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# **An analysis of geopolitical disruptions and foreign policy change in the Norwegian-Russian relationship**

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## Declaration

I, Tim Egil Vernang Endsjø, declare that this thesis is a result of my research investigations and findings. Sources of information other than my own have been acknowledged and a reference list has been appended. This work has not been previously submitted to any other university for award of any type of academic degree.

Signature.....



Date.....

14.05.2024

## **Acknowledgement**

When writing a master thesis, one experience the complexity of pursuing personal interests through an academic process. The finished product of the thesis might appear normal and in line with other academic literature in its category. What does not appear, are the personal journey that this has been. The joy and excitement of writing something that I find interesting are a privilege. The privilege of pursuing one's interests also includes challenges, doubts and frustration. I am grateful for all the human aspects that have influenced my thesis, it would not be the same without it.

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Any errors and mistakes are mine alone.

## **Abstract**

The overarching argument after the Cold War was that stability, prosperity and cooperation would be the defining nature of the European security landscape and prevent inter-state wars from happening. This thesis argue that this view was abruptly questioned after the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014. Western perceptions of Russia took a sharp U-turn and what was once described as a valuable partner, was now portrayed as aggressive and expansionist. After the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the cleavages between the West and Russia were absolute. Once a prosperous partnership had been replaced by fear and uncertainty.

To explain the complex relationships in the system and Norwegian security perspectives. The thesis explores and analyse the Fokus documents, more specifically the threat assessments of the Norwegian Intelligence Service. The findings that emerge from these documents contribute to the understanding of how a changing Russian world view serve as drivers of change with the intention of a new multipolar world order. By utilizing IR theories and concepts, the thesis explores the fundamental structure of the international system, while arguing that balance of power theory enhances the understanding of motivations behind change. In this thesis the security dilemma explores how the cleavages between the West and Russia, create uncertainty and security deficits through an uncontrollable spiral.

The thesis seeks to understand, portray and discuss the changes in Norwegian security, and its perception towards Russia and external developments in the near abroad. The use of foreign policy theory and the concept of subjective security explore the motivations behind dominant security narratives that influence changes in Norwegian foreign policy.

Through the analysis and discussion of Fokus documents, the thesis argues that developments, conflicting world views and hostile intentions between the West and Russia has shaped and influence the social and interconnected relationship between Norway and Russia. Despite cleavages and conflicting world views, both Norway and Russia maintain the idea of a stable and low-tension Arctic. The thesis argues that understanding and clear intentions are the only measures left to ensure that the relations between Russia and the West, remain cold.

# Table of Contents

- 1.0. Introduction ..... 3
  - 1.1. Research question. .... 5
  - 1.2. Outline of the thesis..... 6
- 2.0. Theory and Concepts in IR..... 7
  - 2.1. Ukraine, 2014 and 2022 as security variables ..... 8
  - 2.2. Concepts in IR ..... 9
  - 2.3. The many faces of realism. ....10
  - 2.4. The concept of Foreign Policy .....13
  - 2.5. Intelligence agencies and their role in society. ....14
- 3.0. Qualitative method and research. ....15
  - 3.1. The complex world of methods.....16
  - 3.2. Methodological assumptions. ....17
  - 3.3. Comparative document analysis.....18
  - 3.4. Fokus and Delineation.....19
  - 3.5. Fokus as a data contributor.....22
  - 3.6. A thematic analysis of Fokus. ....23
- 4.0. Analysis: Fokus, threat perception and conflict.....25
  - 4.1. Fokus 2013.....27
    - 4.1.1. *Arctic developments.* .....27
    - 4.1.2. *Russian developments.* .....28
    - 4.1.3. *Russian military developments.* .....28
    - 4.1.4. *Russian foreign policy and internal developments*.....29
    - 4.1.5. *Concluding remarks* .....30
  - 4.2. Fokus 2015.....30
    - 4.2.1. *Russian developments.* .....30
    - 4.2.2. *Internal developments*.....31
    - 4.2.3. *The Arctic*.....32
    - 4.2.4. *Concluding remarks.* .....32
  - 4.3. Comparative analysis of Fokus 2013 and 2015. ....33
    - 4.3.1. *Energy cooperation*.....34
    - 4.3.2. *International cooperation and shipping routes*.....34
    - 4.3.3. *Military development* .....35
    - 4.3.4. *Cyber security*.....35
    - 4.3.5. *International law and continental shelves*.....36

4.3.6. <i>Russian politics and domestic situation</i> .....	36
4.3.7. <i>Concluding remarks</i> .....	37
4.4. Fokus 2021.....	37
4.4.1. <i>West-East Rivalry and Threat perception</i> .....	38
4.4.2. <i>Nuclear Capabilities and strategic deterrence</i> .....	39
4.4.3. <i>Military development</i> .....	39
4.4.4. <i>Intelligence and Cyber security</i> .....	40
4.4.5. <i>Influence activities</i> .....	41
4.4.6. <i>Sabotage</i> .....	41
4.4.7. <i>Domestic issues</i> .....	42
4.4.8. <i>Concluding remarks</i> .....	42
4.5. Fokus 2023.....	43
4.5.1. <i>The War in Ukraine and a changed security landscape</i> .....	43
4.5.2. <i>Military capabilities and strategic deterrence</i> .....	45
4.5.3. <i>Great power conflict</i> .....	44
4.5.4. <i>Unpredictability</i> .....	45
4.5.5. <i>Domestic issues</i> .....	46
4.5.6. <i>Intelligence and influence activities</i> .....	47
4.5.7. <i>Concluding remarks</i> .....	48
4.6. Comparative analysis of Fokus 2021 and 2023.....	49
4.6.1. <i>Threat perception</i> .....	49
4.6.2. <i>West-East rivalry</i> .....	50
4.6.3. <i>Military development</i> .....	51
4.6.3. <i>Nuclear/strategic deterrence</i> .....	52
4.6.4. <i>Domestic issues</i> .....	52
4.6.5. <i>Intelligence/influence activities</i> .....	53
4.6.6. <i>Concluding remarks</i> .....	54
4.7. Fokus from 2013 to 2023, describing change.....	55
5.0. Discussion: Security, threats and foreign policy.....	57
5.1. Security dilemma, defensive turn offensive.....	57
5.2. Inevitable spiral leading to conflict?.....	59
5.3. Balance of power and a multipolar world.....	61
5.4. A foreign policy change from a Norwegian perspective.....	63
5.5. The Norwegian security narrative of Russia.....	64
6.0. Conclusion: is change constant?.....	67
Citations and References.....	71

## 1.0. Introduction

In 2022 the unthinkable happened. The world witnessed Russia invade Ukraine in a brutal all-out war, sending the European security landscape into turmoil. Effectively immediately the relations between the West and Russia cooled to levels unprecedented since the height of the Cold War. This shows a worrisome trend where sovereignty is violated and disregarded. Decades of efforts, agreements and institutional cooperation between the West and Russia since the Cold War was virtually nullified after 2022, with cooperation a distant memory. This was especially evident in the Arctic. Arctic states perceived the region vital towards their national interests and with cooperation and international law being the prime driver towards a stable Arctic (Ilulissat Declaration, 2008). Even though the Arctic countries emphasise that developments elsewhere in the world shouldn't negatively impact the region, this has not been the case. As the Norwegian Intelligence Service (NIS) emphasise.

***“The relationship between Russia and the West is at a historic low point and can best be described as a clash of opposing values and security interests. The prospect of any genuine dialogue seems distant, and Russia’s policies towards the West and Norway are expected to become more unpredictable in the years to come” (Focus 2024, A changed security situation).***

This is not the first-time a conflict has shaken the security foundations in Europe. As the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014 did just that, serving as the first major change of the West's perception of Russia for the first time in decades (FN Sambandet, Ukraina, 03.05.2024). The actions performed by Russia in 2014 and 2022 had repercussion spilling to all parts of the world. Norway has in both occasions followed the EU and US sanctions regime towards Russia created conflict and tension between the neighbours. For instance, when the Russian prime minister visited Svalbard in 2014. He stated that when it comes to the safety of Russian citizens, Svalbard and Crimea were virtually the same (Zimmerman, 08.11.2018).

This thesis argues that the two incidents in Ukraine have changed the Norwegian security perspective of Russia. What was once considered relationship valued for its cooperation and coinciding interest that were maintained through complex and interconnected relationships. Have now been transformed into an increasingly unpredictable political landscape. Uncertainty in the international system terrify states, who above all else, fight to ensure their survival. “The effect of the anarchy depends on how governments perceive it” (Hovi &



Malnes, 2011, p.23), creating the possibility for states to avoid conflict while still perceiving each other as threats. The anarchy in the international system is therefore filled with complex issues, that are not always identifiable, nor easily explainable. Yet, states are perceived to be reactive, constantly responding towards phenomenon's, incidents and policies to pursue their interests without hesitation. This reactivity is what shaped this thesis, the Arctic being perceived as the most important strategic area by both Norway and Russia, where their permanent border, ensures a never-ending geographic and cultural relationship.

This thesis argues that the incidents in Ukraine greatly influenced the Norwegian threat perception of Russia. In order to explore this topic, international relations (IR), theories like structural realism who view states as rational, while offence-balance theory and security dilemmas are considered central concepts (Williams & McDonald, 2018, p.22). Consequently, structural realism allows us to create a perception of emerging threats towards the state's survival, yet maintain the favour of status quo. As will be explained later, this thesis argue that Norway is favouring the status quo, while to some extent continue to pursue their reassurance policy towards Russia. We also have to look at the characteristics of the changing Russian world view, from a structural realist perspective. As the thesis will discuss later, the Norwegian perception of security threats is changing, but in reaction to a changing Russian foreign policy, directly influenced by developments in the international system.

The security dilemma is therefore utilized in order to comprehend how the cleavage between the Russia and the West are increasing based on their conflicting world views. The security dilemma is therefore imperative to apply in order to understand how defensive measures are being perceived offensive, as this further enhances the spiral of increased threat perception. Furthermore, Gunnar Fermand's views on state foreign policy, combined with the concept of subjective security, create an interesting and explorative view of how Norwegian threat perception are changing. The social interplay between Norway and Russia creates security implications, which affect how Norwegian interests and foreign policy are pursued towards its neighbour. Analytical use of these theories is made possible by the Fokus documents. They analysis of the threat assessments provide valuable insights on Norwegian security from an intelligence perspective. In order to establish security areas that are perceived to be important towards understanding Norwegian interests. Structuring the methodological framework towards a qualitative comparative document analysis while utilizing a thematic analysis approach. This approach facilitates towards the enhancement of transparency. In addition to

being an effective tactic towards detecting major themes and changes, it's also perceived to contribute towards the research question's development and constructive value.

### **1.1. Research question.**

This introductory chapter explores the origin of the thesis, and its justified place as part of the academic literature. To analyse and explore the issue at hand, the research question establishes a point of reference on how the issue will be analysed to expand our understanding of the complex world of security and threat perception.

As the thesis explore shifting perception in the state system, where Norwegian and Russian security are considered to be the core focus. The thesis engages in analytical activity through theoretical approaches and data collection to explore exactly how the threat perceptions have changed, and implications for Norwegian security and interests. It explores the changing Russian perceptions in the Fokus documents through a realist approach, while theories on foreign policy link these issues to the changing Norwegian threat perceptions. As the explanatory variables in the document are perceived to be the 2014 Russian annexation of Crimea and the 2022 Russian war in Ukraine. The main research question can be formulated like this.

***“How are the security areas presented in the Fokus documents, and in what way does the geopolitical disruptions in Ukraine in 2014 and 2022 affect the perception and presentation of security issues and themes, as a result of a changing Russian world view?”***

In order to explore the change of threat perceptions and security themes in the documents. This thesis explores four different Fokus documents, specifically the 2013, 2015, 2021 and 2023 edition. These editions are believed to shed light on changes in the NIS perception, concerning key security areas which are established as a result of effective analysis and categorization by the methodological framework.

The concept of security, especially in scholarly circles and policy practice have different meanings. I highlight two approaches of understanding security, that appropriately contextualize the kinds of risks and drivers towards change that Norway is encountering in the near abroad. Realist theory on state security in the anarchic international system shed light on the balance of power between the states and how they attempt to reduce their strategic vulnerability. In particular defensive structural realism provide an explanation on why states think like they do, as they are assumed to be reactive forces in the system that respond to change (Williams & McDonald, 2018, p.28-29). In addition, theories on foreign policy

discussed by Fermann (2018), are part of the conceptual framework that identify and explore characteristics on foreign policy. Highlighting how subjective security facilitate in developing a national security narrative. This thesis engages in analysis and the discussion to explore the complex concept of security and how it become a product of events in the international anarchy. Consequently, foreign policy theory and realism are utilized in order to understand how and why strategic leaderships like the NIS are important in securing foreign policy goals. Concepts from both foreign policy analysis and structural realism are used, with the intention of providing a deeper understanding of the Norwegian-Russian relationship.

## **1.2. Outline of the thesis.**

After concluding the first chapter which have explained the basis and justifications for the thesis including its research questions. The second chapter explore the theoretical framework, first with a brief introduction of geopolitical disruptions in Ukraine in 2014 and 2022. In addition, the description of structural realism as an explanatory concept for state nature that are vital in describing the changing Russian foreign policy. In order to understanding threats and security implications towards Norway, realism is supplemented with insights from foreign policy analysis. In particular, Gunnar Fermann provides the thesis with theories on foreign policy, where states rely on its strategic leaderships to facilitate strategies and policies in response to crisis's in the international system, believed to initiate foreign policy changes.

Chapter three describes the research design and methodological framework. The use of a qualitative methods approach employing a comparative document analysis allows the thesis to explore themes and events that are shaping and changing in the Fokus documents. The Fokus documents are in this chapter evaluated, so are the methodological choices concerning validity, reliability and transparency. This methodological approach provides the ability to understand change over time as its "...primarily conducted to garner in-depth understandings of cause-and-effect relationships" (Blair-Walcott, 2023). This chapter are intended to provide the reader with necessary information regarding methods and choices which have shaped the writing of this thesis.

Chapter four use the thematic approach to establish key security interests and themes, in addition to perceptions and events that the NIS consider to be important. In particular the NIS view on external threats, namely Russia and how they describe the events that unfold in the international system. In order to describe and portray main changes, tables and categorization tools are applied to conduct a comparative analysis of how the themes emerge and change

between the documents. At the end of this chapter, all the main security areas and changes are presented in table 7, showing how the NIS describe and present changes and developments in the international system.

Chapter five present the main findings which are analysed through IR theory in order to provide how the changes are happening and why they are happening in context. By using structural realism and the security dilemma the thesis explore how the changing Russian mentality involve the use aggressive foreign policy capabilities to facilitate in reestablishing a multipolar world order. In which the cleavages between the West and Russia are increasingly more prominent. Foreign policy and subjective security are valuable tools which enhance our understanding of how NIS experience the changes in the system, while attempting to manage its threat perception and the Norwegian security narrative.

The thesis reaches its conclusion in chapter six. It sums up the findings and how the tragedy of anarchy is affecting the social relationship and balance of power in the international system. In addition, this chapter discuss the way forward, while presenting the closing arguments of the thesis. References and literature can be found at the end of the document.

## **2.0. Theory and Concepts in IR**

This chapter introduce the main concepts and explain why these enhance the analytical capability of the thesis, while creating depth towards the research question. First there's the need to explain why one should study the academic subject of international relations (IR) in the first place. When reading, especially research articles, but also anything which attempts to explain the complexity of how the world works and its social relationships, especially one thing are crucial to portray. How one perceives the world matters. Being able to interpret, understand and critically view every encounter and event, are ultimately going to shape your perception of how the world works.

Theories are complex. The ones used in this thesis are chosen with the intention of exploring the social complexity of the term security. It seeks to explain why states value certain security areas more than other, and the measures that are intended to achieve their security in order to accompany their national interests. Security in this thesis is heavily reliant on the national interests of the state. Those interests emerge from what the states value, their priorities and how they intend to ensure that their priorities are secure and safe from harm. States pursue security, to reduce their insecurity. As Buzan stressed, security is subjective, and will vary from entity to entity, and in relation to each other, the conceptual approach towards security is

inherently complex (Buzan, 1991, p.19). This brings me to the next point of using theory, namely that states do not exist in a vacuum. Incidents and developments in the international system ultimately affect the security narrative of the state. Sometimes incidents and developments have positive effects for a nation's security. However, as this thesis explore, events can also shape the state's perception that their interests and security are at risk or even threatened as a result of external threats. Hence, theories in this thesis are perceived to provide a description and discussion of how Russia and Norway view the changes and developments in the international system. Describing how changes are affecting security and interests can also be viewed as a driver towards foreign policy change.

### **2.1. Ukraine, 2014 and 2022 as security variables**

The annexation of Ukraine in 2014 and the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 are viewed to be the two most impactful events in shaping European security landscape the last 20 years. The events can be described as powerful geopolitical disruptions, recreating the Cold War mentality of power struggles and nuclear strategic deterrence in Europe. As a commentator emphasise, "Russia's unprovoked, unjustified and barbaric invasion of Ukraine is not only a manifestation of a huge security danger that has shattered peace in Europe". "More structurally, it has broken the entire security architecture built patiently on the continent over many decades, including international commitments agreed in the last 30 years" (Pczel, 2022).

The events themselves are interesting, however they are in this thesis used as variables to explore and discuss how changes in the international system affects the NIS threat perception of Russia. Furthermore, they are also evidence which show a Russian perception of a more conflictual Europe, where the strategic balance and core Russian security is at risk. I will elaborate more extensively regarding these issues in chapter 5. To explore how change have been evident in the Fokus documents, chapter four compares the Fokus 2013 and Fokus 2015 in order to establish differences in description and perception between the two. The same will be done with Fokus 2021 and 2023. Table eight will display the changes between all the documents, to enhance the readers understanding how the documents have changed over time. By using the events in Ukraine as variables, this thesis acquires valuable data towards establishing a link between crisis, foreign policy management and threat perception. The research question and the inclusion of the variables are therefore valued to produce

knowledge on how security and external threats contribute towards change in the Norwegian-Russia relationship.

In an environment characterised by anarchy and uncertainty, there are certain theories which are more suitable than others towards discussing the findings towards the research question. The theories and their intended use are described below.

