

TOWARDS A NEW NATO

Introduction

In the wake of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Finland and Sweden finally took the plunge and applied for NATO membership. Less than a year after Sweden's accession in March 2024, Donald Trump returned to the White House and upended the transatlantic relationship that has been the ultimate guarantee of Western European security for 80 years, and for most European countries for the past 20 years. What comes to the relations with the United States (US), Finland and Sweden's NATO accession came too late to have benefited the countries to the fullest. At the same time, NATO membership has unlocked new levels of cooperation with the other Nordic countries, in the wider Nordic-Baltic region, and with European powers. As Europe is ramping up its militaries with the goal of reaching independent operational capacity, it is important that Finland and Sweden are active members in all relevant organisations – in the EU, NATO, and the coalition of the willing that has emerged to coordinate support for Ukraine.



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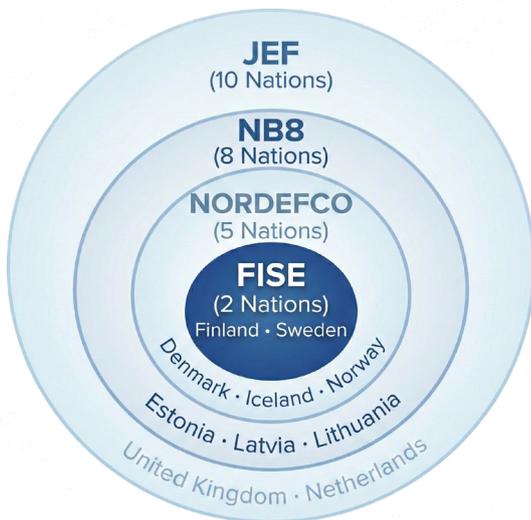
Despite Trump's rambling and incoherent style, the US administration has been consistent on the whole what comes to its foreign policy. Vice President JD Vance's 2025 Munich Security Conference speech that shocked Europeans by its hostility was codified in policy in the National Security Strategy published in December 2025, and despite the more polite tone, Secretary of State Marco Rubio's speech in Munich a year later only confirmed what Vance had put more bluntly a year earlier. This solidifies the US shift away from traditional diplomacy and respect for the rules-based order the US itself created after the World Wars, toward hard power and national interest executed in a Thucydidean fashion within "hemispheres of interest".¹ Trump's Greenland gambit further alienated European allies and marked an unprecedented crisis for Denmark and the other Nordic countries.²

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1. Benedikt Franke (2025) 'Munich Security Conference 2025 | Speech by JD Vance and Selected Reactions, Vol. 2', Munich Security Conference, <https://securityconference.org/en/publications/books/key-speeches-volume-ii-jd-vance-msc-2025/>; The White House (2025) 'National Security Strategy of the United States of America', November 2025, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/2025-National-Security-Strategy.pdf>; Marco Rubio (2026) 'Secretary of State Marco Rubio at the Munich Security Conference', U.S. Department of State, 14 February 2016, <https://www.state.gov/releases/office-of-the-spokes-person/2026/02/secretary-of-state-marco-rubio-at-the-munich-security-conference> (accessed 26 February 2026).
 2. Minna Ålander & Andreas Umland (2026) 'Three strategic dilemmas facing Europe in the ongoing US-Russia-Ukraine negotiations', Stockholm Centre for Eastern European Studies, 20 February 2026, <https://sceeus.se/publikationer/three-strategic-dilemmas-facing-europe-in-the-ongoing-us-russia-ukraine-negotiations/>

Layered regional cooperation: NORDEFECO, NB8 and JEF

While after 2014, the focus within NATO was largely on the eastern flank countries and how the alliance can bolster their security, after 2022 the new northern flank has turned allied attention northward. Finland and Sweden's NATO accession in 2023 and 2024, respectively, enabled important adjustments in NATO's posture in the north. The changes and adaptation have been driven by the Nordic countries and their own initiatives nationally and in regional frameworks. Notably, the new commitments and contributions to allied presence on the northern flank come from European allies, not the US.

Beyond the alliance itself, northern NATO enlargement has unlocked new levels of regional cooperation in three important minilateral formats: the Nordic Defence Cooperation (NORDEFECO), Nordic-Baltic eight (NB8), and the Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF) including the UK and the Netherlands.



From a Swedish point of view, at the very center of these concentric circles lies the bilateral relationship between Sweden and Finland, the FISE cooperation, which remains key for Swedish security. Beyond more traditional military cooperation, FISE covers total defence aspects such as shared planning for the evacuation of civilians in crisis scenarios. This strategic intimacy is further operationalized by Sweden's commitment to serve as the framework nation for the new NATO Forward Land Force (FLF) in Northern Finland.

