

FRVÄRLD



TIME IS UP SANTA IS IN A SNOWSTORM

NORDICS-BALTICS-POLAND IN AN ERA OF
ESCALATING AND EXISTENTIAL THREATS

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ATLANTIC OCEAN



WHY NORDIC-BALTIC-POLAND (NBP)? AND WHY NOW?

The world as we know it is slipping through our fingers. It is a fact that cannot be compartmentalized away. Global developments between the dominant super-powers are accelerating and need to be addressed by Europe—with full force and across policy areas, political blocs, and national borders.

In Europe and the free West, we must manage multiple extremely serious forces and threats that are driving destructive developments simultaneously. These include, but are not limited to: 1) Russia's brutal war of aggression against Ukraine, 2) a culminating "Axis" (in various guises) through expanding and intensifying hybrid warfare, driven primarily by Russia and to varying degrees China and Iran, and 3) a United States that allows itself to be governed by a mercurial administration whose dangerous handling of Russia and territorial claims (albeit still mainly rhetorical) to Canada, Greenland, and others, increases the risks for Europe.

We are in a time and place where we need to rid ourselves of the perceptions and arguments that dominated foreign and security policy talks just a few months ago. But how do we do it? And more importantly, with whom does one have this conversation?

From a Swedish and Northern European perspective, it is increasingly clear that what binds us together with our nearest neighbours is more than just shared geography, but shared values, motivations, and long-term goals that bind us together at the core. A shared history, though always containing different perspectives, has an important place. But without a common idea of the future, history alone is not enough to hold any relationship together.



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The uniqueness of the Nordic region is one relevant dimension. The Nordics can be described as siblings with different mannerisms and temperaments. We stem from the same family. We share a cultural connection. We are grounded by a shared home. With the Baltics, there is a shared understanding that the larger neighbourhood is threatened by an aggressor in the East. Through the continuation of the war, this Eastern neighbor is a long-term threat.

In recent decades, the relationship within the Nordic-Baltic Eight (NB8) has deepened and expanded. Not only have the Baltics integrated into the region through EU and NATO membership, but the Nordics are rediscovering their historical Baltic connection, with the sea once again binding us together—economically, geostrategically, and as a people after half a century divided by occupation.

The icing on the cake, or really the base layer, is that we have dynamic economies and an emerging security leader in the form of Poland, bringing European credibility and making us all safer.

We have seen several ongoing attempts to address the challenges of maintaining and increasing support for Ukraine, the potential loss of an American ally under the current leadership, as well as bolstering resilience against threats from Russia, China, Iran, and other malign actors.

A coalition of the willing is one of the structures that expands support more broadly, throughout the free world, and is open for participation for those acting to address shared challenges.

Does it make sense to talk about other constellations and create new allies? Yes.

Coming back to our shared history, geography, values, and close relations within the Nordic-Baltic-Poland (NBP) initiative, there are multiple reasons to put energy and effort into this structure. While Europe itself needs to be united, we are well aware that there are many different understandings of what Europe is and can be. We also know that, regardless of

whether larger central European powers are at ease or in tension with each other, other parts of Europe are currently less in focus. This is an internal dynamic that needs to be revised for our own sake.

Carrying the shared burden of standing next in line for Russia's expansionist ambitions, whilst also steadfast upholders of democracy, makes us highly relevant for all of Europe. We need to take a leadership position, not ask for it.

There has been a tendency in the EU to wait for the leaders of old Europe to guide actions. This must change. Given the Nordic's strong commitment to Ukraine, the Baltic's steadfast and sober assessment of Russia, and Poland's increasing defense and economic contributions, the NBP alliance framework can create sustainable stability and security around NB8.

At this moment in history, Europe needs to have leaders capable of addressing contemporary conflicts. We have seen impressive continuity of support for Ukraine, but also periods of troubling indecisiveness. Faltering US leadership underscores the urgent need for new strategies to navigate current crises. Engaging closely with like-minded nations will enhance collective strength, independent of US leadership.

Revitalized cooperation for the future of Europe starts, but of course does not end with NBP. Rather, it can be an essential driving force: within a coalition of the willing, within the EU and NATO, and within numerous other multi- and international constellations.

The Stockholm Free World Forum (Frivärld) will continue serving as a platform for political and thought leaders from our region. Together, and united, we are stronger.

Anna Rennéus Guthrie

Director, Stockholm Free World Forum
March 2025

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Patrik Oksanen



NORDICS-BALTICS-POLAND IN AN ERA OF ESCALATING AND EXISTENTIAL THREATS

Summary

NBP in Escalating Global Threats & Security Uncertainty

- Russia's war against Ukraine continues, now with China as an enabler, North Korean troops, and Iranian weapons. A lasting and secure peace is distant, despite talks about an armistice.
- The "Gang of Four" (or should we say Santa's naughty list) is increasingly coordinated: China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea.
- Hybrid warfare and sabotage against Europe is intensifying.
- American political instability and uncertainty about NATO commitments undermine European security and will demand even more action from the Nordic-Baltic-Poland region (NBP).

NBP as a Strategic Powerhouse and Security producer

- The combined NBP economy ranks among the top global economies.
- Defense spending is rapidly increasing, with Poland aiming for 4.7% GDP by 2025.
- High levels of innovation and economic strength position NBP as a strong ally.



