



## **EURODÉFENSE NEDERLAND Webinar**

### **Changing Security Dynamics in the Nordics**

**Time:** 28 June, 2022 from 19:00 to 20:30 (GET)

**Speakers:** Peter Viggo Jakobsen, Gunilla Herolf & Hanna Ojanen

**Moderator:** Bart Brouwers

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#### **Summary**

The War in Ukraine has caused a great upheaval for the existing European security architecture. The ripple effect has been most salient in the Nordic States as Denmark, Finland, and Sweden abandoned security stances that were considered far-fetched just months ago. For Denmark, the revision of the EU defense opt-out leads to a more coherent EU defense cooperation. However, as Peter Viggo Jakobsen shows, it obfuscates a feeling of general content on the overall security situation and a complacency when it comes to increasing its defensive capacities. Across the Kattegat, Gunilla Herolf observes that Sweden is abandoning its long tradition of non-alignment (and previously a neutrality policy). Although it had been inching closer to NATO since 2014, its full accession is to have a drastic effect as it provides the alliance with critical strategic depth to the alliance. As a result of this NATO will be more able to protect the Baltic states and to dominate the Baltic Sea. Lastly, Hanna Ojanen explains how Finish defense policy has always been about Russia.

#### **1. Peter Viggo Jakobsen – Professor of Center for War Studies Denmark**

According to Peter Viggo Jakobsen the Danish security situation is looking quite good. Denmark got rid of the defense opt-out. The US is back in Europe to support the NATO alliance. This also translates to an increase in US military exercises in the Nordic states. Meanwhile, Germany has also woken up and is more present. Russia poses even less of a military threat to Denmark and NATO after its costly invasion of the Ukraine. As the US will not allow a permanent Turkish blockade of Finnish- Swedish NATO membership it is only a matter of time before they join the alliance. In the meantime, the US and the UK have already pledged to support both countries with military help, in the event of a Russian attack. Once they have joined, the Russian Baltic Fleet will face a NATO dominated Baltic Sea, making operations there neigh impossible.

Russia will have a tough time to protect itself when it comes to a future military confrontation. Ad a result of Western sanctions the country will have a very hard time in renewing and regaining its strength. Without China's help, Russia will not be able to make any significant

threats to NATO in the near future. This all leads to a positive security perspective for the Nordic states. Russian forces on the border are shrinking, while at the same time NATO is increasing their military force, also around the Russian border. From that perspective NATO's position is increasing its high preparedness of military forces on the Russian border. The key challenge from the Nordic perspective is to avoid increasing tension with the Russians in the Baltic Sea. Both Sweden and Finland would be well advised to refrain from hosting US nuclear capabilities on their territories and to receive large numbers of troops in peace time. It is likely that Finland and Sweden will adopt a position in NATO that is akin to that of Norway and Denmark. This would allow the US to easily supply rapid air support in the event of a Russian attack on the Baltics.

Danish policy assumes (stemming from 2014) that Russia will not attack Denmark or any other NATO state. The Strategy is designed as to maintain the US security guarantees without spending 2 percent of GDP on the military expenditure. While Denmark is low on cash and capability, it offsets this with a commitment to readily contribute troops to NATO missions. Next to that, the country is providing the US with access to airfields and harbors, something that was not possible during the Cold War. The war in the Ukraine has not changed this Danish threat assessment. The Danish government remains unwilling to spend 2 percent of the national GDP on military expenditure. Although the Danish parliament recently agreed to reach the 2 percent goal by 2033, this is astonishingly late in light of recent developments. The removal of Denmark's defense opt-out means that they are able to participate in the European Defense Agency and participate in EU military operations. However, due to the limitations of the Danish armed forces they are unable to make a meaningful contribution to these missions.

The driving force behind Danish political decision making is not a fear of Russia but a fear of getting left behind by the new German defense ambitions. Denmark is still largely lagging behind in setting higher ambitions of its own. The real concern in Denmark is that they will not be regarded as a member in NATO of good standing. The focus will therefore be on continuing operations and prioritize military cooperation with Germany as the latter's new forces will come available.

