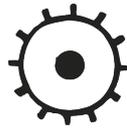


Cooperation Between the Nordic States, The Faroe Islands, Greenland and Åland as an Example of Sustainable Democracy

CONFERENCE REPORT
Copenhagen 8 December 2021

Hasan Akintug





Ålands fredsinstitut
THE ÅLAND ISLANDS PEACE INSTITUTE

FIIA

FINNISH INSTITUTE
OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

CONFERENCE REPORT

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Greenland and Åland as an Example of Sustainable Democracy**

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Arbetspapper från Ålands fredsinstitut
Working Paper from the Åland Islands Peace Institute
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Working Papers from the Åland Islands Peace Institute

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About

This conference report has been written by Hasan Akintug. Akintug is a PhD candidate affiliated with the Centre for Nordic Studies at the University of Helsinki. His research focuses on paradiplomacy in the Nordic region.

On December 8, 2021, the “Conference regarding cooperation between the Nordic states and Faroe Islands, Greenland and Åland as an example of sustainable democracy”, was held at the Danish Parliament (Folketinget) in Copenhagen. The event was arranged under the auspices of Finland’s presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers in cooperation with Åland during 2021.

Publication: February 2022

Om

Denna konferensrapport är skriven av Hasan Akintug. Akintug är doktorand och affilierad med Centrum för Nordenstudier vid Helsingfors universitet. Hans forskning fokuserar främst på paradiplomati i den nordiska regionen.

Den 8 december 2021 hölls konferensen "Conference regarding cooperation between the Nordic states and Faroe Islands, Greenland and Åland as an example of sustainable democracy" vid Folketinget i Köpenhamn, Danmark. Evenemanget var organiserat under beskydd av Finlands ordförandeskap i Nordiska ministerrådet i samarbete med Åland under 2021.

Publikation: Februari 2022

CONFERENCE ON

Cooperation Between the Nordic States, the Faroe Islands, Greenland and Åland as an Example of Sustainable Democracy

Introduction

On December 8, 2021, the “Conference regarding cooperation between the Nordic states and Faroe Islands, Greenland and Åland as an example of sustainable democracy”, was held at the Danish Parliament (Folketinget) in Copenhagen. The event was arranged under the auspices of Finland’s presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers in cooperation with Åland during 2021. This report briefly summarises the core points discussed during the conference.

In his introduction, Minister Blomqvist stated that the purpose of the conference was to discuss important issues such as building democracy, dialogue and sharing experiences. The conference, in and of itself, was a manifestation of cooperation between Finland and Åland. Blomqvist emphasized that the participation of the Faroe Islands, Greenland and Åland in Nordic cooperation as non-state polities is much more far reaching than in other comparable intergovernmental forums.

Summary of Proceedings

1. Introductory Remarks

The introductory speakers were Annette Holmberg-Jansson and Thomas Blomqvist (ministers of Nordic cooperation for Åland and Finland respectively). First to speak was Minister Holmberg-Jansson who emphasised that the Faroe Islands, Greenland and Åland are a natural and contributing part of the Nordic family and that this type of participation in international cooperation serves to counter political instability and polarization. Minister Holmberg-Jansson also touched upon how the islands contribute to build sustainable democracy, lower tensions, and work to prevent conflict in the broader region.

2. Keynote Speech

Keynote speaker, *Gunnar Wetterberg*, gave a brief historical overview of Nordic cooperation with particular emphasis on the inclusion of the Faroe Islands, Greenland and Åland. Wetterberg went on to outline the main themes in his report of 2010, ‘Förbundsstaten Norden’ (A United Nordic Federation, published by the Nordic Council of Ministers) which he wrote, as he explained, in a “post-superpower” context. He concluded his introduction by asserting that the primary cause of disunity among the Nordic states was the historical interference of greater powers.

Turning to the history of the Faroe Islands, he outlined the contribution of Sverrir Sigurdsson,

king of Norway in the early middle-ages, and who was born in the Faroe Islands. In the case of Greenland, early contact was made between the Vikings of Iceland and the inhabitants of Greenland. He also mentioned that the Åland Islands served as a bridge between Turku and Stockholm, which was established as the capital of Sweden and remains so today.