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Securing the Region & Countering Threats

- The NBP countries have a shared threat perception, recognizing Russia as an existential threat, and must prepare for long-term containment.
- Strengthening collective defense, hybrid warfare resilience, and cybersecurity is essential.
- China's role in hybrid incidents in the Baltic Sea further highlights the growing combined China-Russia threat.

Ukraine as the Core of NBP Security Policy

- Russia's defeat is essential for NBP security, and Ukraine must receive long-term military and economic support.
- Key proposals include using frozen Russian assets, increasing military aid, and deploying air defense and training missions.
- A coalition of the willing must ensure security guarantees for Ukraine.

Strengthening NBP Military Capabilities & Strategic Alliances

Defense growth is urgently required, targeting 4%+ GDP military spending.

- NBP should strengthen Baltic defenses, improve rapid deployment forces, and enhance naval and air capabilities.
- Increased cooperation with NATO, the UK, France, and regional allies is necessary to counter Russia and China.

Secure the Strategic Arctic

- The Arctic (Svalbard, Iceland, and Greenland) plays a crucial role in regional security.
- Strengthening military presence, surveillance, and cooperation in these areas is essential.
- Iceland should establish its own defense force, while Denmark, Norway, and Sweden must enhance Arctic readiness.

Introduction

The world is entering a period of extreme geopolitical instability. Russia's war against Ukraine continues, fuelled by Chinese trade and technology, North Korean manpower and weapons, and Iranian weapons. Any armistice and "peace deal" will not change Russia's endgame: The extinction of a free and sovereign Ukraine. In addition, the erratic behaviour of the Trump administration, making claims for NATO countries' territories like Greenland and Canada, undermines trust in the US.

Taiwan faces relentless Chinese pressure. Iran's war-by-proxy against Israel also destabilized Western societies. NATO officials openly acknowledge the growing coordination between the so-called "Gang of Four" or CRINK: China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea, where three (CRI) out of four recently held a joint naval exercise outside of the coast of Oman.

Russia is accelerating hybrid warfare against Europe, with increasingly numerous and severe sabotages and provocations. China is steadily working towards a global Chinese world order. At the same time, with Donald Trump's return to the White House, questions grow over America's commitment to NATO and European security. In the information environment, key figures in the administration share Russian propaganda and support pro-Russian and pro-Chinese political forces within the EU. European confidence in US security guarantees is under open and public debate, which in itself is undermining public trust in NATO's Article 5. This has led to renewed European debate on nuclear weapons, adding a new layer of strategic complexity to NBP.

Recent military intelligence estimates from Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Finland, and Estonia all highlight the same alarming trend: Russia will regain offensive capabilities within a few years for a regional war, posing a direct threat to the whole Baltic Sea region. But both Danish¹

and Swedish military intelligence services assess that Russia could strike with a smaller localized war within months rather than years. The Swedes also say that Russia could choose to attack civilian state aircraft or ships, for example a rescue helicopter or an ice breaker, pointing out that the West would deem this illogical, but the Kremlin operates with another set of logic and values.²

All this against the background of political instability and lack of military capabilities within the EU. In Germany, the already struggling Bundeswehr is facing additional staffing problems, while the UK is stretched thin, and although France is increasing capabilities, it is nowhere near able to compensate for a potential US exit. This leaves the NBP countries with no alternative: We must take on even greater responsibility for our own defense, not only national but also regional. This would also mean being a security provider that has the capability to involve others in a coalition of the willing within a NATO umbrella.

The time for actions is now. The threat is urgent. Time is running out.

NBP: A Potential Regional Giant

Collectively, the Nordics, Baltics, and Poland represent a significant economic and strategic bloc. The combined GDP and defense spending ranks us among the top global economies and military spenders. Additionally, our strong emphasis on innovation creates opportunity in a time of turmoil. In terms of the Global Innovation Index, the Nordics in particular consistently rank high. A hypothetical combined entity would be in the top 10, reflecting a strong performance in education, research, and technology.

In economic terms, the combined GDP amounts to approximately \$2.8 trillion (2023 numbers), according to the World Bank. This would place NBP in the G8 and rank the fourth largest economy in Europe. The combined population, just below 70 million people, would place the NBP among the 20 most populous countries globally, in close competition with the UK and France.

Defense spending is increasing rapidly in the region, and all countries beside Iceland pass the 2% goal of NATO set in 2014. Poland will reach 4,7% in 2025 and President Duda has proposed to enshrine at least 4% spending in the constitution³. Denmark increased the most rapidly, from 1.37% in 2022 to 3.2% in 2025.⁴

Understanding the Threat

One strength of the NBP is a clear threat perception. The Kremlin's imperialistic adventure is an existential threat to free and sovereign countries in the region. Russia's goals are clear. The public understands them, and there is broad political support of the analysis. When the Swedish parliament had approved the 18th, and so far largest support package for Ukraine in February 2025, it was unanimous and met with standing ovations. Compared to continental Europe, this public support is a true strength.

The Russian threat will not go away; it is larger than president Putin. The best option for the NBP is to contain Russia during a long and cold snow storm, with the hope that there might be another Russia decades from now, and to be so strong that the Kremlin will not try a classic salami-tactic land grab.

1. https://www.fe-ddis.dk/en/produkter/Risk_assessment/

2. <https://www.forsvarsmakten.se/siteassets/2-om-forsvarsmakten/dokument/musts-arsoversikter/must-arsoversikt-2024.pdf>

3. <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/polish-president-proposes-enshrining-defence-spending-least-4-gdp-constitution-2025-03-07/>

4. <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/denmark-boost-2025-26-defence-spending-by-7-blm-2025-02-19/>

The NBP countries also have a pretty clear view of the Chinese threat and how China and Russia are deepening cooperation. Chinese ships' involvement in hybrid incidents in the Baltic Sea has contributed to this understanding.

