

Illiberalism, geopolitics, and middle power security: Lessons from the Norwegian case

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Abstract

Middle powers have played a key role in supporting global governance, a rules-based order, and human rights norms. Apart from conveying and effectuating global solidarity and responsibility, multilateral cooperation has been an arena where middle powers seek protection and leverage relatively modest power to greater effect, sometimes as “helpful fixers” to great powers. This article argues that geopolitical revival and the contestation of the liberal order are challenging middle powers’ traditional sheltering policies, based on empirical evidence from the Norwegian case. First, the weakening of multilateral organizations is making middle powers more vulnerable to great power rivalry and geopolitics, and Norway’s relationship with Russia is particularly pointed. Second, existing shelters such as NATO and bilateral cooperation with the US are negatively affected by the latter’s anti-liberal foreign policies, making looser sheltering frameworks important supplements. While Norway’s and other middle powers’ traditional policies within the “soft power” belt may continue, “doing good” may become less prioritized, due to the need for security.

Keywords

Security, middle powers, geopolitics, liberal order, Norway, multilateral organizations

Ever since the global financial crisis in 2008, there has been much debate on the demise of the liberal world order based on free trade, rule of law, multilateralism,

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and cooperative security, as well as US leadership.¹ Emerging economies in the Global South and power shifts towards Asia have helped fuel those debates, as have the UN's failure to promote peace in Syria, Russia's annexation of the Crimea and destabilization of Ukraine, and President Trump's protectionist and anti-liberalist foreign policies. In Europe, contestation of the liberal order is reflected in "Brexit," the failure to craft a common European response to the refugee flows since 2015 and the reinstatement of national border controls, and the rise of right-wing governments and populism.² While important, this is not just a reflection of anti-integration sentiments, dissatisfaction with economic policies, or rage against political elites. International liberalism is under attack as a political idea of how societies should govern themselves, as are the institutions that embody that idea.³

The contestation of international rule of law principles, stability, and restraint is paralleled by an emphasis in several countries on greatness, glory, vitality, patriarchy, unilateralism, and, as Tjalve observes, "a revived geopolitical reasoning and its agendas of historical revisionism [...] that is being directly linked to the liberal order."⁴ Today's geopolitics has, Guzzini argues, "a military bias—which puts national security thinking first," and where "the mobilisation of the implicit nationalist biases of the geopolitical tradition to 'rally round the flag,'" is also visible.⁵

Middle powers' ability to navigate this increasingly challenging terrain when seeking security, is the concern of this article. As Abrahamsen, Riis-Andersen, and Sending argue, "as standard bearers of liberal internationalism, they provide a useful prism for exploring how middle powers are navigating an environment where international institutions are in flux and appear less able to reduce uncertainty."⁶ Together, the demise of liberalism a more insecure world, and new geopolitical shifts raise a set of pressing questions related to middle power security strategies: Will existing multilateral frameworks continue to provide security, or are middle powers likely to opt for new strategies and alignments, if possible? In

1. J. Anderson, John Ikenberry, and Thomas Risse, eds, *The End of the West? Crisis and Change in the Atlantic Order* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008); Charles A. Kupchan, *No One's World: The West, the Rising Rest, and the Coming Global Turn* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Joseph S. Nye Jr., "Will the liberal order survive?, The History of an Idea" *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 2018; Robert Kagan, "The twilight of the liberal world order," *Brookings*, 24 January 2017, <https://www.brookings.edu/research/the-twilight-of-the-liberal-world-order/>
2. A. Bakardjeva Engelbrekt, Niklas Bremberg, A. Michalski, and L. Oxelheim, eds, *Trust in the European Union in Challenging Times* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2018); Anthony Dawkin and Mark Leonard, "Can Europe save the world order?," European Council on Foreign Relations, May 2018.
3. See Michael Williams and Jean Francois Drolet, "The view from MARS: American 'populism' and the liberal world order," *International Journal* 2019, Vol. 74(1) 15–31, DOI: 10.1177/0020702019834716
4. Vibeke Tjalve, "Geopolitical amnesia: The rise of the right and the crisis of liberal memory," paper presented at the Theory Seminar Series, Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, Oslo, 30 August 2018.
5. Stefano Guzzini, "Which geopolitics?," in Stefano Guzzini, ed., *The Return of Geopolitics in Europe? Social Mechanisms and Foreign Policy Identity Crises* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 18–44, at 34–35.
6. Rita Abrahamsen, Louise Riis-Andersen, and Ole Jacob Sending, "Introduction: Making liberal internationalism great again?," *International Journal* 2019, Vol. 74(1) 47–64, DOI: 10.1177/0020702019833739

their search for shelter, are middle powers likely to lower the bar for supporting or participating in interventions or campaigns that do not resonate with or perhaps even counter a rule-governed, liberal order? If so, how are such policies sought justified by states with longstanding self-images as champions of peace, human rights, and a rules-based order? While all of these questions will not be addressed in detail, the article will discuss some available middle power security strategies, focusing on multilateral security cooperation within organizations and in looser, issue-specific formations that have emerged in recent years, as well as cooperation with great powers (e.g. bilateral relationships).

Analyzing how middle powers *as such* are affected by or seek adjustments in their security policies in response to illiberalism, strategic uncertainty, and geopolitical revival with a view to generalization, is beyond the intention of this article. After all, middle powers are found across the globe and include both Western (e.g. Canada, Israel, and several European states) as well as non-Western states (e.g. South Korea, Venezuela, or Algeria). Among these, the Nordic countries have benefitted from and strongly support a liberal order and multilateral cooperation. I will focus on Norway, which not only supports but also depends heavily on multilateral cooperation for its security. Norway joined NATO in 1949, enjoys longstanding ties with the US, stands outside of the EU, and shares a border with Russia. It therefore serves as a good illustration of how illiberalism and revived geopolitics may affect middle powers' action space within security.

The article starts by briefly looking at how middle powers' foreign and security policies have been embedded in a well-functioning multilateral order, before discussing how geopolitical shifts and the revival of great power politics may undermine that order. The main section then lays out four different types of middle power security strategies drawing on the theory of shelter, focusing on Norway. Finally, the conclusion summarizes the argument and suggests how current trends might constrain and reshape middle power sheltering strategies and challenge their future justification.

