

## Northern Flank by Göran Haglund

### Budget cuts weaken northern defense

*Will NATO emergency reinforcements for northern Europe fall under the budget axe in Britain and Canada?*

For "budgetary reasons," the British and Canadian governments have announced proposals to eliminate NATO reinforcement troops deployable in defense of NATO member countries Denmark and Norway in times of war or crisis. If the proposed troop cuts go into effect, the wrong signals will be sent not only to Scandinavia, but to Moscow, about NATO's willingness and ability to defend Europe's northern flank.

The British government is proposing to eliminate the so-called U.K. Mobile Force, a 13,000-troop contingent stationed in Tidworth, England. In an emergency, the U.K. Mobile Force would be placed at the disposal of the NATO Baltic Command in Jutland, Denmark, which commands the defense of southern Norway, Denmark, and Schleswig-Holstein, West Germany. Canada has proposed to cut its so-called CAST brigade of 6,500 men, destined for Norway in case of an emergency. A final decision is expected by the Canadian government after the March 1987 publication of a new White Book in Ottawa.

While Denmark and Norway are indefensible without the commitment of other NATO members to rapidly move in crack combat troops before fighting breaks out, Social Democrats of both countries are debating how to worsen their own defense posture by military spending cuts. Should Britain and other NATO countries revoke their crisis commitments to northern Europe, the temptation for Moscow to pull a surgical surprise strike against

Norway, Denmark, or Schleswig-Holstein would arise.

According to a military correspondent in London, the British troop reduction plan, while chiefly caused by the budget squeeze imposed by the Thatcher government, does reflect a sentiment among British military planners to bash Denmark for its weakening defense commitments.

While the British Ministry of Defense spends more money per capita than anybody else among the European NATO members, the Danish parliament is now debating whether to adopt a version of the opposition Social Democracy's "defensive defense" doctrine, which would dangerously undermine the nation's already woefully inadequate state of defense. It was in the context of this ongoing debate that the Danish government made the British troop reduction plan known to the public.

Denmark's commander-in-chief, Admiral Thiede, stated that the elimination of the U.K. Mobile Force would mean a "serious weakening of Denmark's defense," and that it is not clear how Denmark could replace the British troops. On the contrary, the NATO spokesman of Denmark's anti-NATO Social-Democratic party, Lasse Budtz, gloated that the British proposal puts into question Denmark's membership in NATO, a statement attacked by Danish Foreign Minister Uffe Elleman-Jensen as irresponsible.

Public debate of the troop reduction plans erupted simultaneous to mid-

January visits to Moscow by Norwegian Social Democratic Defense Minister Johan Jørgen Holst and British Foreign Office State Secretary Timothy Renton. The latter visited the Russian capital Jan. 14-18 to prepare Thatcher's spring visit to Moscow, while Holst met with his Soviet counterpart, Defense Minister Sergei Sokolov, on Jan. 16. The stated reason for Holst's Moscow visit had to do with his secretaryship of an environmental commission named after the Norwegian Social-Democratic Premier Gro Harlem Brundtland, but Holst's meeting with Sokolov rather brings to mind his membership in the Trilateral Commission, an institution working for the dismemberment of NATO.

During the days before Holst left for Moscow, the threatened elimination of the U.K. Mobile Force had received much attention in Norway, whose defense is closely linked to that of Denmark. To soothe worries among Norwegian military circles over the British troop reduction plan's effect on the defense of the northern flank, Holst asserted on Jan. 12 that the British and Dutch marine infantry elite troops, which began winter exercises in Norway on Jan. 13, would still be available for the defense of Norway.

The commander of the British elite troops exercising in Norway, Brigadier Robin Ross, denied that his forces have Norway as their prime wartime area of operations. Rather than being earmarked for Norway as such, the British/Dutch amphibious reinforcement troops mentioned by Holst are assigned several tasks on the northern flank.

A weakening of Denmark's defenses, e.g., by the elimination of the U.K. Mobile Force, implies a greater demand for deploying the British/Dutch reinforcements there.