## **2.2. Concepts in IR**

Theories are the pillars of any research article and are subjected to criticism, enthusiasm and constant debate, the ones used in IR are no different. The study of IR can "...be defined as the study of relationships and interactions between countries, including the activities and policies of national governments, international organisations (IOs), non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and multinational corporations (MNCs) (Jackson et al, 2019). According to Jackson, Sørensen & Møller, there are mainly five major classical theoretical approaches in IR. These are realism, liberalism, international society, international political economy and constructivism where the latter reject IR as purely material, opting for a social approach instead (Jackson et al, p.235). Numerous variations of these concepts exist, each with individual differences and characteristics where they all have a place in the IR toolbox. Theories within political science are subject to constant debated regarding their relevance. Despite this, they can be seen as lenses towards exploring and comprehending the complex interplay between the actors in the international system.

We are required to use theories that can shed light on the specific issue and field we are interested in. The ones chosen are believed to answer the research questions in the best way possible. One of the assumptions in this thesis, are the fact that states are by far the most important entities in the international system. States have different ways in which they exert influence. Some have more in their arsenal, while others have to pick their battles, and some can't fight at all. This also affect how states behave in the international system. Some have to appear irrelevant, while some forge alliances to create deterrence and match an external threat. While other states like the United States have far more influence and ways they can project their power towards others. However, even the US have different impact depending on which states, or regions it wishes to influence. For instance, it's obvious that the US it will have more chance in shaping Norwegian actions and promoting its interests there, than in China for instance. This may seem obvious to some, but it's important to highlight that states

interact differently towards each other depending on the situation, perception, and social relationship between them.

However, there are two more assumptions which needs to be shared here. One is that anarchy is the defining nature of the international system, with balance of power determining whether or not a state is inclined to pursue power or security. The second assumption are that powerful states do what they want, although this is not always the case, it's still an important driver towards threat perception and changes in the system. Since we are studying a specific part of the Norwegian framework, namely foreign policy with the emphasis on the security perspective. There is a strong need to explore what makes foreign policy an important dimension of the state. First there will be a description of realism and the concept of structural characteristics that shape the system, providing insights towards the understanding of Russian threat perception as a driver of change in the Fokus documents.

### **2.3. The many faces of realism.**

From a realist point of view, the international system is inherently anarchic. Characterised by being a self-help system, meaning the ultimate goal of the state are survival. According to realist Kenneth Waltz (Jackson, et al, 2019, p.51), there are no worldwide government responsible for governing states in the international system, hence the term anarchic. In addition, he mentions that the current structure of states makes them similar. They are organised in the same way, therefore having the same functions of government, for instance national defence. Waltz argues that the only thing which differentiates states, really comes down to their power levels, often referred to relative power. Neorealism emphasises that "...the structure of the system that is external to the actors, in particular relative distribution of power, is thus the central analytical focus" (Jackson et al, 2019, p.87).

The individual leaders and regime types of states are largely insignificant for a structural realist, as they argue that the system dictates what states do (Williams & McDonald, 2018, p.21). Realism argue that states tend to do the same things and react in the same way as the previous individuals that came before them. This implies that the system itself is rather generic. Neorealism sees the system as tragic, rather than some offensive realists like Morgenthau who see the states as inherently aggressive that always attempt to achieve hegemony and power (Korab-Karpowicz, 2010). The main difference between defensive and offensive realism, are that the former view security as the key state goals, while the latter view power accumulation as the core quest of the state (Nye & Welch, 2017 p.66).

There is rarely a theory in IR which are able to fully comprehend and explain foreign policy of states. There is rarely so much external pressure towards states that one single theory is able to explain the entirety of a state`s changing foreign policy. Even though the prescriptive policy varies from each realism theory, they ultimately predict different things (Williams & McDonald, 2018, p.31).

That said, neorealism has flaws and lacks explanatory power in key areas. First, by emphasising that the individuals in states are perceived to be insignificant, and especially the fact that the system is generic, neglecting the aspect of diplomacy. Therefore, it`s hard for the theory to explain change. For instance, as it depicts a system that is bipolar as the most stable, yet it struggles to explain why the Soviet Union fell, and why the weakest system, unipolarity emerged instead with US as hegemon (Jackson et al, 2019, p.90). This is one of the biggest criticisms towards neorealism, its rigid nature by being “too static and too narrow” as its unable to explain change while completely neglecting domestic society in favour of the system. The second critique are related to its “inability to explain outcomes” (Williams & McDonald, 2018, p.31). Other theories out there which can make more accurate predictions, on a more regular basis. Both of these points are related to the fact that Waltz look at the Cold War, and especially the nuclear weapons have created the longest time of peace in the international system. With the cost of war between great powers being so costly that bipolarity was seen as the most stable choice.

As a complementary theory to neorealism, defensive structural realism has some characteristics that coincide with the understanding of certain aspects of state security and foreign policy. This is due to the notion that Russia are changing its perception regarding the current system being stable, and that its actions are based on neutralizing security deficits rather than power accumulation. Even though one can argue that the latter are achieved by the former, the main concept are that states pursue security in order to create stability. Therefore, security dilemmas, power struggles and threat perception require a defensive approach in understanding both the NIS and Russian changes. Kenneth Waltz, Stephen Walt and Robert Jervis emerge as the main realist theorist in this thesis, with the main argument being that “in anarchy, states form alliances to protect themselves” (Williams & McDonald, 2018, p.23). Inevitably changing the structure of the international system and balance of power.

Williams & McDonald (2019), lists three main differences between neorealism and structural defensive realism which have significant implications for this thesis. Firstly, while neorealism uses micro foundations to explain state behaviour, defensive realism relies only on rational



choice. The second difference are that the latter theory adds “offence-defence” as a variable (Nye & Welch, 2017, p.163). Implying that technology, geography, and power are easier to project in close proximity, while having less effect the longer away the state is. The final point is that by combining rationality and offence-defence, states are more likely to be interested in preserving status quo. If there are change which they can’t control, the safety of the present is more appealing. Hence Walt’s term balance of threat theory, where states form alliances to cope with the anarchic international system (Walt, 2009, p.86). As the discussion in chapter 5 highlight, Russia are determined to use power in order to create change. However, by creating change to the balance of power, does not mean to completely abolish the status quo in the entire system. As the findings and discussion show, the status quo is still pursued in the Arctic, believed to facilitate in ensuring a stable region.

As with neorealism, defensive realism has their fair share of critiques. The first are that the theory struggle to explain where the behaviour of expansionist states come from. The second critique are that while states seek to build up defensive arsenal. There are little which distinguish defensive measures with offensive measures (Williams & McDonald, 2018, p.23). This creates uncertainty, which put pressure on states whether or not preserving the status quo is ideal or even possible, increasing the likelihood of arms race rearmament, creating the security dilemma. The same goes for alliances. When two countries create an alliance in order to balance a stronger opponent, this might as well be seen by the bigger state as an offensive measure that threaten their security. Hence the argument that its the challenges of uncertainty created by complex situations, which often create unavoidable pressure towards states.

Norwegian politics in the Arctic are a peculiar case of a state’s foreign policy. It’s based on reassurance through action towards Russia, while still expressing and pursuing their interests in the region perceived to be in the core of Russian national security (Grindheim et al, 2017, p.351). The realist tradition provides us with valuable analytical tools to explore the complex world of threat perception and balance of power from a state perspective. Despite realism exploring the Russian perception. This thesis also explores how the Norwegian threat perception have changed by analysing the Fokus security documents. In order to explore how NIS perception of security areas have changed due to the incidents in Ukraine, there is the need of a second IR tradition. Foreign policy theory and subjective security are concepts considered important in describing and analysing why change is happening, or in some cases why the strategic leadership are reluctant to change. The foreign policy approach provided by

Gunnar Fermann, and the inclusion of subjective security allow for a deeper understanding foreign policy.

#### **2.4. The concept of Foreign Policy**

We have already been discussing realist theories, which describe how states perceive and react towards developments in a hostile international system. This helps answering half of the research question, namely threat and security perception facilitate in creating change in the anarchy. This thesis is also interested in establishing how change are happening in specific policy documents, we are required to dive deeper into the specific theory related to state security narratives. Gunnar Fermann (2017) elaborate on the concept of foreign policy from a general perspective, while also including certain valuable insights on specific Norwegian foreign policy as well. He explains that, “Foreign policy are the governments claims of self-interests in relations to other states and global entities within its areas of actionable capabilities which are projected through political action” (Fermann, 2013, p.13). This also include the aspect of states being mainly driven by ideology where regime-types should act inherently selfish when interacting with other entities in the system. Security policy which are part of the larger and wider concept of state foreign policy, are defined by Fermann as “intended to prevent, limit and deal with treats concerning national territorial security and political independence – meaning securing the state`s existence and preserving the state`s political action” (Fermann, 2013, p.14).

Foreign and security policy normally change slowly and over time in response to changes in the international system. States react to others foreign policy, developments in the world economy, new international laws, changes of perception within a certain population to gain as much information of the external world as possible. Sometimes these policies change even more rapidly. In response to major incidents in the system which are perceived to be of vital importance to the states, thereby creating rapid change in response to challenges towards existing policies (Fermann, 2013, p.15). An example of this can be the Elektron case in 2005 where a Russian fishing vessel was controlled by the Norwegian Coast Guard for violating several fisheries agreements. The vessel fled with the controllers while being pursued by the Norwegian Navy 4 days until they reached Russian territorial waters (Fermann, 2013, p.231). The incident is usually seen as a foreign policy challenge which showed the diverging interests within the Norwegian government as multiple actors had their own policies and intended response (VG, 2006). The Elektron case demonstrates how Norway wish to pursue its relationship towards Russia. The general tradition of handling Russian matters are

considered to facilitate and ensure low tension and avoid escalation and tension between the two neighbours. While the lack of clear political action showed both the public and senior officials the clear division in interests and authority. The incident show what was initially framed as a foreign policy emergency, maybe should be treated as a security calamity instead.

This thesis attempts to explore how geopolitical incidents create change. As they are perceived to be responsible for triggering short and long-term effects in Norwegian foreign and security policy. Military action and aggression witnessed in 2014 and 2022 are considered to be the most severe challenges towards a state`s foreign policy. It`s up to the individual state to assess the incidents in the system, and adapt accordingly with the intention of shifting the challenge towards political gain. Or as a minimum limit the potential security deficit created by a crisis. Subjective security which revolves around how NIS and Norway create a security narrative in which they pursue and develop their foreign policy (Subotić, 2016, p.611). This ensures that Fermann`s theories on foreign policy are able to analyse Fokus documents from a perspective which explore the notion that security is subjective. Intelligence agencies like the NIS are often influenced by the dominating narrative existing within Norwegian foreign policy. One thing that determine how the documents are shaped, are directly related to the type of organisation that the NIS are. The intelligence community differ greatly from other sections of the government, this uniqueness is described below.

## **2.5. Intelligence agencies and their role in society.**

When analysing how the security issues and threat perception are portrayed in the Fokus documents, it`s important to note the most important aspect about intelligence organisations such as the NIS. “The foremost goal of any intelligence community must be to keep track of threat, forces, events, and developments that are capable of endangering the nation`s existence” (Lowenthal, 2009, Why have Intelligence Agencies). Intelligence agencies therefore view the world through a lens which label everything around as potentially hostile. This stance aligns with the realist school of thought, which view the international system as anarchic, where states seek to maximise security. I would argue that the intelligence agencies are a tool states possess, which they can use to perceive developments in the world. They are a capacity and capability which enhances a state`s understanding of the world around it. While realist theory view states as the most serious threat, intelligence agencies view everything, as a potential threat (Gill & Phythian, 2018, Chapter One). Security is perceived to be subjectivity in foreign policy and relative in realism. “A key consequence of this is that

security is relative, and therefore the purpose of intelligence is to bestow a relative security advantage” (Gill & Pythian, 2018, Chapter One).

Foreign policy on the other hand, are specific views of interests which the states conveys and project towards other states (Fermann, 2018, p.13). As intelligence agencies are vital towards providing what Sherman Kent describes as “high level foreign positive intelligence”. Which refers to the production of information concerning vital areas of the state’s interests, with focus being on creating knowledge about other states (Kent, 1966, p.3). This is to ensure that the state and the high-level policy makers possess accurate information viewed as indispensable towards security. In that sense, intelligence agencies create knowledge towards the states most key policies in areas of national security. This process is created by a complex relationship between intelligence and policy makers.

The intelligence process is important in the protection of the state protection, where intelligence may result in the creation of new foreign policy areas, or create changes in the existing framework to accompany the needs of policy makers. Lowenthal (2009, Chapter 4) describe this as a process where the NIS are presented with, or identify requirements towards policy issues that they are expected to contributed towards. In the NIS case this might be military developments in the Arctic for instance. They collect information or data which they then process towards something which can be perceived as meaningful. Next the information undergoes further analysis to produce what can be viewed as intelligence, intended that can contribute towards policy or simply create knowledge. For instance, intelligence regarding the Russian deployment of hypersonic missiles in the Baltic can be viewed as important intelligence for policy makers. NIS then disseminate it the intelligence through reports or other forms of interaction with the policy makers who then consume it and are expected to provide feedback towards new requirements. As I explore and show in chapter 4, it becomes clear in the Fokus documents where change is present. These changes are argued to be a direct result of the interplay between policy makers and NIS in response to external developments.

### **3.0. Qualitative method and research.**

This chapter explore the complex interplay between the social world, methodological research and how the thesis reached its methodological foundation in exploring the Norwegian security perspectives. First there will be an account of methodological research as a whole, justifying reliance on solely a qualitative methods approach. Using a comparative document analysis with emphasis on themes and contents are the best choice in analysing and exploring the

complexity of the questions which this thesis seeks to explain. In addition, there will be a review of the documents that are subsequent to analysis to provide transparency, as well as a constant review of validity, reliability and confirmability issues surrounding this paper.

### **3.1. The complex world of methods.**

When one wish to explore the complex world of the social sciences and its infinite phenomenon's. The road before actually investigating the issue at hand, are just as long and complex as the issue itself. The complexity of society, the interplay between nature and the social world, evolve as our minds push beyond and pursue the change we inevitably desire. These changes are an integral part of human nature, we explore, adapt and ultimately change according to our experiences, desires and goals. To explore this social world, efforts have been made throughout time to attempt investigate and explain these processes. Clark et al (2021, p.5) explain in the renowned book "Bryman`s Social Research Methods", that "...conducting social research is a way of searching for answers". Technological advancements, events, natural phenomenon`s and everything that transpires around us shape our perception on how the world works and ultimately influence our choices, responses and drivers towards change, or the lack of.

How do one obtain the answers when asking a question, and how do one obtain the necessary data to answer the questions in its entirety? "A research method is a tool, such as a survey, an interview, or a focus groups, that a researcher uses to explore an area of interest by gathering information (data) that they then analyse" (Clark et al, 2021, p.5). Research methods involve the careful planning in obtaining this data, and the analysis revolving these processes. Therefore, strategies and techniques which are used to gather, analyse and interpret data are important, in order to answer a set of hypotheses and questions regarding an issue. Each of the methods available are different and have their respective uses, each have their strengths as well as weaknesses. None of them are perfect and are constantly under reframing to improve their potential towards solving the problem in question. One of the more popular methods in social sciences are a quantitative methods approach which involves analysing large amounts of data from a big sample size usually through online surveys as the main acquisition mean (Strijker et al, 2020, p.262). This method is used by researchers to acquire information regarding a population on something which are of interests, where one attempt to create generalizable information. The other major tradition in research methods is qualitative methods involve in-depth analysis of a phenomenon to create an understanding why things are like they are, usually regarding the social aspect of how we live our lives.

Qualitative methods often involve having the researcher conduct more close engagements with the study subjects, learning more about them and using different methods of data gathering than quantitative methods do. According to Thagaard, an important purpose with qualitative methods is the acquisition of further developed knowledge about how a social phenomenon works by using interviews, observation and thorough analysing forms of expressions, metaphors, social environments (Thagaard, 2018, p.28). This is done to gain a deeper understanding of a social phenomenon, which often are hard to generalize as its more concerned with feelings and different perceptions. In addition, a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods is created to form a mixed methods approach which integrates both the large amounts of samples and data acquired from quantitative methods, while using methods of qualitative analysis to gain a deeper understanding while still attempting to generalize the information which the data provides. This integration enables better triangulation of the data by having more perspectives and different ways of acquiring the data itself, leaving more options for researchers as this create an option rather than solely relying on just one method (Strijker et al, 2020, p.263).

For this thesis, qualitative methods are the preferred choice as the thesis seeks to understand potential changes over time with perceptions revolving around the social reality. One could do a mixed methods approach where the data are acquired from large amounts of data. However, this would in turn create far more data which are increasingly time consuming, and involve more resources and time which does not coincide with the scope of this thesis. After labelling and explaining the different major methodological traditions which are currently used in social science. The next step involves going deeper into the qualitative methods approach and justify the use of a comparative document analysis with the thematic approach as suitable in order to explore the research question.

### **3.2. Methodological assumptions.**

Deciding which method is appropriate for this thesis comes down to the nature of the issue that are explored and more importantly, the sources that are determined relevant in providing relevant and necessary data. When using methods in international relations, one must ask what do we want to achieve, what is the goal of using this particular set of methods in exactly this situation (Bernard, 2018, p.55). IR and social science in general are quite elusive in gaining empirical evidence in the first place, mainly because of the fluidity and lack of universal answers that are generalizable. Part of this is relates to the field of IR not being a static and closed entity, but rather its coexistence with everything around, constantly

questioning what are perceived as knowledge, making generalization much more difficult. “Fields are only relatively autonomous” (Klotz & Prakash, 2008, p.16). As Anna Leander explain, “A general conceptualization of the social world is an integral part of any methodology” (Klotz & Prakash, 2008, p.15) where our choices in methodology are integrated and resting on the particular assumptions of how the world works.