The future hinges on NBP unity, acting as a bloc that contributes to upholding the values of the EU and NATO, increasing our collective relevance and success. The single most important issue for the future of our region is Ukraine.

Ukraine as the North Star of Security Policy

Ukraine's survival as a sovereign, free state must guide the foreign and security policy of the NBP countries. Russia's defeat is essential to securing the NBP region. A peace on Russian terms—reaching its strategic aims, emboldening its imperialistic ideas—is an existential threat for us all. Unity and decisive support for Ukraine will strengthen deterrence, anchor the transatlantic bond, and demonstrate the value of a capable Europe where the North shows the way.

Key Actions:

- Push for the release of the EU's frozen Russian assets and have them contribute to the defense and support of Ukraine.
- A collective commitment of at least **1% of GDP annually** for Ukraine's support, funded through a joint NBP bond if no bonds on a European level is agreed.
- Expanded investment in defense industries within Ukraine and the NBP region, focused on drone and ammunition production.
- Establishment of NBP-led military training missions on Ukrainian territory. This is also a two way street, lessons learned of the Ukraine defense force is highly valuable for all NBP-countries.
- Collective assumption of air defense responsibilities over western Ukraine, stationed in Poland, in a coalition of the willing with primarily France and UK - the so-called Sky Shield proposal.⁵
- Deployment of a coalition of the willing to serve as a stabilisation force in any armistice scenario. Here Sweden and Denmark have already said that they will participate.⁶ This should be combined with a wholehearted commitment to Ukraine's EU and NATO membership. Until membership is obtained, security guarantees are needed, not only in words but in action.
- Reject any acceptance of Russia annexing territories and reject any suggestion to drop sanctions against Russia before a total withdrawal of Russian forces from Ukrainian soil.
- Work against any plans to restart NordStream and impose national legislation that enables the possibility to put sanctions on any entity and persons involved with NordStream.

5. <https://www.newsweek.com/skyshield-ukraine-drones-europe-2040616>

6. However, an armistice will allow Russia to move troops to our part of the world. Russia has the inner lines of logistics and a stabilisation force / peace keeping force in Ukraine would need to have an equal number of force increases from allied countries in the Baltic States.

Santa in a Snowstorm: The Strategic Dilemma

What happens in the Arctic has consequences for the Baltic region and vice versa. In the modern battlefield, the picture must be much wider than just in one area. We are a region that has several challenges that must be met together. No nation can handle them alone.

How can we understand the different areas? Imagining “Santa in a snowstorm” can help us conceptualize the Nordic-Baltic region’s geography and strategic dilemmas.

On top, his red hat is vulnerable to strong winds. Even more so on the very top, Svalbard, dangling at even the lightest gust. The hat on Santa’s head is known as the North Calotte, also known as Cap of the North, the most northern parts of Finland, Sweden, and Norway. It is sparsely populated with extreme conditions during the year. In summer, the sun never sets, and in winter it never rises. This region is also strategic for Russia, in order to create a zone around its nuclear submarines in Murmansk.

When we look further west from Svalbard, we see Santa’s sack of toys. Here are Greenland and the Faroe Islands, which are self-governing and autonomous parts of the Danish realm, and Iceland—the only NATO member without an army. There is growing global interest in the contents of Santa’s sack—from the United States, Russia, and China—but, as an integral part of Nordic interests and identity, these are not “gifts” to be given away. The islands must be protected from prying hands. The future of Greenland must lie entirely with the Greenlanders, without any foreign interference.