More specifically, Wetterberg believes that Nordic cooperation has largely ignored the perspectives of the three regions as things currently stand. For example, he noted that the Åland Islands were a good example of the need for including border regions on decisions regarding borders. Also, with climate change now evident in the Arctic and North Atlantic regions, the implications for the Faroe Islands and Greenland are profound. Moreover, he argued that the increasing relevance of Greenland in foreign and security policy calls for greater Nordic cooperation in this area.

Wetterberg concluded with a call for close Nordic cooperation in matters of taxation and social insurance that would make Nordic cooperation closer to the average Nordic citizen. He called for the establishment of a “Nordic Labour Market 2.0” arguing that it would allow Nordic cooperation to, once again, precede integration of the European Union.

3. First Session

Sia Spiliopoulou Åkermark, director of the Åland Island Peace Institute, presented a report in the first session of the conference. The report, ‘The Faroe Islands, Greenland and the Åland Islands in Nordic cooperation’ (published December 2021 as FIIA Report No 69. Also available online), was a collaboration

between the Finnish Institute of International Affairs (FIIA) and the Åland Islands Peace Institute (ÅIPI). She mentioned that there was no adequate account of the participation of the Faroe Islands, Greenland and Åland in Nordic cooperation. Presenting the report, Spiliopoulou Åkermark explained that its analysis was grounded in four perspectives: aims; institutional arrangements; priorities; and future outlooks for the Faroe Islands, Greenland and Åland in Nordic cooperation. In all three cases, there was a clear understanding of a common Nordic identity, with the participation of the three polities resting largely on the will to expand their jurisdiction and to gain wider recognition. The Faroe Islands advocate for full membership in Nordic cooperation on the same basis as member states – as a matter of principle. On the other hand, the positions of Greenland and Åland are more pragmatic.

The report concluded that there was a lack of structured evaluation of the participation in Nordic cooperation of the Faroe Islands, Greenland and Åland. Moreover, Nordic cooperation is often taken for granted in the three cases studied, both in the islands themselves as well as by the member states.

Spiliopoulou Åkermark expressed the need for greater societal awareness of Nordic cooperation in the three polities, as well as parliamentary debate about it. Not only are the three island polities able to offer particular expertise, but also considerable plurality when it comes to governance models and the legal personality of the Faroe Islands, Greenland and Åland. She stressed that in Nordic cooperation, legal personality was seen as a nuanced concept instead of an either/or binary. She concluded by stating that Nordic cooperation has functioned as a plus sum game rather than a zero-sum game.

Panel Discussion I

The first session continued with a panel discussion led by representatives from the governments of Åland, the Faroe Islands, Finland and FIIA. The panel discussion was moderated by Spiliopoulou Åkermark of ÅIPI.

Ms Annette Holmberg-Jansson, Minister for Nordic cooperation of Åland

Speaking on behalf of Åland, Holmberg-Jansson stated that for Åland, Nordic cooperation is not just a platform for valuable contacts, but also a source of inspiration due to the interactions between the Faroe Islands and Greenland. Indeed, Nordic cooperation includes the perspectives of insular regions, with Åland functioning as a strong voice for border regions within this framework.

Mr Petur Petersen, Head of Nordic cooperation, Government of the Faroe Islands

Petersen described Nordic cooperation as inspirational – where the Faroe Islands, Greenland and Åland encourage each other, benefit from, and contribute to Nordic cooperation. Yet, the goal of full membership in international organizations including Nordic cooperation will require hard work, patience and determination. Petersen explained that the Faroe Islands were not satisfied with the outcomes of the so called Åland Document.

Mr Thomas Blomqvist, Minister for Nordic cooperation in Finland, Chairman of the Nordic Council of Ministers

For Blomqvist, the core message of the report was that participation by the Faroe Islands, Greenland and Åland enriches Nordic cooperation. Dialogue and participation allow

for new solutions and enhance social cohesion and stability. Blomqvist considered Nordic cooperation and the participation of the three island polities an important part of the Vision 2030 agenda.