These assumptions are perceived in a particular way, influenced by our understanding of a certain phenomenon, which is this paper relates to the world as inherently hostile. Other assumptions include the absence of an overarching power in the international system, creating anarchy between states. States are fundamentally rationalist and do what they “perceive” as the right measure to either minimize damage, or maximise gain in relation to other states, creating relational power and security. These assumptions rest on the fact that states value security more than anything, more specifically survival, and will act accordingly to ensure this in coherence with realist perspective (Walt, 2009, p.89). As the goal of this thesis are mainly to explore Norway and Russian perception in a complex interactive social relationship, one also needs to interpret and understand changes in the system and security perceptions.

Methodology and assumptions are carefully considered to enhance the capability of this thesis to answer the research question. Data that are used, come from documents while analysis of the data are conducted using a thematic/content approach. Methodology is a critical step in a research paper, as being able to understand and explore change rely on transparent choices.

As the main focus of data acquisition comes from documents. Using a qualitative methods approach with a comparative document analysis will help understand what the documents are saying, why they are saying it, and who the document is for (Clark et al, 2021, p.498-499). At the minimum this thesis will give a depiction of how the documents have changed, based on changes in the international system. Which at the furthest scope, provide an understanding of systemic change as a driver towards change in a Norwegian intelligence organization.

### **3.3. Comparative document analysis.**

Analysis of documents in social science are quite popular, as they are a source of data from everyone who wants to explore their social complexity. “As a qualitative method, document analysis is defined as a systematic procedure for reviewing, and evaluating documents that entails finding, selecting, appraising (making sense of), and synthesizing the data contained within them” (Okoko et al, 2023, p.140), often called qualitative document analysis (QDA). Documents are an important source of information as they usually include social and historical data. Or in this particular case, political contexts on how document display change

based on a perceived crisis's that's affecting the security focus and contents in the document over time. According to Prior (2008a) documents don't cease to exist after the disappearance of its creator. As time goes by, they are still relevant providing important aspects of a phenomenon as people have long forgotten their initial observations towards it. Another point made here which is quite significant, are that documents can "drive, rather than be driven by, the human actor", which implies that documents appeal and shape human perception, further encompassing the social complexity of the interaction (Okuko et al, 2023, p.140). Qualitative document analysis is often understood as being intertwined with content analysis and thematic analysis. Where the former relates to a technique to analyse texts, words and language. The latter creates patterns within the document to highlight and evaluate central themes (Okuko et al, 2023, p.142-143).

When conducting a document analysis, the evaluation process is essential. Bowen (2009) "suggests that document analysis proves involves skimming (thorough examination), reading and interpretation" (Okuko et al, 2023, p.142). This will be explored further in the next chapter, as it engages with delineation, document criteria, acquisition of the documents, and a thematic analysis to initiate the coding process. This is done to ensure robustness and validity of the documents in order to reduce bias and contradictions while maintaining structural integrity.

### **3.4. Fokus and Delineation.**

When researching and exploring a topic in social science, one of the important things are to create a systematic and thorough review of the steps made to ensure transparency and addressing ethical concerns. Research by nature create the need for consistency throughout the text, as well as maintaining back and forth arguments to create validity in the text. This thesis seeks to explore questions like "how" and "why" to explore and understand changes in foreign policy. The thesis can therefore be considered as inductive, due to lack of a clear hypothesis to explore the research question. Bernard (2018, p.460) emphasise that "Inductive research is what you do when you're in the exploratory and discovery phase of any research project".

Thaagard, similarly to Bernard, explain that the core of qualitative methods and the coding phase are categorized by a systematic and suitable way to understand the data acquired (Thagaard, 2018, p.154). Document analysis with the integration of a thematic and content approach creates contextualizable data to track and verify findings. This thesis does not attempt to be groundbreaking in exploring alternative ideas related to IR theory or foreign



policy implications. It will instead develop further understanding of how foreign policy change, and especially how threat and security perceptions can be altered in response to changes in the international system. The findings in this thesis are believed to explain change in policy and threat perception, where power relations in the system are viewed to structural causes.

This thesis views the geopolitical incidents in 2014 and 2022 as key moments and drivers towards a new security situation in Europe. Therefore, one has to decide which documents are best at providing adequate data. Security documents which revolve around the key national interests in Norwegian security and foreign policy are deemed vital. In foreign policy, Fermann explain that, “The more serious, acute or principled the case is in foreign policy, challenge or opportunity are understood to be, the stronger it will be, or should be, the strategic leaders should involve themselves further” (Fermann, 2018, p.51). One of these strategic leaderships are Norwegian Intelligence Service (NIS), which release one of three publicly open, annual intelligence threat assessments named “Fokus”. Fokus consists of threat and risk assessments provided by the NIS, the Norwegian Police Security Service (PST) and the Norwegian National Security Authority (NSM). All of these intelligence services provide the Norwegian political leaders and citizens with assessments, evaluations and analysis concerning international and domestic incidents. In addition to themes and developments thought to be influencing and affecting national security (Focus, 2024). It’s worth mentioning that all three threat assessments from the security services are important and represent their perceptions in their respective fields of operation. Fokus is best examined when analysing all parts of it, however based on the scope of this thesis, as well as its focus towards the specific changes in perception and foreign policy. Analysis of just the NIS contribution is justified.

When conducting analysis of documents provided by the state. There are a few things which needs mentioning from a methodological standpoint. On a positive note, they provide large amounts of data, documents and often statistical information (Clark et al, 2021, p.506). This mean that the social scientist has access to a significant amount of data which can contribute towards the analysis and research. In addition, and highly relevant towards this thesis, are that states acquire information not always available to the public. In the case of NIS, resources are allocated, highly skilled staff analyse information which are provided through advanced technological instruments, specifically designed to acquire information which others are attempting to keep secret. Official documents can be an important contribution which the scientific community can take advantage of to explore the social world. One needs to keep in

mind that official documents, even though they can be viewed as first-hand sources have issues when it comes to credibility (Clark et al, 2021, p.506). They might be biased towards a certain view which are influenced by the policy maker while being virtually impossible to backtrack and factchecked. Due to the nature of intelligence agencies, the original information, collection methods and analysis are usually classified. This creates transparency and validity implication that are described below.

Intelligence agencies like NIS exist according to former intelligence officer Mark Lowenthal, for four reasons, “to avoid strategic surprise; to provide long-term expertise; to support the policy process; and to maintain the secrecy of information, needs and methods” (Lowenthal, 2008, Why have intelligence Agencies). Lowenthal also explain that intelligence analysis might be biased, as their most important purpose is to support the policy process. Thereby leaving open the possibility for bias towards a specific policy approach, also known as politicized intelligence. From a methodological standpoint we cannot exclude some sort of bias in the Fokus documents. Despite this, from a social context, being aware of potential bias allow us to study the documents from a certain point of view, where the message and themes in the documents provide an interesting background for the analysis (Clark et al, 2021, p.506). Such documents should not be treated as representative but, rather a source of political perception that influence the documents and provide additional information of policy changes over time.

Another aspect that needs clarification, concerns how one should interpret the documents. We do assume that the documents are rooted in reality and reflect the social interpretation of what this reality is. By viewing the NIS as providers of interpretation on domestic and foreign developments. Aligns it with ontology that concerns itself with the perspective of an entity, for instance an organization, a state or the individual, on their perceived representation of understanding the social world (Clark et al, 2021, p.514). According to Colin Wight (2006, p.2) “Politics is about competing visions of how the world is and how it should be”. This stance also coincides with Barry Buzan`s theory on security and that someone`s perceived security might not be universal or sometimes exclusively relevant for one state, whereas security mean different things, to different people (Buzan, 1991, p.19). Coinciding with the realist approach that states are rationalist. While foreign policy and subjective security involves the creation of a narrative, that influence the concept of security and how one should pursue it. When viewing states as rationalist, it implies that they see opportunity in

cooperation as conflict according to defensive realism creates instability as it usually involves using excessive amounts of power (Jackson et al, p.2019, p.93).

The interpretation of the NIS documents is therefore rooted in the belief that the social world is based on diverse perceptions. Security and power with realist theory will be used to conduct an analysis of the hostile international system. Creating a bridge between the intelligence agencies and states, ensure a complex view on how threats shape national security. By using a comparative document analysis, the thesis explore content, themes, dominant perspectives, and changes over time, where the assumed variables are perceived as causes for change. While the Russian perception of the system and its perceived security deficits, are thought to be the causes of the assumed variables causing further change. Content and thematic analysis are intertwined to enhance the analysis of the documents, where the findings are then analysed through IR lenses in order to approach the research question.

### **3.5. Fokus as a data contributor.**

The main source of data, and subsequent to analysis are NIS contributions towards Fokus 2013, 2015, 2021 and 2023. The analysis is conducted with the intention of investigating changes between the documents in 2013 and 2015. With the Annexation of Crimea happening in 2014 assumed to be the major geopolitical catalyst for policy change in this time period. Analysing changes between 2021 and 2023 with the geopolitical catalyst being the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, are the main source of change in this time period. The reasoning behind the selected documents is based on the general idea that war and conflict create uncertainty. Where foreign policy as Fermann argues, needs to adapt to the changing security environment (Fermann, 2013, p.51).

Analysis of the annexation of Crimea in 2014 are done by comparing the differences in themes and contents between Fokus 2013 and 2015. Analysing these two enable us to discover potential changes to the security perceptions the year before the annexation and the year after. Analysing the incident that happened in 2014 are thought to give the NIS enough data and time to conduct a thorough analysis that would appear in Fokus 2015. The same thought process also applies towards the Russian invasion of Ukraine in early 2022, as it would show the change between Fokus 2021 and 2023. I will also contrast and highlight the main developments of change that emerge in the documents from 2013 to 2023. By doing a comparative analysis, the findings become clearer in relation with each other, and change is

more easily identifiable. When comparing these incidents, we are looking for perceived importance and establish what security areas are affected.

A major advantage of using an edition which came about a year after the incidents provide the NIS with time to address and evaluate the consequences. In order to provide a more accurate depiction of incidents, developments and their perceived threat assessment towards Norwegian security. If one were to skip one edition. The issue might be that the situation has been somewhat normalised in the international system while potential changes to the security documents were the result of other developments rather than the one actually investigated. Therefore, these documents are chosen carefully with the intention of depicting and analyse the most accurate data to facilitate an accurate discussion of the research question.

### **3.6. A thematic analysis of Fokus.**

Before we move on to the depiction of the analysis and categorization strategy. Evaluating the documents are necessary to proclaim their credibility and validity. Thagaard (2018, p.119-120) explain that we need to consider the documents, and how to establish its relevance, authenticity, credibility and what the document can provide us with in our specific context. According to Braun and Clarke, a thematic analysis is a six-step process which have a methodological and theoretical transparency “because its sympathetic to the emergent properties of the data and those themes of interest that are actively chosen by the researcher” (Clark et al, 2021, p.538). This is applicable to this thesis, as it’s rather subjective what the researcher decide is important and what’s not (Clark et al, p.369). The findings which are displayed, are a result of the researcher’s interest, and past experiences influence the perception of how a specific issue should be analysed, and why it should be. This is also evident in the documents chosen to provide the data. What kind of documents are emphasised to be important, and why are some left out when they might offer valuable insights. One way to limit this are by providing a trail of thought, explaining the choices made, what thoughts are deemed important, and constantly reviewing choices and key theoretical ideas throughout the research paper (Thagaard, 2018, p.189). Attaining relevant documents are completely up to the researcher and where he thinks he will find the most useful data, and it’s up to him how the data will be analysed and compared, serving as a subjective critique towards the researcher.

In this thesis, the documents that are analysed are open access. However, the first two editions used here, Fokus 2013 and Fokus 2015 do not exist in English translation as far as I have

discovered. Meaning the first part of analysis are hard to backtrack for the reader. This can be limited in what Lincoln and Guba (Clark et al, 2021, p.366) portray as dependability. Where the researcher keeps track of record, data analysis notes, transcripts and all the phases of the research process to ensure that proper research procedures are followed. This means that the reader has the ability to acquire the documents and translate the in an orderly manner. However, this means metaphors and the analysis of the text will nonetheless different being reviewed in a different language. Lincoln and Guba also acknowledge that complete objectivity in research is impossible through confirmability. “In other words, it should be clear that they have not overtly allowed personal values or theoretical inclinations to sway the conduct of the research and any finding deriving from it” (Clark et al, 2021, p.366). To prevent this, direct quotes and examples from the documents are used to create transparency between the researcher and the reader. In addition, tables are created to display finding in the documents to describe major themes, while table 7 represent the researcher’s subjective development changes between all of the documents.

The Fokus documents are viewed as the most important open access contributions towards understanding and highlighting internal and external security developments that influence Norwegian security perspectives. NIS consider it their responsibility to deliver an unfiltered and non-positive view concerning threats towards Norwegian security and national interests. With the overarching goal of contributing towards a public debate towards perceived threats and important developments towards Norway security in the year to come (Etterretningstjenesten, 2024). Fokus establishes its relevance, while enhancing its credibility as a source of data that provide credible information and thorough analysis to the public. NIS are mostly concerned with foreign treats, and analyse developments in the international system, presenting their view of the current situation. By analysing the data provided by first hand-source such as the NIS, provides researchers with access to information not always available to the public. Everything about the intelligence process is highly secretive, however in a document such as Fokus, we are provided with a finished analysis disseminated through a declassification process.

What’s important to note are that Fokus does not engage in deep details regarding processes like direction directives, collection methods, data collection, how its exploited, nor does it explain the analysis process. This matters as Andrew et al, (2020, p.10) stress that “Intelligence is secret, state activity to understand or influence foreign entities”. This secrecy creates a credibility issue, as backtracking the documents origins and its creating processes

are virtually impossible as described earlier. We therefore should according to Bowen analyse it in a way which makes sense, by looking at the original purpose of the document and keep in mind who the target audience is (Bowen, 2009, p.33). As this document is virtually a declassified declaration of who the NIS perceive as potential dangers towards Norwegian security. It would require a critical analysis, as its target audience are everyone, also those who are perceived as potential threats. Bowen (2009) emphasise that this is not necessarily a negative thing, however it requires the documents to be analysed as content-specific, and should be supplemented with other sources as well. IR theory act as the main contributor of analysis of the document while other research articles provide valuable insights on security. All the material used in this thesis serve as valuable complementary material.

The next step is to establish different themes and security areas that emerge in the documents after analysing the data. By starting with the initial set of overarching themes provided through the first skim-reading. It's important to note that each of the documents main interest areas, also identify where the security focus of the NIS lie. This creates a basis for analysis, as the documents reveal their initial perceptions regarding the international system and enable deeper analysis in the next part. This includes a more comprehensive reading, by noting how other themes that emerge can be less prominent than the main ones. Realism and foreign policy theory on security and threat perception allow the security themes to be analysed in a contextual setting of the findings. The findings from each of the documents are compared, presented and analysed to explore change as a result of the complex interplay in the international system.

To sum up, the Fokus documents and NIS, provides information of the changes around threat perspective of emerging threats, being a valuable source of data, providing analytical purpose. Both from the Norwegian perspective, but also concerning Russia.

#### **4.0. Analysis: Fokus, threat perception and conflict.**

This chapter explore the Fokus documents in detail. It explores the main security themes that emerge in the documents which are then analysed through a thematic approach, establishing main areas of interests in the documents. It's important to be aware that the Fokus documents are mostly concerned with foreign policy and external security threats.

First of all, NIS explore all interest areas, also including areas far away from Norwegian territories and borders that it views central towards national interests. The most notable example of this are the developments in Africa, the Middle East and parts of Asia.

Developments happening there are severe and of such magnitude that in Fokus 2013, 2015 and 2021, Islamic terrorism were viewed as the most important threat towards Norwegian security and interests. Fokus 2023 also view Islamic terrorism, while also including far-right extremism as the most serious threat. One should not dismiss the importance of such challenges, as they are highly relevant for the work NIS does, and they do indeed shape the message and objective of the documents. Despite this, the thesis explores Russia as the main external security threat that are in close proximity to Norway. This involves an important delimitation of the thesis. Major challenges and threats concerning development in terrorism and China will in this thesis remain undiscussed. Even though Chinese military and offensive foreign policy might pose a threat towards Norwegian interests elsewhere, it will not be of subject here.

Exploring different editions of Fokus through a thematic lens, involves analysing and attempting to explore the data in the context they were written. What had happened in the world, and how does this affect the document (Naeem et al, 2023). Therefore, when starting a document analysis, familiarization with the document and data are necessary. The next step is meant to establishing certain key words which might be of interest. This is done by viewing certain patterns related to the coding step “to segments of data that capture the data’s core message, significance or theme” (Naeem et al, 2023). This implies that certain words carry meaning for the researcher and help create meaning and enhance understanding of complex themes in the document. However, Naeem et al (2023) also emphasise that this sort of coding is most useful when conducting interviews and having relation through social interaction.

Consequently, this analysis will instead of coding words, establish themes which according to Clark et al (2021) consists of certain categories which are identified by the researcher being related to the research question. An example of this might be the theme military development, as this term are important in both foreign policy and realism. Categories are prominent, because of their relationship with what the researcher view as important in creating a theoretical and practical understanding of the data. Meaning themes and data “...that can make a theoretical contribution to the literature relating to the research question (Clark et al, 2021, p.537). For instance, in the Fokus documents, themes are created on the basis that certain words provide insights to how developments create changing perceptions. In table 1 and table 2 there are certain words which create the main focus for this particular document, while table 3 explore how the perception of these have changed between the documents. Themes alone, are not enough, one also need the relation in which they are used. In order to

do this, direct examples from the document will be provided to enhance analytical transparency. Eldh et al (2020) assess that, “Adopting quotations to illuminate results stems from the epistemological assumptions of an interpretative methodology” (Naeem et al, 2023). This is helpful since the thesis explore the interpretive social environment through the utilization of IR theory to develop an understanding of a changing threat perception. Quotations are therefore necessary in order to forward the message in the documents to the reader, while simultaneously pursuing the research question. The remainder of chapter four are dedicated to describing the documents with a conclusion from table 7, portraying changes between all of the documents.

