

Norway Drops US-NATO Missile Defense Program. Normalization of Relations with Russia?

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Just weeks before meeting Russian officials in the northern city of Kirkenes, to celebrate how the former Soviet Union liberated Finnmark from Nazi German occupation in 1944, Norwegian government officials have made a concession to their neighbours. They won't be going along with the US- and NATO-backed missile defense program after all.

Norway was under pressure by its US and NATO allies to evaluate and accept sensors that would identify any incoming missiles and fire back if necessary. Russia views the US' missile defense program as a provocation.

After what it called a "broader security policy evaluation," the Norwegian government announced that even though it's [significantly boosting its defense budget for 2020](#) because of Russia's own military activity in the Arctic, it won't include acquisition of the sensors or anti-ballistic missiles. As newspaper *Klassekampen* reported this week, the evaluation clearly presented a dilemma for Norway, putting it in a squeeze between its biggest ally (the US) and its mighty neighbour in the north, Russia, which also has complained bitterly about installation of the missile defense system in both Romania and Poland.

Russia's foreign minister will visit Norway later this month to mark the 75th anniversary of the liberation of Finnmark, when Soviet soldiers crossed occupied Norway's northern border and forced Nazi German forces into retreat. Finnmark residents remain grateful and want to stay on good terms with their Russian neighbours. Liberation ceremonies will be attended by King Harald V, Prime Minister Erna Solberg and Norwegian Foreign Minister Ine Eriksen Søreide.

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