Ms. Katja Creutz, Acting Programme Director, FIIA

Katja Creutz emphasised how Nordic cooperation accommodates countries which do not fulfil the criteria of statehood. Knowledge accumulated on the islands is important and contributes to the broader Nordic region in many substantive areas. She also stressed the importance of people-to-people interaction in Nordic cooperation. The panel then received questions from the audience, followed by discussion among panel members of a “wish list” of objectives and outcomes. Petersen looked forward to the Faroe Islands being accepted as a full member in Nordic cooperation. In support, Holmberg-Jansson felt that efforts by the Faroe Islands could facilitate full membership for Åland. Blomqvist noted the value of Åland’s perspective as a border region, with Creutz stating that the limits of Nordic cooperation have not yet been reached by the three island polities, and in this regard a lot more could be done. The moderator, Spiliopoulou Åkermark concluded that it is noteworthy that a significant amount of international affairs takes place by the Faroe Islands, Greenland and Åland within Nordic cooperation, despite this not being reflected in formal structures of Nordic cooperation.

From the floor, Tarja Halonen, former President of the Republic of Finland, said that Nordic cooperation was not primarily a legal arrangement, but rather a political commitment to cooperate and take common action when genuine political will is present. She thought that the “organic” nature of Nordic cooperation

could also serve as an inspiration for the EU or UN with less focus on regulation, and more focus on political will and cooperation.

Panel Discussion II

The second panel discussion was moderated by Johan Schalin, Chief of the Secretariat for Nordic Cooperation, Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland. This discussion focused on the cooperation of the Nordic Council of Ministers today, with particular emphasis on how the Faroe Islands, Greenland and Åland contribute to social and environmental sustainability. Participants included representatives from the Nordic Council of Ministers, the governments of Denmark, Iceland, Åland Regeneration 2030 and the government of Greenland.

*Ms Paula Lehtomäki, Secretary General,
Nordic Council of Ministers*

Lehtomäki stated there was little practical difference between full members (i.e., the member states) and the Faroe Islands, Greenland and Åland within the Nordic cooperation framework. She reasoned that the three islands “came to the table with political commitment and hard work”. She praised the efforts of the islands in the field of sustainability and participation which continues to increase the cultural diversity within the Nordic cooperation framework.

*Mr Flemming Møller Mortensen, Minister for
Nordic cooperation, Denmark.*

Mortensen highlighted the common values permeating the Nordic region, namely welfare societies, and societal trust towards governments, the contribution of experts and interactions between countries. Smaller political units are able

to contribute to Nordic cooperation, with sustainable energy being a primary concern for Greenland and the Faroe Islands.

*Mr Auðunn Atlason, former member of
the Nordic Committee for Co-operation,
Ambassador of Iceland to Finland*

Atlason described Iceland’s perspective on the theme of the conference as “the biggest of the small, and the smallest of the big” within the Nordic region. Nordic cooperation had several points of gravity, including that of the Arctic and North Atlantic. Using trust and inclusion as “key words”, he asserted that Nordic cooperation and the inclusion of smaller political units is important and was optimistic as to the “organic nature” of Nordic cooperation. Thus, cooperation takes place as needed, even if it is not formally sanctioned and/or institutionalised.

*Mr Alfons Röblom, Minister of Environment,
Energy and Higher Education of Åland*

Röblom noted that sustainable development issues have opened international platforms previously closed to Åland. His firm belief was that smaller communities have a role in creating innovative solutions to achieve environmental sustainability, citing Åland’s 2051 goal of full sustainability, pursued through a bottom-up process.

*Ms Ella Turta, Secretary General,
ReGeneration 2030*

Turta spoke of the Vision 2030 agenda of the Nordic Council of Ministers and how it affects Nordic citizens. Individuals (especially today’s youth) must have the opportunity to participate in the creation of sustainable policies. She cited Åland as a good example of broad cross-sectoral societal engagement.

*Mr Jens Ulrich, Acting head of the Greenland
Representation in Copenhagen*

Ulrich observed that sustainability and green energy were key issues in Greenland and stressed the importance of economic development for Greenlandic society. On the question of full membership in Nordic cooperation, the Faroese decision shall be respected.