Middle powers and the multilateral decline

Middle powers have played a key role in supporting the legacy of the post-1945 European order, engaging actively in multilateral institutions. Middle powers have benefitted considerably from a rules-based, multilateral liberal order to protect their sovereignty and territorial integrity. In addition, multilateral cooperation has been an instrument for fulfilling their expected role globally, such as taking global solidarity and responsibility,⁷ and to leverage relatively modest power to greater effect. Paraphrasing Frank (1985),⁸ middle powers have chosen "soft power" areas, such as peace, development, humanitarian aid, and human

7. This is not to imply that these institutions have succeeded in, or have made sufficient efforts toward, reducing inequality between regions and countries, including the North-South divide.

8. Robert H. Frank. *Choosing the right pond: human behavior and the quest for status*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1985.

rights with purpose: they are “the right pond” in which to be a big fish.⁹ With their long-term substantive contributions within these policy areas, and support of a global order based on international law and good governance, the Nordic countries and Canada arguably stand out as “humanitarian great powers.”¹⁰

However, the end of the Cold War bloc politics offered greater leeway for middle powers to pursue more independent foreign policies also beyond traditional “soft policy” fields, including in security and defence.¹¹ Middle powers have participated in international military operations in the Balkans, Afghanistan and Libya, as well as in the fight against ISIL, justified with reference to the protection of international norms, rules, and peoples, as well as regional stability and national security. Hence, whether states are defined as small, middle, or great powers to some degree has reflected the policy field in question, not only size (e.g. population, geographical outreach) or material assets like wealth (e.g. GDP per capita or defence spending), implying that small and middle powers may “punch above their weight.” That said, countries such as Canada and the Nordics also rank high on “great power” dimensions like wealth, happiness, health, governance, civil and political rights, and even defence (Norway).¹²

How does the anti-liberalist critique of the current organization and governing of the world and of Europe that occupies a growing place in the international debate play out in the security discourse? In a more unpredictable world, strong multilateral institutions are of vital importance for the security of middle powers for two reasons. First, because an international order based on the liberal logics of national self-restraint, institutional self-binding, and international law is their first line of defence against the raw pursuit of national interests. The UN has the primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security and of the post-WW2 order. In Europe, which this article explores, NATO and the EU are the main regional organizations involved in providing security and in protecting the liberal order. To this end, both organizations have emphasized the need to strengthen multilateral cooperation. As formulated in the EU’s 2016 European Global Strategy, in a more connected, contested, and complex world, more—not less—cooperation is needed.¹³ This was echoed by NATO Secretary General Jens

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9. William C. Wolforth, “Conclusion: A small middle power,” in Benjamin de Carvalho and Iver B. Neumann, eds, *Small State Status Seeking: Norway’s Quest for International Standing* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 146–156, at 154.
 10. For Norway, see Benjamin de Carvalho and Jon Harald Sande-Lie, “A great power performance: Norway, status and the policy of involvement,” in de Carvalho and Neumann, *Small State Status Seeking*, 56–72. For Canada, see Heather A. Smith and Claire T. Sjolander, eds, *Canada in the World: Internationalism in Canadian Foreign Policy* (Don Mills: Oxford University Press, 2013).
 11. Military contributions to, especially, US-led and NATO operations have also been part of “troops-for-status” strategies. For Norway, see Nina Græger, “From ‘forces for good’ to ‘forces for status’? Small state military status seeking,” in de Carvalho and Neumann, *Small State Status Seeking*, 86–107.
 12. Wolforth, “Conclusion,” 153. On wealth, see <http://nordic.businessinsider.com/the-richest-countries-in-the-world-2017-3?r=UK&IR=T> (accessed 6 February 2019).
 13. EU Global Strategy, *Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe. A Global Strategy for the European Union’s Foreign and Security Policy* (Brussels, June 2016), https://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/top_stories/pdf/eugs_review_web.pdf (accessed 6 February 2019).

Stoltenberg when visiting France in May 2018: “I believe in strong institutions, strong international institutions[;] especially when times are unpredictable, as they are now, then we need strong EU, strong NATO, strong UN.”¹⁴

Second, multilateral security cooperation has been a key to providing “hard security” for middle powers, with NATO and increasingly the EU as the most important organizations in Europe. These organizational frameworks have also functioned as hubs for more informal bilateral security cooperation or sub-regional security cooperation. According to the English School, taking responsibility for international peace and security as well as the maintenance of international society is also about great powerness and leadership.¹⁵ However, as this article will show, the pursuit of national rather than global interests, as well as geopolitical rivalry, seem to be more at the forefront among great powers today, than international leadership and responsibility.

Geopolitical shifts and rivalry

The revival of geopolitics and great power rivalry further undermines multilateral cooperation and liberalism both as an idea and practice, negatively affecting the security of middle powers. Geopolitics comes in many versions, some of which will briefly be mentioned here. The idea that politics and geography are interlinked is not new. In the late 19th century, several geographers and scientists claimed that a country’s location on the map as well as the form (e.g. the existence of “natural” borders like mountains or sea, versus open territory) and size of its territory were the primary determinants of its foreign policy behaviour.¹⁶ Furthermore, the idea that the world had become “a closed political system” gained ground within geopolitical thinking.¹⁷ This classical version of geopolitics was based on the deterministic view that since the world had become whole and finite, meaning that the size of the cake could no longer be increased through colonial expansion, states would by default use any opportunity to seek expansionism.¹⁸

In the realist version, geopolitics is connected to the military or strategic wing of realism where, according to Guzzini, “worst-case scenarios think politics backwards from war,” meaning that “politics is a prolongation of war by other means,” reversing Clausewitz’ 19th-century dictum.¹⁹ And as Guzzini adds,

14. Jens Stoltenberg, “New Challenges for NATO, what role for France in the Atlantic Alliance?,” closing remarks at the German Marshall Fund Seminar, 14 May 2018, Paris, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_154422.htm (accessed 6 February 2019).
15. Iver B. Neumann and Benjamin de Carvalho, “Introduction: Small states and status,” in de Carvalho and Neumann, *Small State Status Seeking*, 1–21.
16. The Swedish geographer and scientist Rudolf Kjellén was one of the pioneers. See Njord Wegge and Kathrin Keil, 2018. “Between classical and critical geopolitics in a changing Arctic,” *Polar Geography*, 41:2, 87–106. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1088937X.2018.1455755> (Accessed 3 June 2018).
17. Halford J. Mackinder’s famous address to the Royal Geographic Society in 1904 largely captures geopolitics at that time. Guzzini, “Which geopolitics?,” 27.
18. *Ibid.*, 27–28. For a discussion of the relationship between classical geopolitics and realism, see p. 39.
19. *Ibid.*, 34.