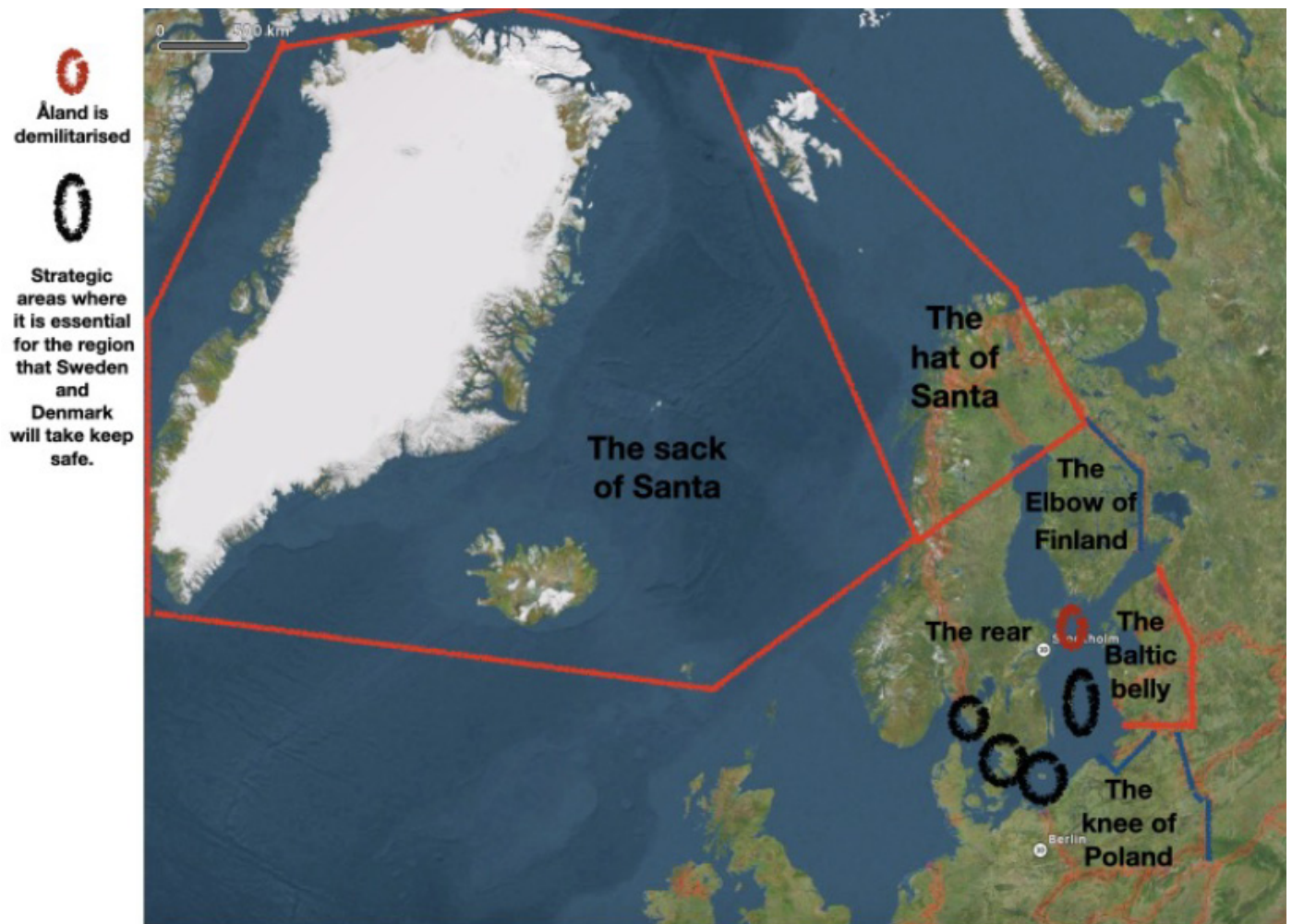
Let us move further south from Santa’s hat. His arm is raised to protect his face from the snowy winds from the east. Now you are looking at the hard elbow of Finland, a country that never scrapped its total defense system, nor its conscription, and has the possibility to mobilize a

formidable land force with large artillery resources. With the historical knowledge of what it means to fight for survival in the forests, Finland is ready to “throw some bows” against a bear’s nose, or “elbows up”, as a Canadian would say.

Then comes the Baltic belly, three small countries that look tasty for a bite if you are sitting in the Kremlin. These countries hang on the edge of the Baltic Sea, with little operational depth. The Baltics have taken care of their defense for a long time, exceeding the NATO target sooner than most countries. But in order to deter Russia, the presence of others is important, a conclusion NATO drew after Crimea and the 2016 Warsaw Summit where enhanced forward presence (eFP) in the Baltics and Poland was decided upon.

Then further south, you have Santa’s Polish knee. Poland has been arming up at an impressive pace and now has the largest land force in European NATO. Here, historical experience plays a big role in understanding the existential threat, which has led Poland to wear armored knee-pads. This is a knee a bear out for easy honey will avoid. Poland has to deal with both the Russian exclave of Kaliningrad, as well as Belarus, and, together with the Baltic states, is on the front line of a more heated hybrid war from Russia.

In the rear, you have the mainland of Norway, Sweden, and Denmark. The three Scandinavian countries all have similarities. Taking the peace time dividend for granted, believing the good weather would last forever, Santa sat on his butt for too long. All three countries have become thin, with military muscle and the fat of reserves waning away over the years. Though they can contribute some very capable forces, technologies, and assets, the numbers are not sufficient to fully endure the threatening storm. Santa has plans to put back on weight, but right now he isn’t filling out his suit.



For the region as whole, much depends on how the three wealthy countries gear up and pace their rearmament. They also have a more complex geostrategic situation. While Poland and Finland can fully focus on a large-scale land war in one direction, the Scandinavians have several focal points. Norway has Santa's hat and Svalbard. Denmark has Greenland and the Faroe Islands. Together they have the Atlantic Ocean, in addition to dealing with Russia in the east and supporting the Baltic states in the south. Sweden is caught between all this and will be the most important rear-area for Santa's hat, the Elbow of Finland, and the Belly of the Baltics. Sweden must think about supporting in the north, helping defend the Baltics, keeping the sea

outside of Gothenburg open, and, if possible, assisting Norway and Denmark against naval threats in the Arctic or quick Arctic land grabs.

Adding to the strategic complexity, there are several spots that could be interesting to exploit for Russia in order to stop support to the Baltic countries or to extend pressure in the region. First, we have the demilitarised islands of Åland that is an autonomous part of Finland. You could say it's Santa's beard, easy to tug on and make it hurt, but you will also quickly face the angry Finnish elbow and the Swedes. The islands are safeguarded by the civilian (but with military capability) Finnish Border Guards, and close

by - ready to defend - are also the Marines of the Brigade of Nyland. But since Åland is demilitarised in peace time, the islands are a weak spot for a hybrid or surprise attack.

