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DEFENCE AND SECURITY COMMITTEE (DSC) SUB-COMMITTEE ON TRANSATLANTIC DEFENCE AND SECURITY COOPERATION (DSCTC)

SEA CHANGE: THE RAPID EVOLUTION OF BALTIC SECURITY AFTER RUSSIA'S INVASION OF UKRAINE

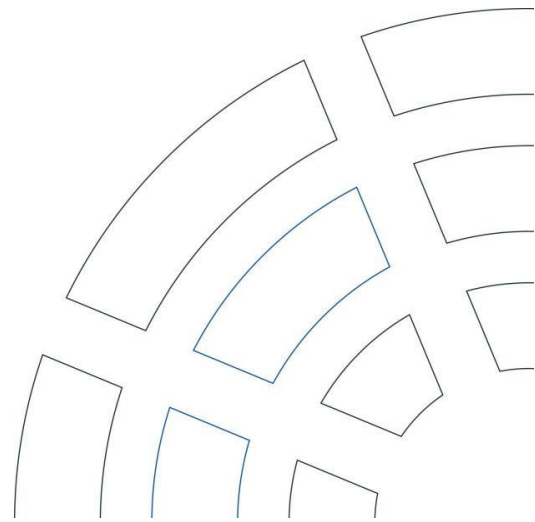
Report

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Founded in 1955, the NATO Parliamentary Assembly acts as a consultative interparliamentary organisation which is institutionally separate from NATO. This report was adopted by the Defence and Security Committee at the 2023 NATO PA Annual Session in Copenhagen, Denmark. It is based on information from publicly available sources or NATO PA meetings – which are all unclassified.



Russia's invasion of Ukraine unleashed the most violent and consequential conventional war on the European continent since World War II. The war sent immediate shockwaves that continue to resonate along the Alliance's eastern flank, from the High North down to the Black and Mediterranean Seas. The impact on Baltic Sea security is ongoing and represents a potentially wholesale transformation of the region's security order.

In the run-up to and immediately following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Allies surged maritime, land, and air forces to the Baltic to reinforce NATO's regional deterrence and defence posture. Less than three months later, Sweden and Finland submitted their letters of application to join NATO together on 18 May 2022. With their bids to join the Alliance, both states abandoned long-standing and relatively entrenched positions of neutrality. Finland's accession and Sweden's future accession to NATO will fundamentally impact the security order of the Baltic Sea region.

Implementing NATO's new baseline for deterrence and defence is an essential imperative. To get there, Allies agreed to six decisions at the Vilnius Summit. Key among them are three new regional defence plans which establish clear responsibilities for all member states - Allies in the Baltic Sea region will need to invest in force structures adapted to take on these responsibilities. Immediate priorities will be combat-capable ground forces, integrated air and missile-defence systems, long-range firepower, advanced ISR, and logistics. Implementation of the new defence investment pledge agreed upon by member states at the summit will provide much of the resources necessary to fulfil this.

This report reviews the significant changes to Baltic Sea security since the end of the Cold War, focusing on the rapid shift to the region's security after 2014. These changes are the key drivers for Finland and Sweden's relative about-face in their foreign security policies. It assesses the impact of the expansion on NATO's north-eastern flank via the addition of Finland as the 31st NATO Ally, and reviews the immediate contributions Finland will bring, and what Sweden has the potential to bring, to the Alliance, as well as the potential roles each will be able to play in the Alliance post-accession. It concludes with a set of recommendations for NATO member state parliaments and governments to consider as they negotiate another challenging and rapidly changing year in Euro-Atlantic security. Key among them are continued support for Sweden's membership bid and an increased Allied forward presence across the region, anchored by improved ISR assets, long-range strike capabilities, improved air defence systems, as well as coastal defences.

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I- INTRODUCTION

1. Russia's invasion of Ukraine unleashed the most violent and consequential conventional war on the European continent since World War II. The war sent immediate shockwaves that continue to resonate along the Alliance's eastern flank, from the High North down to the Black and Mediterranean Seas. The impact on Baltic Sea security is ongoing and represents a potentially wholesale transformation of the region's security order.
2. In the run-up to and immediately following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Allies surged maritime, land, and air forces to the Baltic to reinforce NATO's regional deterrence and defence posture. Less than three months later, Sweden and Finland submitted their letters of application to join NATO together on 18 May 2022. With their bids to join the Alliance, both states abandoned long-standing and relatively entrenched positions of neutrality. Finland's accession, and Sweden's future accession to NATO will fundamentally impact the security order of the Baltic Sea region.
3. Allies made clear at the Vilnius Summit that implementing the new baseline for deterrence and defence is an essential imperative. Key to doing so involves the implementation of three new regional plans, each with their own set responsibilities for designated Allies. Allies in the Baltic Sea region will need to invest in force structures adapted to take on these responsibilities. Immediate priorities will be combat-capable ground forces, integrated air and missile-defence systems, long-range firepower, ISR, and logistics. Implementation of the new defence investment pledge agreed upon by member states at the summit will provide much of the resources necessary to fulfil this.
4. This report reviews the significant changes to Baltic Sea security since the end of the Cold War, focusing on the rapid shift to the region's security after 2014. These changes are the key drivers for Finland and Sweden's relative about-face in their foreign security policies. It assesses the impact of the expansion on NATO's north-eastern flank via the addition of Finland as the 31st NATO Ally, and reviews the immediate contributions Finland will bring, and what Sweden has the potential to bring, to the Alliance, as well as the potential roles each will be able to play in the Alliance post-accession. It concludes with a set of recommendations for NATO member state parliaments and governments to consider as they negotiate another challenging and rapidly changing year in Euro-Atlantic security. Key among them are continued support for Sweden's membership bid and an increased Allied forward presence across the region, anchored by improved ISR assets, long-range strike capabilities, improved air defence systems, as well as coastal defences.

II- A 'STRATEGIC TIME-OUT' TO REAP THE BENEFITS OF THE PEACE DIVIDEND

5. Over the first decades after the Cold War, the Baltic Sea region's political gravity shifted significantly. The dissolution of the Soviet Union brought about immediate regional political cooperation initiatives, such as the Council of the Baltic Sea States in 1992, which started to undo the sea's East-West division. Poland and the Baltic States democratised quickly – even Russia attempted a democratic transition in the 1990s. However, while Russia's democratic experiment was failing by the turn of the millennium, Poland and the Baltic States raced toward Euro-Atlantic integration – Poland was admitted to NATO in 1999, the Baltic States in 2004; Finland and Sweden entered the EU in 1995, Poland and the Baltic States in 2004. By the early 2000s, every Baltic region state was looking West for its future, except for Russia.
6. In the post-Cold War era, the Baltic Sea became known for not only increased political cooperation, but the growth associated with increased cooperation and trade. From 1995 to 2017,

for example, one study shows the Baltic Sea region¹ economies grew on average at 2.7 percent, while the EU 28 average was 1.6 percent over the same period (Skilling, 2018). The same period cut in half the income gap between the Nordic and the Baltic states and Poland. This increased connectivity resulted in a boom in inter-Baltic seaborne trade, and a slew of undersea infrastructure from telecommunication cables to energy pipelines. The resulting flow of energy, communications, and commodities drove growth and ever closer economic integration.