**4.1. Fokus 2013.**

In Fokus 2013 and 2015, there are a few major topics of security concern, all of these are in some way emerging in both the 2013 and 2015 NIS editions. As explored in the comparative analysis. The security themes are portrayed, showing their change and relevance towards both NIS and Russia. The major security themes in Fokus 2013 are portrayed in table 1 which contain the main and minor topics which emerge in the document. Mainly based on how important they are in the Norwegian-Russian relationship, but also how much they are mentioned also contribute to this categorisation. For instance, the term “energy security” are emerging throughout the document. While for instance continental shelves are considered a minor interest, based on its low appearances and its little effect on security perceptions. Delineation of the thesis is important to acquire the correct data which are to be analysed. In Fokus 2013, the information concerning Russia are viewed as most important ranging from page 1-18, while the chapter of cyber security is also included.

*Table 1. Box 4.1. Fokus 2013: Themes/Security areas.*

Themes Fokus 2013, p.1-18, and p.44				
<b>Main areas of interests</b>	<i>Energy security</i>	<i>Cooperation</i>	<i>Shipping routes</i>	<i>Military development</i>
<b>Minor areas of interests</b>	<i>Cyber security</i>	<i>International law</i>	<i>Continental shelves</i>	<i>Internal developments</i>

**4.1.1. Arctic developments.**

Fokus 2013 does not necessarily connect developments towards security to a great extent. The overarching thought that comes to mind when reading this edition, are of the almost non-existent Russian threats implicating Norwegian security. This is of importance, as NIS view the coinciding interests to be limiting potential conflict. Current Russian and international



developments in the Arctic, appear to in minimal degree at or not at all affecting Norwegian national interests. For instance, when discussing the conflict potential in the Arctic, NIS actually view the new sea-routes as being the foremost source of conflict internationally (Fokus 2013, p.10). Furthermore, NIS consider the conflict potential to be low, emphasising that all the Arctic coastal states respect the UN framework in the governing of the Arctic. All the states view international law important, and attempt to solve any disputes bilaterally. To sum up, NIS therefore view the current situation in the Arctic as having a low conflict potential. “The Arctic coastal states – Norway, Russia, Canada, USA and Denmark – have largely coinciding interests in the region. This reduces the danger for conflict” (Fokus, 2013, p.9).

#### ***4.1.2. Russian developments.***

“The relationship between Norway and Russia are characterised by stability and well-established cooperation in numerous fields” (Fokus, 2013, p.10). This characterization of the Norwegian-Russian relationship is visible throughout the document. Russian energy security is considered to be the most important aspect of the document. As developments in other fields such as rearmament, shipping routes and internal developments are viewed in light of their energy security. NIS view the most vital goal of Russian arctic politics being able to access energy resources and retaining national control over these. NIS also view that the need for investments from Western companies reduce potential conflict (Fokus, 2013, p.10). As Russia consider it important to build out infrastructure and enhance energy-cooperation on areas where Russia already have national control. This view is supported by official Russian politics which consider international cooperation in the region as important towards their national interests as well as developing the entire region in the long term. “Russian authorities are therefore likely to prioritize strengthening international cooperation going forward and are likely to avoid emphasising a militarization of the region” (Fokus, 2013, p.11).

#### ***4.1.3. Russian military developments.***

NIS emphasises that the most important military goal for Russia will be strategic deterrence (Fokus, 2013, p.14). It’s also important to note that the Russian parts of the Arctic are more likely to gain strategic importance with time.

The Northern fleet are considered the most important capability regarding strategic deterrence that Russia possesses. Current military development, are not perceived as a direct threat towards Norwegian security. To provide an example. Succeeding the 2008 war in Georgia, Russia initiated modernization reforms of its armed forces, including the Northern fleet. NIS

explore some detail how the modernization reforms have changed the Russian military in the North, but not extensively. For instance, they note that the Northern fleet also have received another priority area. Namely protection of Russian energy resources and creating search and rescue (SAR) facilities around its coast (Fokus, 2013, p.12). NIS view the current modernization of Russian military activities and presence in the Arctic as rather neutral. For instance, they argue that an increase in Russian Arctic capabilities is primarily defensive because of the view that they are protecting own forces in base or on patrol. While enhancing responsive capabilities to other parts of Russia. Even though Russia in 2012 conducted a military exercise to show Russian dominion and capabilities. NIS view these sort of actions as “...not serving Russian interests regarding low tension in the Arctic, and such exercises will happen sporadically” (Fokus, 2021, p.13). Russian modernisation and rearmament of its military are therefore not viewed as affecting Norwegian security, based on coinciding interests concerning stability in the region.

#### ***4.1.4. Russian foreign policy and internal developments***

“Russian ambitions in strengthening and develop itself as a great power are an important driver in Russian politics, also domestically” (Fokus, 2013, p.14). NIS argue that Russia is becoming increasingly more authoritarian. Their utmost foreign policy goal will be regional integration with European states and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). However, Western relations are considered to remain cool. This is one of the few instances in this edition where they present a view of a potential conflict between the west and Russia. NIS argue “The plans of establishing a European missile defence and Georgian ambitions to gain NATO membership” (Fokus, 2013, p.14), are potential conflict areas. NIS argue this will influence certain areas of the Norway-Russian relationship. However, Russia argues towards a close and beneficial relationship with Norway, which NIS consider to be achieved bilaterally. Russia intends to strengthen their international position which NIS argue will occur through the UN security council to discuss matters of international importance like the conflict in Syria.

Russian internal developments are in this edition largely comprised of economic stability, domestic political insecurity and insurgencies in other parts of Russia. Norwegian security is considered to be largely unaffected by the developments portrayed in Fokus 2013. That said, NIS view internal stability is a prerequisite for the external, and mention “...Russian leadership view Russia`s position internationally, as dependent on its political stability

(Fokus, 2013, p.15). Fokus 2013 consider the Russian economy as positive, however they are likely to see a decrease in GDP, based on their dependence on energy exports.

**4.1.5. Concluding remarks**

The Fokus document explore in detail security areas, Russian developments internally and externally, and also cyber-threats. NIS view that great powers will utilize and could use cyber-security to protect themselves while conducting operations towards others (Fokus, 2013, p.44). NIS view cyber security as increasingly more important in the future. While the Arctic are in this edition characterized by stability, cooperation and economic security. Military modernisation from the Russian side receives a neutral depiction, explained as rational and defensive. Russian developments are seen as modest, being a natural part of the overarching Russian policy goal in asserting itself as a great power with foreign policy ambitions. This edition is largely presented as positive due to Russia and Norway having coinciding interests, pursuing stability and cooperation. The exception being the Russian view on the West and especially NATO, that influence certain aspects of the Norwegian and Russian relationship.

**4.2. Fokus 2015.**

Fokus 2015, as with Fokus 2013, explore the different developments in the Arctic, Russia and in the cyber-domain. As explored in chapter 4.3, the perception of Russia in 2015 is radically different from 2013. This chapter are meant to give a descriptive and informative view regarding significant developments. The analysis of Fokus 2015, ranges from page 1-25, and then from page 80-85 on cyber-threats. Below are a depiction of the most important security areas emerging in Fokus 2015. Crimea emerge as a new security area, while internal developments and cyber-security appear important. Shipping routes become a minor area of interest. Nonetheless all of these areas are viewed as important by the NIS.

*Table 2. Box 4.2. Fokus 2015: Themes/Security areas*

Themes Fokus 2015, p.1-25, and Cyber-threats					
<b>Main areas of interests</b>	<i>Crimea</i>	<i>Cooperation</i>	<i>Internal developments</i>	<i>Military development</i>	<i>Cyber-security</i>
<b>Minor areas of interests</b>	<i>Shipping routes</i>	<i>Continental shelves</i>	<i>International law</i>		

**4.2.1. Russian developments.**

In Fokus 2015, Russia is perceived as an aggressor. Its annexation of Crimea and military operations in Eastern-Ukraine are viewed as violations on international law. Considered to be a major driver in changing the European security situation. NIS emphasise that Russia view

NATO as a possible threat and will continue to deliver harsh criticism to NATO capacities near its border, and towards NATO expansion (Fokus 2015, p.6). Russia is depicted as prepared to use military power to support its foreign policy goals. Western countries including Norway imposed economic sanctions on Russia, which are believed to promote an increased conflictual Western-Russian relationship in 2015. An interesting point provided by NIS are that “Russia have since 2007 acted more offensively, ensuing a collision-course with the West” (Fokus, 2015, p.9). Russia is also portrayed to be influencing countries like Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia with the intention of limiting their efforts to establish cooperation with the West. NIS also see an increase in energy cooperation with China. This cooperation is considered to be permanent, as their international cooperation like in the UN security council prove that Russian foreign policy is turning eastwards (Fokus, 2015, p.9).

Russian involvement, export and political support to countries in the Middle-East are seen as a tool to limit western influence in the region, while further establishing itself as an important actor (Fokus, 2015, p.9-10). NIS consider Moscow’s support towards the Assad regime in Syria as another example of opposing western dominance in international politics.

#### ***4.2.2. Internal developments***

NIS view the regime’s increased authoritarian development as a result of the events in Ukraine. The regime pursues patriotism internally to exert power in foreign policy intended to present a positive view of the regime, in order to justify similar actions in the future (Fokus, 2015, p.12). This will enhance an anti-wester mindset in Russia. In addition, NIS explain in great detail what sort of capabilities Russia have acquired in the North, as the Northern fleet are seen as establishing Russian sovereignty in the Arctic. Military developments are explained in relation to Russia’s aggressive foreign policy strategy while reinforcing additional domestic control.

The sanctions severely impact the strength of the Russian economy, while struggling with “structural challenges like corruption, hostile investment climate and oil dependency” at the same time (Fokus, 2015, p.10). NIS also view this economic development as something which create basis for justifications for revanchist foreign policy like we see in Ukraine. Mainly because a weak economy combined with tight control over the domestic political situation and the population. Allow Putin to base the regime on “patriotism, great power ambitions and conservatism” (Fokus, 2015, p.11). The annexation of Crimea is largely supported by the population, reinforcing this view.

#### ***4.2.3. The Arctic.***

NIS starts this chapter by stating that “Russia has defined the Arctic as the country’s important future resource base” (Fokus, 2015, p.21). Despite the events in Ukraine, Russia are attempting to continue international cooperation in the Arctic, while simultaneously experiencing a deteriorating relationship to the West. NIS view the international cooperation in the Arctic as one with mostly coinciding interests of a low-tension region. According to the document, Russian actions in Ukraine, have nonetheless affected relations in the Arctic (Fokus, 2015, p.20). The West are suspicious of Russian interests, and Russia are showing increased concern towards NATO presence. Combined with an increase in anti-western perception that NIS view is likely to create more security challenges which implies a more challenging Russia in the Arctic. NIS also argue that Russia wants good relations with countries in the Arctic to ensure stability. However, this is mostly going to occur through bilateral cooperation, as “Russia are concerned that the region is increasingly internationalized” (Fokus, 2015, p.22).

The Russian depiction of the security situation in Europe are vastly different from the West’s. NIS argue the Russian view are fortified by the Western sanctions. While Russia is perceiving themselves to be preserving their core strategic interests, “as Russian authorities develop new strategies to adopt to a changing reality” (Fokus, 2015, p.23). The results of economic sanctions, lack of investments and reduced oil price implicates the Russian economy in the near future. Continental shelves and shipping routes are also presented here as important, while military developments have seen an increase and are depicted as more influential. NIS explore the Arctic of strategic importance for Russia perceived to be driving the increase in capabilities and development of infrastructure.

#### ***4.2.4. Concluding remarks.***

Russia is portrayed in Fokus 2015 as an aggressor which negatively impact relations in the international system. NIS argue that Russian foreign policy is adapting to a new reality. In the cyber domain, foreign intelligence services regularly attack Norwegian governments and organizations as “Russia and China are the most active entities behind internet-based intelligence operations targeting Norway” (Fokus, 2015, p.83). State sponsored actors conducting intelligence, sabotage and cyber operations towards Norway are seen as the most prominent threat. NIS view that protecting critical infrastructure like power supply, telecommunication and military command is vital, as sabotage could cause significant damage (Fokus, 2015, p.85). NIS emphasise that the modernization of Russian military in the long

term, will create a capable Russian military power with a wide array of capabilities. Which could stand on the opposite side of Norway and NATO (Fokus, 2015, p.13). However, NIS expresses the fact that "...Russia in today's situation does not pose a threat towards Norway" (Fokus, 2015, p.17). Even though they view the Russian change as negative, they consider that the issues will require increased attention in the future.

#### **4.3. Comparative analysis of Fokus 2013 and 2015.**

This chapter explore the most significant changes between the documents when conducting a comparative thematic analysis of the two. The main topics prominent in both documents are highlighted, while also presenting the changes in how the themes are portrayed. While also discussing more subtle developments from a more interpretive view. For instance, differences in how the document are organized. In order to portray developments in a clearer way, table 3 show the perceived changes between the documents on main areas of interest. The developments are categorized based on their perceived importance in the document. By using the overarching goal of NIS. "In our annual threat assessment Fokus, NIS presents its analysis of the current situation and expected development in areas that the service considers to be particularly relevant to Norwegian security and national interests" (Etterretningstjenesten, 2024). It creates a point of reference for the analysis on what themes can be viewed as important, and how their perceived importance have changed from Fokus 2013 to 2015. NIS ultimately present their perception on how certain issues affect Norwegian security and national interests while also explaining the causes.

In table 3, "positive" implies that current and future developments are perceived as beneficial and, in some way, perceived as beneficial for Norwegian interests. Neutral depiction occurs when themes are considered to be presented in a way where the view is neither perceived as negative or positive with little implications towards Norwegian security. A negative view occurs when NIS perceive developments as being negative towards Norwegian interests and security. The themes emerge as important areas of interests in the documents.

Table 3. Box 4.3. Comparative presentation of Fokus 2013 and 2015: Themes/Security areas.

<b>Presentation of Russian/Arctic developments: Positive, Neutral, Negative.</b>		
<b>Themes:</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2015</b>
<i>Energy cooperation</i>	Positive	Neutral
<i>International cooperation</i>	Positive	Negative
<i>Shipping routes</i>	Neutral	Neutral
<i>Military development</i>	Neutral	Negative
<i>Cyber security</i>	Neutral	Negative
<i>International law</i>	Positive	Negative
<i>Continental shelves</i>	Neutral	Neutral
<i>Internal developments</i>	Neutral	Negative

**4.3.1. Energy cooperation.**

Energy cooperation is seen in Fokus 2013 as positive while it's perceived as neutral in the 2015 edition. In 2013 NIS view the 2011 Barents agreement on fisheries between Norway and Russia important to forward stability, predictability and strengthen energy cooperation in the future (Fokus 2013, p.10). However, energy cooperation is seen as neutral in the 2015 edition. Economic sanctions limit Russian ability to develop energy resources and cooperation with other states (Fokus, 2015, p.23). However, this is not perceived to be of negative impact for Norway. As the lack of cooperation with Russia are perceived not to influence the Norwegian economy nor its ability to continue energy cooperation with other states.

**4.3.2. International cooperation and shipping routes**

International cooperation has a negative change from 2013 to 2015. NIS present in 2013 that, "Official Russian politics emphasise international cooperation in the region as a condition for further development in line with Russian goals" (Fokus 2013, p.9). In Fokus 2015, the dominant view is still related to coinciding interests between the Arctic states. The reason why its perceived as a negative development relates to the fact that the sanctions are already limiting and affecting cooperation between the West and Russia (Fokus, 2015, p.22). In addition, a more offensive Russian foreign policy emerges in Fokus 2015. With NATO perceived as a potential threat, negatively affect Norway as well (Fokus, 2015, p.22). They do emphasise that Russia will prioritise bilateral cooperation with Arctic states, however the international cooperation is still seen as a negative development between the two.

Shipping routes have seen little too no change in how they are perceived between the documents. NIS emphasise that Russia views the Northeast-passage as vital to their Arctic

strategy. However, other than depicting how international excitement has cooled regarding the passage, shipping routes are perceived as rather unimportant for NIS (Fokus, 2015, p.24).

#### ***4.3.3. Military development***

Military development experiences a negative development from 2013 to 2015. In Fokus 2013, military development is seen from a neutral perspective, as Russian modernisation are viewed to be a result of several reasons. One is because of developments in Georgia in 2008. Another is to enhance capabilities when a crisis happens, argued to be of a defensive nature. Military developments have seen as a shift in priorities, argued to be of economic security and to make themselves less dependent on nuclear weapons (Fokus 2013, p.18). The 2013 edition are somewhat descriptive when discussing military development without doing in-depth analysis of where the spending goes. NIS view Russian military development as defensive. Where they argue that the Arctic are of increased strategic importance for Russia in terms of protecting energy. While enhancing their military capacity, NIS underline that “there are no quantitative escalation of strength levels in the north” (Fokus, 2013, p.12).

There is a radical change of the Russian military developments in Fokus 2015. Firstly, there are five pages directly dedicated to describing Russian military, compared to the one page in Fokus 2013. In addition, NIS view the Russian military power as in the mid-long term being on the other side of NATO and Norway (Fokus 2015, p.13). Perceiving current Russian military development as a potential future threat. Furthermore, NIS perceive the incidents in Crimea and East-Ukraine as examples where Russia has the will to use military power to achieve its foreign policy goals. Which are depicted as being opposed to Norway and the West, also in the Arctic. “Action to establish Russian sovereignty and deter potential challenges in the north will likely involve capabilities from the Russian armed forces” (Fokus, 2015, p.23). In addition, NIS go in great detail of explaining specific developments in Russian capabilities like fighter jets, helicopters and surface to air missiles just to name a few. Reinforcing the negative view this edition has on Russian military development.

#### ***4.3.4. Cyber security***

Cyber security is also seeing a negative development, as Fokus 2013 focus our attention to new and emerging challenges towards Norwegian security. This edition provides mostly descriptive information concerning terrorism, intelligence operations and attacks on critical infrastructure. Here the Russian development in cyber-security is portrayed as firstly defensive to protect its infrastructure and interests. Its perceived as neutral since NIS emphasise that “The digital domain could have a significant role for crisis and conflict



management” (Fokus, 2013, p.44). Indicating that it should receive increased attention in the future. In Fokus 2015 the developments are seen as negative. NIS provides justification for this view by highlighting that, “Cyber based intelligence operations are a considerable threat towards Norwegian interests. Such operations are conducted against a number of targets in Norway” (Fokus, 2015, p.82). This is a clear change, as NIS explain that Russia and China are behind most of the cyber intelligence operations towards Norway. NIS see the Russian cyber development as being capable of conducting high levels of intelligence operations towards other states. They also view the Ukraine conflict as an example of how Russia is combining cyber operations with other capabilities (Fokus, 2015, p.25). This development in cyber security is fundamentally negative.