Then we have Santa's belt buckle, the island of Gotland, also known as the unsinkable aircraft carrier, where Swedish armed forces are continually boosting defenses to make the island safe. However, it is vulnerable, with dependence on underwater cables. A recent sabotage on a water facility (with unknown perpetrators) underlines the risks of hybrid warfare. The strategic importance of Gotland for the region cannot be overemphasized. Santa's belt buckle keeps the Baltic belly in place, and Sweden's pants on.

In the south, you have the Danish Island Bornholm, Santa's shoes with toes that can be stepped on, but they can also kick. The woolen socks are the straits between Sweden and Denmark, which are crucial for connecting the Baltic Sea to the Atlantic Ocean. This passage is crucial for Russia to have access to trade and shipping, and to close for the NBP in the event of war. Without warm socks, Santa won't be moving anywhere because of frozen feet.

On the Swedish west coast lies Gothenburg, which is not only Sweden's largest harbour but also Norway's in terms of transported volume. Think about the port like Santa's gloves, without which his hands begin to freeze and he is unable to pick up his toys for delivery. Santa needs good goods gloves to keep the children happy.

Santa's Nuclear Umbrella (or Sleigh)

The most effective and stabilizing nuclear posture for the Nordic-Baltic-Poland (NBP) region is the continued protection of the US nuclear capability, within NATO's existing deterrence framework. This has provided security and strategic stability for decades, countering Russian nuclear threats and ensuring European defense cohesion. For our Santa, the nuclear sleigh ensures a peaceful Christmas delivery. However, there are now serious doubts if Rudolph the Red-White-and-Blue nosed reindeer will be around much longer.

The possibility of a diminished US commitment—or even a full withdrawal from NATO—requires serious contingency planning. If the US nuclear guarantee weakens, NBP countries must act swiftly to ensure that nuclear deterrence remains credible in Northern Europe. The most immediate path is closer coordination with the United Kingdom and France, Europe's two nuclear-armed NATO allies, in order to uphold the nuclear deterrence. Both nations maintain robust nuclear capabilities and extended deterrence frameworks that could be adapted to reinforce the security of the NBP region.

Poland, in particular, has not ruled out acquiring its own nuclear capabilities, should the situation deteriorate further. While the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) remains a cornerstone of international arms control, the security environment today demands that all options remain on the table to counter Russian nuclear coercion. For now, the best course of action is to strengthen NATO's nuclear-sharing arrangements and expand UK and French commitments to Northern European deterrence. But if the strategic situation worsens, NBP countries must be prepared to explore alternative solutions, ensuring that Europe is not left vulnerable to Russian blackmail. A clear message must be sent: Any attempt by Moscow to exploit nuclear threats for strategic gain will be met with a firm and coordinated response.

Withdrawal from Treaties

The security landscape in Northern Europe has changed dramatically since the Ottawa Treaty (Mine Ban Treaty) and the Convention on Cluster Munitions were signed. These agreements, while aimed at addressing humanitarian concerns, now place unnecessary restrictions on the defensive capabilities of the Nordic-Baltic (NB8) countries at a time when military preparedness is paramount and the threat is existential. Given the increasing likelihood of high-intensity war in the Baltic region, it is time for all NB8 nations to coordinate a strategic withdrawal from these treaties to ensure that defense forces are equipped with the full spectrum of necessary deterrent capabilities, i.e. the same weapons that the Russian aggressors possess.

Landmines: A Crucial Tool for Defensive Warfare

Our region consists of chokepoints, rugged terrain, and vast forested areas that are highly suitable for defensive warfare. Anti-personnel mines—when used responsibly—are a crucial force multiplier in slowing or stopping enemy advances. In Russia's war against Ukraine, we see how mines are used for defensive operations on both sides.

A key argument against landmines has always been their indiscriminate effects on innocent civilians, who suffer from mines many years afterwards. However, modern self-deactivating and smart mines significantly reduce these risks, especially relative to their effectiveness for defensive purposes. (During the work on this brief, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, and Finland all declared their intent to leave the Ottawa Convention. We recommend the rest of NBP follow suit).

Cluster Munitions: A Necessary Weapon Against Massed Assaults

The war in Ukraine has demonstrated that Russian military doctrine is highly reliant on large-scale infantry and armoured assaults. Cluster munitions are among the most effective tools to disrupt and destroy such formations, particularly in open terrain.

Even NATO states that are signatories to the Convention on Cluster Munitions have accepted Ukraine's use of these weapons because they are essential for battlefield success. The conclusion then is that if cluster munitions are effective for Ukraine, they are necessary for our own defenses as well.

Withdrawal can enable national stockpiling and production. Currently, Sweden, Denmark, Norway, and Iceland are bound by the Convention on Cluster Munitions, limiting their ability to produce, stockpile, or transfer these weapons. A coordinated withdrawal would enable national defense industries to develop and maintain necessary stockpiles, ensuring the NBP has full access to this crucial capability.

A Coordinated Withdrawal is A Message of Deterrence

Russia does not adhere to these treaties and possesses vast stockpiles of mines and cluster munitions. A unified withdrawal from these treaties would be politically stronger: It would send a strong signal to both NATO and the EU that the region is taking defense seriously. An approach where countries leave one at a time could invite criticism and make the individual country vulnerable to Russian influence operations. A united withdrawal would be more robust.

Withdrawal also aligns us with key allies. The US has never signed these treaties and continues to use both landmines and cluster munitions in strategic defense planning. A full regional withdrawal would bring policies in line.