7. The post-Cold War decades of peace also brought about a period of reflection on the purpose of the regions' armed forces, particularly among the Nordic states: The Swedes even called the period a "strategic timeout" (Milne, 2017). The result was a Nordic-wide cashing in on the peace dividend in the form of a significant reduction in defence spending, which in turn led to a decline in capabilities. Swedish defence spending, for example, hovered around 1 percent GDP in the decade up to 2014, down from 2 percent at the end of the Cold War, and 4 percent in the 1960s (Braustein, 2021). The declining trends were similar across the Nordic states, though the troughs levelled out slightly higher.

8. Nordic states² also allowed some of their force development shift to meet the post-9/11 demand among Allies and partners to have more robust expeditionary forces, capable of partnering with global counter-terrorism operations. With already less resources, these efforts diverted attention from their territorial defence and Baltic maritime space focus. Finland, however, remained a clear exception, as it continued to focus on investing in and maintaining the forces necessary for territorial defence – a hard-learned lesson over centuries of wars and territorial occupation by Russia.

9. The Nordic states have a range of security policies and affiliations with the Euro-Atlantic institutions. Some are members of NATO, but not the EU, others of the EU, but not NATO – to varying degrees each participates in missions and operations of one or the other, or both. In contrast, Germany, Poland, and the three Baltic states are all members of NATO and the EU, and take part in both organisations' military and security missions. To overcome their diversity of approaches, the Nordic states established the Nordic Defence Cooperation (NORDEFCO) as a means of institutionalising previously ad hoc approaches to defence cooperation. NORDEFCO was a clear means of using the regions' relatively small defence resources more efficiently. By 2011, the Baltic states were asked to participate in some areas of the cooperation – often referred to as NORDEFCO+3 (Forsberg, 2013).

III- 2014 AS A CRITICAL JUNCTURE: A RENEWED FOCUS ON NORDIC-BALTIC SECURITY, 2014-2022

A. INCREASING RUSSIAN BRINKMANSHIP IN THE BALTIC AND THE ALLIED RESPONSE

10. Russia's illegal and illegitimate annexation of Crimea and subsequent financial and military support for armed formations in eastern Ukraine in February-March 2014 sent shockwaves through the Alliance. Russia's actions were a brazen use of force to change established borders to expand its own territory at the expense of a sovereign independent nation. The Alliance responded to the

¹ The study includes only the European Nordic states, the Baltic States, and Poland in its data analysis, not Germany.

² Iceland, Norway, Denmark, Sweden, and Finland (including the autonomous territories of the Faroe Islands and Greenland (Kingdom of Denmark) and the Finnish autonomous territory of Åland).

act by suspending all practical civilian and military cooperation with Russia in April 2014.³ The post-Cold War souring of Russia-NATO relations thus began in earnest.

11. The security dynamics of the Baltic Sea region (BSR) have been evolving significantly ever since. NATO Allies took the first significant steps in the post-Cold War era to bolster their deterrence and defence posture along the Alliance's eastern flank as part of the Readiness Action Plan (RAP) announced at their September 2014 Wales Summit. A key RAP focus was the Baltic region, which many analysts consider(ed) to be strategically vulnerable due to its unique geopolitics – including the relative vulnerability of the three Baltic states to the northeast of Russia's Kaliningrad exclave and ally Belarus, the presence of both NATO Allies and partners Sweden and Finland, and the closed nature of the sea itself, with narrow straits governing entry and exit. These steps included the quadrupling of Allies' Baltic States Air Policing Mission (from 4 to 16 jets), additional NATO AWACS reconnaissance flights, and increased naval forces operating and exercising in the area. It also included the establishment of NATO Force Integration Units (NFIUs) to facilitate the rapid deployment of Allied forces⁴ to the eastern flank, and support regional defence planning, training, and exercising. NFIUs in the BSR were established in the three Baltic states and Poland.

12. In addition, as part of the Framework Nations' Concept⁵, adopted in the run-up to the 2014 Wales Summit, the UK agreed to lead a framework nation construct in the BSR – the Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF). The original agreement on the JEF was signed in 2015 between the UK, Denmark, Estonia, Latvia, the Netherlands, Lithuania, and Norway (It was updated in 2021, adding Iceland, Finland, and Sweden)^{6,7}. The JEF has an 'opt-in' clause, allowing members to provide capabilities and expertise depending on the task and members involved. The UK provides JEF command and control via its deployable Standing Joint Force Headquarters (SJFHQ) in Northwood, England.

13. Allied efforts to bolster collective defence in the Baltic region proved necessary, as, in parallel to its intervention in Ukraine, Russian foreign policy had significantly hardened toward NATO Allies. Increasingly strong rhetoric coming out of Moscow denounced the Alliance and made clear Russia's intention to undermine NATO's interests whenever and wherever possible. The result was a rapid escalation in close military encounters between Russia's air, sea, and land forces with those of NATO and its partners across Europe. By the end of 2014, one report noted over 50 incidents such as airspace violations (often requiring emergency scrambles for monitoring and escort), near mid-air collisions (with both military and civilian aircraft), close at-sea encounters, as well as others (Frear, et al., 2014). Most of the incidents took place on, in, over or around the Baltic Sea, significantly increasing tension between Russia and NATO Allies and their partners Sweden and Finland.

3 The NATO Parliamentary Assembly withdrew Russia's Associate Membership of the Assembly all together in March 2014.

4 The Readiness Action Plan, announced at the Wales Summit, was a suite of measures to both reassure Central and Eastern European Allies and to adapt Allied command structures and force readiness. The most significant step announced was the tripling of the NATO Response Force (NRF) to 40,000 and the establishment of the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF) to act as a 5,000-strong 'spearhead force' within it.

5 As part of the Framework Nations' Concept, Allies agreed to develop 'framework' nations (smaller groups within the Alliance, but to include partners), with lead nations providing the command and control framework. The goal was to galvanise nations – in a region or with historical cooperation – to coordinate exercising, capability development, and doctrine. The concept was meant to improve interoperability, burden sharing, and the security of NATO's regions.

6 <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-led-joint-force-launched-to-tackle-common-threats>

7 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/joint-expeditionary-force-policy-direction-july-2021/joint-expeditionary-force-jef-policy-direction>

14. By the end of 2014, Russia's anti-NATO position had hardened significantly. This was made clear by the classification of NATO's military infrastructure as a 'threat' in a new military doctrine published on 25 December (Oliker, 2016). Into 2015, the pace of incidents continued to increase and, as regional defence officials told visiting delegations from the NATO PA Defence and Security Committee, the range and sophistication of the Russian platforms encountered during such incidents raised significant concern (NATO PA, 2015, 2016, 2018, 2019). Russian grey zone activities also sharply increased, including economic coercion, disinformation (and propaganda), cyberattacks, the escalation of confrontive rhetoric with the West, and the use of drones along critical maritime and military infrastructure. This was particularly evident in the Baltic States.