“With potential war planning as a backdrop, geographic factors [...] acquire a particular salience,” meaning that military movement and defence are conditioned by geography, making the domination of space “a crucial strategic facet” and where the notion of geopolitics will almost automatically “mobilize a particular bias of strategic thinking.”²⁰

The realist version of geopolitics dominated during the Cold War, where the bipolar balance of power structured global and regional rivalry as well as cooperation patterns. With a few exceptions (neutrals and non-aligned states), European and North American middle powers aligned with one of the two power blocs—the US or the USSR—and participated in their respective defence alliances, NATO or the Warsaw Pact. Some states functioned as the super-powers’ “back-yards,” where the latter would position themselves for conventional or nuclear war by having stationary bases or being granted access over air, sea, and land. In short, middle powers were left with little action space outside of these alliances, and often also within them.

Although realist scholars also launched geopolitical ideas in the 1990s,²¹ the specific Cold War geopolitical narratives were now generally demised as irrelevant for European security. Security gradually came to be centred on broader security agendas; on cashing in the peace dividend; on integrating former Soviet states, and to some extent Russia, into European and transatlantic multilateral structures (EU, NATO, etc.); as well as on handling the intra-state wars following the dissolution of former Yugoslavia and the USSR.²² In northern Europe, a new reading of the border between Russia and Norway—which was highly politicized and militarized during the Cold War as a border between the West and the Soviet Union—gradually appeared.²³ Absent of the East–West divide, old 19th-century narratives of cooperation and cross-border interaction were re-invented. The border gradually became more permeable and transparent, allowing for people-to-people cooperation as well as local cooperation on infrastructure, business, environmental issues, knowledge, and research, and indigenous peoples.²⁴ From 2006/2007 onwards, intensified and regular Russian military activity in the High North, and a tripling of Russian overflights with heavy strategic bombers during 2013–2014 again changed the border narrative.²⁵ According to experts, the tense

20. Ibid.

21. See, for example, Samuel P. Huntington, “The clash of civilizations?,” *Foreign Affairs* 72, no. 3 (1993): 22–49; Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and its Geostrategic Imperatives* (New York: Basic Books, 1997).

22. On humanitarian interventions, see Nicholas J. Wheeler, *Saving Strangers: Humanitarian Interventions in International Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

23. Of course, the Russia–Finnish border was intensely politicized but reflects a different bilateral story and is, therefore, left out here. For a recent study, see Hans Mouritzen, “Small states and Finlandisation in the age of Trump,” *Survival* 59, no. 2 (2017): 67–84.

24. Geir Hønneland, *Barentsbrytninger: Norsk nordområdepolitikk etter den kalde krigen [Barents Changes. Norwegian High North Policy after the Cold War]* (Oslo: Cappelen Damm, 2005).

25. The Armed Forces of Norway, *Et Forsvar i endring [A Defence in Change]*, Chief of Defence’s military advice 2015, 5 October 2015, <https://forsvaret.no/fmr> (accessed 7 February 2019).

security situation confirmed the historical importance of the region as “an arena for geopolitical struggle.”²⁶ These changing narratives of the Norwegian–Russian border are an illustrative example of the relevance of critical geopolitics, which emphasizes how the meaning of geography and space is neither objective nor constant, but formed by narratives that are contextual and socially constructed.²⁷

Globally, the geopolitical shifts starting in 2006/2007 were reflected in the rise of Russia and China, and in the US “pivot” towards the Asia-Pacific.²⁸ More recently, the term “New Cold War” was used to describe the US, Russia, and China’s clashes over issues like industrial competition and engaging in information subversion and subversive covert and cyber warfare operations against domestic infrastructures and political institutions.²⁹

While the return of geography to politics with a military bias is visible today, we see a different configuration of geopolitics and multipolarity than during the Cold War. First, the “New Cold War” is basically tripolar, although Russia and China are increasingly aligned, as we shall see below. Second, the great powers of today do not seek the status quo (a bi- or tri-polar balance of power), but rather to change and expand their global roles and influence. For Russia, restoring greatness has been materialized in its military build-up and the interventions in Georgia in 2008 and Ukraine in 2014. For China, enhanced global influence is pursued through economic investments and engagements in Africa and Europe, and a growing interest in the Arctic. For the US, “making America great again” has been manifested in, for instance, US withdrawal from multilateral treaties, as well as protectionism. The US National Security Strategy from 2017 also names China and Russia as “rivals” and “revisionist powers” which are “attempting to erode American security and prosperity.”³⁰ Third, not only Russia but also the US seem to operate according to a rationality marked by the absence of predictability, as well as disrespect for international rules and norms of conduct, and engagement in disinformation campaigns. Some of these illiberal, nationalist and protectionist policies also seem to have found resonance among other state leaders, such as Erdoğan and Orbán.

The revival and present reconfiguration of geopolitics have been paralleled with a decline, or at least a change, in Western leadership.³¹ Both trends have potentially

26. Norwegian Ministry of Defence. *Unified Effort*. Report from the Expert Commission on Norwegian Security and Defence. Oslo: Norwegian Ministry of Defence. <https://www.regjeringen.no/global-assets/departementene/fd/dokumenter/unified-effort.pdf> (accessed 3 June 2018).

27. See, for example, John A. Agnew, *Geopolitics: Re-visioning World Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2006); Gerard Otuathail, *Critical Geopolitics: The Politics of Writing Global Space*, vol. 6 Borderline series (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

28. Apart from Russia and China, emerging powers include Brazil, India, and South Africa (BRICS) and others, but due to their lesser importance for Norway’s security strategies, they will not be discussed here.

29. Michael W. Doyle, “A new Cold War?,” UI Paper no. 2, Swedish Institute of International Affairs, 2018.

30. President of the United States, “National Security Strategy of the United States of America,” December 2017, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905-2.pdf> (accessed 7 February 2019), 2, 25.