In response to a question from the floor, Lehtomäki stated that there were several policy fields in which the Nordic Council of Ministers could assist the Faroe Islands, Greenland and Åland. This would include questions such as developing sustainable energy sources, maritime issues, indigenous issues, and cooperation with neighbours in the west. Röblom spoke of the importance of setting good practices and sharing inspiration in relevant policy fields, despite the small size of the Faroe Islands, Greenland and Åland. The latter could also speak on behalf of Nordic cooperation in other forums. Mortensen reminded us of the lessons learned from border closures during the pandemic and looked forward to further cooperation on climate policy which could also inspire other parts of the world.

4. Second Session

In the second session, the keynote speakers were Tarja Halonen, former President of the Republic of Finland, and Ms Ilze Brands Kehris, Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights at the United Nations. This was followed by a panel discussion.

President Halonen commenced with a description of the Nordic region as a family in which members look similar from the outside – but where members are conscious of internal

differences. She outlined the experience of autonomous regions in the Nordic region, stating that Norway, Iceland and Finland share a history of being autonomous. Despite the geographical distance between the three autonomous regions, Nordic cooperation draws these regions together. Halonen stated that autonomy was a living and ever-changing relationship. Despite internal differences, the Nordics could be considered a success story especially on issues such as sustainable development and the Nordic welfare model.

Ilze Brands Kehris maintained that her key point was the issue of trust at the global level. She held that the three Nordic self-governing regions and Nordic cooperation were an example to the world and that participation was vitally important, especially in a minority context. However, the pandemic had laid bare inequalities within and across member states of the United Nations. Furthermore, the pandemic has been detrimental to certain human rights, particularly the freedom of movement.

Brands Kehris mentioned that associate membership is an important part of networking and trust building for autonomous regions and the inclusion of the Faroe Island, Greenland and Åland in Nordic cooperation and UNESCO associate membership were key examples of this. She cited the UN Secretary General's February 2020 Call to Action on Human Rights and the Vision of the Future agenda as calls for a stronger networked and trust-based international order with a strong focus on regional perspectives and local needs.

Panel Discussion

Are there lessons to be learnt? The subject of the panel discussion of the second session was a global perspective on the Nordic cooperation, with particular focus on the Faroe Islands, Greenland and Åland. The participants were from Greenland, Åland, Scotland, Finland and the United Nations. The panel was moderated by Kristina Háfoss, Secretary General of the Nordic Council. Ms Natuk Lund Olsen, Head of Department, Government of Greenland. Lund Olsen spoke from the perspective of Greenland, which she maintained has not been an obvious geographical part of the Nordic region. Olsen noted that through its indigenous Inuit population the island has a right to independence under international law and serves as a role model for other indigenous societies around the world. She argued that Greenland's connection to the Nordic region derives from its historical legacy of colonialism. She concluded that indigenous approaches could inspire, and help to develop, egalitarian society and traditions.

Mr Harry Jansson, Deputy Head of the Åland Government

Jansson spoke on behalf of the Åland Government and compared the inclusion of autonomous nations in the Nordic cooperation with their relationship to the European Union. Smaller regions with their limited resources need to be strategic when it comes to participating in international forums. Jansson contrasted Åland's representation (one civil servant) at the EU level to Åland's access to important political meetings in Nordic cooperation. He questioned the EU's reluctance to directly engage with autonomies.

Mr Michael Keating, Professor at University of Aberdeen

Professor Keating spoke about the concept of sovereignty with a focus on European and Nordic perspectives. He argued for a "post-sovereigntist" interpretation of sovereignty, viewing the concept as a network of relationships, which allows multiple voices to be heard on the international stage. Indeed, politics was not a zero-sum game, but rather a set of relationships. He also referred to the concept of "paradiplomacy" as a way for autonomous regions to gain external competences corresponding to their internal competences, when necessary and when appropriate. By contrast, Keating argued, the EU in Brussels applies a "one size fits all" solution, whereas the Nordic experience offers a different approach to similar cases of autonomous regions.

Tarja Halonen, President of Finland

President Halonen questioned what would substantially change for the Faroe Islands, Greenland and Åland were they to achieve full membership considering the high degree of participation by the autonomous regions already in Nordic cooperation. She mentioned that all the Nordic countries were small states from a global perspective, and perhaps this factored in the participation of the Faroe Islands, Greenland and Åland.