NORDEFECO has seen a significant acceleration in the scope and depth of cooperation in the past three years, moving towards integration of the Nordic armed forces. For example, the air forces of Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden have established a Nordic Division at the Norwegian Joint Air Operation Centre (JAOC) in Bodø and have begun implementing the Nordic Airpower Concept (NAPC), with the aim "to achieve the ability to operate as one force in full-scale joint air operations with day-zero readiness".³ The decision to procure uncrewed aircraft jointly is another significant step.⁴ The NORDEFECO Memorandum of Understanding was updated in May 2025 for the first time since the framework was established in 2009, to reflect this new level of ambition.⁵

3. The Nordic Air Forces (2025) 'Four Nordic Air Forces Fighting as One', Norwegian Armed Forces, 3 March 2025, <https://www.forsvaret.no/en/news/articles/nordic-division> (accessed 25 February 2026)

4. Finnish Ministry of Defence (2025) 'Nordic countries to prepare joint procurement of unmanned aircraft', 22 October 2025, <https://defmin.fi/en/-/nordic-countries-to-prepare-joint-procurement-of-unmanned-aircraft#e9a2d81b> (accessed 25 February 2026).

5. Astri Edvardsen & Birgitte Annie Hansen, 'Nordic Defense Ministers Met in Lapland: Updated NORDEFECO with new agreement', High North News, 12 May 2025, <https://www.highnorthnews.com/en/nordic-defense-ministers-met-lapland-updated-nordefeco-new-agreement> (accessed 25 February 2026).

Additionally, the JEF group signed a new Comprehensive Memorandum of Understanding (CMOU) in November 2025 and extended enhanced partner status to Ukraine.⁶ The CMOU focuses on situations of security concern short of NATO's Article 5 that would activate the collective defence. JEF is starting to operate more in JEF+ formats, which is already common practice in the NB8-context with flexible add-ons. For example, in fall of 2025, Canada took part in TARASSIS, a series of JEF military activities. The enhanced JEF-Ukraine partnership foresees training for the Ukrainian armed forces, closer collaboration on protection of critical underwater infrastructure, drones, battlefield medicine, and methods for countering disinformation, with mutual learning opportunities.⁷

Nordics: exposed but (increasingly) capable

The Nordic countries are on the one hand geographically exposed to Russia's strategic goals and interests around the Kola Peninsula and the Greenland-Iceland-UK (GIUK) gap. The Russo-Finnish and Russo-Norwegian borders are only about 200km from Kola. Russian military exercises

and other signalling activity also frequently takes place in the Norwegian Sea and Barents Sea.⁸

On the other hand, the geographical vicinity to Russia also elevates the strategic value and relevance of the Nordic countries within NATO: Norway, for example, has profiled itself as "NATO's eyes and ears in the north"⁹ due to its unique capability to collect and share intelligence on the much-feared Russian submarines' movements. Both Norway, for intelligence, and Iceland, for anti-submarine warfare purposes,¹⁰ thus have relevance even for US homeland security.

Finland and Sweden have for their part kept their pledge to become active security contributors within the alliance. Sweden is the framework nation in the new FLF in Finland, with contributions from the other three Nordic countries, France, Italy, and the UK.¹¹ In September 2025, a new NATO Multi-Corps Land Component Command became operational in Mikkeli, Finland – less than 1,5 years after Finland became a full member of the alliance in April 2023.

6. Finnish Ministry of Defence (2025) 'Minister of Defence Häkkinen signs Memorandum of Understanding strengthening JEF's support to NATO's deterrence and defence in Northern Europe', 7 November 2025, <https://defmin.fi/en/-/minister-of-defence-hakkanen-signs-memorandum-of-understanding-strengthening-jef-s-support-to-nato-s-deterrence-and-defence-in-northern-europe#e9a2d81b> (accessed 25 February 2026).

7. British Ministry of Defence (2025) 'Joint Expeditionary Force launches enhanced partnership with Ukraine as allies step up further', 5 November 2025, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/joint-expeditionary-force-launches-enhanced-partnership-with-ukraine-as-allies-step-up-further> (accessed 25 February 2026).

8. Kristian Åtland, Thomas Nilsen & Torbjørn Pedersen (2024) 'Bolstering the Bastion: The Changing Pattern of Russia's Military Exercises in the High North', *Scandinavian Journal of Military Studies*, 7(1), pp. 145–160, <https://sjms.nu/articles/280/files/66eabbbf27caa.pdf>

9. Katya Adler (2025) 'Tensions rise as superpowers scrap for a piece of the Arctic', BBC, 24 May 2025, <https://www.regjeringen.no/en/whats-new/nato-secretary-general-mark-rutte-to-visit-norway-for-the-first-time/id3101867/>; <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/01402390.2025.2549321>; <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cjwqn7z02plo> (accessed 25 February 2026).

10. NATO Allied Maritime Command (2025) 'Dynamic Mongoose 25: NATO hunts beneath the waves as Allies put most advanced Anti-Submarine Warfare capabilities to the test', 24 April 2025, <https://mc.nato.int/media-centre/news/2025/dmon25-nato-hunts-beneath-the-waves-as-allies-put-most-advanced-antisubmarine-warfare-capabilities-to-the-test> (accessed 25 February 2026).

11. Swedish Ministry of Defence (2025) 'Sweden welcomes Italy's participation in NATO's Forward Land Forces in Finland', Government Offices of Sweden, 24 October 2025, <https://www.government.se/press-releases/2025/10/sweden-welcomes-italys-participation-in-natos-forward-land-forces-in-finland/> (accessed 25 February 2026).