31. See Kupchan, *No One’s World*.

negative effects on middle powers' security, including Norway's. For various reasons, many great powers have developed a preference for engaging more with looser international fora like the G20 and G7 (formerly G8), at the expense of multilateral organizations. It has been argued that global leadership depends on the ability of great powers to find common ground and cooperate.³² However, when seeking such common ground is issue- or interest-driven, rather than guided by international norms and (binding) rules, global leadership may come at a price. When great powers are putting their heads together in looser, more informal fora to solve problems or develop common agendas, it is not necessarily to the benefit of multilateral organizations or other states, let alone middle powers. Great powers are often pursuing policies that fulfil their own interests, and with a weakening of international institutions and binding rules on the wane, this option has few downsides. Until Russia was temporarily suspended because of the Ukraine intervention, President Putin used the G8 actively to promote Russia's return as a great power as he did with the G20. For Russia, as well as China (who attends both G8 and G20 meetings as a guest), these fora have been important for seeking global recognition and reshaping international norms that constrain their pursuit of national interests.³³

How the combination of multilateral decline and geopolitical revival may affect middle powers' search for security is discussed in the next section, which explores some key middle power security strategies, using Norway as an example.

Middle power security strategies

Just as hedging within financial and economic markets varies, so do states' risk management strategies in the field of security. Sheltering is one available strategy that is thought to reduce risk in the event of a crisis, as well as help absorb shocks if a crisis occurs, and assist in dealing with the aftermath of the crisis. According to the theory of shelter, lesser powers lack sufficient or adequate capabilities and are, therefore, dependent on the economic, political, and societal shelter provided by larger states and/or regional and international organizations.³⁴

A shelter can be economic or political—or both. Political shelter, which is relevant in the context of this article, implies direct, visible diplomatic or military backing, as well as other strategic coverage when needed, usually by another state or an international organization.³⁵ Building on the theory of shelter and

32. Ole Jacob Sending and Morten Bøås, "En verden av mistillit [A world that lacks trust]," *Hvor Hender Det* no. 7, Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI), Oslo, 2018.

33. See, for example, Alexander Cooley, "Countering democratic norms," *Journal of Democracy* 26, no. 3 (2015): 49–63.

34. Baldur Thorhallsson, "The Icelandic crash and its consequences: A small state without economic and political shelter," in R. Steinmetz and Anders Wivel, eds, *Small States in Europe: Challenges and Opportunities* (London: Ashgate Publishing, 2010), 199–214.

35. Baldur Thorhallsson, "Nordicness as a shelter: The case of Iceland," *Global Affairs* 4(4–5): 377–390. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/23340460.2018.1522507> (accessed 28 September 2018). Economic shelter can be provided through direct economic assistance, a currency union, help from an external financial authority, beneficial loans, favourable market access, a common market, etc., all of which are provided by a more powerful country or an international organization.

Table 1. Norway's sheltering frameworks.

| | <i>Permanent (long-lasting and stable)</i> | <i>Issue-specific</i> |
|-----------------|--|------------------------------------|
| <i>Formal</i> | NATO Nordic cooperation | Agreements with: EU/CSDP EDA |
| <i>Informal</i> | Bilateral relationships (the US) | NORDEFCO Northern Group |

drawing on the Norwegian case, I have developed four types of political sheltering frameworks based on their degree of permanency and formalization, presented in Table 1. Political shelter can be permanent and formal (alliances and organizations), or permanent—or at least long-lasting and stable—and informal (bilateral relationships). Issue-specific political shelters may be part of, or outside of, multilateral frameworks, with different degrees of formalization. While based on Norway, these sheltering strategies are also of relevance to other European middle powers.

Permanent formal shelters: Multilateral security cooperation in NATO

Most sheltering strategies involve and presuppose some form of multilateral cooperation. In the upper-left column in Table 1, we find the key shelter that many European middle powers have relied on for security since 1949: NATO. Norway developed its armed forces primarily after the Second World War in line with its place in NATO's security strategy, military doctrines and national defence concerns. Sharing a border with the Soviet Union, from where an invasion could be expected, largely shaped Norway's defence concept. The deterrent element lay in the concomitant binding guarantee of mutual security in Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty. During the Cold War, the Armed Forces were dimensioned to deny an attacker the possibility of invading Norwegian territory or, if invaded, of putting up resistance until Western allies could come to Norway's assistance (calculated to 48 hours). Preparing for receiving allied assistance by providing infrastructure for regular allied exercises and the pre-positioning of US military equipment and regular presence of US troops on Norwegian soil, was and remains a cornerstone in Norway's security and defence strategy. From the 1990s onwards, Norway sought to compensate for losing its Cold War role as NATO's "watch-tower" in the High North, by participating in NATO's military transformation and deploying troops to international peacekeeping, peace enforcement, and peace-building operations in the Balkans, Afghanistan, post-war Iraq, and Libya.

How do the revival of geopolitical reasoning and illiberalism potentially affect NATO's value as a framework for shelter? NATO, as well as other multilateral frameworks that middle powers have come to rely on for security, depend on

the engagement and backing from great powers to be attractive and efficient. The US is the biggest contributor to NATO, and the credibility of the alliance is largely based on US military contributions, engagement, and leadership. In NATO, a lack of American leadership has, however, been visible for some time. The US “back seat” position, which became particularly visible prior to the Libya operation “Unified Protector” in 2011, has been accentuated by Trump’s speeches and tweets about NATO’s lack of relevance and harsh critique of Europe’s military deficit in NATO. While this critique is not new, when combined with Trump’s political project, it has cast the US military guarantee behind Article 5 into doubt. Beyond its importance for the security of the other NATO members, this also questions NATO’s role as the constitution of the Western security community.³⁶ Another trend that points in the same direction is the internal North–South divide in NATO concerning what the most pressing threats are (e.g. illegal immigration and organized crime versus Russian expansion) and how to spend NATO resources to meet them.

