his Scandinavia, modernity and the present do not reign supreme: history is always there. The same applies to the Austrian writer Walther Eidlitz, who also visited Scandinavia in 1935. His travelogue, *Reise nach den vier Winden*, was translated to Swedish as *Vindrosen runt* (“Around the wind rose”). Eidlitz was preoccupied with the struggle between cultural spheres and he spent a great deal of time on the Vikings, the ancient Goths, and especially Charles XII of Sweden, in favor of describing modern Nordic society. He talks about the days of Peter the Great. Because the Scandinavians had once been a master in history, they would, according to Eidlitz, once again liberate the peoples in the east and carry out the grandiose plans of Charles XII.

**The geography of fear and hope**

There was an obvious need to draw boundaries in Europe in the 1930s. For some, it was a matter of cultural, linguistic, and ethnic dividing lines, but for others, this was an attempt to find positive alternatives to development towards increasing numbers of totalitarian states on the Continent. For the latter group, in which we can include Karel Čapek, Josep Pla, Serge de Chessin, and Émile Schreiber, it was important to emphasize the pure and unadulterated democracy in Scandinavia. This was done at the expense of a more balanced picture of reality. Their descriptions were, of course, grounded on actual developments in the Nordic countries, but the reality might not have been as rosy as they led people to believe. There were labor conflicts in Norway and Sweden which in the latter case led to lethal violence. Unemployment was 15–20 percent in the Nordic countries during these years. The class society was far from eradicated. The Swedish Eugenics Institute, founded in 1923, and the documented anti-Semitism within the workers’ movement in the 1920s do not fit the picture – and so they are omitted.

**This was perceived** as insignificant by comparison in 1930s Europe. As the situation in Europe became increasingly ominous, Scandinavia still seemed like a paradise. There was hope here, hope for a better society and a better life for people. To Čapek, the geography of fear and hope was a concrete reality. When the Germans invaded Czechoslovakia, his name was among the first on the Gestapo’s list of public enemies to be liquidated. Čapek died in 1938 from complications of an illness, a few months after Sudetenland had become German. His brother, the artist and writer Josef Čapek, died in Bergen-Belsen during the final stages of the war. Serge de Chessin had fled the Russian Revolution and devoted most of his life to demonizing Bolshevik Russia. A civilized and peaceful Scandinavia was an effective contrast in that endeavor. In an anti-German spirit, Chessin was careful to hold up the Scandinavians as the true Aryans because they had created an authentically equal society. Scandinavia and Nordic social democracy became a model for Émile Schreiber, who attached the more French-sounding Servan to his surname during the war. The Servan-Schreiber family became significant actors in media and politics in postwar France. One of his sons, Jean-Jacques Servan-Schreiber, enjoyed an outstanding political career; a center-left liberal, his positions on many issues were very closely aligned with the social democracy of Olof Palme.

For the social actors of the time, 1930s Europe was a political powder keg, a place where people were engaged in a life-and-death struggle. The histories are full of narratives that sketch the outlines of this geography of fear. History is also acquainted with a great deal of testimony about visits to Scandinavia in which the region is put forth as the domicile of hope. For many, Scandinavia was the place where fascism never took hold.  

Note: This is an abridged version of an article published in *Ny Tid*.
gested that the Arctic may emerge as a future power hub – a “Northern Rim” made up of the eight states that constitute the present Arctic Council – perhaps even outpacing the development of the Pacific Rim by 2050. Some Arctic Council members have projected ambitious visions, although usually not quite as grand, onto the Arctic. Canada expects continuous population growth in the coming decades and sees its future in “our North.” Russia has begun developing the Arctic as its next “resource base.” Both Denmark and Norway have adopted more active national strategies for the Arctic. Sweden and the US mainly channel their Arctic interests through the Arctic Council itself, where Sweden holds the chairmanship until May 2013, when Canada takes over.

Some interest in the Arctic has led observers to consider the consequences for the regions bordering on the Arctic. How are the three distinct Nordic, Baltic, and Arctic – coming together in the “New North”? These regions all have their own security concerns, which may or may not benefit from being intentionally connected with the scramble for the Arctic.