Denmark will do everything they can to facilitate the Swedish and Finnish entry into NATO. In terms of practical military cooperation they have little to offer. This means that Danish policy is completely out of sync with what is happening at the NATO summit in Madrid where a decision is being made to establish a 300.000 strong Rapid Reaction Force. While the NATO Rapid Reaction Force aims for a readiness in a 30-day timeframe, Denmark aims to build a brigade that is deployable in 180 days. Little can be expected of more Danish troop contributions to the NATO Enhanced Forward Presence in the Baltics. Time will tell if Denmark lets herself be pushed by her partners to commit more to defense.

It is not to be expected that recent developments will have a large effect on the Arctic region. The war in Ukraine will slow down the modernization of Russian forces. That is going to have an impact on the Northern Fleet. Russia is going to have less military capability in the high north as they otherwise would. The prediction is that the war will weaken Russia economically and increase its dependence on China. Right now, the ball is in the US court, they are best positioned to decide on what the relations that the US and Russia have are going to be. For both Denmark

and Norway it will remain important to continue cooperation with Russia in the Barents Sea and negotiations on territorial claims in the North Pole.

## **2. Gunilla Herolf – Senior Associate Research Fellow of the Swedish institute of International Affairs**

According to Gunilla Herolf Sweden's non-alignment policy has always been means to avoid war, and never been ideological. It has therefore been adapted to circumstances and from 1995, when Sweden joined the EU, much influenced by this. In 2009 the Swedish unilateral solidarity stated that Sweden would not remain passive when another EU member state or Nordic country suffered a disaster or attack. This was Sweden's way of showing that it was a loyal European country and to express its view that there is no place for neutrality if war breaks out in Europe.

The development, which took place in 2014, was in direct reaction to the Russian attack on Ukraine. This led to the Nordic countries becoming even more interested in regional cooperation and, in particular, for the first time on Nordic cooperation focused on territorial defense. For the non-aligned countries it also involved a closer cooperation with NATO. This was also the start of the very close Finnish-Swedish defense cooperation.

Sweden now hopes to join NATO in case other member states do not demand requirements that are impossible to fulfill. Sweden will stay true to its values. One of Sweden's greatest assets to NATO is the offer to use its territory as a springboard to further action in the region. Other assets include defense forces based on a high technology level that are already interoperable with NATO.

The biggest gain for Sweden by joining NATO are the advantages that come from Article 5. As non-member of NATO Sweden has hoped for NATO support when needed but has never been sure of it. The mutual defense article also means a change for military cooperation. Sweden's previous sole focus on territorial defense will change when joining NATO. Instead it will have the great benefit of full cooperation in NATO planning and communications.

The protection that NATO membership offers is sometimes more geographically extensive than perceived. A prime example of this is Gothenburg on the west coast of Sweden, which is the most important harbour for Sweden and- Norway and also an important harbour for Finland and for which NATO protection is absolutely necessary. Another example is the island of Gotland, which is strategically very important. A common expression is that the force that controls Gotland controls the Baltic sea, a fact that also makes it important for the defense of the three Baltic countries.

## **3. Hanna Ojanen – Research Director Tampere University.**

According to Hanna Ojanen the Turkish opposition on Finland and Sweden joining NATO was unforeseen. Finland had hoped for a smooth and rapid accession process. Finnish defense policy has always been Russia centered, whereas before it was the reason for staying out of NATO, now it is the reason to want in. The invasion presented the country with a stark choice, but due to the dramatic shift in public opinion it was able to take decisive action in this regard. The political leaders are now prepared to act directly against Russia's demands towards them.

This change in both public and political opinion has led to similar changes in argumentation for or against NATO membership. Before the war, Finland was well served with the freedom to

move from NATO rapprochement to non-alignment, depending on its interests. Now it is argued that its interests and freedoms are best served inside the alliance, as a failure to react would lead to less room for political maneuver.

There are many positive sides to Finnish accession with a broadly improved perspective for Nordic security. In practice this could mean an expansion of pre-existing deep Finnish-Swedish defense cooperation. The question is if this stronger Nordic flank will lead to a sub-regionalization within NATO. Furthermore, people wonder what their prospective influence in the wider alliance will be. This is reminiscent of the countries' EU accessions when member states were questioning how the traditionally neutral positions of Finland and Sweden would fare inside the Union. The answers to these questions will re-emerge after the accession process.

It may be questioned how these developments might influence Finnish and Swedish efforts to EU defense cooperation. However, they above all give evidence to the reinvigoration of both NATO and the EU, showcasing that these institutions are capable to renewing themselves. This is good news to a country such as Finland that is strongly reliant on institutions to protect their interests from larger states.