Despite these developments, which are particularly worrisome for a middle power like Norway, if we look at what NATO is doing, there has, nevertheless, been a strengthening of joint efforts to reassure its members that aggression against any NATO member will not be tolerated. Since the Wales Summit in September 2014, a territorial “turn” has defined alliance policies, strategies, and outlook.³⁷ This is most notably reflected in the ongoing realization of NATO’s missile defence, the organization of regular allied exercises and presence in eastern and northern Europe. A number of small and middle powers like Belgium, Canada, Croatia, Denmark, Norway, Slovakia, and Iceland are contributing to NATO’s Enhanced Forward Presence in the Baltic states and Poland.³⁸ Norway has welcomed the return to national, territorial defence and NATO’s renewed focus on Russia, at the expense of international operations afar, as signalled already in its 2008 Core Area Initiative.³⁹

However, for Norway and other middle powers, implementing NATO’s reassurance policy may come at a cost. Insofar as the Norwegian–Russian relationship also mirrors the NATO–Russia relationship, being a neighbour to an increasingly assertive Russia renders Norway more vulnerable to external pressures. In 2018, the Norwegian government proposed to double the number of US troops on Norwegian soil and hosted the largest NATO exercise (Trident Juncture) in the last decade. While both practices have been in place since the Cold War, Russian authorities have on several occasions claimed that enhanced allied military activities close to or within the Russian “sphere of influence” challenge the power

36. Alexandra Gheciu, “NATO, liberal internationalism, and the politics of imagining the Western security community,” *International Journal* 2019, Vol. 74(1) 32–46. DOI: 10.1177/0020702019834645

37. Wales Summit Declaration, 5 September 2014, https://www.nato.int/cps/ic/natohq/official_texts_112964.htm (accessed 7 February 2019). See also Matthew Kroenig, “Facing reality: Getting NATO ready for a new Cold War,” *Survival* 57, no. 1 (2015): 49–70.

38. https://kariuomene.kam.lt/en/e_f_p.html; see also https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_136388.htm (both accessed 7 February 2019).

39. Unpublished government paper that I cannot cite but which is in my possession.

balance.⁴⁰ Also, Norwegian analysts have maintained that the stepping up of US presence in Norway may reduce, rather than increase, Norway's security.⁴¹ While no adjustments in Norwegian security policy are expected any time soon, the revival of realist geopolitics may, over time, constrain Norway's sheltering strategies with NATO.

Russia's ongoing intervention in Ukraine has brought back worst-case scenarios in NATO and among Norwegian politicians, military officials, and analysts.⁴² Concrete regional episodes have strengthened these scenarios, such as Russian incursions into territorial waters in the Nordic-Baltic region (e.g. the submarine incident in Sweden in October 2014); the Russian military exercise in 2015 where a rapid intervention in the islands of Åland (Finland), Gotland (Sweden), Bornholm (Denmark), and Northern Norway was the primary scenario;⁴³ and recent China–Russia military cooperation in the Baltic Sea.⁴⁴ While generally marked by low tension and cooperation, ice melting and new technology are opening new sea routes in the Arctic,⁴⁵ making the region a potential arena for geopolitical struggle, and also potentially influencing Norway's sheltering strategies.

Sheltering through informal and stable relations: The US

A close bilateral relationship with the US is an essential part of many middle powers' sheltering strategy. This has also shaped Norwegian defence procurement programmes and capability development policies, which have been firmly embedded in cooperation with the US.⁴⁶ In the post-Cold War period, contributing to US-led and NATO-led operations around the globe also became an important element in Norway's sheltering policies. Facilitated by its petroleum economy, Norway has been able to offer competitive military "hardware" and troops that are in demand, at the right time, to key allied operations and coalitions of the

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40. Some 700 US Marine Corps will be stationed on a rotational basis in Middle and Northern Norway from 2019. According to Norwegian authorities, this is in line with its self-imposed restrictions regarding foreign bases on Norwegian soil and a continuation of Norwegian defence policy and NATO cooperation. See <https://www.regjeringen.no/en/aktuelt/det-amerikanske-marinekorpsets-oving-og-trening-i-norge/id2604216/> (accessed 6 February 2019).
41. See, for example, Jakob Børresen, "Lar USA rykke inn for å fylle hullene i det norske forsvaret," *Dagbladet*, 9 June 2018. <https://www.dagbladet.no/kultur/lar-usa-rykke-inn-for-a-fylle-hullene-i-det-norske-forsvaret/69883754> (accessed 20 September 2018)
42. See Nina Græger, *Norsk Forsvarspolitik: Fra invasjonforsvar til internasjonal innsats 1990–2015 [Norwegian Defence Policy: Territorial Defence and International Operations 1990–2015]* (Oslo: Scandinavian Academic Press, 2016), chapter 10.
43. See A. Matlé and A.S. Corvaja, "From Wales to Warsaw: A new normal for NATO?" *Fact and Findings* 187 (Bonn: Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, October 2015); G. Lucas, "The coming storm: Baltic Sea security report," Center for European Policy Analysis, Washington DC, June 2015.
44. Richard Weitz, "Assessing the Sino-Russian Baltic Sea Drill," *China Brief* 17, no. 12 (2017).
45. Huang F.L. Lasserre and O. Alexeeva, "China's strategy in the Arctic: Threatening or opportunistic?," *Polar Record*, 53, no. 1 (2017): 31–42.
46. Nina Grager, "Norway between NATO, the EU and the US: A case study of post-Cold war security and defence discourse," *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 18, no. 1 (2005): 89–108.

willing, like in the US-led war on terror.⁴⁷ As *The New York Times Magazine* observed in 2003: “Small nations like Norway have been assuming disproportionately large roles in global affairs since 9/11. [...] [T]he evolving nature of conflict presents opportunities for Davids to fight alongside Goliaths, if they bring the right slingshot.”⁴⁸ Norway’s contributions to the Libya operations in 2011 showed “that we are as good as any other European ally with regard to the quality and quantity of our contribution,” according to then Minister of Defence Espen Barth Eide.⁴⁹ In policy areas of importance to great powers, middle powers have been able to pursue national security interests, alliance solidarity as well as global responsibilities by being “helpful fixers.”⁵⁰ However, invitations to participate in operations do not come automatically. For instance, Norway was not asked to join the US-led coalition against ISIL formed at the NATO summit in 2014, but was invited in later.⁵¹

Despite being an Atlantic coastal state with strong historical ties to the West, seeking protection from the US was not always friction-free during the Cold War.⁵² The transatlantic relationship also came under heavy pressure under George W Bush’s presidency (2001–2008). This was first and foremost because of the unilateral US-led Iraq intervention in 2003, which lacked a UN Security Council mandate and caused a split between Europe and the US, as well as within Europe. But the Bush Jr administration’s general neglect of, and resentment towards, the UN and other multilateral institutions that could constrain US foreign (or trade) interests, were equally difficult to reconcile with Norway’s and other European states’ support of a multilateral, rule-governed order.