15. Russia also steadily outfitted its anti-access/area denial (A2/AD)⁸ capabilities over the same period. Russia's A2/AD zones began to create an overlapping, redundant precision strike capability from Russia's bastion for its strategic forces on the Kola Peninsula in the Barents Sea down to the Crimean Peninsula in the Black Sea. A2/AD capabilities in the Baltic – in Kaliningrad and St. Petersburg – were reinforced by the strike capability from those in the Western Military District near Belarus and the Baltic states (Hicks, et al., 2016). Russia's ability to strike at distance with precision with its new Iskander-M and Iskander-K missile systems (capable of delivering both conventional and nuclear warheads), holds not only the immediate Baltic Region states at risk, but also other NATO bases within their range. Russia deployed the Iskander-M missile to Kaliningrad in 2016 (Reuters, 2016). In addition, according to experts at the Federation of American Scientists, Russia began the "major renovation" of an "active nuclear weapons storage site" in Kaliningrad at the same time (Kristensen, 2018).

B. INCREASED ALLIED PRESENCE – SIGNIFICANT DEFENCE CHALLENGES

16. Escalating concerns over Baltic State vulnerability drove Allies to announce the establishment of the Enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) by the 2016 Summit in Warsaw. The eFP established forward-deployed multinational battlegroups of +/- 1,000 soldiers on a permanently rotating basis in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland. These were anchored by the establishment of the Multinational Division North East (MND-NE) in Poland, which coordinates their activities. A total of 23 Allies contribute to the eFP battlegroups.

17. Despite these initiatives and efforts, the Baltic Sea region remained a key vulnerability. This was due to both the escalating regional brinkmanship between Russia and NATO regional Allies and partners, as well as the growing consensus that Allies would be hard-pressed to repel a concerted Russian attack on the Baltic States – a series of RAND tabletop exercises concluded it would take Russian forces no longer than 60 hours to reach either Tallinn or Riga (Shlapak, 2016). As some experts noted, the eFP multinational battalions, as fielded, were simply insufficient for the defensive purposes of Allies' stated objectives – while the battalions hovered just under 5,000 troops, experts estimated NATO would in fact need about 35,000 in the Baltics with much better equipment, such as air defence systems and heavy armour to defend and repel a Russian attack (Shlapak, 2016). Given the numerical superiority of Russia's forces in the Western District and its geographic proximity with secure and robust supply lines up to the borders of Estonia and Latvia, a Russian incursion into the Baltics would present Allies with a hard fight to recover rapidly seized territory.

18. As such, Allied attention to the Baltic region, therefore, was considered woefully insufficient. First, the whole defence concept for the eastern flank was predicated on a tripwire defence posture

8 A2/AD forces and infrastructure seek to deny an enemy combatant entry into a region or once entered, significantly reduce their ability to manoeuvre. A2/AD forces and infrastructure combine air defences, counter-maritime forces, as well as theatre strike missiles and precision-guided weapons.

- meaning the relatively smaller forces in place would require rapid reinforcements from the centre to the periphery of the Alliance. Conceptually, the tripwire concept implicitly recognises Allies would cede territory in the region in the event of a Russian attack. Second, from a theatre and tactical standpoint, reinforcing a contingency in the Baltics presents two significant, as well as many other, obstacles. As noted above, the ability to reinforce the Baltic States in any potential contingency was challenged by both geography of the Alliance in the region and the status of Russian forces along its western borders and in Kaliningrad: The Suwalki Gap, the narrow strip of land between Poland and Lithuania connecting Kaliningrad and Belarus, plus the growingly complex A2/AD bubbles in the region made the prospect of Baltic reinforcement even more complex than any other Alliance region from a defence planning perspective. Russia's increasingly robust A2/AD bubbles in the region made the prospect of accessing and operating in the region a very difficult military undertaking.

C. INCREASED READINESS AND REINFORCEMENT CAPACITY

19. Given the continued decline in Russia-NATO relations, as well as Russia's concerted efforts to modernise and expand its conventional and strategic forces, and deploy them forward along its borders with NATO, Allies announced the Readiness Initiative at the July 2018 Brussels Summit to add significant reinforcement capabilities to the 2014 RAP adaptations. As part of the initiative, Allies pledged to coordinate the availability of 30 battalions, 30 air squadrons, and 30 naval combat vessels on 30 days' notice for reinforcement, warfighting, or crisis intervention. The initiative backstopped efforts to bolster Allied presence in the region via increased exercising of land, air, and maritime forces, as well as more patrolling by NATO's Standing Naval Groups and individual Allies. A key focus of the initiative was ensuring Allies had the capabilities ready to break through Russia's Baltic A2/AD bubble in its Kaliningrad exclave to be able to reinforce NATO forces in the event of a contingency.

20. A year later, in May 2019, Allied Chiefs and Heads of Defence agreed to a new Military Strategy to better formulate key NATO military objectives, as well as the ways and means needed to achieve them. The new Military Strategy was also an explicit recognition of the Alliance's shift to refocus on collective defence as its core task – the post-2014 adaptations had made this a de facto reality, but to have sufficient forces capable of responding to a contingency in Allied territory in time required renewed attention to force structure adaptation by all Allies.

21. The framework for this structure came in the form of the 2020 Concept for the Deterrence and Defence of the Euro-Atlantic Area (DDA) and the 2021 NATO Warfighting Capstone Concept (NWCC), which serve as implementing concepts for the NATO Military Strategy. As briefers at NATO Allied Commander Transformation (ACT) told the DSC delegation during its March 2023 visit, the DDA provides a framework for the employment of Allied military power to deter and defend against known threats, while the NWCC lays out a 20-year view on the development of Allies' military capabilities.

D. INCREASED REGIONAL DEFENCE INVESTMENTS AND NATO FOCUS

22. The dramatic shift in the strategic character of the Baltic Sea region drove all countries in the region to increase defence spending significantly. The shock of Russia's actions in Ukraine spurred Latvia and Lithuania to record the two fastest-growing defence budgets in the world between 2014-2016 (TBT, 2016). All Baltic States and Poland⁹ reached the 2% GDP benchmark established by the 2014 Wales Defence Spending Pledge and have stayed above it since (SIPRI Milex). A key focus by all was force modernisation, with new equipment purchases leading the way - Baltic States

⁹ Poland initially reached the 2% benchmark by 2015 but fell off to 1.9% in 2016 and 2017.

almost doubled new equipment orders by 2016, and then again two years later (IISS, The Military Balance, 2023).

23. In parallel, Nordic defence spending, except for Finland, also increased significantly, but not at the same pace as the Baltic States. Further, among the Nordic states, the previous divergent security perspectives of the roles of (and their own roles in) the Euro-Atlantic institutions began to converge on an understanding of NATO as the central focus of future defence investment direction. For example, in addition to renewed defence investments for force modernisation, Norway pledged to strengthen its own, as well as NATO's, collective defence capabilities in its defence and security policy in its 2016 Long-Term Defence Plan due to the "deterioration" of the European security environment (Norway Government, 2016). Denmark also underscored the importance of NATO in its defence and security policy prior to the 2016 Warsaw Summit. Both nations also pledged to send forces to NATO's eFP multinational battalions upon their announcements.