Ms Ilze Brands Kehris, Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights, UN

Brands Kehris spoke of understanding the participation of smaller political units in the international field as a dynamic and evolving concept. While size and resources present practical challenges for autonomous regions, it is still possible to 'punch above one's weight'. She praised the accommodation of the Faroe Islands, Greenland

and Åland in Nordic cooperation and its global relevance for trust and participation.

5. Closure of the Conference

Bringing the conference to a close, *Ms Kristina Háfoss*, Secretary General of the Nordic Council stressed that we are living in historic times which are creating serious challenges in international affairs. Current issues included digitalization, the pandemic, climate change and inequality. All of these challenges had one thing in common – they could only be dealt with closer international cooperation. No state or nation alone was able to address these issues. In the face of such international challenges “one can either build windshields or windmills”, i.e., be proactive or reactive in building international cooperation. She argued that Nordic cooperation continues to “build windmills”.

As for the concept of sustainable democracy, Háfoss argued that the Nordic experience could inspire others and help the Nordics learn from the past. However, she also reminded that the historical, cultural and legacy differences should be taken into account. In the case of her home country, the Faroe Islands, she noted a clear trend towards political decision-making at the local level rather than in Copenhagen. Moreover, she argued that if decisions regarding the Faroe Islands were made in Copenhagen this would create more problems and endanger sustainable democracy. She praised the system which allows the Faroese parliament to take on competences by its own volition and noted the consensus on the islands for authority transfers and full membership in Nordic cooperation.

Háfoss underscored the importance of self-

determination as a keyword denoting human rights and sustainable democracy. Nordic values were more relevant than ever, and democracy should not be taken for granted. In terms of full membership for the Faroe Islands, there is room within the legal framework for different solutions provided there is political will. If the COVID-19 pandemic highlights certain weaknesses in Nordic cooperation, it also affirms the importance of finding international, sustainable and fair solutions to global challenges and existential threats to democracy. She concluded by re-stating her hopes that the Nordic region continue its walk towards sustainable democracy, and also to benefit other nations that want to tread the democratic path.

Background Report

The research report presented at the conference, “The Faroe Islands, Greenland and the Åland Islands in Nordic cooperation” by Katja Creutz and Sia Spiliopoulou Åkermark, is available here: <https://www.fiia.fi/julkaisu/the-faroe-islands-greenlandand-the-aland-islands-in-nordic-cooperation>

Annex

Conference Programme

Folketinget, Copenhagen, Wednesday 8 December 2021, at 12.30 - 16.30 (CET)

12.00 – 12.30 Light lunch hosted by the Government of Åland

12.30 – 12.45 Introductory remarks

Ms Annette Holmberg-Jansson, Minister for Nordic cooperation.

Mr Thomas Blomqvist, Minister for Nordic cooperation.

Speakers introduced by **Mr Matts Lindqvist**, Senior Adviser, Nordic Council and Nordic Council of Ministers.

12.45 – 13.05 Keynote Speech

Mr Gunnar Wetterberg, Author of the book “Förbundsstaten Norden”.

Historic overview of the development of the Nordic cooperation with special interest on the incorporation of the Faroe Islands, Greenland and Åland.

First Session

13.05-13.20 **Ms Sia Spiliopoulou Åkermark**, Director, Åland Islands Peace Institute Presentation of the report on the participation of the Faroe Islands, Greenland and Åland and their contribution to the Nordic cooperation.

13.20-13.50 **Panel discussion** regarding the Nordic council of ministers’ cooperation today with special interest on cooperation with the Faroe Islands, Greenland and Åland. What have the impacts been on the Nordic cooperation?

Speakers

Mr Thomas Blomqvist, Minister for Nordic cooperation in Finland, Chairman of the Nordic Council of Ministers.

Ms Katja Creutz Acting Programme Director, Finnish Institute for International Affairs.

Ms Annette Holmberg-Jansson, Minister for Nordic cooperation in Åland,

Mr Petur Petersen, Head of Nordic cooperation, Government of the Faroe Islands.

Moderator

Ms Sia Spiliopoulou Åkermark, Director, Åland Islands Peace Institute.

Questions from the floor allowed.