#### ***4.3.5. International law and continental shelves***

Developments in international law and continental shelves are considered interconnected since both themes are pursued through international frameworks. International law is depicted in the 2013 edition as positive, fortified by the notion that the Arctic states respect the UN process concerning continental shelves (Fokus, 2013, p.10). International law is perceived as important for stability and cooperation in the Arctic. In the 2015 edition however, Russian actions in Crimea and East-Ukraine are seen as violating international law by breaching Ukrainian sovereignty. International law has a negative development. As NIS view the offensive Russian foreign policy current use of military power in Ukraine and Crimea. Creating a “...more unpredictable and challenging Russia also in the North” (Fokus, 2015, p.20). There is a perceived negative development for international law in the future when it comes to sovereignty.

The perception of continental shelves being a source of conflict remain neutral. In the Arctic, the view on international law and respecting the UN process on continental shelves are seen as important. NIS view unsolved disputes on continental shelves as a potential source tension in the region, but nothing suggests this at the moment (Fokus, 2013, p.10). NIS also view the “Submission of great and partially overlapping claims on continental shelves as being a source of new tension in the region, but will likely not lead to confrontation or conflict” (Fokus, 2015, p.20). Continental shelves are perceived to have a neutral development.

#### ***4.3.6. Russian politics and domestic situation.***

The final theme concerns the Russian domestic situation and internal politics. Viewed as neutral in Fokus 2013. NIS mostly describe the economic situation, more authoritarian characteristics of the regime and the development of insurgency in the Caucasus (Fokus,

2013, p.14-17). This depiction is viewed as neutral, being more descriptive than anything else. Considering descriptions in Fokus 2015, there are enough material to conclude that the developments are negative. First, and most importantly, the developments in Russian foreign policy pointing to a more aggressive and unpredictable neighbour are seen as negative (Fokus, 2015, p.6). In addition, the increased authoritarian control and the regime rhetoric's that "Russia are facing an external enemy", help reinforce and increase support towards anti-western values in the population (Fokus, 2015, p.12). Government propaganda and the actions in Ukraine and Crimea, reinforce the Russian public's view that Russia should continue its great power ambitions. Creating a more unpredictable security landscape for Norway, supporting the basis that internal developments in Russia are considered negative for Norwegian security.

#### ***4.3.7. Concluding remarks.***

One change which might seem subtle, are the fact that NIS present their perspective on Russia first in the 2015 edition, changing from being presented second in the 2013 edition. This might not seem that important yet are perceived as a radical shift in the NIS perception of Russia towards Norwegian security. This claim is reinforced by how NIS present the themes when comparing and analysing the developments between Fokus 2013 and Fokus 2015. NIS see a more unpredictable Russia, with developments that in 2013 were portrayed as defensive. Are now perceived as more conflictual towards Norwegian security and interests. From 2013 to 2015 there are a significant negative development on a range of these security areas. Next are a comparative analysis between Fokus 2021 and Fokus 2023.

#### **4.4. Fokus 2021**

In Fokus 2021, we are witnessing emerging security concerns that was not highlighted in in the previous analysis. Some are considered to be of great importance while others are mentioned more briefly. Most of the themes and security concerns we see in Fokus 2021 appear in the 2023 edition as well, while some disappear and other have resurged importance. In this edition, pages 1-25 concerning the introduction, intelligence, influence and cyber threats are considered important. In addition, page 34-65 which explore superpower rivalry, armament and Russia will be analysed. As with previous analysis, table 4 highlight what's considered the most important security concerns. NIS consider all aspects of the document important, however the main and minor themes indicate what specific subjects they are focusing on in relation to Norwegian security and interests. Terrorism is still considered the

greatest threat towards Norway, and the Rise of China are also receiving a lot of attention. However, as advocated earlier, this will not be subjected to analysis here.

Table 4. Box 4.4.1. Fokus 2021: Themes/Security areas.

Themes Fokus 2021, p.1-25, and p.34-65					
Main areas of interests	West-East rivalry	Nuclear capabilities	Intelligence and cyber-security	Military development	Influence activities
Minor areas of interests	Domestic issues	Strategic deterrence	Sabotage	Threat perception	

NIS emphasise West-East rivalry in Fokus 2021, as they explore numerous conflictual relationships. Most of these themes are related to state power, their capabilities as well as their threat perception, as described below.

**4.4.1. West-East Rivalry and Threat perception**

Situations and conflicts throughout the world are marked by the superpower rivalry according to NIS. This are a product of threat perception, mainly how Russia perceives the West. “Russia considers Western activity in the Hight North as a threat to its military bases on the Kola Peninsula and to its national security” (Focus, 2021, p.46). Russia perceives the Western sanctions regime as hostile, and “Norway are perceived more as a NATO ally than as a neighbour” (Focus, 2021, p.46). NIS view that the lack of cooperation and integration have ensured that “Superpower rivalry has resulted in less coordinated efforts against international terrorism” (Focus, 2021, p.8). This rivalry also creates setbacks in arms control and international cooperation. In addition, NIS view the West to be struggling to prevent the spread WMD knowledge, due to the lack in cooperation.

Russia also accuses Norway of presenting and promoting “anti-Russian sentiment”, while “pulling Sweden and Finland closer to NATO”, attempting to limit Russian activities in the Arctic as part of a NATO strategy (Focus, 2021, p.51). According to NIS, Russia is increasingly perceiving Norway as a threat. In addition, for the first time ever, Russia commented on Norway’s cooperation with Ukrainian officials. One of Russia’s main policy goals are political control over former territories in Belarus, Ukraine and the Caucasus. NIS considers it important that Russia are openly commenting on Norwegian relationship which they perceive as a threat towards their national security (Focus, 2021, p.51). To sum up, NIS explain in great detail about how Russia perceived the West, why it matters and that it has potential security implications for Norway in all the points which are to be described under. Rivalry between the West and Russia influence security implications and developments.

#### ***4.4.2. Nuclear Capabilities and strategic deterrence***

NIS explore nuclear capabilities in detail. As mentioned above, the superpower rivalry has had massive setbacks for arms control. NIS view that arms control is important because it create trust between parties, openness. As states are compelled to explain what their capabilities being equally important as the “technical content” of arms control. “Hence, agreements have a stabilising effect and considerable impact on global security” (Focus, 2021, p.42). NIS go into great detail explaining how new weapons are not covered by old treaties with the conflicting views between US, Russia and China as limiters of cooperation. For instance, Russia is expanding their capabilities in order to create strategic deterrence and not be reliant on solely nuclear weapons as a means to defend themselves (Focus, 2021, p.57).

According to NIS, Russia is viewing that the strategic balance in the international system is at risk. They give three reasons for this. 1) Shift in NATO activity that involves more simulated attacks on Russia with strategic bombers. 2) New areas of warfare, mainly NATO in cyberspace and outer space. 3) Claiming the US tries to undermine and push the world towards a new arms race by undermining the “global security architecture” (Focus, 2021, p.57). Russia is attempting to secure this “military-strategic balance” by transforming its armed forces from just being ready for full-scale war against NATO. Towards attaining the capabilities of becoming a more flexible military power which operate in multiple dimensions, hence the term “strategic deterrence” (Focus, 2021, p.57).

Russian nuclear capabilities in the Arctic are brought up as a concern as there have been two accidents in close proximity to Norway. However, NIS view it as more likely that accidents happen instead of deliberate actions towards Norway (Focus, 2021, p.63). To conclude the security concerns addressed in this document. NIS explore mainly how Russia are perceiving the developments in the international system to be a result of rivalry and Western aggression, while nuclear weapon capabilities are viewed as rational choices within Russian security policy.

#### ***4.4.3. Military development***

NIS goes into great detail explaining Russian military capabilities. For instance, the Northern fleet already have acquired, and will receive new and more modernised vessels. In addition, military infrastructure has been successfully built out with a new airstrip on Franz Josef Land being ready, and increasing their capabilities in the air (Focus, 2021, p.60). In addition to NIS describing development of new hypersonic missiles. NIS also mention the military exercise Zapad 2021, which are going “...to simulate a regional war against an adversary in the West

(Focus, 2021, p.60). The military exercise Zapad are a regular exercise in which the Russian military test their capabilities with other branches of the military. “Since 2013, the deployment of airborne forces to exercises has become part of the normal picture in the north” (Focus, 2021, p.60). With some concluding remarks from this chapter. NIS view military developments regarding research, acquisition and the production of new and more effective military equipment, intended at enhance their capabilities. NIS explain that the most important task the Northern Fleet has, are to protect and strengthen control over resources, early warning, fighting capabilities and national control over the strategic location of the Northeast passage (Focus, 2021, p.59). Russia sends criticisms towards NATO in the Arctic, and according to this document, rely on defending their country through offensive action and early strikes against an adversary (Focus, 2021, p.59). Which according to NIS, coincide with the development of military capabilities in accordance with the Russian threat perception.

#### ***4.4.4. Intelligence and Cyber security***

This chapter elaborate on issues like intelligence, cyber security and sabotages, however based on its nature and key difference, it`s dealt with separately. NIS dedicate as much as 12 pages to dealing with intelligence, cyber security, sabotages and influence activities which are more than superpower rivalry and armament combined. These topics are therefore of prime concern for NIS as they address the complexity of the Norwegian security perspective.

“Foreign intelligence and influence activities remain a major threat to Norway and Norwegian interests. Particularly the parliament elections in the autumn of 2021 could be subject to influencing attempts” (Focus, 2021, p.6). NIS argue that digital solutions have made us vulnerable (Focus, 2021, p.14). NIS consider Russia and China to pose the greatest threats towards Norwegian public and private sector. NIS highlight increasing activity concerning intelligence gathering. As foreign intelligence services seek to acquire information regarding policy formulations, foreign affairs, defence, energy security and critical infrastructure (Focus, 2021, p.23). NIS provide their own definition of intelligence in their threat assessment. “...intelligence is defined as the result of state-sanctioned collection, analysis and assessment of data and information, obtained overtly or covertly and compiled to provide an advantage in decision-making processes” (Focus, 2021, Fact Box #01, p.17).

NIS explain how intelligence agencies can acquire information while providing clear examples on this happening in Norway, with serious implications like the operation against the Norwegian parliament in 2020 (Focus, 2021, p.21). In Focus 2021, NIS provide clear

examples and information concerning how Norway are affected by such issues with the intention to enhance awareness.

#### ***4.4.5. Influence activities***

“Russia has carried out influence operations during elections in both Europe and the United States, by means such as network operations, provocations and the coordinated spreading of disinformation” (Focus, 2021, p.6). NIS consider psychological operations such as disinformation, forgeries, fake news as a measure to achieve a policy goal. NIS also provide a definition where, “Influence is defined as overt or covert campaigns, operations and activities, often without the use of military force, in order to change attitudes, decisions or outcomes in another country. States also carry out intelligence operations to facilitate influencing in the future” (Focus, 2021, Fact Box #01, p.17). A goal might be to create or enhance a divide in society, increasing polarization between groups or populations, creating domestic instability. NIS explain that because of Norway’s seat at the UN security council in the period from 2021-2022, it creates increased attention from foreign entities, potentially leading to more intelligence and influence activities. NIS consider that the parliamentary election could be subjugated to influence attempts as “...they could undermine the population’s trust in central institutions’ management and protection of information” (Focus, 2021, p.21). NIS conclude that influence operations becoming increasingly popular, and seeking to protect secrets and stability, they attempt in this document to spread awareness around this concern.

#### ***4.4.6. Sabotage***

In a different realm, NIS label just how reliant Western states are on submerged internet cables, where as much as 97% of all traffic go through there (Focus, 2021, p.64). In addition, NATO relies extensively on satellites for intelligence collection activities, command and control and navigation. NIS therefore elaborate on Russian developments concerning establishing offensive capabilities which can be applied underwater if needed. In addition, and related to threat perception, Russia are viewing space to be of increasing military importance, especially as they see the West as a potential military adversary (Focus, 2021, p.60). Russia is developing anti-satellite capabilities, which NIS view as a considerable threat towards NATO capabilities, and therefore Norway. Sabotage attempts in the cyber domain are also more likely. Finding the actors behind sabotage, intelligence and influence activities are hard thanks to encryption. Therefore, NIS view such operations as becoming increasingly effective thanks to the sponsors of such operations are becoming gradually more and more anonymous (Focus, 2021, p.23).

#### ***4.4.7. Domestic issues***

Lastly, NIS describe how the Russian domestic situation affect its foreign policy. First, NIS describe a change in living conditions for Russians (Focus, 2021, p.46). Russian economy has been increasingly worse with “The covid-19 pandemic and the drop in the oil prices sent Russia into the deepest recession since the financial crisis in 2008” (Focus, 2021, p.49). NIS explain that these changes can decrease the regime’s legitimacy. Domestically, Russia perceives the West as a threat. With its foreign policy getting increasingly dedicated to reduce Western influence in areas like the Middle East and Africa. NIS argue that their political capabilities in Syria and Libya have been enhanced through mediation and military engagement (Focus, 2021, p.46).

Russia chairs the Arctic Council from 2021, which according to NIS will be marked with distrust and national control (Focus, 2021, p.46). The same goes for Arctic interaction in general, where Dmitry Medvedev expresses “concern that the United States and other NATO countries continuously try to limit Russian activity in the region” (Focus, 2021, p.51). The general distrust of the West domestically in Russia will according to the NIS, continue to shape the conflictual relationship in the future. “The relationship with the United States and NATO shows no signs of improvement, and there is a growing distrust in Western initiatives and motives” (Focus, 2021, p.52-53). In this chapter, NIS view internal developments in Russia as unfortunate, becoming increasingly authoritarian and portraying the West as a threat. Russia is therefore taking steps in the Middle East to challenge Western influence, while attempting to increase control over Belarus, Caucasus and Ukraine (Focus, 2021, p.51-55).

#### ***4.4.8. Concluding remarks***

Fokus 2021 are dedicated largely to explaining Russian threat perception as it influences a lot of the security areas. NIS devote a lot of attention towards exploring the Russian perspective, what they perceive, why they perceive it, and developments as a result of this. Despite arms race and great power rivalry being prominent throughout the text. One cannot exclude the fact that intelligence and influence activities are the only areas where NIS perceive Russia as a clear threat. There is no clear evidence in this documents that NIS perceive Russia of having intention of military action towards Norway. For instance, “The majority of the nuclear weapons on the Kola Peninsula are stored in the depots and will only be transferred to military units in the event of a conflict” (Focus, 2021, p.63). Implying that there is no reason for these capabilities to be used, unless there is a conflict, which aren’t indicated in the

document. NIS view the Russian mentality as being opposed and attempted limited by NATO and the US. Russia is therefore perceived to be acting rationally based on their perspective, with the increase in capabilities intended to ensure their strategic interests (Focus, 2021, p.46). To conclude, the 2021 edition of Focus see the NIS view Russian developments from a Russian threat perspective, as being forced to enhance its capabilities to secure its national priorities.

**4.5. Fokus 2023**

Fokus 2023 mark a radical switch in NIS perception of Russia. “Russia`s invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022 marks a watershed for Europe” (Focus, 2023, p.5). This analysis is conducted using page 1-35 and on 54 to 55. Some clarifications regarding this edition of Fokus are necessary. First and most importantly, a lot of the former security themes found in 2021 like intelligence, influence activities, sabotage and nuclear capabilities are incorporated in the chapter “A strategic mistake”. Despite this, the main and minor themes of interests still exist, being described below.

*Table 5. Box 4.5. Fokus 2023: Themes/Security areas.*

Themes Fokus 2023, p.1-35, and p.54-55					
<i>Main areas of interests</i>	<i>War in Ukraine</i>	<i>Great power conflict</i>	<i>Threat perception</i>	<i>Changed security landscape</i>	<i>Military capabilities</i>
<i>Minor areas of interests</i>	<i>Domestic issues</i>	<i>Strategic deterrence</i>	<i>Unpredictability</i>	<i>Intelligence and influence activities</i>	

**4.5.1. The War in Ukraine and a changed security landscape**

NIS explain how the events in Ukraine have serious implications for European cooperation and security and in detail how the war has been fought, capabilities and how areas of interests are interlinked with the events in Ukraine. NIS also view the events in Ukraine as devastating towards Russia, as they have lost significant capabilities, despite accepting huge losses, and intend to escalate towards both Ukraine and the West (Focus, 2023, p.8).

NIS view the future developments in the Arctic as marked with distrust, conflict and lack of cooperation on numerous fields (Focus, 2023, p.32). According to the NIS there are a possibility for Russia to abandon its low-tension policy in the Arctic if they deem it to be in their interest to do so. As Russia views that the “...Arctic cannot be separated from the confrontation with the US and NATO” (Focus, 2023, p.32). The War in Ukraine have drastically altered the security landscape in Europe. NIS see a permanent rupture in relations between Russian and the West, which will lead to an increase in hostilities, in addition to the



potential for misunderstandings of intentions goes drastically up. NIS view the events in Ukraine as detrimental to European security, and will affect foreign policy, security and defence decisions for a long time.

#### ***4.5.3. Great power conflict***

NIS explain that “The invasion has unified the West and driven Sweden and Finland to apply for NATO membership; the West is training Ukrainian soldiers and delivering arms to Ukraine; Russia is subject to vast political and economic sanctions and has lost access to Western markets in the foreseeable future” (Focus, 2023, p.8). Implying that the West perceive Russia as a threat, willing to mitigate damage towards Ukraine. Russia on the other hand is aided by China, in which it redirects “a considerable share of its oil exports” towards (Focus, 2023, p.17). Also, Iran and North Korea produce and supply large amounts of ammunition to Russia. NIS describe the alliance cooperations in line with the idea of great power conflict between the West and the East. NIS reinforce this view explaining that, “Moscow is prepared for a permanent rupture with the West” (Focus, 2023, p.15).

Furthermore, NIS describe Russian efforts in cooperation forums elsewhere, with the aim to “...challenge what Russia refers to as an American hegemony and build a multipolar world order which, to a greater extent, safeguards Russian interests” (Focus, 2023, p.15).

