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Rupturing the illusion of Nordic peace – and where to go from here

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ABSTRACT

The relationship between Nordic peace and levels of militarisation needs interrogation, including how peace has relied upon previous levels of militarisation, and what role militarisation plays today. This is particularly important as civilian involvement in conflict escalation complicates easy (an increasingly blurry) divides between civilian and military, peace and war.

KEYWORDS

Militarism; militarisation; preparedness; civilian domain; peace; democratic values

Conversations about militarisation often reflect a black-and-white understanding of war and peace, with a relatively neat divide between the two. This perceived clear division between peace and war is reflected in the idea of Nordic peace, where overt military activity has had little role in the region (although militaries have never been far away) and is therefore ‘peaceful’. However, conversations like these need to include analyses of the use of non-military tools to exacerbate fear, hate, distrust, division, and polarisation in societies long before a classical military confrontation takes place. What role does civilian preparedness, frequently lauded as imperative to the security of the Nordic countries, have in conversations about militarism and militarisation? How is the civilian domain employed, manipulated, in the attempt to weaken societies, exacerbating existing political cleavages and vulnerabilities? Discomfort, distrust, fear and hate around issues from migration, LGBTQI2S+ discrimination and exclusion, reproductive rights, civil rights and racism, to vaccine and climate change denials, are combined and recombined, informing disinformation and influencing operation campaigns in attempts to increase polarisation in society.

If it does not involve militaries and their machinery – is it peace? Where does targeting the civilian domain, through civilian means (communication, social media, influencers, etc.) fit in perceptions of militarisation? Feminist insights are now more crucial than ever for highlighting and reminding the public what democratic values are, and what they mean. Equality, respect, open debate, inclusion – indeed, values our democratic societies have often been less-than-stellar at representing – need to be strengthened as the cornerstones of a robust society. Reducing threat perceptions means reducing polarisation, reducing fears about ‘the other’, increasing capacities for debate and disagreement, without excluding those who are fearful (even of the things feminists stand for). Civil preparedness and the reduction of the threat of war depends on what we, the everyday people, do with our commonplace security perceptions, to not exclude and shut down each other’s efforts.

Notes on contributor

Gunhild Hoogensen Gjørsv is professor in security and geopolitics at UiT The Arctic University of Norway, focusing on security broadly understood, and the role of civilians in the escalation and/or mitigation of conflict.

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