



Executive Summary

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BREAKING THE NORDIC DEFENSE DEADLOCK

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Events in Ukraine in early-2014 have prompted a re-evaluation of national defense capabilities across Europe. In the case of the Nordic states (Sweden, Finland, Norway, Denmark, and Iceland), this renewed attention has highlighted the lack of military resources to fulfill nationally stated defense tasks. Two decades of underinvestment in defense, force reductions, and focus on expeditionary crisis management in support of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), have combined to hollow out the once fundamental principles of territorial defense. Northern Europe has been left dangerously exposed to military coercion in a time of greatly increased uncertainty.

Norway and Denmark, being NATO member states, are better off than nonaligned Finland and Sweden, but common to all of them is the perception that security cannot be managed alone but has to be developed in cooperation with each other. During 2014, profoundly negative developments in Ukraine, mixed and disappointing signals from the NATO Summit in Wales, and the question marks left by the result of the Swedish parliamentary elections all combined to reinforce the stalemate in domestic politics over Swedish or Finnish membership in NATO. In this context, there is little that the United States can do to “help solve the problem,” since it is, in fact, self-inflicted in both countries. Attempts to influence public opinion in Finland or Sweden directly would, however well-intended, be counterproductive.

The Nordic countries, apart from their different security political solutions to date, have one thing in common. They all crucially depend on the United States for their national defense. Strengthening these bilateral ties, as well as building on them within the

framework of the *Nordic Security Dialogue* launched at the meeting between President Barack Obama and Nordic heads of state in Stockholm, Sweden, in September 2013, hold the potential to be fundamental building blocks for a new security assurance in the region. Conversely, meeting the Nordic and Baltic security challenges without the support of the United States is doomed to failure, and the entire region would be left vulnerable and exposed to extortion and external threat.

There is significant scope for defense cooperation with and between the Nordic states, which have been notably less resistant to defense burden sharing than several established NATO allies in Western Europe. In particular, enhanced cooperation with the United States by Finland and Sweden, backed up by U.S. security guarantees in whatever form they may take, has the potential to lessen the current isolation and exposure of the Baltic States to intimidation by Russia.

Based on both historical and current analysis of the problem, the authors propose that cooperation among the Nordic states (to the point of complete interoperability) and with the United States is essential. The alternative—inaction—is entirely unsatisfactory for any country in the region. Norway and Denmark would not be reassured, thanks to continued downsizing (including the U.S. rebalancing to Asia) and the alarming potential for a split in NATO. Sweden has already explicitly rejected territorial defense as a policy for the foreseeable future, and Finland, despite recent increased willingness to state the threat publicly, remains increasingly exposed and unable to manage alone.

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