Regarding areas in close proximity to Norway, “The Arctic becomes a stage for great power rivalry” (Focus, 2023, p.32). Norwegian geopolitical value is according to NIS said to increase, as Europe will be reliant on Norwegian energy supplies, enhancing the country’s importance on the continent. In addition, Russia now perceive Norway as being a part of the NATO enlargement with Sweden and Finland to join NATO. Increasing Russian awareness and enhance its national interests regarding Norwegian oceans, territory and infrastructure (Focus, 2023, p.32).

To sum up, the events in Ukraine have unified most of the Western community in response to Russia. This combined with Europe being more dependent on Norwegian energy, make Norway more geopolitically important for Europe with a special increase in the Arctic. Russia is seeing Norway as a part of the NATO structure rather than a neighbour. With a shift in alliances and a clarifications of threat perception, ensures that cooperation have virtually diminished.

#### ***4.5.2. Military capabilities and strategic deterrence***

“The war will continue to weaken Russia’s military capabilities throughout 2023” (Focus, 2023, p.8). NIS explore how the War in Ukraine has had a severe impact on Russian capabilities.

NIS describe the Russian nuclear doctrine permits the use of nuclear weapons, if “...a conventional attack threatens the existence of the Russian state” (Focus, 2023, p.10).

According to NIS, Russia have deliberately said they will consider using nuclear weapons, as a deliberate way to create uncertainty. Even though they have lost quite a lot of capabilities, they are still capable of providing strategic deterrence. For instance, the deployment of fighter aircrafts equipped with hypersonic missiles to the Baltic, “...to ensure strategic deterrence against NATO in the region” (Focus, 2023, p.10). In addition, NIS explain that Russia does not consider NATO to be an imminent threat as they have redeployed forces away from the NATO border (Focus, 2023, p.11).

NIS view the “Northern Fleet’s strategic submarines are a crucial part of Russia’s nuclear capabilities (Focus, 2023, p.21). NIS see no change in armament regarding the Northern Fleet’s capabilities. Due to the West’s response regarding the events in Ukraine, NIS describe strong mistrust between NATO and Russia, increasing the risk of potential “unintentional incidents” (Focus, 2023, p.21). To conclude, NIS describe in detail Russian capabilities with nuclear deterrence as the main tool of strategic deterrence towards NATO. NIS sum these development up as “Russia has not become a less dangerous threat to NATO” (Focus, 2023, p.34).

#### ***4.5.4. Unpredictability***

NIS view that the events in Ukraine have showed that Russia have become unpredictable, and a threat towards its neighbours (Focus, 2023, p.19). The Russian view is that Norway is part of the NATO structure rather than a neighbour as the two states have a vastly different view on how the world works. NIS also provide with an interesting argument in regards to this. Since diplomatic efforts have been dialled back and cooperation are happening less, diplomats and experts will have less power of influence in the Russian state system (Focus, 2023, p.32). “This could affect Russia’s understanding of Norwegian politician’s viewpoints and increase the likelihood of misunderstandings” (Focus, 2023, p.33). Domestic issues and instability will affect Norwegian security according to NIS, as change within the regime is unavoidable, creating unrest which will enhance its authoritarian stance in world politics (Focus, 2023, p.35).

This chapter have explored NIS description of Russia being increasingly unpredictable, willing to use military capabilities when their perceived national security is at stake. In addition, less diplomatic efforts as the lack of dialogue or in-depth understanding creates uncertainty regarding others interests.

#### ***4.5.5. Domestic issues***

Despite huge losses in Ukraine, NIS emphasise that the Russian leadership will continue to pursue a policy which cause conflict with the West, in addition to pursuing the goal of political control in Ukraine (Focus, 2023, p.11). The Putin regime seems to have stable control over the country; however, NIS explain that “Putin`s fate is tied to the developments in Ukraine” (Focus, 2023, p.11). Russia have become increased authoritarian after the initiation of the War in Ukraine, political dissident is virtually impossible, and all major opposition figures have either been jailed or fled elsewhere.

“Russia has serious economic challenges” (Focus, 2023, p.11). According to NIS, the sanctions will continue to be felt throughout the population who experience the continuation of deteriorating living standards. NIS explain that with the discrepancies between the official narrative and the reality in Ukraine, “the regime risks losing control of how people perceive the war” (Focus, 2023, p.13). Deaths, injuries and material loses, will likely increase the discontent from the ones affected by the War in Russia, and resistance are likely to increase. Domestic issues like this will continue to plague Russia in the year to come, as emigration are of increased concern. This implies according to NIS, that a lot of the educated have left, and this will continue and hit in full force the domestic situation in Russia in 2023. “...emigration will undermine Russia`s long-term economic and technological development and its ability to keep important functions in society running” (Focus, 2023, p.13).

Concerning other former Soviet states, “Russia considers these countries to be part of its sphere of interest and influence” (Focus, 2023, p.13). The regime will attempt to control these states, because if they don`t, everything from work, trade and politics will “amplifying pre-existing cleavages” (Focus, 2023, p.13). NIS view this development as a potential strategic vulnerability for the regime in the coming years.

NIS view the Russian-China partnership as the main stabilising factor towards the economic challenge the regime is up against. The war in Ukraine have not limited Russian trade with Beijing, rather they have redirected much of their energy export to China and India (Focus, 2023, p.17). Despite this, NIS don`t think China and India can compensate 100% percent for

the revenues Russia are losing in Europe. In addition, NIS view the Russian situation as non-negotiable which “Beijing will exploit this situation to its advantage” (Focus, 2023, p.17). NIS also view China important for Russian development in energy production in the Arctic. China will see this as an opportunity to gain more influence in the Arctic. Russia will be wary of such development, as “Russia seeks to restrict China’s footprint in the Arctic, but depends on larger Chinese involvement to fulfil its ambitions” (Focus, 2023, p.18).

NIS also explore on how the war has affected Russian imports of critical material. “Russia relies on imported technology to maintain and develop its military capabilities” (Focus, 2023, p.24). NIS explain that European markets are preferred, however after restrictions on exports and imports. NIS view the greatest obstacle Russia has of replacing lost material as the “...lack of Western technology” (Focus, 2023, p.27). NIS also link this issue to Norwegian security, since intelligence operations against Norwegian producers of this technology are more likely. This will be elaborated on in the next chapter.

To conclude, domestic issues plaguing Russia also affect its foreign policy. Russia are in deep financial trouble and other energy markets can’t compensate for the loss of revenue in Europe. Russia attempts to control former Soviet states, challenged by economic decline and authoritarian rule. Russia attempts to address the domestic issues, perceived by NIS to directly affect Norwegian security.

#### ***4.5.6. Intelligence and influence activities***

“...Russia and the West are in a continuous information battle, where the West tries to destabilise Russia” (Focus, 2023, p.29). NIS consider the Russian mindset important towards the development of their capabilities. NIS view cyber operations, communication collection and sabotage as their most important technical tools and capabilities. While their perception management involve “attempts to influence people’s perceptions and attitudes” (Focus, 2023, p.28). However, NIS view that these efforts have been less prominent, mainly because of the loss of forums for dialogue and interaction in the West (Focus, 2023, p.29). However, NIS view the digital domain of increased importance for Russia. As “Russia’s military doctrine is based on a concept that network operations are included in both strategic information campaign and military operations” (Focus, 2023, p.29).

Russia have increased interest in gaining intelligence on Norwegian policy formulations, foreign affairs, defence and security, in addition to companies involved in arms industry and maritime sector (Focus, 2023, p.31). When it comes to influence activities, the Russian goal is

“...not to convince, but to sow doubt about the truth and undermine people’s trust in the authorities and national media” (Focus, 2023, p.31). However, NIS consider Russian influence activities to be harder to achieve, due to the events in Ukraine largely unifying opinion in Western countries. NIS consider people more likely to be subjected and influenced by these kinds of operations are people with existing “Anti-government and politically extreme communities” (Focus, 2023, p.31). Russian psychological operation is tailored towards those already on the extreme spectre in politics, intended to increase cleavages in society. In addition, NIS view defence and security policies to be areas susceptible to influence activities in Norway. The Russian aim is therefore to spread disinformation regarding such policies.

To sum up, the war has limited forums for interaction, potentially limiting influence activities towards Norway. Clarifying public perception about the war, further challenging the effects of such operations. NIS explain that although Russia have lost a lot of its capabilities and vital imports, likely means an increase in intelligence activities towards Norwegian sectors. Sabotage and network operations are elusive, and will be more prominent in 2023. “The number of concealed and covert procurements attempts by Russia is expected to increase in 2023. Russian actors will continue to use Norway as a transit country for procurement from other Western countries” (Focus, 2023, p.24).

#### ***4.5.7. Concluding remarks***

The 2023 edition of Fokus are dominated by the NIS considering Russia to be a threat, in addition to the Russian perception of the West. According to NIS, the war marked the final split between Russia and the West. The NIS threat perception also emphasise great power rivalry believed to influence the document. The document provide insight on developments in Ukraine. It’s effects on Russian capabilities perceived to influence their perception of the world, especially the West. Fokus 2023 explore shift in the European security landscape that affects Norway’s geopolitical role, as well as enhancing its importance towards Russian interests. Norway is perceived by Russia as part of the NATO structure. While also being an actor Europe are dependent on for energy imports, as well as possessing capabilities and information valued by Russian intelligence services. NIS view the War in Ukraine as the final push towards a world with more great power rivalry, new alliances and factions and new cooperation structures. “The war in Ukraine has reinforced Russia’s need to consolidate its security interests in the Arctic” (Fokus, 2023, p.32), which NIS perceive will be a more

unpredictable region. There`s a clear emphasis on power struggles resulting from cleavages emerging from the East-West divide evident throughout the document.

**4.6. Comparative analysis of Fokus 2021 and 2023**

This chapter explore the main differences between Fokus 2021 and 2023. With Fokus 2021 as point of reference when analysing the differences in presentation and description of the themes. The security areas describe how Norwegian security perceptions are changing based on developments in the system. As with the previous comparative analysis, “positive, neutral and negative development” are used to portray the nature of the changes. In addition, some security areas have changed their definitions entirely. The Ukraine events in 2022 have a profound effect on the 2023 document which are not visible in the 2021 document. Despite this, the security areas are mostly the same, with changes highlighted in table 6.

*Table 6. Box 4.6. Comparative presentation of Fokus 2021 and 2023: Presentation of Russian/Security areas.*

<b>Presentation of Russian/Security areas: Positive, Neutral, Negative.</b>		
<b>Themes:</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>2023</b>
<i>Threat perception</i>	Neutral	Negative
<i>West-East rivalry</i>	Neutral	Negative
<i>Nuclear/strategic deterrence</i>	Neutral	Negative
<i>Military development</i>	Neutral	Negative
<i>Domestic issues</i>	Negative	Negative
<i>Intelligence/influence activities</i>	Negative	Negative

**4.6.1. Threat perception**

This chapter discuss the aspect of threat perception, which can be viewed as who states perceive as threats towards their security. One clear example of this that are prominent in both the 2021 and 2023 edition of Fokus are how Russia perceives the West. NIS explore in both documents how Russia view especially NATO but also Western countries as a threat towards their core national interests. An example of this can be that “Russia considers Western Activity in the High North as a threat to its military bases on the Kola Peninsula and to its national security” (Focus, 2021, p.46). The reason “threat perception” are viewed as neutral in Fokus 2021 are mainly because this its Russia perceiving the West as a threat. Other than intelligence and cyber issues there are no clear views from NIS that perceives Russia as a threat.

In Fokus 2023, the threat perception has changed. Norway and NIS specifically view the Russian invasion of Ukraine as a direct threat towards Norway and the European security landscape. The prologue written by the director of NIS, Vice Admiral Nils Andreas Stensønes, provides a clear description of Russia. “The invasion has clearly shown what kind of threat Russia represents to its neighbours and to NATO. Russia is conventionally weakened, but no less dangerous” (Focus, 2023, p.5). In Fokus 2023, Russia perceives the West as a threat, while NIS and NATO have a united and strong perception of Russia as a threat. This threat perception is present in all parts of the document that have been reviewed, and clearly shows a negative development between Fokus 2021 and 2023.

#### ***4.6.2. West-East rivalry***

The changes related to West-East rivalry and great power competition have seen a negative change. In Fokus 2021, the great power rivalry between the West and East are viewed as being of a neutral nature. NIS explore in great detail several arms agreements, and view them as valuable for increase stability, trust and clarification of intentions (Fokus, 2021, p.42). However, NIS also view that, despite intentions and will to establish more agreements, “...there is less arms control and international cooperation in general due to the superpower rivalry” (Focus, 2021, p.34). There is still a clear perception that Russia is viewing NATO as a threat towards their interests, where their response is “...stronger strategic deterrence and active defence” (Focus, 2021, p.57). NIS consider Russian efforts to facilitate solutions for conflict and create cooperation elsewhere as a combined efforts to reduce its relations with the West, while enhancing their diplomatic, political and military influence in other regions (Focus, 2021, p.55). The lack of a clear threat perception from NIS regarding West-East relations reinforce the view that these developments are depicted as neutral in Fokus 2021.

In Fokus 2023 the clear negative trend between the Russian and Western emerge, sparking a threat perception from NIS regarding great power competition. First, the Russian invasion of Ukraine sparked a response from the West, who are sending military capabilities, conducting training and supporting Ukraine. This fact is seen by NIS as a positive response to Russian aggression. In addition, this response further reinforce the threat perception Russia had of the West in the first place, further dividing perceptions between the two fractions. NIS consider the hope of creating arms agreements being virtually gone. As NIS view “...tensions between the US and Russia after the invasion of Ukraine will make it difficult to reach an agreement” (Focus, 2023, p.54). “The collaborative environment has never been worse than now” (Focus,

2023, p.54), reinforcing the view that there is a permanent rupture between Russia and the West, justifying the view of a negative development between Fokus 2021 and 2023.

#### ***4.6.3. Military development***

Military development also sees a negative change. Fokus 2021 is viewed to be presented in a neutral way. NIS argue that the main reasons for Russian increase in capabilities are because of a strategic deficit “They refer to this as an existential threat” (Focus, 2021, p.57).

Enhancing and developing capabilities are considered to enhance their security to what Russia views as an expansive and aggressive NATO. “Russia regards Western military activity in the High North as a threat to the military bases on the Kola Peninsula and to Russian security” (Focus, 2021, p.46). This is mainly seen in relation from a Russian perception which “seeks to neutralise NATO’s technological superiority” (Focus, 2021, p.65). The military developments are described as one of technological advancements, with the emphasis on lack of adequate arms control and cooperation. The neutral view in Fokus 2021 is based on the NIS description that Russia is vastly inferior in a lot of military areas. In addition, the NIS threat perception of Russia is not an enemy, but rather an actor which are pursuing a military development to compensate for their security deficits in certain areas. NIS describe a lack of cooperation, the need for arms control and strategic vulnerability which need to be addressed from the Russian side.

In Fokus 2023, there are clearly a negative development when it comes to presenting military developments. The basis for this argument, are again based on the threat perception which the NIS possess in this edition. For instance, NIS provide in Fokus 2023 a ten-year perspective concerning Russian military in areas of national interest to Norway (Focus, 2023, p.32). NIS describe the military developments as heavily influenced by the loss of Russian material and ground capabilities in Ukraine. For instance, NIS view that “...Russia has run through three fourths of its modern surface-to-surface missiles in Ukraine” (Focus 2023, p.21). This developments nuclear and strategic deterrence explained in the next chapter. NIS highlight that Russian military power are still powerful and a threat, the events in Ukraine enhances this threat perception. NIS also argue, “Provided that Russia is able to learn from and correct its, mistakes, Russia’s conventional fighting power will improve in the future” (Focus, 2023, p.35). NIS also consider Russian developments in anti-satellite weapons and underwater sabotage, as clear threat towards NATO and Norwegian infrastructure. The negative development that occurs are mainly as a result of the clarification of the Western threat perception towards Russian intentions. The negative change is portrayed by the ten-year



perceptive which NIS consider the Russian military development to have towards Norwegian security and interests.

#### ***4.6.3. Nuclear/strategic deterrence***

The negative change continues with the description of nuclear capabilities and strategic deterrence between Fokus 2021 and 2023. Fokus 2021 and NIS present the nuclear and strategic deterrence between NATO and Russia in a neutral way. NIS mainly describe nuclear weapons as a capability to protection their security and ensure survival. NIS explain that both fractions have possessed nuclear weapons for a long time while opting for increased cooperation. NIS also explain the Russian transformation of its armed forces to transform into a more adaptable force while reducing the dependence of nuclear weapons as solely the strategic deterrence capability (Focus, 2021, p.57). Fokus 2021 provides a thorough description on why cooperation should be preferred regarding such capabilities, and why one should also include new capabilities not included in the existing agreements. However, as the NIS emphasise, their interests are different, and so are their capabilities, creating a challenge for cooperation on these issues. NIS does possess a clear threat perception concerning development on Russian strategic deterrence policies, therefore validating the neutral view Fokus 2021 have on the issue.

There`s a clear observable negative trend in nuclear capabilities and strategic deterrence between Fokus 2021 and 2023. The threat perception NIS possess of Russia are the cause of this. “Tactical nuclear weapons are a particular serious threat in several operational scenarios that could involve NATO countries” (Focus, 2023, p.21). The cooperative view concerning agreements are virtually gone. With NIS explaining that “Either way, a conflict with NATO will always have a nuclear dimension” (Focus, 2023, p.34). This highlights the negative change between the documents, as Russian developments are now seen as a clear threat.

#### ***4.6.4. Domestic issues***

The domestic issues in Russia in both Fokus 2021 and 2023 are portrayed to have a negative view with little to no change. In both editions economic challenges and popular discontent are reinforce authoritarian rule with a tighter political grip to ensure the regimes survival. “...and there are growing distrust in Western initiatives and motives” (Focus, 2021, p.46). Economic challenges, public rhetoric and sanctions help reinforce the domestic perception that Western countries are a threat. NIS consider the 2021 developments in combination with Western sanctions towards Russia as a reinforcing factor for threat perception which affect Norwegian interests in a negative manor.