Time for Non-Members to Join the European Union

For countries outside the EU, it is now time to join in order to increase economic and political security, and be a part of the EU rearmament. Norway and Iceland are recommended to finally join, as well as Sweden and Denmark joining the Euro and abandoning the krona as currency. Joining the EU should also be on the table for the territories of the Danish Realm that today stand outside, namely the Faroe Islands and Greenland. If there is an interest to join, the EU should make sure it is a swift and easy process.

Mutual Engagement: Key for Common Interests

The security of the NBP region is inseparable from the security of its individual nations. At the same time, we must also understand and address the security concerns in other parts of the alliance so that they contribute to our region. It starts with us; all NBP states need to concretely address each other's challenges, not just in political statements, but in tangible military presence, exercises, and force deployments.

Here there are several cases already in place. Sweden's JAS 39 Gripen fighter jets, now deployed to southern Poland as part of NATO's Air Policing mission, demonstrates Sweden's willingness to contribute to Polish air security and deter Russian incursions. Similarly, Denmark's troop deployment to Latvia under NATO's Forward Land Forces (FLF, previously Enhanced Forward Presence (eFP))

has been a crucial demonstration of Nordic commitment to the Baltic states' security.

However, these bilateral and NATO-led efforts must evolve into a more structured and multilateral framework, ensuring that regional security does not rely solely on NATO mandates but also on proactive NBP cooperation. While NATO's FLF missions in the Baltic states and Poland are important, the NBP countries should also develop their own regional rapid-reaction forces, ready for deployment in crises. This could be done together with the UK led Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF) or outside JEF.

The aim must be that all NBP countries should be permanently integrated into each other's military training programmes and exercises, ensuring seamless interoperability between Polish, Nordic, and Baltic forces. Current security threats are not limited to conventional warfare. Joint efforts in cyber defense, space-based surveillance, and electronic warfare capabilities should be expanded across the NBP region, together with instruments to deal with other kinds of hybrid threats like sabotage, seabed warfare and influence operations. Key partners to quickly develop strategies are the Hybrid COE in Helsinki, NATO Stratcom COE in Riga, and the Cooperative Cyber Defence COE in Tallinn.

Concrete Proposals:

- Establish a joint NBP mechanism for situational awareness and hybrid response.
- Cooperate to launch more military satellites to lessen vulnerabilities.
- With these two steps taken, the logical third step is an even closer intelligence and analysis cooperation. This could be done together with the UK and Canada who are invested in the region, as well as Germany and other NATO partners.

- Implement and enforce sanctions targeting hybrid actors, including those responsible for sabotage of undersea infrastructure. If possible on the EU-level, otherwise a coordinated national approach where all NBP countries impose the same sanctions regime.
- Counter disinformation and influence operations through coordinated strategic communication and offensive campaigns against the Kremlin's influence, in and outside of Russia.
- Support good quality journalism around the globe in other languages. With the US defunding RFL/RE, RFA, and VoA, the NBP must push the EU to take up the fallen positions, or if necessary fill part of the void itself.
- Impose sanctions on Chinese entities enabling Russia's war effort.
- Prepare EU-wide sanctions against any Chinese action to alter the status quo in the Taiwan Strait.

Looking Beyond our Region

One of the most persistent security dilemmas for the NBP is how to ensure continued NATO engagement in the Baltic and Arctic regions—especially given concerns about the second Trump administration. The answer is clear: Security engagement must be reciprocal. If the NBP wants strong NATO commitment in our region, we must also be active in the security concerns of other NATO members. For the US, the Indo-Pacific is a priority. If the NBP countries want continued US commitment to European security, we must actively support deterrence efforts against China in the Indo-Pacific and also build stronger

relations with partners such as Japan, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand, and Taiwan. Another key element is to keep the involvement of the UK and the Netherlands through JEF in the region.

If we want Italy, Spain, and France to commit to security to the Baltic region, we must also show engagement in the Mediterranean. This could mean contributing naval assets to counter hybrid threats in the Mediterranean, supporting NATO's deterrence efforts against Russia in North Africa and the Balkans, and assisting with European air policing over Southern Europe together with supporting Italy, Spain, and France in the EU to secure the southern border.

Securing Santa's Sack: Arctic Dilemmas and Possibilities

This dilemma focuses around three islands: Svalbard, Iceland and Greenland which are situated in a global region that will be increasingly contested in the decades to come due to climate change, resources, and sea lanes.

Svalbard

Norway faces a unique challenge in ensuring the security of Svalbard, while respecting the Svalbard Treaty of 1920 that limits military activities on the archipelago. The situation is more thoroughly assessed in the Stockholm Free World Forum's brief [Svalbard Storm Watch](#), including Russian presence and Chinese interest.

Norway could engage NBP to use NATO and the EU in order to strengthen its position without breaching the obligations under the Treaty and risk giving Russia an

excuse to launch an attack. The Svalbard Treaty prohibits military bases and naval fortifications, but it does not prevent Norway from strengthening its own defensive posture on the mainland or within Norwegian-controlled waters and airspace.

Here NATO could be engaged in enhanced Maritime and Air Surveillance. NATO member states could conduct joint air and maritime patrols near the archipelago in the Barents Sea to enhance deterrence. FISENO joint-air forces could conduct patrols on a regular basis in the high north with regular contributions from Denmark and Poland but also the US, UK, France, Germany, and Canada. Maritime patrols should be planned on a very regular basis from NATO Marcom in the UK. NATO should also exercise more frequent military support to remote Arctic locations with special forces and marines. This would be beneficial not only for Svalbard.