Denmark and Greenland have been in the eye of the transatlantic storm. Greenland is of real strategic value for the US, as early warning radars on Greenland are crucial for detecting Russian intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) flying towards US homeland territory across the Arctic airspace.¹² However, the hostile US policy under President Trump towards Greenland, including threats of military means to gain control over the island,¹³ has made accommodating US interests in Greenland impossible. Denmark has therefore stepped up its national military buildup in unprecedented ways, investing in its Arctic operational capability and building back entire capability profiles that were dismantled 20 years ago, such as ground-based air defence.¹⁴ Denmark is also planning to procure four new frigates.¹⁵ It seemed to be the Danish military deployment to Greenland and the ongoing exercise “Arctic Endurance” together with select European allies - among them Finland, Norway and Sweden - that finally persuaded Trump that Greenland is a red line.¹⁶

Increasing European interest in the High North

The UK

The UK enjoys a particularly positive reputation in the Nordic-Baltic region, thanks to what the smaller allies perceive as a “similar outlook on the security environment, transatlantic relations, utility of military force, and the threat from Russia”.¹⁷ The UK has been visibly present in the region for a long time as the leading nation of the JEF. On the bilateral level, the UK reacted quickly to the need for presence and reassurance in Northern Europe in the wake of Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine. In 2022, the UK signed bilateral security assurances with Finland and Sweden, with the purpose of establishing deterrence for the interim period while the two Nordic countries awaited their NATO accession.¹⁸ The following

12. Troy Bouffard et al. (2025) ‘The Strategic Importance of Greenland: The Role of Tactical Missile and Air Defense in the Arctic’, Small Wars Journal, 13 October 2025, <https://smallwarsjournal.com/2025/10/13/greenland-missile-defense-strategy/> (accessed 25 February 2026).

13. Aaron Blake (2026) ‘Is Trump serious about Greenland? Gaming it out’, CNN, 15 January 2026, <https://edition.cnn.com/2026/01/15/politics/greenland-trump-denmark> (accessed 26 February 2026)

14. Danish Ministry of Defence (2025) ‘The Second Agreement on the Arctic and North Atlantic strengthens the operational effectiveness of the Danish Armed Forces with new acquisitions totalling DKK 27.4 billion’, 10 October 2025, <https://www.fmn.dk/en/news/2025/the-second-agreement-on-the-arctic-and-north-atlantic-strengthensthe-operational-effectiveness-of-the-danish-armed-forces-with-new-acquisitions-totalling-dkk-27.4-billion> (accessed 26 February 2026); Danish Ministry of Defence (2025) ‘Parties to the Defence Agreement approve historic investment in ground-based air and missile defence systems’, 17 September 2025, <https://www.fmn.dk/en/news/2025/parties-to-the-defence-agreement-approve-historic-investment-in-ground-based-air-and-missile-defence-systems/> (accessed 26 February 2026).

15. Mads Hørkilde (2025) ‘Beslutning om danske krigsskibe trækker ud. Nu advarer eksperter om, at politikerne er på afveje’, Berlingske, 31 August 2025, <https://www.berlingske.dk/politik/beslutning-om-danske-krigsskibe-traekker-ud-nu-advarer-eksperter-om-at-politikerne-er-paa-afveje> (accessed 26 February 2026).

16. Danish Defence (2026) ‘Arctic Endurance continues throughout 2026’, 23 January 2026, <https://www.forsvaret.dk/en/news/2026/arctic-endurance-fortsatter-i-hele-2026/> (accessed 26 February 2026); Nandita Bose et al. (2026) ‘Trump reversal on Greenland followed push by aides against military option, sources say’, Reuters, 22 January 2026, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/trump-reversal-greenland-followed-push-by-aides-against-military-option-sources-2026-01-22/> (accessed 26 February 2026).

17. Mads Hørkilde (2025) ‘Beslutning om danske krigsskibe trækker ud. Nu advarer eksperter om, at politikerne er på afveje’, Berlingske, 31 August 2025, <https://www.berlingske.dk/politik/beslutning-om-danske-krigsskibe-traekker-ud-nu-advarer-eksperter-om-at-politikerne-er-paa-afveje> (accessed 26 February 2026).

18. Government of the United Kingdom (2022) ‘Prime Minister signs new assurances to bolster European security: 11 May 2022’, 11 May 2022, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/prime-minister-signs-new-assurances-to-bolster-european-security-11-may-2022> (accessed 27 October 2025).

year, the UK opened a new Arctic operations base, called “Camp Viking”, in Northern Norway.¹⁹ Norway’s long-term policy has not allowed permanent NATO or foreign bases on its soil, but the 10-year-agreement with Norway is permanent enough for all intents and purposes. The UK is also among the contributing nations to the new NATO FLF in Finland, and leads NATO’s enhanced FLF in Estonia.²⁰ Thus, the UK has a steady and regular presence in the High North.