While the transatlantic relationship got back on track under President Obama, President Trump’s anti-liberal foreign policies are jeopardizing the value of the

47. This has also been part of Norway’s status seeking. See Græger, “From ‘forces for good,’” 91–107; and John Karlsrud, “For the greater good?: ‘Good states’ turning UN peacekeeping towards counterterrorism,” *International Journal* 2019, Vol. 74(1) 65–83, DOI: 10.1177/0020702019834725. In 2015, Norway ranked sixth worldwide on defence spending per capita, ahead of the UK and France: Military Expenditure Database (Stockholm: SIPRI, 2015). Its 2018 defence budget was 55 billion NOK. “For budsjettåret 2018” [For the budget year 2018], Proposition 1 S (2017–2018) (Oslo: Ministry of Defence, 2017).

48. “Who is afraid of Norway?,” *The New York Times Magazine*, 24 August 2003. Matthew Brzezinski <https://www.nytimes.com/2003/08/24/magazine/who-s-afraid-of-norway.html> (accessed 29 August 2018).

49. Cited in Græger, “From ‘forces for good,’” 98.

50. Ibid. For Denmark, see Kristian S. Kristensen and Kristian K. Larsen, “Denmark’s fight against irrelevance, or the alliance politics of ‘punching above your weight,’” in Michael Wesley, ed., *Global Allies: Comparing US Alliances in the 21st Century* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 2017), chapter 5.

51. Norway contributes with some 110 Army and Special Forces to support and train Iraqi soldiers, staff officers, and a medical unit in Iraq. See <https://www.regjeringen.no/en/aktuelt/norways-military-contribution-to-the-fight-against-isil-in-2018/id2592092/> (accessed 6 February 2019).

52. Kjetil Skogrand, *Allierte i Krig og Fred 1940-1970 [Allied in War and Peace 1940-1970]*, vol. 4 *Norsk forsvarshistorie [Norwegian Defence History]* (Bergen: Eide Forlag, 2004). For instance, NATO’s nuclear policy in the 1980s led Denmark to mark its reservations by “footnoting” communiques. While causing concern also in Norway, the government warned against the effects of becoming a “footnote country” in NATO for Norway’s security and standing in the Alliance. See Nicolai Pedersen, “‘Footnoting’ as a political instrument: Denmark’s NATO policy in the 1980s,” *Cold War History* 12, no. 2 (2012): 295–317.

bilateral relationship in Norway's sheltering strategy. First, these policies put into question whether Norway can rely on the US shelter when the current administration pursues a foreign policy that deliberately seeks to weaken a liberal system aimed at, ultimately, protecting states from illegitimate interventionist policies and which Norway and other middle powers have relied on.

Second, in times of uncertainty like today, middle powers' vulnerability is more pointed, potentially increasing the costs of aligning with great powers, both vis-a-vis political aggressors but also domestically. As noted by Abrahamsen, Riis-Andersen, and Sending, addressing the challenges that illiberalism and global challenges impose on middle powers needs to take into account and resonate with domestic audiences, not only internationally oriented elites.⁵³ Within the realm of security, as noted above, offering relevant contributions to international operations has been part of middle powers' fulfilment of their roles as "helpful fixers" as well as their sheltering strategies. In seeking domestic support for such contributions, arguments such as protecting a rules-based order—by punishing states that harbour terrorists, or commit or accept atrocities against groups or citizens, or possess illegal weapons of mass destruction—as well as demonstrating alliance and international solidarity, have been essential.⁵⁴

In the Norwegian case, critical voices nevertheless have argued that participation in the US-led Afghanistan and Libya operations, as well as in the coalition fighting ISIL, de facto makes Norway a part of the US military strategy, questioning whether such participation meets or rather puts Norway's own security needs in the High North at risk. Providing troops to coalitions of the willing and infrastructure for military activity certainly ties middle powers to the lead nation, usually a great power. In the current situation of growing great power rivalry, close alignment with the US may expose more junior partners to enhanced pressures from potential aggressors. As noted above, strengthened bilateral defence cooperation with the US has fuelled the Russian critique of Norway and may potentially also expose the country to Russian pressures in the High North.

Other concerns voiced by critics at home have centred on what Norwegian troops have been doing abroad (warfare, stabilization, peace building?), as well as on whether international operations would achieve their goals, and whether they were ethically acceptable, since Norwegian troops and local civilian lives would be at risk. In the Libya interventions in 2011, for instance, Norway had practically no national caveats.⁵⁵

Hence, a sheltering strategy relying on bilateral relations with the US has occasionally clashed with Norway's broader foreign policy and self-image as a humanitarian, peace-seeking middle power, reducing domestic political support for these

53. Abrahamsen et al., "Introduction," 11.

54. Nina Græger, "'Home and away'? Internationalism and territory in the post-1990 Norwegian defence discourse," *Cooperation and Conflict* 44, no. 1 (2011): 1–18.

55. Dag Henriksen, "Norges erfaringer fra operasjonene over Libya: Suksess uten innflytelse? [Norway's experiences from the operations over Libya: success without influence?]," *International Politikk* 71, no. 1 (2013): 29–58.

policies. The ongoing contestation of liberalism and multilateralism, not least by the US, is likely to make the traditional justifications even more shallow to domestic audiences. Some politicians have even proposed that Norway should reconsider its relationship with the US entirely.⁵⁶ While parts of the establishment largely seem to share that concern, few alternative bilateral sheltering relationships have been put forward as available, realistic, or reliable. In fact, the government has emphasized the need to maintain the transatlantic bonds and further develop Norway's security policy cooperation with the US—a line that is supported by Parliament.⁵⁷ This signals a continuation of the long lines in Norwegian security policy, where its Atlanticist orientation has trumped Norway's relations with other Nordic middle powers, as well as with the EU in the entire post-World War II era.⁵⁸ That said, this relationship will hardly remain unaffected by long-term Trumpism, future serious clashes between Europe and the US, or if US/Western–Russia relations deteriorate further.

Issue-specific shelters: The Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), Nordic cooperation, and groupings

Shelters can also be issue-specific and either formal or of the looser type, as illustrated in the upper- and lower-right columns of Table 1, respectively. The EU constitutes the core of the European liberal order, and as such has sought to regulate member states' and partner countries' policies through binding commitments and legislation, increasingly also within security. The Common Foreign and Security Policy and CSDP, adopted in 1993 and 1999 respectively, as well as EU civilian and military crisis management operations form the core of the EU's security policy and crisis management instruments. Although the Lisbon Treaty (2009) strengthened the institutional set-up and EU coordination within these fields, security is still mainly subject to intergovernmental decision-making.