24. Finland and Sweden, though maintaining their long-standing neutral positions, also moved closer to the Alliance by the 2014 Wales Summit, with each signing host nation support agreements and becoming Enhanced Opportunity Partners. In 2014, both nations also stated their intent to strengthen bilateral defence cooperation across all branches of their armed services as well as their defence ministries; in parallel, they worked to deepen their NORDEFCO efforts and security cooperation with the EU (Salonius-Pasternak, 2014). In September 2017, Sweden held its largest exercise since 1994, Aurora-17, which included 19,000 Swedish soldiers and a contingent of forces from seven NATO Allies¹⁰ and Finland (Winnerstig, 2017). The scenario focused on the defence of Gotland Island – less than a year later, in 2018, Sweden reinvested in the Island's defences via the relocation of a mechanised battalion and anti-aircraft capabilities. In May 2018, both Finland and Sweden signed a trilateral statement of intent with the United States to develop closer cooperation on exercises and interoperability (Finland Defence Ministry, 2018). As noted above, both states also decided to opt in to the Joint Expeditionary Framework in 2021.

25. All Nordic nations signed on to the Nordic Defence Cooperation Vision 2025 in November 2018. The document served as updated political guidance to the original 2009 NORDEFCO memorandum of understanding and was driven by a collective understanding of increasing complexity of the security challenges they faced. Nordic states accordingly pledged to not only improve their own national defence capabilities, but also to hone their capability for joint action, strengthen their security cooperation with the Baltic states, and encourage investment in their defence industrial bases (NORDEFCO, 2018).

IV- THE SHOCK OF RUSSIA'S FULL-SCALE INVASION OF UKRAINE

26. Russia's 24 February 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine sent seismic shockwaves across the Alliance.¹¹ The impact of the war on Baltic Sea security was immediate and significant. As signs increasingly pointed to a potential invasion in January 2022, Allies surged military capabilities to the eastern flank to reinforce the eFP, including air and naval assets, and put their forces on high alert for the NATO NRF. In the Baltics, for example, the UK committed to doubling its forces overseeing the multinational battalion in Estonia (UK Army, 2022; Sciutto & Bertrand, 2022).

10 Denmark, Estonia, France, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, and the United States.

11 The scale and scope of the war's impact on Euro-Atlantic security and beyond is outlined in detail in the 2022 DSC Special Report - [Ukraine's Fight For Freedom & Allied and Global Response to Russia's War](#).

27. To further bolster Allied deterrence and defence, Allies focused on ensuring sufficient forces and equipment surged eastward; the capabilities to reinforce them were placed on high alert. As such, NATO's 40,000-strong NRF was activated for the first time, with some elements of the VJTF deployed to the eastern flank. In the first month after the invasion¹², Allies surged an additional 8,900 troops to eFP battlegroups – the total US forces in Europe rose to over 100,000 (10,000 in Poland and 2,500 in the Baltics) (Vandiver, 2022). By June 7, Germany added 500 additional troops to Lithuania and put an additional high-readiness brigade of 3,000 on alert, with Chancellor Scholz pledging to “defend every centimetre of NATO's territory” (Rinke & Sytas, 2022). Germany practiced with Estonian troops plans for the defence of the nation's vulnerable critical infrastructure such as Tallinn's harbour and international airport (Sprenger, 2022). Sweden earmarked an additional SEK 1.6 billion (USD 163 million) in special funding to strengthen military infrastructure and defence systems on Gotland Island (Johnson, 2022).

28. Allies dramatically increased fighter aircraft and naval patrols across the Baltic Sea region – including the presence of a US carrier strike group (NATO, 2022). Allies' maritime response in the Baltic Sea saw NATO's Standing Naval Groups full for the first time in the last 30 years – NATO had 50 vessels under its command in the Baltic, including frigates, destroyers and minesweepers, making it the second largest fleet in the Alliance, second only to the United States (NATO PA, 2023).

29. All eFP lead nations – Canada, Germany, The United States, and the United Kingdom – increased forces and equipment in the region, demonstrating the Alliance-wide position on reinforcing the NATO's northeast flank. These efforts were critical for two key reasons. First, as noted above, the rapid reinforcement efforts addressed one of the Alliance's key geographic vulnerabilities during a moment of significant insecurity in Euro-Atlantic peace and security. Second, the nations involved sent strong political signals of the enduring strength of NATO: the United States and Canada's continued transatlantic focus, the UK's post-Brexit leadership role in Euro-Atlantic, and particularly Baltic, security, and Germany's new role as a security guarantor in Europe, a key element to the Zeitenwende in German security politics in the wake of Russia's invasion – which is leading to increased German defence investments and an augmented role in Alliance initiatives.

MADRID SUMMIT INITIATIVES AND BALTIC SECURITY

30. At the 28 June Summit in Madrid, Allies pledged to transition NATO's deterrence and defence posture to a modern form of forward defence. Three elements characterise the immediate changes to Allies' posture in the Baltic – larger combat formations, significantly increased high-readiness forces to augment reinforcement capacity, and more stocks of prepositioned equipment for combat enablement. Allies agreed to upgrade the eFP multinational battalions to brigades “when and where required” and welcomed cooperation with the eFP Framework Nations and their Baltic hosts to establish division-level command structures (NATO, 2022a).

31. In a shift in force readiness strategy not seen since the Cold War, Allies adopted the New Force Model, pledging to increase the NRF from 40,000 to 300,000 troops at 15 day-readiness with an additional 200,000 ready within 6 months (NATO, 2022b). The New Force Model is three tiers: 100,000 (or more) forces within 10-day readiness to deploy; 200,000 within 30 days; and an additional 300,000 (or more) to follow within 30-180 days. According to NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, for the first time since the Cold War, Allies will have “forces pre-assigned to defend

12 At the 24 March Extraordinary Summit, Allies agreed to establish an additional four multinational battlegroups in Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania, and Slovakia – bringing the total to eight from the Baltic to the Black Seas.

specific Allies” to hone contingency planning and acquire advanced terrain knowledge to increase their defensive capacities (NATO, 2022c).

32. Additionally, in the Baltic Sea region, the United States pledged to augment its regional rotational deployments, including armoured, aviation, air defence, and special operations forces (White House, 2022). Washington also pledged to enhance its interoperability with regional Allies via increased training initiatives (White House, 2022).

V- CRITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE THREATS AND RUSSIA’S CONTINUED GREY ZONE ACTIONS

33. Threats to seabed and onshore critical infrastructure came into sharp focus for Allies on 26 September 2022. That morning, Danish monitoring equipment detected a seismic event just south-east of Bornholm Island. This was soon followed by the sighting of bubbling methane gas about 800 meters in diameter on the surface. Seventeen hours later, another leak was detected to the north-east. A detonation had blown holes in the steel and concrete casings of the parallel gas pipelines Nord Stream 1 & 2 (Reed, 2022; Economist, 2023). Allies condemned what by all appearances were “deliberate, reckless, and irresponsible acts of sabotage” and noted that “deliberate attacks against Allies’ critical infrastructure would be met with a united and determined response” (NATO, 2022d). At the time of writing, concrete evidence indicating a clear culprit in the pipeline attacks had yet to be determined (Economist, 2023).