The view described in Fokus 2023 coincide with the one portrayed in 2021, viewing internal developments in Russia as even more negative. Furthermore, because of the sanctions imposed by Western states, Russia faces even more economic challenges and the regimes stability are even more exposed than in 2021. “All prominent opposition figures have either been jailed or forced to flee, leaving people with no political alternatives to turn to at the moment” (Focus, 2023, p.11). NIS consider that in the future, “Political and economic unrest could challenge Russian control” (Focus, 2023, p.13). In addition to emigration of educated Russians, ensures that the domestic developments “...constitute a strategic vulnerability” (Focus, 2023, p.13). The negative view can be justified as NIS consider “A Russia that is unstable could also mean that Russian decision-making processes concerning Norway and areas close to Norway become less predictable” (Focus, 2023, p.33).

Concerning the other security developments explained earlier. Russia being unpredictable are considered by NIS as a severely negative development as misunderstandings are more likely to happen. Which without proper handling, increased chance of escalation.

#### ***4.6.5. Intelligence/influence activities***

Intelligence and influence activities are considered to be portrayed negatively in both Fokus 2021 and 2023. Furthermore, some key differences need mentioning. In the Fokus 2021, there`s a dedicated chapter that describing these activities. Rather than being a chapter in 2023, these activities are explained in chapters concerning Russia and China. This does not mark a substantial change. Yet important nonetheless as NIS connect hostile intelligence and network operations are directly to Russia and China. Fokus 2021 have a clear negative view concerning these activities, and provides significantly more description regarding these types of threat than Fokus 2023. In the Fokus 2021 prologue, Stensønes view that “The combination of different means – civilian and military, open and cover, in the physical and digital domain – have given rise to a challenging and complex threat environment” (Focus, 2021, p.5). NIS present examples of how Norwegian security and interests are jeopardized and affected by intelligence and influence activities. The clearest example NIS provide are the network operation against the Norwegian Parliament in 2020 (Focus, 2021, p.21). NIS view that, “Particularly the parliament elections in the autumn of 2021 could be subjected to influencing attempts” (Focus, 2021, p.6). NIS view Russian psychological operations, influence operations and intelligence operations as a threat and a source that could “...undermine the population`s trust in central institutions` management and protection of information” (Focus, 2021, p.21).

Fokus 2023 address these issues slightly different. Russia is still perceived as the biggest threat concerning such activities. Despite this, influence activities are harder to accomplish as the War in Ukraine have clarified Western threat perception (Focus, 2023, p.31). NIS perceiving Russia as a threat, ensure that these issues are still presented in a negative view in 2023. With the Russian perception being in a continuous information battle with the West. The divide between East and West creates incentive to develop tactics to polarize and create domestic cleavages. In addition, NIS consider the loss of Russian dependency on Western technology, combined with a loss of capabilities as yet another incentive to conduct network operations towards Norway. Especially, "...manufacturers of maritime technology and sensor technology" (Focus, 2023, p.24).

To sum up, NIS see Russian efforts and operations in intelligence and influence activities towards Norway as a clear threat. NIS consider such activities as likely in both editions of Fokus and consider them to have a negative impact on Norwegian security and interests.

#### ***4.6.6. Concluding remarks***

When comparing Fokus 2021 and 2023, there is a profound change in how NIS see Russia. As this comparative description have found, there is little doubt that the Russian invasion of Ukraine have shaped the threat perception of NIS in Fokus 2023. NIS clarification of Russia in 2023 have an impact on all the security areas in Fokus 2023. After the invasion of Ukraine, Russia is seen as a threat who are willing to project their hard power in the form of military engagement towards their neighbours. Furthermore, NIS have had a consistent negative view in both editions regarding internal developments and intelligence and influence activities. The events in Ukraine have negatively affected all security areas. With Russia seen as increasingly unpredictable having direct consequences for the areas in close proximity to Norway. Intelligence and influence activities have on numerous occasions been projected towards Norway, and will continue to expose and harm Norwegian security and interests. When comparing the two editions, the driver of change is Russia. Providing NIS with a clear threat perception in 2023






**4.7. Fokus from 2013 to 2023, describing change.**

So far, chapter 5 have explored the Fokus 2013, 2015, 2021 and 2023 documents. This chapter is dedicated to a short summary on how the security areas have changed between the documents. Table 7 provides a concise summary of the perceived change and developments between the documents. The security areas are color-coded in association with how the NIS perceive and describe them in the respective editions.

*Table 7. Box 4.7. Developments of security themes in relation with NIS perception of Russia. Fokus 2013, 2015, 2021, 2023*

Norwegian Intelligence Service. Characterizing security areas in relation to Russia				
Russia and important themes:	2013	2015	2021	2023
Overall threat perception of Russia	Not perceived as threat	Concerned, viewed as aggressor	Concerned, but not perceived as a threat	Constitutes a clear threat
Energy cooperation in the Arctic	Positive/coinciding interests	Not prominent/Russia turning East	Emphasis on cooperation with China	No cooperation between Russia and the West
International cooperation in the Arctic	Positive/coinciding interests	Negative development/Bilateral rather than multilateral	Increased potential for misunderstanding	Non-existent, clear threat perception
Shipping routes	Neutral/Russian security concern	Neutral/Russian security concern	Neutral/Russian security concern	Neutral/Russian security concern
Military development	Neutral/peaceful development	Negative/willing to use military power	Neutral/closing the gap on NATO superiority	Clear threat/more dangerous in the future
Cyber security, intelligence and influence activities	Neutral/future concern	Negative/threat	Clear threat	Clear threat
International law	Positive	Negative, disregard for sovereignty	Other than arms control, non-existent	Negative/disregard for sovereignty
Continental shelves	Neutral	Neutral	Non-existent/not perceived	Non-existent/not perceived
Internal developments	Neutral	Negative/more authoritarian	Security concern/potential threat	Security concern/potential threat/unpredictability
West-East Rivalry	Non-existent/not perceived	Neutral/not a clear rivalry	Russian perceived rivalry/NATO expansion	Clear West-East rivalry, permanent rupture
Nuclear/strategic deterrence	Non-existent/not perceived	Northern fleet as defensive, otherwise not perceived	Russian national security/neutral development	Russian tactical nuclear weapons, clear threat to NATO

Colorcodes:

	Clear threat/substantial negative development		Negative development/threat		Neutral development/not perceived as a threat
	Positive development/coinciding interests		Not prominent/little or none document description		

The color-codes are developed using how the NIS depict the security areas. Furthermore, the black and orange category emerge as new, in order to display the developments in relation with each other, intended to portray change. The neutral developments are characterised as not

affecting Norwegian security, being presented in a neutral way by NIS. To provide context, shipping routes are not described as a security threat. However, they are mentioned by NIS as important towards Russian actions and military development, receiving a neutral depiction. Positive development is presented as good for long term development and positive for Norwegian security in general. For instance, NIS describe Arctic energy cooperation in Fokus 2013 as important for development and stability in the region. Orange development is characterized by negative development, which have implications for Norwegian security areas. An example is towards military development in 2015 where Russia is seen as a security threat. Justified by the willingness to use hard power in Crimea and Ukraine in 2014. Issues which NIS describe as a direct threat or a serious negative development towards Norwegian security and interests fall in the red category. For instance, Russian influence and intelligence activities considered a direct threat in both 2021 and 2023. The black category concerns issues that receive, limited or none description in the document. For instance, continental shelves were described towards development and security in the Arctic in the 2013 and 2015. While they receive little to no description in the 2021 and 2023.

As table 7 describe, there has been changes in the NIS description of the security issues between the documents. The most significant change in the documents relates to how the NIS perceive Russia, and this affects most of the security aspects presented in the documents. In both Fokus 2015 and 2023, Russian actions in Ukraine are viewed to be the most contributing factor to NIS perception of Russia. In the table themes like continental shelves disappear, while new themes like West-East rivalry and strategic deterrence emerge as prominent. Cyber security and intelligence have seen a development consistent with the emerging new threats and developments described in the documents. It can be observed that some themes had a more negative view in 2015 than they did in 2021. While Fokus 2023 saw most of the security issues with a threat perception. Furthermore the 2014 events in Ukraine are argued to be the starting point of this negative trend. The differences between 2013 and 2015 are significant, and possibly more profound than between 2021 and 2023.

By comparing the documents, it provides a thorough analysis that describes, portrays and discuss how changes over time are influenced by threat perception in addition to international and domestic developments. It becomes clear that in accordance with a changing Russian perception and foreign policy, NIS subsequently respond to these changes and they affect Norwegian security interests. The changes explained above depicts a more demanding, uncertain and more hostile international system, which the next chapter will explore in detail.

By analysing the findings through the use of IR theory, it will be discussed why these changes are happening, and why cooperation virtually vanished, being replaced by power struggles and security threats in greater context with the international system and foreign policy.

## **5.0. Discussion: Security, threats and foreign policy.**

This chapter analyse and discuss the findings by using IR theory, with the intention of explaining change from a state security perspective. This chapter explore the changes in the documents by looking at the changes in the Russian perception, inevitably leading to the geopolitical disruptions in Ukraine. Theory on structural realism and the security dilemma are used to explore how the changes of Russian perception are related to response to change in the international system. These changes serve as the catalyst for the geopolitical disruptions in 2015 and 2022. The discussion highlights the events and analyse them towards Russian developments being the driver of a changing NIS threat perception. Furthermore, this chapter discuss how foreign policy and subjective security play a role in shaping the perception of NIS, leading to the change witnessed in the documents. Highlighting that subjective security serve as a powerful narrative in which the strategic leadership can evolve and develop responses in line with their perception of how the world works. Exploring how the international system are perceived by Russia, illuminating the tragedy that is anarchy when defensive is considered offensive, while understanding is replaced with uncertainty.

### **5.1. Security dilemma, defensive turn offensive.**

The changing NIS perception of Russia, are what determines the security areas portrayed in table 7. In terms of security, states are the only ones who can threaten a nations survival, where intelligence agencies like NIS are tasked with preventing strategic surprise (Lowenthal, 2009, Chapter One). Norwegian survival is not considered at risk in any of these documents, however NIS are nonetheless tasked with portraying external actors capable of threatening major parts of Norwegian security and interests. Russia is portrayed as that external state capable of negatively affect all the Norwegian security areas as portrayed in table 7. The table also show that when NIS change their perception of Russia, so does their view on its effect on security areas.

The realist Robert Jervis explains the security dilemma that emerge in the anarchy, which determine how states perceive each other and how defensive actions are indistinguishable from offensive measures (Jervis, 1978, p.168). A clear example of this become evident when describing military developments. The development and buildup of Russian military and

capabilities in the Arctic were seen as a natural part in response to changes in the international system, therefore not perceived as a threat in Fokus 2013 and 2021. In both these documents, this development was not perceived nor described as a direct threat towards Norwegian security. Fokus 2013 explained military developments in the context of Russian experiences in Georgia, energy security, quick reaction forces, strategic importance, low tension and cooperation in the Arctic (Fokus, 2013, p.12). In Fokus 2021 the military development is viewed as Russian efforts to limit and catch up to NATO and US technological superiority. NIS view these developments to be rational from a Russian perspective (Focus, 2021, p.65). Therefore, NIS perceive the military developments as mainly defensive in order to increase the overall strength of Russian capabilities.

However, in Fokus 2015 and 2023, NIS view this development completely different. For instance, in 2015 Russian military developments receive a negative depiction. This view is connected to Russian actions in Ukraine where the argument is willingness to use military power as a tool to achieve foreign policy goals. “Russian operations in Ukraine are a new element which demonstrates a clear will to use military power against a neighbouring country if deemed necessary” (Fokus, 2015, p.8). Military development which was perceived in 2013 as defensive, are in 2015 perceived as offensive. In Fokus 2023, this negative description is even more evident. NIS directly perceive the military development as a serious threat towards Norway, even though it was described as a balancing force towards NATO superiority in 2021. Concluding that, “Hence, Russia has not become any less dangerous threat to NATO” (Focus, 2023, p.35).

As a result of the events in Ukraine, NIS change its view concerning Russian military development as a negative change, greatly influencing their perception of threat. The security dilemma persists and precisely describe how capabilities first were viewed as defensive, that turned offensive after the geopolitical incidents in 2014 and 2022. Russia perceives its actions in Ukraine to be of protecting vital interests in its near abroad which coincides with the realist perception of security accumulation. “In order to protect themselves, states seek control, or at least to neutralize, areas around their borders” (Jervis, 1978, p.169). Russia is increasingly worried about NATO expansion, European missile systems and loosing influence over former soviet states. However, as Jervis also emphasise that, “...attempts to establish buffer zones can alarm other who have stakes there, who fear that undesirable precedents will be set, or who believe their own vulnerability will be increased” (Jervis, 1978, p.169). This help explain what Russia view as defensive measures, are actually perceived as offensive and threatening

for NIS. This also relates to the negative development which international law are perceived to experience. As breaches of sovereignty can be considered as the most serious violation of international law and norm, argued to further enhance the security dilemma.

## **5.2. Inevitable spiral leading to conflict?**

We have established that the security dilemma explains how what was once considered defensive are now perceived as aggressive and offensive. Furthermore, this thesis seeks to explore change through a contextual analysis and discussion. How then, does the security dilemma lead to increased conflict and cleavage in threat perception in the international system?

Jervis considers the security dilemma to be at its most serious when the only way to gain security lies in expansion measures. (Jervis, 1978, p.187). For instance, NIS consider Russia to have great power ambitions and seek to limit NATO and US influence to increase its own security interests. From a Russian perspective, NATO expansion is the cause of their perceived security deficit jeopardizing the strategic balance in the system. Russia also considers their technology and capabilities inferior compared to NATO's, further acting as a source of insecurity, enhancing the security dilemma. Furthermore, Russia attempts to limit the impact of their inferior technology by developing capabilities that can directly target and destroy NATO infrastructure in space and underwater. However, satellites and underwater infrastructure are highly vulnerable capabilities which are hard to defend if the attacker have effective measures to destroy them (Jervis, 1978, p.196). This means that the measures employed by Russia to increase their security, does in fact increase NATO and Norwegian insecurity, further spiralling the perception of offensive and aggressive developments.

The Fokus documents also go into detail regarding Western measures like sanctions, intended to deter Russia from using hard power to pursue their foreign policy like in Ukraine, at a later time. These sanctions can be argued to deter actions and intentions towards destabilizing the status quo which are sought to be maintained. In addition, the sanctions are intended to hinder cooperation on issues like energy exploitation which in fact are the most important sector in Russia, accounting for "20 per cent of Russia's GDP and 22 per cent of all Russian exports" in 2014 (Dadwal, 2014, p.815). In what are viewed as necessary sanction from Western countries, Russia only see the sanctions as aggressive measures to limit their security and interests (Focus, 2021, p.46). This negatively affect Russia's energy security in the long term as the loss of investments negatively impact economic policy goals. This also impact



exploitation and infrastructure development in areas that require advanced technology and cooperation with Western partners, negatively impacting their energy security in the physical realm as well. What does this mean in terms of escalation? As NIS describes, the lack of Russian technological capabilities in areas like maritime sector and oil and gas, increase their need for information regarding such areas. Russian intelligence agencies are on the lookout for information regarding "...energy, oil and gas" (Focus, 2021, p.23), which actually mean that the sanction have created another security deficit elsewhere.

The sanctions do indeed create issues for Russian energy security, impacting the Russian economy which inevitable affect other security areas as well. Domestic issues like fall in oil revenues and covid-19 create severe economic challenges for Russia (Focus, 2021, p.49). NIS view these challenges to severely impact the regime`s legitimacy. To limit this, the regime has been increasingly authoritarian since 2013. The regime has employed nationalism rhetoric`s and presenting the West as the main external threat, in particular NATO and the US. From a realist standpoint, Mearsheimer view nationalism to be "...the most powerful political ideology on the planet..." (Mearsheimer, 2019, p.8). Due to the authoritarian rule combined with regime efforts, Russia have successfully created a domestic mentality which perceive the West as a threat. As there are believed to be a linkage between domestic and foreign policy (Jervis, 1978, p.168), NIS consider the domestic developments as a driver towards an unstable Russia, creating uncertainty that influence Norwegian security.

Security dilemmas create seemingly unending negative spirals. This discussion shows that "...one state`s gain in security often inadvertently threatens others" (Jervis, 1978, p.170). Russian breaches of Ukrainian sovereignty, are intended to limit NATO policy while controlling its near abroad (Focus, 2023, p.17). From a Russian standpoint, their actions are entirely defensive, yet they are perceived as aggressive by NATO, NIS and the West. Therefore, the response in the form of sanctions from the West are intended to reinforce and support the status quo against Russian expansive measures. As this discussion shows, the sanctions reinforce the Russian perceptions that the West and NATO are pursuing an aggressive policy attempting to limit Russian influence and interests. From a security dilemma perspective, these developments increase the escalation between the West and Russia. The question is, when does the escalation stop? The next chapter explore how the escalation have shifted something that was once the liberal world order, to something else. Something slowly resembling a multipolar international system.

### **5.3. Balance of power and a multipolar world.**

Within the realist tradition, balance of power refers to the structure of the international system. Balance of power emerge as either unipolar, bipolar and multipolar systems, each with their own characteristics shaping the nature of relationships and events in the system. Power can be defined as “...the ability to affect others to get the outcomes you want regardless of whether its sources are tangible or not” (Nye & Welch, 2017, p.48). Hard power can be explained in the context of military capabilities, for instance the Russian annexation of Crimea and the invasion of Ukraine. Soft power on the other hand produces different results where the measures are intended to change ideas or perceptions. For instance, Western sanctions towards Russia or Russian psychological operation towards the West, with the intention to attempt to undermine democratic systems and polarize societies (Focus, 2021, p.24).

After the bipolar world order fell with the Soviet Union, a unipolar world order rose from the ashes with the US as its hegemon, capable of wielding and projecting power towards any entity in the system (Mearsheimer, 2019, p.8). Balance of power and the Russian intentions to drive the world towards a multipolar system became evident in Fokus 2015 and onwards. “The aim is to challenge what Russia refers to as an American hegemony and build a multipolar world order which, to a greater extent, safeguards Russian interests” (Focus, 2023, p.15). Multipolar systems are characterized by three or more states emerging as “great powers” with significantly more power than the rest of the states in the system (Nye & Welch, 2017, p.50). The Russian goal of creating a multipolar world is in direct correlation with the security dilemma explained above. When a powerful state considers its security at risk. Combined with the significant increase in escalation and between Russian and the West, changing the power structure are perceived work in Russia`s advantage. This development becomes evident in the Fokus documents, and provide valuable description of Russian perception, intentions and actions.

