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Analysis of today
Assessment of tomorrow

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UK and Norway - a strategic partnership for the protection of the seabed

The UK and Norway have reached an agreement worth more than ten billion pounds to build new Type 26 frigates. This is being presented as the biggest export deal in history for the UK defence industry.

For domestic politics in London, it's news to celebrate - new jobs, technological progress and confirmation that British shipbuilders still have global significance.

For Oslo, it is a signal of solidarity with one of its most important NATO allies and a clear message to Moscow that Norway is prepared to invest in its own security.

What remains beyond the reach of standard commentary, however, is the essential dimension of these frigates: they will not only be a symbol of military might but also guardians of the modern world's most sensitive resources - the undersea cables and energy pipes that connect northern Europe with the rest of the continent.

Critical infrastructure beneath the surface

The North Atlantic and the Arctic are not only important because of their geographical location and military routes.

Thousands of kilometres of optical cables crisscross their floor, carrying almost all digital traffic between North America and Europe.

The pipelines through which Norway supplies the countries of the European Union with gas and energy also run through the same depths.

After the sabotage of the Nord Stream gas pipeline in 2022, it became clear that undersea infrastructure is no longer invisible or safe. It is a target.

Sabotage can disrupt internet connections, financial transactions, trade and energy supplies – in short, it can threaten the foundations of modern societies.

> A strategic move to ensure the survival of the European digital and energy industries

This is precisely where the new generation of frigates that the UK is building for Norway comes in.

Type 26 frigates are designed as specialised anti-submarine warfare vessels, but their strength lies not in missiles and torpedoes but in extremely sophisticated sonar and surveillance systems.

This makes them ideal platforms for the protection of undersea infrastructure. In other words, what at first glance looks like a traditional investment in the military is actually a strategic move to ensure the survival of the European digital and energy industries.

The new definition of deterrence

In the last century, deterrence was measured by the number of tanks, aeroplanes and nuclear warheads. Today, however, deterrence is measured by the ability to preserve the web of invisible threads that connect the continents.

Norway has thus acknowledged that the threat is not only posed by Russian submarines in the Barents Sea but also by sophisticated actions and diversions with which the enemy could cut, damage, or secretly monitor cables and pipes.

> The British frigates are not only going to Norway to defend Oslo but also to defend their own internet, their own banks and their own energy stability

The Type 26, with its sonars that can "listen in" to the ocean hundreds of kilometres away, is becoming a symbol of a new form of

deterrence - deterrence against sabotage and covert operations.

With this agreement, the UK is strengthening industrial cooperation and expanding its own doctrine.

London strategists know full well that the future of transatlantic relations rests on the security of submarine communications.

That is why the British frigates are not only going to Norway to defend Oslo but also to defend their own internet, their own banks and their own energy stability.

Hybrid threats – physical and digital

The line between cyberattacks and physical sabotage has become increasingly blurred in recent years.

Russia and other countries with powerful intelligence apparatuses are developing specialised underwater drones capable of sneaking up on cables, mapping them, and potentially destroying them.

Such devices are subtle but devastating, as their impact is measured not in explosives but in minutes of communication disruption, causing panic on stock exchanges and blocking international transactions.

> The ships labelled as warships on paper are increasingly evolving into hybrid digital and physical security stations

Norway and the UK assume that the new frigates will be precisely this mobile platform, which will be able to detect and prevent such actions using a combination of radar, sonar, and drones.

Put simply, in practice, the ships labelled as warships on paper are increasingly evolving into hybrid digital and physical security stations.

They will patrol not only the sea but also the seabed, not just for military purposes but also for the optical threads through which all modern life runs.

Industrial alliance as a geopolitical message

Norway could have chosen other partners, including Germany or France, whose naval industries also offer modern frigates. However, the choice of the UK is not accidental.

Oslo wanted to reaffirm the strategic partnership with London but also express that the Arctic would not be an area dominated by a single European centre of power.

> A chance for the UK to prove it will still be a pillar of European security post-Brexit

It is also a signal to the United States that Europe, at least the North, can rely on its own capabilities and not just on the American navy.

This deal is a chance for the UK to prove it will still be a pillar of European security post-Brexit. When the Norwegian frigates sail into the North Atlantic, they will not only carry the flag of Oslo but also the industrial signature of London.

Forecasts and next steps

Observing this treaty from a broader perspective, it is clear that it will shape Northern Europe's defence policies for the next decade.

The Baltic states and Poland will probably follow Norway's lead and invest in platforms to protect undersea infrastructure. The British frigate model will become a role model and precedent in the region.

The Baltic states and Poland will probably follow Norway's lead and invest in platforms to protect undersea infrastructure - Mark Rutte with Donald Tusk

At the same time, NATO will be forced to redefine the concept of collective defence. Article 5 will not be put to the test in the event of an armoured attack, but in the event of the sabotage of an undersea cable that disrupts the entire region's internet connection.

Brussels is already thinking about standards and scenarios for such situations, because it is obvious that the security reality of the XXI century requires a different approach.

Russia's response will probably not be overt and military but sophisticated and covert. The Kremlin knows that a direct conflict with NATO is not an option, but it also knows that hybrid threats are cheap and effective.

This is why the number of incidents on undersea cables and pipelines with unclear perpetrators and no official attribution will increase in the coming years.

The agreement between the UK and Norway could potentially pave the way for a broader industrial partnership.

If the frigates prove successful, the next step could be the development of specialised unmanned underwater systems for joint production. This would further strengthen Europe's autonomy in a sector that has so far been dominated by the US and Russia.

The Type 26 frigate for Norway will therefore not just be a warship. They will become mobile guardians of the network on which the digital economy, gas supply and the very idea of modern life depend.

Their role will not be measured by the number of missiles fired but by the continuity of the daily functioning of European societies. It is a new definition of deterrence and a new frontline – invisible, silent, but decisive.

With this agreement, the UK and Norway show that they have recognised, on time, that whoever controls the seabed also controls the currents of the modern world.