34. The attacks revealed a key vulnerability to Allies’ interests: Seabed infrastructure has become an increasingly vital link to the functioning of modern societies and economies, and it is relatively poorly surveilled or protected. For example, as DSC members learned on their February visit to London, the UK is particularly vulnerable to seabed infrastructure threats; up to 95 percent of gas supplies are delivered through undersea pipelines and 98 percent of its data is received via undersea cables. This infrastructure is relatively easy to damage or destroy and difficult to replace. As UK experts noted, Russia has invested significantly in the undersea vessels capable of holding critical undersea infrastructure at risk (NATO PA, 2023).

35. In response to the sabotage of the Nord Stream 1 & 2 pipelines, NATO Allies doubled their naval assets in the Baltic and North Seas. Reinforcement measures include expanded undersea and overflight monitoring with submarines, autonomous vessels, and P8 surveillance aircraft (NATO PA, 2023). Other mysterious hybrid threats surrounding critical infrastructure - from drone sightings to cable cuttings - around Norway, the UK, Sweden, and Germany only reinforced concerns about the vulnerability of energy and communication infrastructure. An ominous warning from Russian President Vladimir Putin, noting the world’s energy infrastructure was now “at risk”, spurred on further coordinated Allied action (Economist, 2022).

36. NATO Allies also set up a Critical Undersea Infrastructure Coordination Cell at NATO Headquarters on 15 February 2023. The new NATO centre will focus on coordinating cooperation between key military and civilian stakeholders to share best practices and leverage innovative technologies, thereby boosting the security of Allied undersea infrastructure. A month later, senior NATO and EU officials announced the launch of a new NATO-EU Task Force on Resilience of Critical Infrastructure, citing “the sabotage of the Nord Stream pipelines and Russia’s weaponisation of energy as part of its war of aggression against Ukraine” (NATO, 2023a). Sharing best practices, situational awareness, and cooperation on improving resilience, the Task Force will begin focusing on energy, transport, digital infrastructure, and space.

VI- THE IMPACT OF RUSSIA'S WAR IN UKRAINE ON RUSSIA'S WESTERN MILITARY DISTRICT

37. Russia's Western Military District received the bulk of Russia's attention over the course of its focused post-2008 military modernisation efforts. As Russian relations with NATO deteriorated post-2014, the Western Military District received the most advanced weaponry and the majority of Russia's highly trained forces (with a total of approximately 400,000 troops estimated prior to the 2022 invasion of Ukraine). These were forward positioned from the southern half of Finland down along the border with the Baltic states and continued down to and along the northern border with Ukraine (NATO PA, 2020). The 6th Combined Arms Army concentrated 30,000 forces from the southern tip of Finland down along Russia's borders with Estonia and Latvia, representing the densest concentration of Russian military forces facing NATO territory (Gramer & Detsch, 2022).

38. After Russia's initial failures in the Kyiv offensive and the onset of attritional warfare in eastern Ukraine, Russia's losses in manpower and equipment rose precipitously.¹³ As a result, Russia committed more and more of its military resources from all five of its military districts across the country. By September 2022, experts reported that as much as 80 percent of the troops from the 6th Combined Arms Army, for example, was committed inside of Ukraine (Gramer & Detsch, 2022). Satellite imagery revealed Russia had moved substantial amounts of anti-aircraft systems and missile systems out of the Western Military District entirely to supplement efforts in Ukraine. For example, Russia moved some of its S-300 long-range surface-to-air missile systems from around St. Petersburg (Gramer & Detsch, 2022). Open-sourced satellite imagery even showed one missile basing area originally aligned near Russia's border with NATO to be entirely abandoned (Mäkeläinen, 2022).

39. Despite Russia's significant losses of men and matériel in its war in Ukraine, Baltic regional officials caution against being dismissive of Russia's ability for force reconstitution and even augmentation along its now expanded border with NATO (Gramer & Detsch, 2023). Experts believe it will take Russia only two years post-war in Ukraine to rebuild to pre-Ukraine invasion levels along its borders with NATO (Gramer & Detsch, 2023). Baltic state officials are quick to underscore the region's remaining vulnerabilities due to its unique geography (Suwalki Gap) and proximity to Russia, and current distance from the substantial Allied reinforcement forces in the event of a contingency (Economist, 2023). As one top Baltic diplomat is quoted saying, "[Russia] wanted to create a buffer between themselves and Europe, and that buffer would be us" (Economist, 2023d).

VII- BALTIC SEA REGION OUTCOMES OF THE VILNIUS SUMMIT

40. At the June 2023 Vilnius Summit, Allied leaders agreed (or reaffirmed) several decisions and measures to further enhance NATO's deterrence and defence posture across all domains – All will have an impact on NATO's ability to deter and defend against any potential future Russian aggression in the Baltic Sea region. The centrepiece of the agreements is a trio of new regional defence plans, which amounts to the largest overhaul of NATO's military structure since the Cold War (NATO, 2023c).¹⁴ The plans are designed to counter NATO's declared two principal threats –

¹³ Detailed analysis of Russia's war in Ukraine is provided in the DSC Special Report, *Ukraine's Fight for Freedom & Allied and Global Response to Russia's War* – Special Rapporteur, Rick Larsen (US).

¹⁴ There are also sub-plans for cyber, space, and special forces.

Russia and terrorism – and provide for 300,000 Allied forces to be at high readiness. The plans divide the area of responsibilities North, Centre, and South: North, covering the Atlantic and European Arctic; Centre, the Baltic down to the Alps; and South, the Mediterranean and Black Sea. The southern plan will split its focus equally between the Russian and terrorism threats. NATO SACEUR, General Christopher Cavoli, will allocate specific countries to specific parts of the region, thereby allowing greater advanced terrain knowledge in the event of a contingency or crisis. To help execute the plans, Allies also agreed to strengthen NATO command and control. The regional plans are a significant step in the implementation of the new baseline for deterrence and defence announced in the 2022 Strategic Concept.

41. The plans will not only allocate responsibilities for the increased amount of ready forces, but it will also compel Allies to set new priorities for procurement and investment to fulfil their new responsibilities. Allies have identified five immediate priorities: combat-capable ground forces, integrated air and missile-defence systems, long-range firepower, advanced digital networks, and logistics. To help achieve these priorities, Allies also agreed upon a new Defence Production Action Plan to increase joint procurement and production capacities among Allies' defence industrial bases. All of this will be underwritten by a new enduring commitment to invest a minimum of 2 percent of GDP in defence (NATO, 2023d).