France

With new personnel capacity available after having ended operations in Africa, France is now going through a strategic reorientation towards Northern Europe. France published an Arctic Defence Strategy in 2025 and is contributing

to the FLF in Finland.²¹ The French navy and air force have been supporting their Danish counterparts in deployments to Greenland in 2025 and France and Denmark worked together on the certification of A400M military transport aircraft for operations on icy Arctic runways as part of its goal to develop its cold weather capabilities.²² France also conducted a large and flashy air exercise in Northern Sweden last year, with dual use Rafale fighter jets and live ammunition, in a clear signalling effort towards Russia.²³ France is eyeing Sweden as a potential partner for defence industrial cooperation: in an unprecedented move, France decided to buy up to four Swedish-made GlobalEye early warning and control airplanes, hoping for Sweden to buy French frigates in turn.²⁴

19. Royal Navy (2023) ‘New Arctic operations base for UK commandos’, 8 March 2023, <https://www.royalnavy.mod.uk/news/2023/march/08/230308-campvikingnorway> (accessed 27 October 2025).

20. British Army (n.d.) ‘Operation Cabrit: Estonia And Poland’, <https://www.army.mod.uk/learn-and-explore/global-operations/europe/operation-cabrit/> (accessed 26 February 2026).

21. French Ministry of the Armed Forces (2025) ‘Arctic Defence Strategy’, March 2025, https://www.defense.gouv.fr/sites/default/files/dgris/Arctic%20defence%20Strategy_Full%20version.pdf, for more on France’s Arctic interests, see: <https://www.thearcticinstitute.org/frances-strategic-role-natos-arctic-ambitions-non-arctic-powers-perspective/>

22. The Danish Defence Command (2025) ‘F-16 operations in Greenland pose new challenges’, Danish Defence, 16 September 2025, <https://www.forsvaret.dk/en/news/2025/f-16-operations-in-greenland-pose-new-challenges/> (accessed 26 February 2026);

The The Danish Defence Command (2025), ‘Denmark and France Join Forces to Handle “Dark Targets” in Greenland’, Danish Defence, 3 September 2025, <https://www.forsvaret.dk/en/news/2025/danmark-og-frankrig-sammen-om-handtering-af-dark-targets-igronland/> (accessed 26 February 2026); Forsvarskommandoen (2025) ‘Det franske flyvevåben har trænet landing på isbaner i Grønland’, Danish Defence, 13 March 2025, <https://www.forsvaret.dk/da/nyheder/2025/det-franske-flyvevaben-har-tranet-landing-pa-isbaner-i-gron-land/> (accessed 26 February 2026).

23. Niclas Vent (2025) ‘Kärnvapenplan bombar i Sverige – signal till Putin’, Aftonbladet, 26 April 2025, <https://www.aftonbladet.se/nyheter/a/zAj9X5/karnvapenplanen-bombar-i-norrboten-en-signal-till-putin> (accessed 26 February 2026).

24. Reuters (2025) ‘Saab wins order from France for two GlobalEye surveillance planes’, 30 December 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/business/aerospace-defense/saab-wins-order-france-two-globaleye-surveillance-planes-2025-12-30/> (accessed 26 February 2026); Jonas Olsson (2025) ‘Sweden to pick next frigate design by ‘early 2026’, working on GlobalEye sale to France’, Breaking Defence, 24 November 2025, <https://breakingdefense.com/2025/11/sweden-to-pick-next-frigate-design-by-early-2026-working-on-globaleye-sale-to-france/> (accessed 26 February 2026).

Germany

Germany's Arctic Policy Guidelines from 2024 state that "Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine has fundamentally changed the security environment for Germany's engagement in the Arctic. The Arctic can no longer be regarded as an isolated region."²⁵ Germany has invested significantly in its security and defence partnership with Norway, as Norway became its main gas supplier after Russia shut off the gas tap for Germany. Major bilateral projects include a joint submarine project, advanced missiles systems, and a cooperation agreement on space.²⁶ Norway and Germany have also pushed forward cooperation on the protection of critical undersea infrastructure within NATO, where Germany has an urgent self-interest as a gas-reliant country.²⁷ Germany has also signed a memorandums of understanding with Sweden.²⁸ In October

2025, Germany's Minister of Defence visited Iceland and pledged to increase Germany's military presence on the Atlantic island that lacks its own military.²⁹ Germany is also in discussions on closer cooperation in the North Atlantic with Canada, Norway, and Denmark.³⁰

Poland

Poland has expressed an interest in establishing a closer relationship with the Nordic and Baltic countries with a focus on the Baltic Sea and is prioritising the region in its foreign and security policy, encapsulated in the idea of a "Baltic Triangle" consisting of Poland, the Baltic states, and the Nordic countries.³¹ A particular focus lies on cooperation with Sweden, with which Poland signed a strategic partnership agreement in November 2024 and another

25. The German Federal Government (2024) 'Germany's Arctic Policy Guidelines', September 2024, <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/resource/blob/2676060/5496910022404f7cf68049f1b10e4d5a/arktis-leitlinien-data.pdf>, p. 11.

26. Government of Norway (2023) 'Norway and Germany sign agreement on space cooperation', 18 December 2024, <https://www.regjeringen.no/en/aktuelt/norway-and-germany-sign-agreement-on-space-cooperation/id3079293/> (accessed 21 October 2025); Government of Norway (2023) 'Norway and Germany signed a new declaration of intent agreed to enhance the bilateral co-operation in the area of security and defence', 12 September 2023, <https://www.regjeringen.no/en/aktuelt/norway-and-germany-signed-a-new-declaration-of-intent-agreed-to-enhance-the-bilateral-co-operation-in-the-area-of-security-and-defence/id2993637/> (accessed 21 October 2025).