The EU provides little direct shelter for Norway, who has declined EU membership through popular vote twice (in 1972 and 1994). Despite having close economic and political ties with the EU (e.g. the European Economic Area agreement, the Schengen cooperation), Norway's political involvement with the EU's security and defence dimension is mainly limited to the union's foreign policy dialogue with third countries and bilateral framework agreements.⁵⁹ Norway's political sheltering

56. Bård V. Solhjell, "Mot Norden og Europa [Towards Norden and Europe]," *Dagsavisen*, Op.Ed., 27 April 2017. Others have argued that Norway's critique of illiberalism also should include our allies: Minda Holm, "Norge, USA og det liberale verdifelleskapet" [Norway, the US and the liberal community of values], *Internasjonal Politikk* 75, no. 1 (2017): 52–63, <https://www.dagsavisen.no/nyemeninger/mot-norden-og-europa-1.958551> (accessed 15 July 2018).

57. Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Veivalgsmeldingen" [The road map report], White Paper 36 (2016–2017), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Oslo, 2017.

58. Nina Græger, "Nice to have or need to have? Nordic cooperation, NATO and the EU in Norwegian foreign and security policy," *Global Affairs*, first online 13 July 2018, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23340460.2018.1492351> (accessed 8 September 2018)

59. Norway has participated in the EU satellite centre since 2001; in several EU-led civil and military crisis management operations since 2004; in the Nordic EU Battle Group (EUBG) since 2005; and has been an associated member of the European Defence Agency (EDA) since 2006.

strategies vis-a-vis the EU have, however, been more about seeking access and influence through troop contributions, than about national security—with very mixed results.⁶⁰ For Norwegian ministers of foreign affairs and ministers of defence, who constantly feel Norway's lack of relevance and importance in the EU, travelling to Brussels to be informed about already-adopted EU initiatives and decisions without having a say, has been unattractive.⁶¹

One exception is the associated EDA membership, which is presented as a success story at home. While not represented at the EDA Steering Board (at the level of defence ministers), Norway participates in research and certain defence-related cooperation activities in the agency. Because of its EDA association, Norway—as the only non-EU country—has, since 2017, also participated in some of the new capability development projects under the EU's Preparatory Action on Defence Research.⁶² Norwegian decision-makers also see opportunities for engaging with the European Defence Fund, the Permanent Structured Cooperation, and other EU defence initiatives, if and to the degree that they are opened to non-EU members. As summarized by two former Norwegian ministers, Norway seeks the closest possible relations with the EU on security and defence.⁶³ This notwithstanding, the anti-EU sentiments that have become particularly visible with Brexit, the populist regimes in Hungary and Poland, and rise of right-wing extremism, which, have reinforced the image of a politically impotent union in crisis.

Another issue-specific, formal multilateral framework of increasing relevance to Norway's and other Nordic middle powers' security is the Nordic Defence Cooperation (NORDEF), adopted in 2009.⁶⁴ It forms part of Nordic Cooperation, which involves Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden, and which spans the economic, cultural, political, and military field. Nordic Cooperation has been a useful regional hub for cooperation and coordination of positions in and vis-a-vis multilateral organizations like the UN, but also in the EU and NATO, where the Nordics have different memberships. Since the Ukraine

60. Græger, "Nice to have or need to have?"; Nina Græger, "Norway and the EU security dimension: A 'troops-for-influence' strategy," in Nina Græger, Henrik Larsen, and Hanna Ojanen, eds, *The ESDP and the Nordic Countries: Four Variations on a Theme* (Helsinki: Finnish Institute of International Affairs/Berlin: Institut für Europäische Politik, 2002), 33–89. Norway contributed to the FYROM and Bosnia and Herzegovina operations under "Berlin Plus," and to the EU operation in the Gulf of Aden, but does not currently (2019) participate in any EU-led military operations. Despite being on call three times (2008, 2011, and 2015), the European Union Battle Groups (EUBGs) have not been deployed. For Norwegian contributions, see <https://itjenestefor-norge.no/operasjoner> (accessed 7 February 2019).

61. Græger, *Norsk Forsvarspolitik*.

62. Nina Græger (2018) Need to have or nice to have? Nordic cooperation, NATO and the EU in Norwegian foreign, security and defence policy, *Global Affairs*, 4:4–5, 363–376, DOI: 10.1080/23340460.2018.1492351

63. Frank Bakke-Jensen and Marit Berger Røslund, "Norge og EU" [Norway and the EU], Ministry of Defence, Oslo, 2017.

64. Thorvald Stoltenberg, *Nordisk samarbeid om utenriks – og sikkerhetspolitikk [Nordic Cooperation About Foreign and Security Policy]*, Norwegian Government, Oslo, 9 December 2009, <https://www.regjeringen.no/globalassets/upload/UD/Vedlegg/nordiskrapport.pdf> (accessed 6 February 2019). Græger, "Nice to have or need to have?"

crisis, however, the Nordic foreign policy and security dialogue has been stepped up and changed fundamentally. Security policy, including “hard core” topics, is frequently on the agenda of Nordic meetings, and the density of bilateral consultations at all levels has increased including with the Baltic states.

In the current times of security, and based on the assumption that Nordic security and defence cooperation adds an extra layer of security in addition to NATO, the EU, and the US relationship, NORDEFECO has become more attractive. The Nordic “turn” in Nordic security and defence cooperation is especially visible in non-NATO members Sweden and Finland, who have entered into closer cooperation the past years within the Nordic framework as well as bilaterally.⁶⁵ For Norway, however, engaging with NORDEFECO has not always been straightforward, due to its commitments to NATO and the US. For example, while the purchase of the American-manufactured joint-strike fighter plane (F-35 Lightning II) reflected Norway’s desire to maintain close relations with the US, other Nordic states interpreted the decision as a lukewarm interest in Nordic procurement cooperation, or even a devaluation of the Swedish JAS Gripen fighter plane (and the French Eurofighter, for that matter), creating tensions. However, a more insecure strategic situation undoubtedly has lifted practical Nordic defence cooperation on Norway’s political agenda, also as part of Norway’s sheltering strategy. That notwithstanding, in the foreseeable future Nordic cooperation is likely to remain a supplement to transatlantic European and bilateral cooperation.