Norway could also extend mandate and capabilities of the Norwegian Coast Guards, which operate under civilian jurisdiction, as well as the Governor of Svalbard's law enforcement units. This includes considering adding a volunteer police reserve force recruited among the 2500 inhabitants of Longyearbyen in order to be able to deal with sudden physical hybrid threats with equipment relevant to deal with such situations. This would be a valuable contribution to the small regular police on Svalbard.

The EU could be engaged in supporting strategic infrastructure as well as supporting Arctic scientific facilities on Svalbard to strengthen Norwegian control. The EU could also be used as a tool to impose targeted sanctions on Russian or Chinese firms paving the way for attempts to gain

strategic influence in Svalbard. Here the EU members of NBP could be Norway's greatest advocates in Brussels.

Norway can thus strengthen the security of Svalbard without violating the treaty by enhancing NATO's surveillance, the EU's economic support, and civilian-controlled security measures. This ensures deterrence against Russian hybrid threats and Chinese economic influence while respecting Norway's treaty obligations.

Iceland

In light of escalating geopolitical tensions, particularly in the Arctic region, it is imperative for Iceland to establish a defense force. Iceland is the only country in NATO without its own defense forces. Defense expert Arnór Sigurjónsson, formerly at the Icelandic MFA and author of the book *An Icelandic Army*, emphasized in the beginning of March 2025 that Iceland must prioritize national security, dispelling the notion that the nation's small population and economy are barriers to maintaining a viable defense force.⁷

To bolster its defense capabilities, Iceland could benefit from multinational forces under NATO command. This could be led by Denmark or Norway and could serve as a foundation for training an Icelandic military force. One suggestion would be a national guard of the Scandinavian model, combined with some air defenses and a small HQ.

The proposed Icelandic national guard, comprising a few battalions as a start, should be equipped with modern defense systems, including drones, anti-tank, and anti-ship weapons. Such a force would enhance Iceland's ability to

7. https://icelandmonitor.mbl.is/news/news/2025/03/06/defense_should_be_a_priority_for_iceland_expert_arg/
<https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cgj5gl25756o>

defend against unconventional threats, such as “green men” tactics and sudden incursions to take control and establish *fait accompli*. Collaborative training with NATO forces would ensure that the national guard is well-prepared to respond to various security challenges.

Establishing this defense infrastructure would not only safeguard Iceland’s sovereignty but also contribute to regional stability. A well-defended Iceland would serve as a deterrent to any adventurous attempts by Russia or China to alter the status quo in the Arctic, thereby reinforcing the security architecture of the entire region.

In conclusion, by developing a dedicated defense force in collaboration with NATO allies, Iceland can effectively address emerging security threats and uphold its national sovereignty in an increasingly complex geopolitical landscape.

Greenland

Denmark has announced a defense package in Greenland of 2 billion USD and is currently strengthening its defense. However, the defense of Greenland has turned into a delicate situation after repeated public statements from President Trump that Greenland should be a part of the US. These statements are in violation of NATO Article 2 and have been turned down both by the autonomous government in Nuuk and by Copenhagen. With that said, the diplomatic situation is delicate for Denmark to handle. Besides this point, Greenland is of strategic importance for NATO, and a growing militarization by Russia in the Arctic, combined with the outset that China will join forces with Russia in the Arctic, increases the need to bolster Greenland’s defense even more.

If Denmark finds that a contribution on the ground, at sea, or in the air is desirable, the other NBP countries should support such efforts. Support from the UK, France, and Canada would also be valuable in establishing a broader NATO presence alongside the US Pituffik Space Base, formerly known as Thule Air Base.

8. <https://edition.cnn.com/2025/01/27/europe/denmark-greenland-trump-defense-latam-intl/index.html>



Strengthening Santa's Military Capacity in the Snowstorm

In order to avoid unpleasant surprises where the NBP has its weak spots, military capabilities to deal with threats must increase.

The key for NBP success now relies on countries that are lagging behind to speed up rearmament and build military capacity. Here, Denmark is quickly on the move, while Norway and Sweden need to pick up the pace. The aim must be to fill the needs on a rapid force increase within two years, to meet a Russian threat on a regional level, five years to meet a Russian war against the whole Europe if the US withdraws, and then a post 2030 perspective in a

scenario where some of the Chinese Navy joins forces with the Russians in the Arctic.

Buckle up the Baltic belly

The need to buckle up the Baltic belly is well understood within NATO. Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania are preparing themselves at a high pace, but in order to establish deterrence much more is needed from allies. As stated, any peace keeping force to Ukraine should be matched by equal numbers of reinforcement to the Baltic countries.

Here, the larger countries in the NBP have a special responsibility, but also a diplomatic mission to keep other allies engaged in the region.

NBP should support making a buckle of iron, to strengthen border surveillance and security, and help the Baltics to invest and build an even stronger Baltic defense line.⁹ The belly can be forged into a cast iron stomach, capable of taking on whatever is thrown at it—as unyielding as the Finnish elbow, as powerful as the Polish knee. A strong stomach serves the whole NBP and must be a shared responsibility.