27. Government of Norway (2024) 'New Norwegian-German initiative to strengthen critical undersea infrastructure in Europe', 17 October 2024, <https://www.regjeringen.no/en/aktuelt/new-norwegian-german-initiative-to-strengthen-critical-undersea-infrastructure-in-europe/id3061340/> (accessed 21 October 2025).

28. Ministry of Defence of Germany (2025) 'Deutschland und Schweden wollen Verteidigungskooperation intensivieren', 23 September 2025, <https://www.bmvg.de/de/aktuelles/deutschland-schweden-verteidigungskooperation-intensivieren-5996670> (accessed 28 October 2025); Government Offices of Sweden (n.d.) 'Bilateral defence cooperation', <https://www.government.se/government-policy/international-defence-cooperation/bilateral-defence-cooperation/> (accessed 28 October 2025).

29. Ministry of Defence of Germany (2025) 'Pistorius in Reykjavik: Deutschland und Island vertiefen Militärkooperation', 20 October 2025, <https://www.bmvg.de/de/aktuelles/deutschland-und-island-vertiefen-militaerkooperation-6034006> (accessed 28 October 2025).

30. Ministry of Defence of Germany (2025) 'NATO-Präsenz im hohen Norden: "Wachsam und handlungsfähig"', 22 October 2025, <https://www.bmvg.de/de/aktuelles/nato-praesenz-im-hohen-norden-wachsam-und-handlungsfachig-6034330> (accessed 28 October 2025).

31. Aleksandra Kuczyńska-Zonik (2025) 'Baltic triangle', Heinrich Böll Foundation in Warsaw, 24 July 2025, <https://pl.boell.org/en/2025/07/24/baltic-triangle> (accessed 26 February 2026); Damian Szacawa (2024) 'Poland's Northern Policy and Nordic-Baltic Cooperation', Instytut Europy Środkowej, 19 December 2024, <https://ies.lublin.pl/en/comments/polands-northern-policy-and-nordic-baltic-cooperation/> (accessed 26 February 2026).

joint statement of intent on cooperation in civil defence in February 2025. Poland has also chosen to acquire Swedish submarines.³² Poland intends to deepen its relations with the other Nordic countries as well.³³ Poland has also become a frequent addition to the NB8 format, resulting in the letter soup NB8+PL.³⁴ In terms of military cooperation, Poland was a driving force behind NATO's enhanced vigilance mission Baltic Sentry that became operational in January 2025 after several cable-cutting incidents in the Baltic Sea.³⁵ Following yet another agreement in September 2025, this time on military cooperation, Sweden and Poland also conducted a first-ever bilateral short notice exercise "SNEX Gotland Sentry" in the Baltic Sea.³⁶

Preserving the transatlantic link

Canada

Next to Denmark, Canada is among the close US allies that have been forced to change course radically due to open US hostility. President Trump's suggestions to make Canada the 51st US state, if necessary by invasion, sufficed to make Canadians look for other partners. Canada has therefore intensified its outreach, especially in Northern Europe: Canadian ministers were touring the Nordic region, announcing a strategic partnership with Finland and working towards one with Sweden, in August 2025. With Finland, Canada aims to increase cooperation on comprehensive security, Arctic security; maritime security, particularly addressing risks posed by Russia's shadow fleet;

32. Swedish Ministry of Defence (2025) 'Next step in Polish submarine procurement', Government Offices of Sweden, 17 December 2025, <https://www.government.se/press-releases/2025/12/next-step-in-polish-submarine-procurement/> (accessed 26 February 2026).

33. Swedish Prime Minister's Office (2024) 'New Strategic Partnership between Sweden and Poland', Government Offices of Sweden, 28 November 2024, <https://www.government.se/press-releases/2024/11/new-strategic-partnership-between-sweden-and-poland/> (accessed 26 February 2026); Ministry of the Interior and Administration Republic of Poland (2025) 'Joint Polish-Swedish statement on strengthened cooperation concerning civil defence', 19 February 2025, <https://www.gov.pl/web/mswia-en/joint-polish-swedish-statement-on-strengthened-cooperation-concerning-civil-defence> (accessed 26 February 2026); Ministry of National Defence Republic of Poland (2025) 'Strategic security partnership of Poland and Sweden', 20 January 2025, <https://www.gov.pl/web/national-defence/strategic-security-partnership-of-poland-and-sweden> (accessed 26 February 2026); Jacek Lepiarz (2024) 'Poland seeks new partners in Scandinavia and the Baltics', Deutsche Welle, 30 November 2024, <https://www.dw.com/en/poland-seeks-new-partners-in-scandinavia-and-the-baltics/a-70929195> (accessed 26 February 2026); The Chancellery of the Prime Minister Republic of Poland (2024) 'Polish-Norwegian relations a model for other countries in the world', 28 February 2024, <https://www.gov.pl/web/primeminister/polish-norwegian-relations-a-model-for-other-countries-in-the-world> (accessed 26 February 2026).