42. Allies also recommitted to placing additional combat-ready forces on NATO's Eastern Flank, scaling up the existing multinational battlegroups to brigade-sized units where and when required (NATO, 2023d). Just prior to the summit, as part of its announced new national security strategy, Germany pledged to upgrade its presence in Lithuania to a brigade (4,000 troops), up from its current 1,000 troops in place as the lead of NATO's enhanced forward presence battalion in the country (Economist, 2023c). On July 11, Canada and Latvia announced a plan to scale up the multinational battle group in Latvia to a brigade; Canada, as the lead nation, pledged to increase its existing forces from 800 to 2,200 by 2026 (Canada National Defence, 2023). In the weeks prior to the summit, the United States, Germany, and the United Kingdom all practised rapid scaling of their existing battalions to brigades in Poland, Lithuania, and Estonia – Italy plans to do the same in Bulgaria in the near future (Economist, 2023c).

43. Allies also announced their intention to improve the "readiness, preparedness and interoperability of NATO's Integrated Air and Missile Defence, in particular through regular training and the rotational presence of modern air defence systems and capabilities... with an initial focus on the Eastern Flank' (NATO, 2023d). Allies note the renewed commitment to and focus on air and missile defence capabilities will strengthen deterrence. Over the past year, Allies have increased modern short and medium air defence systems along the eastern flank, particularly in the enhanced forward-presence deployments, to ensure the capabilities in place to defend Allied air space in the region.

44. During the Vilnius Summit, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania also signed a declaration on cross-border airspace cooperation. The coordinated effort will establish "suitable airspace volumes" for NATO exercises, training, and other activities in the Baltic Sea region (NATO, 2023e). NATO's recent air exercise Air Defender 23 demonstrated the need for such an initiative. The exercise was the largest multinational air defence exercise in NATO history, assembling 10,000 personnel and 250 aircraft from 25 countries (NATO, 2023e).

45. Understanding the real and developing threat to critical undersea infrastructure, Allies also agreed to establish NATO's Maritime Centre for the Security of Critical Undersea Infrastructure within NATO's Maritime Command (MARCOM). Allies also agreed to set up a network convening NATO officials, Allies, private sector and other relevant actors to improve information sharing and exchange best practices (NATO, 2023d). These decisions will be bolstered by the efforts of the existing Critical Undersea Infrastructure Coordination Cell at NATO.

VIII-ANCHORING A NEW REALITY IN NATO'S NORTHEASTERN FLANK: FINLAND AND SWEDEN'S NATO BIDS

46. Perhaps the most significant Baltic Sea security development since the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, however, was the decision by both Finland and Sweden to submit membership bids to the NATO Alliance. Russia's blatant aggression against a sovereign state in the Euro-Atlantic pushed both countries to an about-face with regards to their long-standing neutrality policies. In a new era of Euro-Atlantic security, each nation decided their future would be safer inside of NATO, rather than out – in the months following Russia's invasion, cross-societal and parliamentary debates demonstrated clear majorities in favour of joining NATO; with these processes complete, both countries submitted their membership bids simultaneously on 18 May 2022. As the US President Joe Biden noted in his speech in Warsaw just prior to the one-year anniversary of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine: "[President Putin] thought he'd get the Finlandization of NATO - Instead, he got the NATOization of Finland... and Sweden" (White House, 2023).

A. TÜRKİYE'S SECURITY CONCERNS ABOUT FINLAND AND SWEDEN'S MEMBERSHIP BIDS AND THE TRILATERAL MEMORANDUM

47. Finland and Sweden's accession bids to NATO received strong early support from almost all Allies, a notable exception being Türkiye. Immediately following the pair's accession bids, Turkish President, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, stated he planned to reject the bids as long as two major issues remained outstanding. First, Türkiye stated both Sweden and Finland were harbouring members of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), a separatist armed group waging an insurgency against Türkiye for decades, which is designated a terrorist organisation by Ankara, as well as by the United States, the EU, and many other Allies (Karadsheh and Sariyuce, 2022). Erdogan noted he expected both nations to extradite any PKK or related terrorist group members in their countries to Türkiye before their NATO membership bids could be considered. Second, Ankara also demanded both Finland and Sweden to drop the arms embargos they imposed on Türkiye in 2019 after Turkish forces began their own anti-terrorism operations in north-eastern Syria (Karadsheh and Sariyuce, 2022).

48. Just prior to the June 2022 NATO Summit in Madrid, Finland, Sweden, and Türkiye signed a trilateral memorandum to set up a roadmap each nation could follow to address outstanding grievances (Trilateral Memorandum, 2022). Signing the agreement unlocked the impasse temporarily and, with all Allies' support, both nations signed the accession protocols on 5 July 2022 in Brussels, marking the start of the ratification process in each member state's parliaments.

49. The Trilateral Memorandum outlines seven concrete steps for Finland and Sweden (and even Türkiye) to implement. They resolve around enhanced counter-terrorism cooperation, the adoption of stronger counter-terrorism legislation, responding to Türkiye's extradition requests, the lifting of arms embargos, support for Türkiye's involvement in the EU's CSDP (including PESCO), and countering disinformation related to terrorist groups. By the turn of 2023, both Sweden and Finland had made such significant steps to address each of the memorandum's commitments that NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg was stating publicly the terms of the agreement had been met (DW, 2022). Turkish officials, however, demurred, noting Sweden remained far away from meeting the commitments of the Trilateral Memorandum (DW, 2022a). As such, Türkiye signalled that Finland and Sweden were now on separate accession tracks – such a development forced both partners to admit they would no longer be able to join together as they had originally wished.

50. By the end of 2022, all other member states ratified both Finland and Sweden's bids to join NATO except for Hungary and Türkiye. The Turkish government declared a moratorium on all further negotiations with Sweden on 24 January 2023, after a far-right Danish-Swedish politician burned a copy of the Koran outside the Turkish ambassador's residence in Sweden (RFI, 2023). While an

interdiction on burning the Koran is not in the Trilateral Memorandum, Erdogan declared Sweden cannot join NATO if it continues to permit it (Fraser and Tanner, 2023). The meetings of the Permanent Joint Mechanism between the three countries, as established in the wake of the Trilateral Memorandum, resumed on 9 March 2023. The outcome of the meeting was positive in that all parties agreed the rapid ratifications of both Sweden and Finland's accession were in the interest of all parties and that their membership in NATO would strengthen the Alliance (NATO, 2023).

51. On 17 March, President Erdogan paved the way for Finland's accession to NATO during a visit to Türkiye by Finnish President Sauli Niinisto, where he lauded Finland's "authentic and concrete steps" on Turkish security (Kirby and Adler, 2023). The Turkish parliament passed a bill on 30 March clearing the way for Finland's membership in NATO, as the vote came on the heels of the ratification of Finland's bid by the Hungarian parliament on 27 March. Finland became an official NATO Ally on 4 April.

52. Türkiye and Sweden, however, continue negotiations to resolve outstanding issues. Türkiye stated repeatedly that Sweden needed take additional steps against supporters of Kurdish militants as well as members of the Gülen network, which Türkiye has stated was behind the failed 2016 coup – reports indicate Türkiye still expects Sweden to extradite more than 100 people (Economist, 2023a). The fourth meeting of the Permanent Joint Mechanism took place 14 June 2023 and demonstrated Türkiye remains unsatisfied by the measures taken by Sweden to address its continued grievances. Only a week prior to the Vilnius Summit, Turkish President Erdogan noted Türkiye was still not ready to ratify Sweden's NATO membership noting Sweden still has "homework" to do – signalling Türkiye believed Sweden had yet to meet its understanding of the terms of the Trilateral Memorandum (AP, 2023).