Time to Spend and to be Creative

All countries must realise that an average 4% defense spending or higher will be needed for a substantial period of time. The pace must be high, the time to think, talk, and plan has since long disappeared. Now the approach must be urgent with a focus on good enough results, not a perfect process with little output (looking at you Sweden, Denmark, and Norway...) Large investments in the other pillars of total defense are needed: civilian, economic, and psychological defense as well as dual-use infrastructure investments are needed to facilitate large troop deployments. Urgency must be the watchword of the day.

In order to meet these different challenges, a large measure of creativity will be needed where the NBP could find crossborder ways of creating the effect.

Proposals:

- Finland and Sweden have leading total defense and comprehensive security approaches. This model could be shared and strengthened in various international constellations and interwoven throughout the

Nordic-Baltic region to enhance civil, economic, and psychological defense capabilities. Here, several concrete projects must be launched in order to get the workshop working.

- The region must focus on infrastructure investments of shared interest. Two steps need to be taken: First, the region must coordinate and put into action national infrastructure plans. Time is of the essence. Therefore, governments need to secondly make funds available for priority projects. Sweden takes on a heavy burden here, due to its geography linking the Nordics, but is currently frustrating some neighbors due to a perceived lack of urgency.
- Poland and Finland can take a leading role in helping smaller armed forces accelerate a build up of army units, where Finnish and Polish reserves could assist in scaling up forces in Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia. For example, Finnish officers could quickly train and build a Swedish Arctic brigade in Sollefteå, destined for northern Finland. It would contribute to Arctic warfare readiness.
- Sweden could also cooperate with Finland's Swedish-speaking Nyland Brigade to speed up the force increase of the Swedish marines, a force that could operate in the coastal area of the whole Baltic sea region.
- A joint Swedish-Norwegian-Finnish logistics unit, for example in Östersund, would strengthen sustainment capabilities across the High North.
- Norway, Denmark, and Sweden should establish in cooperation with the UK and Canada a joint training and a joint force of marines that could operate in the Arctic areas.
- Sweden and Denmark need to quickly have one full battalion each within NATO's Forward Land Force

9. <https://www.fpri.org/article/2024/02/the-baltic-defense-line/>

- in Latvia, instead of sharing a reduced size battalion. Both countries also need to store equipment for at least a mechanized brigade each in Latvia, so troops could fly over and march to their vehicles. Norway should have the same ambitions as Sweden and Denmark in their contribution to the Lithuanian Battlegroup, but Norway also needs to prioritize the Cap of the North and Arctic.
- Finland and Poland should consider stationing permanent troops in Estonia and Lithuania respectively under NATO Battle Groups to strengthen the Baltic defense even further.
 - Norway, Denmark, and Sweden could also relatively quickly transform part of their Home Guards into more of a US National Guard style, equipped with air defense, drones, and anti-tank weapons, that could be deployed quickly in the whole NBP-region. This would increase flexibility, readiness, and could both be a deterrent factor and create an opportunity to buy time. The ambition should be no less than that all three Scandinavian countries, within two years, should be able to deploy a brigade each.
 - And if the EU fails to get the financial instrument in place for defense spending, establish of a joint NBP loan facility to ensure rapid increases in defense spending.
 - Russia, together with China's naval build-up, poses a huge strategic challenge in the coming decades. The NBP countries should partner with the UK and the Netherlands (JEF) to develop a common naval procurement strategy and rapid ship building programme focused on: advanced surface combatants and submarines, enhanced anti-submarine warfare platforms, air defense and sea-denial capabilities, and joint operations and exercises to ensure seamless coordination. This could be open to other allies as well, such as Canada and Germany.
 - Strengthening and protecting shipping to keep important sealanes open.
 - Such a partnership would bolster both NATO's maritime posture and Europe's industrial base. Sweden and Denmark in particular must deal with maritime warfare in two different theaters: The Baltic Sea and the Arctic/Atlantic Ocean. Finland and Poland have their focus in the Baltic Sea and Norway in the Arctic/Atlantic Ocean. For Sweden, this is a radical shift since the decision to focus on the near sea more than half a century ago.
 - Industrial output: Even if the EU is on the move to boost European defense industry capacity, the NBP could deepen even further in cooperation, procurement, and ambition.

These steps would significantly fortify the northern flank, ensuring rapid reinforcement and deep interoperability.

Conclusion: Building Santa's NBP Workshop

For too long, security cooperation in the NBP region has been viewed as a collection of individual national efforts, loosely coordinated under NATO and EU frameworks. This is no longer sufficient. The threats we face are regional, not national, and they are existential for not only one of us but for all. Our response must acknowledge this challenge. We must work together, under one roof.

Our common NBP workshop must build a regional defense and security network, not just a series of bilateral commitments. This means integrating our forces, sharing our security burdens, and ensuring that engagement goes both ways—both within the region and across the wider transatlantic alliance, strengthening NATO and the EU.

If we expect NATO and the EU to stand by us in our most dangerous hour, we must prove that we are ready to stand with them and on our own—wherever threats arise.

Europe stands at a crossroads. The era of strategic ambiguity is over, the era of Era of Escalating and Existential Threats is here. This is something none of us wished for. It is not happening because of us. The threats are real, the warnings are clear, and the responsibility to act rests with us.

Through decisive action—rooted in unity and resolve—the NBP countries can secure the Baltic and Arctic, defend Ukraine, and help Europe through this time of historic peril.

The future is in our hands. Now is the time for action. Not tomorrow, not later—but today. Russia does not listen to words, but action. That is why we in Santa's shop must seamlessly work together to deliver in time. Anything else is as unthinkable as a Christmas without Santa.