especially after 9/11, at the individual and aggregate level in the West, resonates widely in Norwegian High North discourses. And this collective sense of vulnerability has instigated a renaissance for realism and state-centrism. Indeed, for Norway’s part, there is no more obvious place for prolonging a sense of paranoia and general insecurity than in relation to the High North, where Norway’s national identity as a tiny, vulnerable land, and the image of massive Russia (‘the Russian bear’) as ‘the radical other’ (Hansen, 2006), are clear and easily resuscitated in the ‘collective Norwegian mind’ – as articulated in the primary texts and then picked up and further refined in the media discourse.

The combination of securitization theory and discourse analysis works well for conceptualizing a discursive process outlined here in the role and development of security thinking in Norway on the High North, especially after 2005. Still, it is far too early to see in this a *de facto* re-securitization, in the sense of the term as originally defined by the Copenhagen school. What this article stresses is the existence of a discursive process or tendency which seems to be heading in the direction of securitization. Insofar as increasing numbers of questions and issues dealing with the High North acquire a security flavour in the expanded sense of the term, the discursive

consequences would appear to be the sublimation of other issues. Whether and how far the public or audience will come to ‘accept’ a new version of reality shot through with security, is a purely empirical question, which will have to be studied at the locus of the struggle: in the discourse. If the audience gradually immerses itself in a ‘re-securitization’ discourse, that could pave the way for, or perhaps constitute a precondition for, ‘institutional securitization’. Securitization theory has been criticized for paying too little attention to what happens in the build-up to the securitization of an issue, especially as regards the audience. This article has shown that a post-structuralist conceptualization through discourse analysis is a fruitful way forward in relation to securitization theory – because the really important ‘stuff’ goes on precisely in the debates, discourses and deliberations where the audience is not so much an audience in the passive, receiving sense, as an important participant in framing the issue. Moreover, discourse analysis has much to offer by revealing the processes leading to the securitization of a given issue-area. As noted, concluding unequivocally that re-securitization has taken place would be unwarranted in the case of the High North, as is likely to be the situation in most other cases in which transparent, Western democracies are the object of analysis. Securitization is the last stop, that crucial point at which democratic principles can be compromised, and will therefore probably remain a rare occurrence, too extreme for use as a broad analytical category in its strict, original sense. But that is not to say the concept could not be useful here as well.

In conclusion then, this article argues for a continued strong focus on the audience, but indirectly, understood as the ‘audience discourses’ and how these interplay with official discourses and possible attempts at securitization from the corridors of power. By knowing more about the discursive dynamics and the dominant discourses within a given realm, we should be better able to understand more about how, under which circumstances and conditions an issue area is propelled along a continuum towards (perhaps without actually reaching) an endpoint of securitization. Discursively, any number of ‘-ization’ processes could conceivably be relevant here, whether they concern securitization, ‘legalization’, ‘technization’, ‘environmentalization’ or whatever. There are several examples of discursive processes on the High North,⁵ and probably elsewhere, which are closed politically and therefore removed from democratic deliberation because the issue has been successfully removed from a discursive struggle and inserted into legislation or transformed into a technical question of likely impact. A discursive understanding can help us to conceptualize and describe analytically phenomena in which something gets lifted from a deliberative context and institutionalized, making discussion of the issue area ineffective or irrelevant, with a view to influencing a political outcome. Here the logic underlying securitization theory should be both highly relevant and fully applicable in combination with a post-structuralist perspective.

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Notes

¹ A key point of departure in this article is that discourses are involved in determining actual behaviour by narrowing the definition of what counts as acceptable actions and utterances in society at a given point in time. Against this background, discourses can shed light on political practice by defining the scope for action and which options are taken

as politically feasible. Hansen (2006), Skånland (2010) and Græger (2011) are examples who share similar theoretical and methodological vantage points and approaches as this article. There are no hard and fast methodological rules that can help us to reveal the world as it ‘really’ or ‘objectively’ is. Nor can we in a narrower sense falsify theories, and thereby fuel a cumulative progress which could ideally bring us ever closer to reality. As Hansen (2006:25) notes, ‘there is no “extra-discursive” materiality that sets itself forward independently of its discursive representation – which to reiterate, is not to say that the material has no importance [or does not exist], but rather that it is always discursively mediated’. She further notes that, ‘for facts to become politically salient and influence the production and reproduction of foreign policy discourse there must be human and discursive agency; individuals, media, and institutions who collect, document and distribute them’ (ibid.: 32). The discourses are interesting from the moment they become politically relevant (appear) regardless of what motives or hidden agendas (which we can never observe) that might or might not lay behind them.

² This article covers the High North debate in relation to ‘security’. The choices of primary texts reflect that by only looking at the two ministries where one would imagine that the term ‘security’ have the state as the relatively undisputed and uncontested reference object. Other aspects of the High North debates have been examined through other and even larger data sets representing public discourse and from other primary texts including the Ministry of Oil and Energy and the Ministry of Environment. See for instance Jensen (2007) for a study of the environmental discourses and the ‘extraction versus protection’ debate in Norway in relation to the High North. See Jensen and Hønneland (2011) for a broad and thorough mapping of the most central general High North discourses and their ‘traceability’ back to the 1990’s images of Russia.

³ For more on this database, see www.retriever-info.com/en/

⁴ The intention behind the Barents Partnership, as it is also called, is to help bring stability to what had been an area of tension and troop concentration during the entire progress of the Cold War. (Hønneland, 2005: 44–47) The concept retained, not surprisingly perhaps, a clear, palpable security bias although the times were changing and rhetorical gestures growing milder.

⁵ See for instance Jensen (2007) and Jensen (2012) regarding the re-opening of the Barents Sea for petroleum extraction.

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