53. Over the year after the signing of the Trilateral Memorandum, Sweden and Türkiye enhanced their counter-terrorism measurably. Sweden took several significant steps to mitigate Türkiye's terrorism concerns; among them were a constitutional amendment (effective 1 January 2023), the adoption of new legislation punishing participation in a terrorist organisation (most significantly the anti-terrorism law effective 1 June 2023), the extradition of a PKK supporter, and the lifting of an arms embargo against Türkiye (Economist, 2023b; Le Monde, 2023).

54. An additional Permanent Joint Mechanism meeting on 6 July, however, also failed to resolve Turkish objections to Sweden's membership bid. Türkiye's remaining objections revolved around three key issues: the scope and rigor of Sweden's new anti-terrorism legislation – Türkiye argues supporters of militant groups that Ankara views as threats can still freely organise demonstrations, recruit and procure financial resources in Sweden, the pace and amount of extraditions (Sweden has proceeded with only one extradition, while Türkiye has asked for over 100), and, being too lenient toward anti-Islamic demonstrations (Economist, 2023b).

55. On 10 July, the eve of the Vilnius Summit, Turkish President Erdogan, Swedish Prime Minister Kristersson and the NATO Secretary General reached an agreement which would clear the way for Sweden's accession to NATO. In line with the agreement, President Erdogan committed to send the accession protocol to the Turkish parliament and work closely with it to ensure ratification, "given the imperatives of the deterrence and defence of the Euro-Atlantic area" (Hubbard, et. al., 2023; NATO, 2023). The following are the key elements of the agreement:

- The continuation of counter-terrorism cooperation after Sweden's entry into NATO via the Permanent Joint Mechanism, as well as a new bilateral Security Compact between Türkiye and Sweden, under which ministers will meet annually and through which working groups can be created (Sweden committed to present a counter-terrorism roadmap at the Compact's first meeting);

- The NATO Secretary General reaffirmed NATO's commitment to its counter-terrorism efforts and announced the establishment of a new position of Special Coordinator for Counter-Terrorism;
- All three parties underlined that "there should be no restrictions, barriers or sanctions to defence trade and investment among Allies" and committed to work to eliminate such obstacles;
- The two countries also agreed to increase economic cooperation through the recently established Türkiye-Sweden Joint Economic and Trade Committee;
- Sweden also committed to actively support efforts to reinvigorate Türkiye's EU accession process.

56. Allied leaders welcomed this agreement and noted they "look[ed] forward to welcoming Sweden as a full member of the Alliance". The NATO PA President also welcomed the agreement and subsequently wrote to the Heads of the Hungarian and Turkish delegations to the NATO PA to support the prompt scheduling of relevant parliamentary procedures, in line with the Assembly's recommendation "to finalise as soon as possible the ratification of Sweden's accession" (NATO PA, 2023a).

57. Alongside Türkiye, the Hungarian parliament has also not yet voted to ratify Sweden's entry into NATO. On 4 July, Hungarian Foreign Minister, Péter Szijjártó, made a public statement noting Budapest would move forward on the issue once Türkiye does (Gyori, 2023). A scheduled extraordinary session to ratify Sweden's accession to NATO on 31 July was adjourned after a quorum was not reached to permit a vote (Cskay, 2023). The Hungarian Parliament had not scheduled a vote on Sweden's accession at the time of the update.

B. WHAT FINLAND BRINGS TO THE ALLIANCE – AND WHAT SWEDEN WOULD

58. As made clear above, Sweden and Finland have been in relative lockstep in their evolving security policies since 2014, moving closer to NATO, the US, increasing their defence investments, and expanding their roles as regional security providers. After submitting their bids for entry, however, they have diverged upon their speed of entry. While Sweden continues to negotiate its entry, Finland is now a full-fledged Ally. At the 11-12 July Vilnius Summit, Allies welcomed the rapid progress Finland has already made toward full integration into NATO's defence and deterrence. They agreed to work together to complete this process as soon as possible.¹⁵

59. Finland added an additional 1,340 km border with Russia on 4 April, more than doubling the Alliance's shared border with the country. Such a move expands Allies' defence responsibilities along what Russia's actions are increasingly making a hostile border. Further, the Gulf of Finland will be predominantly NATO-friendly, with only a narrow egress between Finland and Estonia, making Russia vulnerable to a NATO blockade around St. Petersburg. Such an expansion of territory implies significant new collective defence responsibilities for NATO, as Russia maintains significant portions of its armed forces, and the bulk of its strategic maritime forces up in the Kola peninsula, anchored in the Barents and White Seas, where it has built up a very strong A2/AD bubble with an emphasis on modern and overlapping maritime and air early warning and defence systems (Conley, et. al., 2020).

¹⁵ The Defence and Security and Political Committees will visit Finland 18-21 September to exchange views with their Finnish colleagues on the progress of this integration. This will be the first NATO PA delegation to visit Finland since its accession to NATO.

60. Finland brings significant defence capabilities to act as a bulwark along NATO's now much longer border with Russia along the northeast flank. As noted above, Finland's challenging history with Russia in the 20th century, particularly due to the Winter War of 1940 and the resulting loss of territory, led it to remain focused on maintaining a modern military capable of territorial defence. As a DSC delegation learned during a visit to Finland in recent years, Finland's defence concept is total and focuses on resilience across all sectors (NATO PA, 2018). As such, despite Finland's relatively small population (5.5 million), the Finnish Defence forces can mobilise approximately 285,000 during war time, with a reserve potential as high as 900,000 (IISS, 2023; Forsberg, et. al., 2022). Finland's civilian defence infrastructure is built upon a total defence concept that would be activated in a contingency, which includes strategic stockpiles and shelters for urban populations (NATO PA, 2018).

61. It has very capable land and air forces; its artillery forces rank first in Europe, making them a clear net addition for NATO. Its armed forces also maintain approximately 700 artillery pieces, ranging from howitzer to heavy mortar; its most recent purchase being Guided Multiple Launch Rocket Systems (GMLRS) in 2022 from the United States. Finland's artillery capabilities exceed those of France and Germany combined (Brennan, 2023). Finnish forces also maintain a significant number of main battle tanks (Leopard 2A6 & 2A4), infantry fighting vehicles (IFVs), and armoured personnel carriers (APCs). Finland has also acquired sufficient modern 'stand-off' coastal defence systems. In February 2022, Finland signed a deal to purchase 64 F-35s, joining several other Allies as current or future operators of the joint strike fighter, replacing its fleet of F-18s. Finland's 2022 defence budget of USD 5.8 bn equals 2.1 percent of GDP; Finland committed an additional 700 million for 2022 in response to Russia's aggression, and cleared another 2.2 bn in additional defence spending for its 2023-2026 fiscal plan (IISS, 2023).