34. Ministry of Foreign Affairs Republic of Poland (2024) 'Poland's top diplomat meets with ambassadors of Nordic and Baltic', 6 March 2024, countries <https://www.gov.pl/web/diplomacy/polands-top-diplomat-meets-with-ambassadors-of-nordic-and-baltic-countries> (accessed 26 February 2026).

35. The Chancellery of the Prime Minister Republic of Poland (2025) "'Baltic Sentry" – A New NATO Mission', 14 January 2025 <https://www.gov.pl/web/primeminister/baltic-sentry--a-new-nato-mission> (accessed 26 February 2026); The Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (2025) 'Baltic Sentry To Enhance Nato's Presence In The Baltic Sea', NATO, 14 January 2025, <https://shape.nato.int/news-releases/baltic-sentry-to-enhance-natos-presence-in-the-baltic-sea> (accessed 26 February 2026).

36. Swedish Ministry of Defence (2025) 'Military-technical cooperation between Sweden and Poland', Government Offices of Sweden, 2 September 2025, <https://www.government.se/press-releases/2025/09/military-technical-cooperation-between-sweden-and-poland/> (accessed 26 February 2026); Michał Górski (2025) 'Poland and Sweden launch Baltic military drill', Defence 24, 22 September 2025, <https://defence24.com/defence-policy/poland-and-sweden-launch-baltic-military-drill> (accessed 26 February 2026).

hybrid threats; and cyber challenges.³⁷ With Sweden, the areas identified for closer cooperation reflect the Canadian interest in the Swedish defence and other critical industries: defence and security, space cooperation, digital innovation and emerging technologies, critical minerals and clean energy supply chains, and pharmaceutical and life sciences cooperation.³⁸ Whether Canada will choose the Swedish JAS Gripen fighter jet instead of more American F-35s is unclear, but the Swedish company Saab might set up Gripen production in Canada to ramp up its production capacity.³⁹

While Canada has traditionally wanted to keep the Arctic off NATO's agenda and focus on the bilateral cooperation with the US within the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD),⁴⁰ this is now changing rapidly as more non-Arctic allies seek to increase their presence in the region and the alliance is ramping up its exercise and other activity in the High North. The Nordic countries would be wise to reciprocate the Canadian interest for closer cooperation, given Canada's like-mindedness, similar Arctic climate, and vast untapped natural resources – especially critical minerals and metals. Even though Canada's military capability is negligible compared

with the US, Canada is going through a similar rearmament process as European NATO members and has the potential to become an important partner in the transatlantic link.

The United States

The biggest factor of uncertainty within NATO is currently the Trump administration and to what extent the alliance can keep working as intended if the US significantly cuts back its commitment to European security. The US has already initiated a process of transferring responsibility for NATO's Joint Force Commands (JFCs) to European allies: the UK is to take over JFC Norfolk, located in Virginia, US, and Italy the JFC in Naples.⁴¹

The Trump administration's national security strategy fundamentally reshapes the transatlantic relationship. It prioritizes the Indo-Pacific theater and a managed competition with China, while pressuring European capitals to align with US demands for a negotiated settlement in Ukraine. For Nordic and European allies it is clear that the post-WW2 era of American security guarantees is over.

37. Government of Canada (2025) 'Canada and Finland joint statement on foreign and security policy strategic partnership', Government of Canada, 19 August 2025, <https://www.canada.ca/en/global-affairs/news/2025/08/canada-and-finland-joint-statement-on-foreign-and-security-policy-strategic-partnership.html> (accessed 26 February 2026).

38. Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada (2025) 'Joint statement: Toward a strategic partnership between Canada and Sweden', Government of Canada, 19 August 2025, <https://www.canada.ca/en/innovation-science-economic-development/news/2025/08/joint-statement-to-ward-a-strategic-partnership-between-canada-and-sweden.html> (accessed 26 February 2026).

39. Elisabeth Gosselin-Malo (2026) 'Saab floats Gripen production hub in Canada, if Ottawa were willing', Defense News, 5 February 2026, <https://www.defensenews.com/global/europe/2026/02/05/saab-floats-gripen-production-hub-in-canada-if-ottawa-were-willing/> (accessed 26 February 2026).

40. Gabriella Griecius (2024) 'NATO and the Arctic: Implications for Command and Control', North American and Arctic Defence and Security Network, 20 August 2024, <https://www.naadsn.ca/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/24aug-NATO-Can-C2-GG-Policy-Brief.pdf>

41. NATO (2026) 'European Allies to take on new leadership roles in NATO's Command Structure', NATO, 10 February 2026, <https://www.nato.int/en/news-and-events/articles/news/2026/02/06/european-allies-to-take-on-new-leadership-roles-in-natos-command-structure> (accessed 4 March 2026).