Another issue-specific and increasingly important shelter for Norway and other Northern European middle powers is looser security groupings or clusters organized around security and defence cooperation (as illustrated in the lower right column in Table 1). Some clusters are bilateral and service-specific,⁶⁶ whereas others are regional, such as the Northern Group. Britain was the main initiator behind the Northern Group in 2010, which consists of the Nordic states, the Baltic states, the Netherlands, as well as Britain, Poland, and Germany. The group is a forum for informal discussions on common defence and security issues, for exploring opportunities for cooperation, and which holds regular ministerial, strategic, and expert-level meetings.⁶⁷

Middle powers, such as the Nordics, the Baltics, and the Netherlands have benefitted greatly from engaging in these looser multinational formations to top up their sheltering policies. The value of the Northern Group as a shelter largely depends on the continued engagement of especially Britain and Poland, whose

65. Hanna Ojanen & Tapio Raunio (2018) The varying degrees and meanings of Nordicism in Finnish foreign policy, *Global Affairs*, 4:4–5, 405–418, DOI: 10.1080/23340460.2018.1533386; Douglas Brommesson (2018) ‘Nordicism’ in Swedish foreign policy – from mid power internationalism to small state balancing?, *Global Affairs*, 4:4–5, 391–404, DOI: 10.1080/23340460.2018.1516116.

66. Examples include the German–Netherlands cluster and the Benelux cluster. See Margriet Drent, Dick Zandee, and Lo Casteleijn, “Defence cooperation in clusters: Identifying the next steps,” Clingendael Report, The Hague, 2014.

67. The meeting in Oslo on 14 November 2018 established an expert group to tackle disinformation and fake news campaigns. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-leads-northern-group-response-to-disinformation> (accessed 6 February 2018).

military clout adds strategic importance. Some have called the Northern Group a “mini-NATO,” which indicates its increasing security relevance, although two of the members are not NATO members (Sweden and Finland). That said, these groupings or clusters where the members have agreed to be “preferred partners” are not competing with NATO or the EU. Geopolitics and illiberalism, combined with continued lukewarm US interest in NATO may, however, strengthen the importance of unilateral security groupings to complement middle powers’ other shelters. Due to their loose or informal character, groupings organized around specific issues are also more likely to remain unaffected by the contestation of liberal values and the formal institutions that embody them, such as the EU and NATO.

Conclusion: Many constraints, few opportunities?

This article has discussed how the unravelling of the liberal order, geopolitical shifts, and great power politics may affect middle powers’ search for security and shelter, as well as their roles as bearers of liberal values and policies. Middle powers have traditionally sought protection by actively supporting a rules-based international order, global governance, and multilateral institutions, and in a more direct way through various types of shelters. Building on the theory of shelter and drawing on empirical lessons from Norway, this article has developed four types of political shelter according to whether they are permanent (stable) or issue-specific, and their degree of formalization. These sheltering frameworks can be combined in various ways, which make them particularly relevant to middle powers. For Norway, this article has shown how shelter is sought with multilateral organizations like NATO; stable bilateral relationships with great powers (the US); formal agreements—when possible, in view of its third country status—with the EU’s CSDP, the EDA, as well as more recent defence EU initiatives; and finally, participation in issue-specific groupings inside (NORDEFECO) or outside (the Northern Group) multilateral frameworks (as illustrated in Table 1).

For middle powers, multilateral frameworks are important not only for security but as common arenas for carving out common policies and responses to common challenges, and for managing disagreements and differences. To have meaning and relevance, however, liberal internationalism and multilateralism must be practiced. Today, the ideas and practices of organizations like the UN, NATO, and the EU are being contested by illiberal and anti-integrationist forces internally as well as externally. Contestation, however, may not necessarily take the form of bold statements of withdrawal or boycott, but may happen incrementally, with states and especially great powers shortening down or cancelling their attendance at multilateral meetings, postponing or refusing to sign declarations or treaties, downsizing permanent staff, or reducing resources from multilateral organizations. Before the NATO summit in July 2018, for instance, NATO officials and politicians worried that President Trump would not only use “sensational” rhetoric, but that he would walk out of the North

Atlantic Council before the meeting closed, which indicates that such scenarios are realistic.⁶⁸ Arguably, the hollowing out of existing security multilateral frameworks could make other sheltering frameworks, such as the issue-specific groupings discussed in this article, appear as more attractive to middle powers.

For middle powers, a sheltering strategy may also involve (military) contributions to international operations and coalitions of the willing, often justified with reference to the restoration of stability and maintenance of the liberal order. While being “helpful fixers” to the US has provided security as well as international standing for Norway, especially in NATO, the policies of undermining multilateralism and the liberal order initiated by President George W Bush and furthered by President Donald Trump have brought the bilateral relationship under scrutiny. Ultimately, middle powers like Norway might need to think more than before about how and where to seek shelter, and re-think their roles as “helpful fixers.” Lowering the bar for participating in interventions that do not respect or de facto counter a rule-governed, liberal order for purposes of security, would be hard to justify domestically in countries with longstanding self-images as champions of peace, human rights, and a rules-based order, like Norway.

Gazing into the future, which counter-strategies could middle powers pursue to lessen the constraints of illiberalism and geopolitical rivalry, and contain and counter the raw pursuit of national interests? Without great powers that protect and enforce the rule-governed order, international shaming apparently has marginal ethical and practical implications for states’ bending or breaking of liberal rules. Middle powers are likely to be facing increased vulnerability and fewer available options for seeking shelter (security) as well as international standing. Regarding the latter, they can probably still play a role in the traditional “soft power” policy belt (e.g. development, aid, and peace facilitation), because the attention of great powers might be directed elsewhere than to “doing good,” leaving that space open.

Regarding security, being neither small nor big but “average” could arguably provide some sort of protection against great power pressures and rivalry, simply by being too unimportant to be a potential threat and too visible to be worth the risk involved in subjecting it to severe political or military pressure. However, if retreating to “smallness” when the going gets tough to reduce visibility and, hence, vulnerability, is followed by a retreat from liberal internationalism, middle powers would contribute to tearing down the very fundament for their own security as well as international standing.

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68. Of course, the negotiations of the NATO Declaration text were completed prior to the meeting itself, but the “signal” would have been undisputable.

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