13.50 – 14.10 Coffee break

14.10 – 14.50 **Panel discussion** regarding the Nordic council of ministers’ cooperation today with special interest on how the Faroe Islands, Greenland and Åland can contribute to social and environmental sustainability.

Speakers

Mr Auðunn Atlason, former member of the Nordic Committee for Co-operation, Ambassador of Iceland to Finland.

Ms Paula Lehtomäki, Secretary General, Nordic Council of Ministers.

Mr Flemming Møller Mortensen, Minister for Nordic cooperation, Denmark.

Mr Jens Ulrich, Acting head of the Greenland Representation in Copenhagen.

Mr Alfons Röblom, Minister of Environment, Energy and Higher Education.

Ms Ella Turta, Secretary General, ReGeneration 2030.

Moderator

Mr Johan Schalin, Chief of the Secretariat for Nordic Cooperation, Ministry for Foreign

Affairs of Finland.

Questions from the floor allowed.

14.50 – 15.10 Coffee break

Second Session

15.10 - 15.20 Keynote speech, **President Tarja Halonen**, Finland, Cooperation between the Nordic states and Faroe Islands, Greenland and Åland as an example of sustainable democracy

15.20 - 15.30 Keynote speech, **Ms Ilze Brands Kehris**, Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights, UN, global perspective on the Nordic cooperation with special interest on cooperation with the Faroe Islands, Greenland and Åland.

15.30 - 16.10 **Panel discussion** regarding the global perspective on the Nordic cooperation with special interest on cooperation with the Faroe Islands, Greenland and Åland. Are there lessons to be learnt globally?

Speakers

President Tarja Halonen, Finland.

Ms Natuk Lund Olsen, Head of Department, Government of Greenland.

Mr Harry Jansson, Deputy Head of the Åland Government.

Mr Michael Keating, Professor at University of Aberdeen.

Ms Ilze Brands Kehris, Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights, UN.

Moderator

Ms Kristina Háfoss, Secretary General, Nordic Council.

16.10 – 16.30 Closure of the Conference

Concluding remarks

Ms Kristina Háfoss, Secretary General, Nordic Council

The Åland Islands Peace Institute is an independent institute working with research, education, and information activities. Research at the Åland Islands Peace Institute is a central part of the institute's activities and is conducted within projects, networks, and partnerships with other knowledge-oriented institutions. The research concerns issues of minorities, autonomy arrangements, demilitarisation and neutralisation using Åland and its special status and competences as a starting point.

The research conducted at the Peace Institute strives to produce and deepen knowledge and promote fact-based conversations and dialogue as part of a peaceful societal development. The Peace Institute provides knowledge and analysis to visitors from all over the world and acts as a meeting place and arena for dialogue within its areas. The experiences from Åland can provide inspiration for conflict resolution, peace processes and national dialogues.

Research results and information about ongoing projects and seminars are spread through www.peace.ax, books, reports, the report series, and the peer reviewed e-journal *Journal of Autonomy and Security Studies* (www.jass.ax).

Ålands fredsinstitut är ett oberoende institut som arbetar med forskning, utbildning och information. Forskningen vid Ålands fredsinstitut är en central del av verksamheten och bedrivs i olika former och samarbeten. Ålands internationella särställning utgör utgångspunkten för forskningen, som därför fokuserar huvudsakligen på tre centrala komponenter: minoritetens ställning, självstyrelsefrågor samt demilitarisering och neutralisering.

Institutets verksamhet som helhet ska bidra till fredlig samhällsutveckling, fredlig konfliktlösning och konfliktförebyggande. Fredsinstitutet tillhandahåller kunskap och analys samt fungerar som en mötesplats och arena för dialog inom sina områden.

Utifrån kontinuerlig och kritisk forskning om Ålandsexemplet och dess komponenter kan fredsinstitutet bidra med aktuell kunskap och analys för de besökare från hela världen som kommer till Åland för att studera erfarenheterna på plats och få inspiration och kunskap som kan användas vid konfliktlösning, fredsprocesser och nationella dialoger.

Forskningsresultat och information om pågående projekt och seminarier sprids genom fredsinstitutets hemsida www.peace.ax, böcker och rapporter, rapportserien och den vetenskapliga tidskriften *Journal of Autonomy and Security Studies* (www.jass.ax).

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