Beyond the clearly waning US interest in European security, another problem for Europe is US policy elsewhere. The fall 2025 military campaign against fisher boats suspected of drug trafficking in the Caribbean prompted the UK to stop sharing intelligence with the US to avoid complicity in potentially illegal operations.⁴² Most European NATO allies have hitherto followed a policy of supporting the US in its military operations for reasons of alliance solidarity. The global war on terror in the Middle East after the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the US was the only time NATO's Article 5 collective defence clause has been activated to date. However, there is no appetite in Europe to support the US either politically, let alone militarily, in the military endeavours the Trump administration may choose to engage in – from Venezuela to Iran – although it is equally unlikely that the US under Trump would desire European support. That even the UK, historically the closest and most loyal US ally, limits intelligence sharing and was reluctant to let the US use British bases in the buildup on Iran, is a significant change.⁴³

An agreement has emerged among European NATO allies that Europe needs to become capable to operate

independently of the US as fast as possible. However, Europe's dependence on various US-provided strategic enablers will take time and money to overcome.⁴⁴

Europe's nuclear options

The question of how much American military footprint will remain in Europe is intimately tied to the much larger elephant in the room: NATO's Article 5 security guarantee based on the extended nuclear deterrence that the US has provided its European allies. The problem is not only that the US is now facing two nuclear peers (Russia and China) instead of one, like during the Cold War when the extended deterrence arrangements were established, but that the current US administration under President Trump is actively undermining the credibility of the extended deterrence by calling American commitment to European security into question.⁴⁵

During his first term in office, Trump already nearly withdrew the US from NATO.⁴⁶ His inauguration and the hostile approach the new administration adopted towards Europe immediately prompted a public and expert debate

42. Natasha Bertrand (2025) 'Exclusive: UK suspends some intelligence sharing with US over boatstrike concerns in major break', CNN, 12 November 2025, <https://edition.cnn.com/2025/11/11/politics/uk-suspends-caribbean-intelligence-sharing-us> (accessed 26 February 2026); Katherine Faulders et al. (2025) 'Trump briefed on updated military options in Venezuela', ABC News, 14 November 2025, <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/trump-briefed-updated-military-options-venezuela/story?id=127503563> (accessed 26 February 2026).

43. Sophie Brams (2026) 'Pentagon blocked from using UK bases in potential Iran strike', The Hill, 20 February 2026, <https://thehill.com/policy/defense/5748731-starmer-refuses-trump-iran/> (accessed 26 February 2026).

44. Amy Graham & Francis Harris (2025) 'Europe — Very Well, Alone', Center for European Policy Analysis, 23 June 2025, <https://cepa.org/article/europe-very-well-alone/> (accessed 6 March 2026).

45. Paige Gasser (2025) 'toward A New Strategic Approach To U.S. Extended Nuclear Deterrence', Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory - Center for Global Security Research, August 2025, <https://cgsr.llnl.gov/sites/cgsr/files/2025-09/Toward%20a%20New%20Strategic%20Approach%20to%20U.S.%20Extended%20Nuclear%20Deterrence-WEB.pdf>; Trevor Hunnicutt & David Brunnstorm (2025) 'Trump: If NATO members don't pay, US won't defend them', Reuters, 7 March 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/world/trump-if-nato-members-dont-pay-us-wont-defend-them-2025-03-07/> (accessed 26 February 2026).

46. Jens Stoltenberg (2025) 'Min tid i Nato', Albert Bonniers Förlag

on Europe's nuclear options.⁴⁷ Europe is relatively better off than Indo-Pacific US allies, as France and the UK possess their own national nuclear arsenals and have agreed to start coordinating their nuclear policies, capabilities and operations.⁴⁸ The proliferation pressure is thus not as strong as in Asia and the Indo-Pacific, where especially Japan and South Korea may well cross the nuclear threshold, if they assess the risk of abandonment by the US to be sufficiently high.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, there is a fairly active debate in Sweden about other nuclear options and Poland has openly signalled its intent to explore the acquisition of nuclear weapons.⁵⁰

France, with the only fully independent European nuclear capability, has risen to the occasion and offered European partners the opportunity to explore developing the French nuclear deterrent into a European "forward deterrence".⁵¹ France already made an offer for strategic dialogue on the matter in 2020 but was rebuffed as European partners did not want to risk rocking the boat with the US. But now,

after initial talks with Poland, Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands, Sweden, and Greece, it was announced that first concrete steps would begin this year, involving partners in French nuclear exercises. At the same time, France announced the first increase in decades of its arsenal of currently about 300 warheads, and has also offered to temporarily deploy elements of its strategic forces to allied countries, e.g. for exercise purposes.

There are some questions related to relying mainly on the French nuclear deterrent. The UK, Europe's other nuclear power, only has a submarine-based deterrent but no air leg, like France, and is technologically dependent on the US. The UK's nuclear deterrent therefore only qualifies as a contribution, not a fully-fledged alternative. The French nuclear deterrent cannot replace the US one either, given that France has a significantly more limited arsenal (like the UK) and does not foresee tactical nuclear war as an option in its doctrine.⁵² However, otherwise the questions raised about the credibility of a sovereign French nuclear

47. Astrid Chevreuil & Doreen Horschig (2025) 'Can France and the United Kingdom Replace the U.S. Nuclear Umbrella?', Center for Strategic and International Studies, 4 March 2025, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/can-france-and-united-kingdom-replace-us-nuclear-umbrella> (accessed 26 February 2026); Minna Ålander (2025) 'The Trump Administration Should Be Careful What They Wish For', Northern Flank Notes, 17 February 2025, <https://minnalander.substack.com/p/the-trump-administration-should-be> (accessed 26 February 2026); Paul van Hooft (2025) 'Nuclear Deterrence: Can Britain and France Take on America's Role in Defending Europe Against Russian Aggression?', RAND, 19 March 2025, <https://www.rand.org/pubs/commentary/2025/03/nuclear-deterrence-can-britain-and-france-take-on-americas.html> (accessed 26 February 2026).