NIS explore great power rivalry in detail in both Fokus 2021 and 2023 in relation with the concept of threat perception. Threat perception is a part of a state`s subjective security. According to Jervis, subjective security is reinforced by whether or not two entities perceive the world similarly. As the analysis show, Fokus 2015, 2021 and 2023 describe how the West and Russia have increasingly different view on how the world works, especially on how they

should pursue their security (Focus, 2023, p.33). NIS also explain the change in the Russian world view, coinciding with Jervis's view that states act in fear, as they will inadvertently loose if they act to slow (Jervis, 1978, p.174). The developments in Ukraine and Russian pursuit of a multipolar order can therefore be viewed as an attempt to shift the balance of power from the US and Europe, towards Asia and China.

The Russian shift towards Asia is also largely due to the loss of investments towards their energy exploration in the Arctic. For instance, the sanctions against Russia are directly influencing Russian capability to develop energy resources, therefore the need for Chinese investments are highly regarded. The analysis in chapter 5 also explored how Russia are strengthening its relations in other parts of the world like the Middle East and Africa to create new alliances (Focus, 2023, p.17). "An alliance (or alignment) is a formal (or informal) commitment for security cooperation between two or more states, intended to augment each member's power, security, and/or influence" (Walt, 2009, p.86). NATO are for instance a collective defence alliance consisting of 32 member states that were established in 1949. Alliances are therefore measures in which states can pursue to balance and match an external threat (Waltz, 2000, p.25). This aligns with the view presented in Fokus 2015 where Russia needs to respond quickly in order to mitigate the effects and actions the West are imposing on them (Fokus, 2015, p.23).

Geopolitical rivalry does not only include shift in alliances. Nuclear power and strategic deterrence are two of the most important themes and capabilities the state can have at its disposal. Central in the great power rivalry theory, nuclear weapons are heavily emphasised as a key capability towards a country's strategic deterrence. Waltz view deterrence and defence as "...strategies that a status quo country may follow, hoping to dissuade a state from attacking" (Waltz, 1990, p.732). This is central in what NIS describe as Russia's strategic deterrence policy, where they integrate nuclear and non-nuclear weapons to ensure a mutual retaliation capability. In addition, NIS view the Russian strategic deterrence as their key strategy of warfare against NATO (Focus, 2023, p.33). Russian perception considers the "strategic balance" to be at risk and the capabilities are becoming unsymmetrical in the system. Structural realism would therefore argue that Russian actions and military developments are considered to be reinforcing their security against the perceived unbalance in the international system.

From a realist standpoint, concepts like security dilemmas, great power rivalry and balance of power are key concepts that emerge in the international system, which can be analysed in order to explore a state's changing security perception. Russia may consider their actions defensive, yet the NIS and the West experience them as offensive (Focus, 2023, p.35). The negative spiral continues as the subjective security between Russia and the West continue to deviate from each other. In particular, the Russian view that they are technologically and strategically inferior in the current security climate, creating a need "to close the gap" mentality. As Jervis explain, "The side with the "superiority" will be more likely to stand firm in a confrontation if it thinks its "stronger" military position helps it, or if it thinks that the other thinks its own "weaker" military position is a handicap" (Jervis, 1978, p.208). It became clear that the West consider their position against Russia stronger, based on sanctions intended to directly hit the Russian economy. Subsequently, Russia view NATO as a threat. Reinforced by the view of their technological advantage, but also own its own inferiority in technology and security. In this sense, multipolarity are attractive for Russia, as this means there are more states in the system that could challenge the hegemon, shifting and absorbing the relational power in the system.

So far, the discussion shows that the quest for multipolarity is indeed shaping and affecting the external security climate. The West received its clarification of Russian intentions after the invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Furthermore, this discussion has explained the development of security issues presented in the Fokus documents. One thing remains unanswered, namely how these incidents have changed the threat perception, foreign policy and the subjective security of the NIS.

#### **5.4. A foreign policy change from a Norwegian perspective.**

Foreign policy change is a rather elusive subject. How should change be determined, and does this change happen instantaneous, as a result of crisis and severe events in the security periphery? Or does foreign and security policy slowly change over time in a leisurely pace. The changing NIS perception of Russia was slow until it served as a catalyst for rapid change. As showed in table 7, NIS perceived Russia in 2023 as a clear threat towards major areas of Norwegian security policy. How come that NIS didn't change its threat perception until 2023, despite the negative developments which have become clear since 2013? From a realist point of view, NIS should perceive Russia as a clear threat. Even in 2021 when describing military development that were fundamentally characterized by great power rivalry and the change of

status quo, but the clear threat isn't there. Instead, the security issues receive a neutral description in this edition, why? Intelligence agencies like NIS exist according to Lowenthal to provide Norwegian decision makers advise and actionable intelligence (Lowenthal, 2009, Chapter One). Furthermore, in the case of Fokus, they present an overview of security developments that impacts Norwegian interests. It therefore makes sense that NIS should have a more critical and concerning view of Russian developments and intentions, especially when it comes to military development. Yet it seems like Russia are only perceived as a threat when only when the aspects of intelligence and cyber activities are concerned. In which they have been directly connected in conducting network operations towards Norway (Focus, 2021, p.21).

One answer might be due to the traditional dual foreign policy Norway has pursued towards Russia since the start of the Cold War. Norwegian foreign policy has traditionally viewed Russia as a neighbour and cooperative partner with mutual interests for a long time, especially in the Arctic. "Norway and Russia share an interest in maintaining stability and predictability in the Arctic. Ensuring respect for Law of the Sea is in the interests of both countries" (Meld. ST 36 (2016-2017) p.14). The view of ensuring stability and predictability is most prominent in Fokus 2013, Fokus 2015 and 2021. Furthermore, even though NIS consider Russia to be a threat towards Norwegian interest in Fokus 2023, there are still emphasis on mutual interests in keeping the Arctic stable. According to Wilhelmsen & Gjerde (2018, p.384) "Norway is a small state with a foreign policy identity that often makes it inclined to support international legal regimes, multilateral institutionalism, cooperation, and compromise". This coincides with the general view that small states always have to be cautious in close proximity to more powerful states if there is a case of conflicting interests. Whether it's Russia or the US, small states are always at a disadvantage and are inclined to pursue frameworks and policies in which they receive a relative security gain. This view then, describe part of the equation on why NIS does not consider Russia a clear threat until 2023. Another reason is the history between Norway and Russia.

### **5.5. The Norwegian security narrative of Russia**

According to Fermann, states construct their identity over time, and these narratives are challenged in crisis (Fermann, 2013, p.14). Throughout the Cold War, Norway created the narrative of being opposed to Russia. However rather than perceiving Russia as an enemy, the view was that of a neighbour with coinciding interests on certain areas that required cooperation as well. Jelena Subotić determine that "State narratives are constructed through

an active and elaborate process that involves multiple political and cultural agents” (Subotić, 2016, p.615). I would argue that it’s the traditional state narrative Norway have of Russia and the cultural and interconnected relationship over the years, caused NIS to view Russia as less of a threat in 2021, than in 2015. The general Norwegian view is that international law and especially sovereignty are absolute values which should be respected (Office of the Prime Minister, 24.02.2022). This was seen in 2015 as a substantial negative trend where military power was willingly used in Ukraine to achieve foreign policy goals. In 2021 on the other hand, rather than viewing Russian developments as a clear threat towards Norway. It was rather viewed as Russian efforts to maintain its influence in the international system, while pursuing a more active policy towards the East (Focus, 2021, p.11).

Fermann explain that crises can negatively influence aspects of security, but it can also have benefits if played correctly. For instance, the Elektron case, which Fermann argue could lead to confrontation between Norway and Russia, but could prove valuable for future cooperation if the issue was handled correctly (Fermann, 2013, p.13). I would also argue that this particular view is emerging in the Fokus documents through the aspect of subjective security which look at Russia from a different angle. This view mainly concern’s itself with how cooperative Russia are perceived to be, where one has coinciding interests (Jervis, 1978, p.175). In Fokus 2013, Russia was seen as largely cooperative, and valued stability and international law, especially in the Arctic (Fokus, 2013, p.9). In Fokus 2023 there were virtually no emphasis on cooperation in the Arctic anymore. Despite this, Russia still viewed the Law of The Sea as the preferred way of governing the Arctic in order to ensure low tension and stability (Focus, 2023, p.19). I would argue that this is part of the reason why NIS does not perceive Russia as a clear threat towards major parts of Norwegian security in Fokus 2013, 2015 and 2021. The Arctic is potentially Norway’s most important region in terms of military strategic planning, economic security, sovereignty control and environmental protection (Regjeringen.no, Arctic Policy, 2021). Subsequently despite negative developments and breaches of international law elsewhere, the everlasting interest is a stable Arctic emphasised by all Arctic states.

Fermann argue that strategic leaderships like the NIS have to respond to certain events and crisis’s, how they handle them matters greatly. How should one move forward, what sort of policies are most appropriate without being excessive, what are the risk of these policies are all questions which the strategic leadership are required to evaluate (Fermann, 2013, p.55). I would argue this is the other reason why NIS does not perceive certain developments as

threats towards Norwegian security. The quest for stability and low tension was pursued in the early days of the Cold War. Highlighting that Norway imposed restrictions on NATO deployment in the North to pursue a reassurance policy towards the Soviet Union (Fermann, 2013, p.37). The reassurance policy was still evident after the Cold War, with Norway being reluctant and evasive regarding discussion of a European missile defence and the inclusion of Georgia or Ukraine into NATO (Fermann, 2013, p.37). For Norway, the relationship with Russia is one of both cooperation and conflict, which Elana Wilson Rowe describe as “frenemies”. “The state of being simultaneously both “friends” and “enemies” is not uncommon in global politics” (Rowe, 2020, p.1). This interactive and persistent foreign policy are what determine reactions, perceptions and intentions of the NIS. Despite the need for stability and low tension as the ultimate goal in the Arctic. The events in Ukraine in 2014 served as the catalyst towards what inevitable changed NIS perception of Russia in 2023.

Even though both Russia and Norway have the intention of keeping the Arctic stable, NIS concede, that “Russia could abandon its low-tension policy. In the areas close to Norway, the potential for conflict is persistent” (Focus, 2023, p.32). Therefore, NIS view that cooperation with Russia has slowly faded away over the years, allowing for the change in threat perception which are described in table 7. This development coincides with the concept of subjective security, refereeing to whether or not a state will cooperate with you. If two states have coinciding interests with one another, then an increase in power are likely to be welcomed by the other (Jervis, 1978, p.175). The disappearance of cooperation on important areas like energy cooperation, combined with the geopolitical events in Ukraine in 2014 and 2022. Ensured that the increase in Russian capabilities was portrayed as concerning in 2015, and subsequently a threat in 2023, reinforcing the view that cooperation was not present.

Even though there was positive development in certain security areas from Fokus 2015 to 2021, the changes had gone from describing cooperation, to describing great power rivalry. “...policymakers construct security narratives to make sense of the strategic environment... (Subotić, 2020, p.613). With the events in 2014 and Russian expansion policies in the 2010s, former foreign minister Ine Eriksen Søreide explained that these developments confirmed the invaluable transatlantic cooperation with NATO policy in the heart of Norwegian security (Grindheim et al, 2017, p.351). NATO have been the cornerstone of the Norwegian security narrative since the Cold War started, serving as the main deterrence towards Russia. It’s viewed that “Our NATO membership is crucial to balancing Norway’s asymmetric

relationship with Russia – it contributes to predictability and underpins neighbourly relations that are also characterized by dialogue and cooperation” (Meld. St 27 (2018-2019), p.6). The decision regarding appropriate action and response towards the events in Ukraine have been clear. In both instances, a stable Arctic was the most important aspect about Norwegian security and relations towards Russia. After the annexation of Crimea, the security guarantee was, and would continue to be NATO.

## **6.0. Conclusion: is change constant?**

This thesis set out to illuminate how the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the Russian invasion of Ukraine have caused changes towards major Norwegian security areas. By analysing central parts of the Norwegian Intelligence Service’s contribution to the Fokus threat assessments in 2013, 2014, 2021 and 2023. This thesis has strived to enhance our understanding of the complex relationship between responses to crisis’s in the security periphery, foreign policy and threat perception in the international system. The disruptions in the international system have in this thesis been portrayed to be influential towards foreign policy and a state’s threat perceptions towards external threats. By utilizing IR concepts like structural realism, security dilemma and subjective security in foreign policy theory, the findings have become clear in the context of the current security environment. the Fokus documents are examined through a comparative document analysis while employing a thematic approach. The thesis has been able to present the dominant security areas that emerge in the documents, which after being categorized by their importance, are presented to the reader in the tables. The purpose of the tables and the analysis is to provide a clear view how the themes are portrayed in the documents, after applying IR theory, the findings can be explained in their respective context.

As one of the assumptions this thesis set out with, was that everything that happens in the international system, was because of balance of power and the nature of the anarchic system. Theories of realism was therefore employed to explore the changes in Russian security perceptions and foreign policy by utilizing concepts like uncertainty and security deficit to comprehend how the events in Ukraine become a reality. The security dilemma shows how what was once perceived as defensive and non-threatening developments. Are now perceived and labelled as offensive measures to pursue an aggressive foreign policy. Countermeasures to deter such actions from Western powers was deployed, only to further divide the two entities in the system. As this thesis argue, understanding the international system and the events that



unfold there are only half of the equation in understanding foreign policy change. The national security tradition in Norway is equally important in understanding how subjective security affects decision making and the strategic leadership's perception in handling major security implications. By analysing the Norwegian reassurance policy towards Russia, the interconnected relationship conceptualize how change emerge in the Fokus documents.

When applying the methodological framework and conceptual theory, this thesis describes the impact of a changing Russian world view. The discussion shows a clear Russian perception of a strategic deficit. The changes from Fokus 2013 to 2023 are profound. What was initially characterised as a fruitful and close cooperation between Norway and Russia, was abruptly gone after the annexation of Crimea, and it did not return. The thesis describes a challenging security environment, Western perceptions was time and time again influenced by Russian actions. Whether or not it was to influence public opinions through psychological operations, or by pursuing a restructure policy of the balance of power, the cleavages between Russia and the West continued to spiral in the documents. Western sanctions, Russian breaches of sovereignty and network operations continue this spiral. The capabilities the states utilized towards each other only increased their threat perception of each other. NIS did not consider Russia as a clear threat in 2021, which this thesis argue are because of to the Norwegian objective of a stable Arctic and a reassurance policy towards Russia. After the invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Norwegian policy makers saw the alarms flashing red, ensuring that Fokus 2023 had a clear view of Russia as the most severe external threat in the near abroad.

This thesis has discussed and enhanced our understanding of how security deficits promote Russian efforts in establishing a multipolar world order. The battle of dividing world views ensure that actions once viewed as defensive are now perceived offensive in the face of an increasingly capable adversary showing willingness to use hard power to address its security concerns. While hard power was the catalyst of the geopolitical disruptions that changed the European security landscape, soft power and sanctions was the driver of change targeting the core of Russian energy security. As the discussion show, the cleavages between Russia and the West have only increased, and if the current changes that's been described in this thesis continue, the reassurance policy might be a thing of the past.

Why does this matter? Why not change the Norwegian foreign policy tradition towards Russia to address the changes and security discrepancies that's happening in the near abroad? I would

argue that if one were to discard the reassurance policy towards Russia in the Arctic, the uncertainty between NATO and Russia would reach unprecedented levels. The Arctic being of such great importance to both Norway and Russia, it is only in their best interest to keep this region as low tension and stable as possible. While the reassurance policy is being stretched to its limits, it still persists in 2024. I would concur with Knutsen and Pettersen who view that, “Norway should strive to seek High north stability instead” (Knutsen & Pettersen, 2023, p.44). They view that if the goal is stability, then Norway should strive to avoid a militarization of the Arctic. I would also argue that due to the Arctic’s strategic importance on issues like deterrence, nuclear capabilities and national security, intentions portrayed in the open, will ultimately reduce conflict levels, creating stability. If the main goal of Norwegian policy makers is stability, the openness and a continuation of a reassurance strategy while maintaining the last remaining bilateral relationship with Russia are by far the best approach.

Ultimately, portraying intentions are one of the reasons why the Fokus documents exists in the first place. Intelligence agencies like the NIS serve the policy makers. Fokus serves as a way to disseminate the official Norwegian policy view on the security and threat environment, towards a target audience. This audience can be the ordinary person in the street, or it can be a policy maker somewhere else. What matters is that it become clear to external actors what the core of Norwegian interests are. External actors just have to live with the fact that NATO are a core part of Norwegian security, and will continue to be so for the foreseeable future. Therefore, considering breaking of relations and cancelling bilateral agreements with Russia will inevitably enhance the security dilemma discussed in this thesis.

NIS consider in all editions of Fokus analysed, that stability is in all the Arctic states interests, if this view would cease to exist from foreign policy, it would inevitably ensure further escalation between the West and Russia. Cleavages between states are reinforced by attempting to perceive the adversary as “the other”. If one does not recognize the spiral in the security dilemma, or the lack of will in controlling it, it will escalate further, however in a covert manner. If this is the case, then the system will appear to be stable, until someone realizes that they are unable to understand and interpret the action performed by “the other”. In the end, only by removing the notion of “the other”, the security dilemma ceases to exist.

To portray this thesis’s final argument. The Fokus documents are not simply a threat assessment, or a description of Norwegian intentions and interests. The single most important thing about Fokus is that the NIS attempt to understand why others, like Russia are perceiving the world like they do. It serves as a way to create understanding, not just of own intentions,

but by portraying towards Russia, what others think their intentions are. Being aware of how you are perceived by others creates understanding, that in turn create informed choices based on rationality and the thought that excessive political action might create consequences that no one wants. Informed choices decrease uncertainty, enhancing stability between states.

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