The Baltic Sea, for example, has a strategic value in its own right, serving as a transport corridor for 15 percent of global trade, including oil exports from Primorsk. While the Nord Stream gas pipeline that runs along the bottom of the Baltic Sea will improve the Russian gas industry’s ability to supply its EU customers, it may also make Poland and Germany more vulnerable to Russian political pressure.

It is crucial to note that the high North as well as the Baltic Sea – where Russia has limited legal or military capability of exercising effective territorial control – are growing in importance to Russia’s overall economic development and hence to Vladimir Putin’s political plan. At the moment, Russia’s neighboring Nordic countries, with the exception of Finland, appear less capable of guaranteeing the security of their own territories or fully controlling the Baltic Sea, which is a concern not only to the Nordic security community, but to Russian observers as well.

In response, the Nordic countries have stepped up intra-Nordic and Baltic-Nordic defense cooperation. There are already proposals to pool military resources under the auspices of NORDFORCO in order to cut costs. But more than simply economic considerations lie behind these moves. In January 2010, for example, Sweden adopted a “solidarity declaration” addressing both the Baltic and the Nordic countries.

The Baltics for their part are concerned about their own as well as the EU’s dependence upon Russian fossil fuel, a growing share of which is, incidentally, produced above the Arctic Circle, further increasing the importance of the North. Another issue is the overextension of US global policy commitments. Some Nordics also worry about being marginalized as US interest shifts to the Pacific.

In a longer perspective, policy analysts have predicted the emergence of a global energy-security axis, which would run from North to South, eventually connecting the new gas fields of the Arctic with the oil fields of the Caspian Sea and the Persian Gulf. Such a link could conceivably guarantee continued American security commitments in the Baltic Sea region, a perspective welcomed by Poland for example, by linking the Baltic to US strategic interests in the Middle East and in the Arctic.

Yet most Nordic commentators note with some relief that both Russian and US security planning documents tend to regard the Baltic and Nordic regions as “stable” areas, which do not require much attention, in contrast to the Middle East, North Africa, the Far East, and the Arctic.

To some, then, decoupling the Arctic, Baltic, and Nordic security agendas is a way of ensuring continuous stability. To others, connecting them is a means of guaranteeing security.

Noting that the interests of great powers have prevented earlier attempts at closer Nordic cooperation, the Swedish historian and debater Gunnar Wetterberg has argued that the current absence of great power interest in the region would permit the existence of a “Nordic Federation”. While small on a global scale, the five Nordic countries do represent significant economic and demographic power, with 25 million inhabitants and an aggregate GDP of $1.5 trillion.

While Wetterberg’s proposal may appear utopian to some, it also expresses a new sense of reassurance in the “soft power” of the Nordic realm as the “new supermodel” to combine economic stability and competitiveness with social security and sustainability, recently noted by The Economist.

The Swedish historian Jonas Harvard has suggested that Norden can be viewed as either “hard” or “soft.” Traditional Nordic cooperation has indeed been soft. “Thinking big” in the sense of Wetterberg’s proposal may be a way of aligning the hard and soft aspects. But a new and more far-ranging kind of Nordic cooperation would also have consequences for the traditional role of the Nordic countries in solidifying and stabilizing the region, precisely because of the countries’ small size. A more firm Nordic cooperation would also have to consider the geopolitical consequences of its own weight on the surrounding Baltic and Arctic regions. The recent return of geopolitics in the region puts this perspective in a new, perhaps harsher, light.

It may be paradoxical that geopolitics – whether positive or negative, reactive or proactive – is making a comeback at a time when traditional geopolitics is widely seen as superseded by soft power. At the same time, more and more “soft” issues such as democracy, regional cooperation, and environmental sustainability are becoming just as important as the “hard” issues of old. As the ice is melting and new forms of international cooperation and conflict take shape in the New North, the Cold War logic of securitization and desecuritization will likely be transformed as well. But small and soft may continue to be smart even in the future.

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references
1. The central arguments of this comment were originally presented in a talk titled “Ett stort Norden eller många små nordiska länder i Europa?” (“A great North or several small Nordic countries in Europe?”), given at the meeting of the Nordic Association in Helsinki, August 26, 2011.

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