48. Prime Minister's Office, 10 Downing Street & The Rt Hon Sir Keir Starmer KCB KC MP (2025) 'Northwood Declaration: 10 July 2025 (UK-France joint nuclear statement)', United Kingdom government, 10 July 2025, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/northwood-declaration-10-july-2025-uk-france-joint-nuclear-statement> (accessed 26 February 2026).

49. Ross Andersen (2025) 'The Nuclear Club Might Soon Double', The Atlantic, 8 July 2025, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2025/08/nuclear-proliferation-arms-race/683251/> (accessed 26 February 2026).

50. Dagens Nyheter Ledare (2026) 'Ingen vill diskutera svenska kärnvapen – men vi måste', Dagens Nyheter, 10 January 2026, <https://www.dn.se/ledare/ingen-vill-diskutera-svenska-karnvapen-men-vi-maste/> (accessed 26 February 2026).

51. Leila Abboud & Ian Bott (2026) 'France offers to deploy nuclear deterrent across Europe for first time', Financial Times, 2 March 2026, <https://www.ft.com/content/45d90eeb-5084-4c22-8d4a-9fdb223759fb> (accessed 11 March 2026).

52. Emmanuelle Maitre (2025) 'The French nuclear deterrent in a changing strategic environment', Fondation pour la recherche stratégique, 11 March 2025, <https://frstrategie.org/en/publications/notes/french-nuclear-deterrent-changing-strategic-environment-2025>; Liviu Horovitz & Lydia Wachs (2023) 'France's Nuclear Weapons and Europe', Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, 15 March 2023, https://www.swp-berlin.org/publications/products/comments/2023C15_Frances_NuclearWeapons.pdf

deterrent that would include a “European dimension”⁵³ are essentially the same as with the US: would France be willing to trade Paris for Tallinn, and does decision-making need to be shared with partners who are supposed to benefit from the extended deterrence?⁵⁴ So far that option remains ruled out. Like in the past with the American arrangement, notwithstanding the inherent uncertainty about the nuclear power’s resolve and solidarity to use nuclear weapons to protect allies, none of these issues are insurmountable.

Conclusion

The end of the transatlantic partnership as it existed until around the 2000's should not have come as a surprise, given that US interests have begun shifting towards the Indo-Pacific long before Donald Trump’s first term as US president.⁵⁵ What is more, Trump nearly ended NATO already during his first term and is merely implementing now what he already threatened then.

While the Russian full-scale war in Ukraine was a strategic shock for most European countries, it did not induce sufficient sense of urgency to unite behind a common purpose and to build up militarily in Western Europe.

Trump’s second term in office did. While the Russian aggression only transformed the threat assessment of countries in Russia’s direct vicinity, the US openly questioning its commitment to defend Europe upended the security arrangement that has been in place for Western Europe since World War II. Less than a year after Trump’s return to power, Europe therefore finds itself on the same page about the need for independent European military capability.

While rethinking European defence so fundamentally is easier said than done, Europe is nevertheless well on its way to take charge of its own security. Progress is particularly tangible in Northern Europe, where the Nordic countries and other European NATO allies have increased their military cooperation and presence quickly over the four years of Russia’s full-scale war in Ukraine. The greatest dilemma for Europe is the renewed relevance of nuclear deterrence and the global proliferation tendencies that the Trump administration has now accelerated not only on the adversary’s side, but also among allies. Europeans will have to learn to trust each other – and to identify new transatlantic and global partners – in order to survive the upheaval.

53. Emmanuelle Maitre & Etienne Marcuz (2025) ‘The European dimension of deterrence: prospects for cooperation’, Fondation pour la recherche stratégique, 27 October 2025, <https://frstrategie.org/en/publications/recherches-et-documents/european-dimension-deterrence-prospects-cooperation-2025>

54. Carine Guerout & Jason Moyer (2024) ‘France wants to extend its nuclear umbrella to Europe. But is Macron ready to trade Paris for Helsinki?’, Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, 10 May 2024, <https://thebulletin.org/2024/05/france-wants-to-extend-its-nuclear-umbrella-to-europe-but-is-macron-ready-to-trade-paris-for-helsinki/> (accessed 26 February 2026); Alexander Sorg (2025) ‘Force de l’Europe: How Realistic is a French Nuclear Umbrella?’, War On The Rocks, 24 March 2025, <https://warontherocks.com/2025/03/force-de-leurope-how-realistic-is-a-french-nuclear-umbrella/> (accessed 26 February 2026).

55. Zane Kheir (2025) ‘The US Pivot to Asia Reborn: Old Grand Strategies, New Challenges’, The Diplomat, 10 January 2025, <https://thediplomat.com/2025/01/the-us-pivot-to-asia-reborn-old-grand-strategies-new-challenges/> (accessed 26 February 2026).