62. Due to its challenging northern and Arctic geography, Finland is also at the forefront in training, planning, and implementing cold weather warfare. Large-scale inter-Allied and partner exercises such as Arctic Forge and Arctic Shield, for example, demonstrate Finland's leadership in not only honing Arctic warfare know-how, but also in sharing it with partners and Allies to hone interoperability. Further, Finland is the world's leading designer of icebreakers, with 80 percent of all icebreakers in operation today being Finnish designed and 60 percent Finnish built.

63. Finland's defence industrial base, however, expands far beyond icebreakers. Though dominated by mostly privately owned SMEs, it is also home to larger international companies producing high-quality equipment such as armoured vehicles and turreted mortar systems. In addition, Finland is an advanced technological society with various industrial-grade IT capabilities, with 5G, innovative satellite technology, and robust cyber security capabilities among them. Nokia is among the top three providers of 5G infrastructure in the world, along with Ericsson (Sweden) and Huawei in China (Forsberg, et. al., 2022). Not only do these high-tech capabilities make Finland more resilient domestically, but they also provide opportunities for NATO-wide procurement.

C. SWEDEN'S STRENGTHS

64. When Sweden joins the Alliance, the Baltic Sea's over 8,000 km littoral will be almost all NATO, with the small exceptions of the Russian coastlines in the Gulf of Finland and Kaliningrad, which account to barely one tenth. Critically, Sweden's accession will also bring Gotland Island, which is central to the defence of the BSR maritime arena, into NATO and will, as a result, degrade Russia's BSR A2/AD capabilities in Kaliningrad. Sweden's accession will also allow for territorial continuity in NATO's defence planning across the Nordic states. Like Finland, Sweden's integration as an Ally into NATO will also bring considerable strengths.

65. Sweden's armed forces are configured for territorial defence as well. Sweden announced with its 2021-2025 budget it would reach 2% GDP defence spending (IISS, 2023). Sweden maintains a

relatively large fleet of tactical combat aircraft, including almost 100 multi-role JAS 39 Gripens. It also maintains 120 Leopard 2A5 main battle tanks, over 400 IFVs, and over 1,000 APCs, as well as advanced air defence systems, including 4 Patriot battery systems. The Swedish navy also has relatively good surface and subsurface capabilities, including the first diesel-electric submarines to feature air-independent propulsion systems.

66. Like Finland, Sweden also has a robust whole-of-nation defence concept. This total concept focuses on resilience across all sectors in the event of any form of national emergency (NATO PA, 2019). Further, Sweden also trains its forces to excel at Arctic warfare. It hosts an annual exercise, 'Winter Sun', with French, British, and US forces to bolster the cold weather capabilities of its partners. Sweden's robust domestic defence industry, while export oriented, is also capable of meeting the demands of domestic armed forces; strong suits being Sweden's advanced combat aircraft systems and conventional submarines (IISS, 2023).

D. WHAT ROLES FOR FINLAND (AND SWEDEN) IN NATO?

67. As Nordic-Baltic members will quickly tell you, the addition of both will heal a 'divided' northern flank – a clear benefit to NATO's defence and deterrence posture becoming more integrated. The integration of the Nordic states into NATO, however, implies both states will need to align (and likely increase) their defence investments with NATO's Defence Planning Process (NDPP) to accommodate potentially very large numbers of Allied forces in the event of a contingency. This implies near-term decisions to be made about hosting prepositioned equipment, weapons, and ammunition stocks. Whether or not to host a NATO Force Integration Unit (NFIU) and/or a regional or functional command will also be forthcoming – this remains a decision for the Finnish government. At the Allied level, Finland will now have to consider the number of its officers it will loan out to Allied command structures. More broadly, Finland will have to coordinate closely with Joint Force Command (JFC) Norfolk to meet the requirements of the new regional plan for the High North and the Atlantic adopted at the Vilnius Summit. In addition, Finland's exercise schedule will have to evolve to take on the broader range of Allied exercise cycles and mandated trainings.

68. Given their expertise, either nation may also feel compelled to set up a centre of excellence focused on any skill set from cold weather fighting to total defence concepts to hybrid warfare. Fundamental questions will follow as well in the medium term about what role each would play in Allied security, moving from a regional security provider to leaders in the High North or larger contributors to Alliance forward defence along the eastern flank or to its many southern flank and cooperative security outreach initiatives.

IX- CONCLUSIONS FOR NATO PARLIAMENTARIANS, NATO MEMBER GOVERNMENTS, AND THE GOVERNMENTS OF SWEDEN AND FINLAND

69. Russia's invasion of Ukraine has created the most violent and consequential war in Europe since the Second World War. This war remains unresolved and has potential to escalate beyond its current theatre confines of eastern and southern Ukraine. As a result, the Russian threat to Allied security across the Euro-Atlantic is immediate and persistent. Consequently, NATO's strategic seas along its eastern flank are areas of significant change, competition, and challenge.

70. The two strategic seas anchoring the NATO's eastern flank – the Baltic and the Black – have witnessed the most evolution of their security environment. The Baltic has seen the "NATOization" of Finland (with Sweden in the queue) and increased grey zone events heightening regional security concerns, and the Black Sea has become an element of the war's theatre.

71. Russia places great strategic value to its assets along its western frontier from the Barents to the Baltic to the Black Sea. To protect them it has arrayed a string of A2/AD bubbles and, at least prior to the war, forward-positioned forces. These positions remain strong and, as experts believe, will be reinforced relatively rapidly after the war in Ukraine. Further, Russia's maritime forces remain a real and persistent threat in NATO's strategic seas due to them being relatively spared the war efforts in Ukraine.

72. Russia will likely learn from its mistakes as it rebuilds its forces worn down by the war of attrition in Ukraine. It will also remain focused on its anti-NATO stance with regards to Euro-Atlantic security. Russia likely feels it will be supported in its rebuilding efforts and hard-line international political stance by its seemingly strengthening strategic partnership with China. Both Chinese and Russian interests seem to be converging on any policy capable of undermining Allied interests and the rules-based international order they underpin.

73. The amplification of Russia's threats in the Baltic Sea make it clear the BSR is a region deserving significant strategic attention by the Alliance. The strategic character of the region for Allies is shifting rapidly. Finland's recent accession (and Sweden's pending accession) has unified and strengthened NATO's northeast flank – and even created a continuous flank from the Baltic to the High North.

74. NATO's expansion in the region can reduce Russia's freedom of action in the Baltic Sea significantly, as well as in the High North. Security in the BSR, however, remains far from guaranteed. The addition of Finland into the Alliance requires immediate actions by Allies to shore up their defence and deterrence posture along an extra 1,340 km of border with Russia. Sweden's pending accession will further solidify NATO's northeast flank, anchoring the region's cooperation as NATO Allies on all key security issues. A strong unified approach to adapting the BSR to the new security environment facing Allies is vital.

75. As such, Allies must focus on the following recommendations:

- Work closely with Finland to shore up immediate defence and deterrence needs now. This will require a close focus on building new, or outfitting existing, logistical hubs and bases, command and control linkages, as well as taking decisions about new levels of Allied forward presence, regional defence plans and exercises. Allies "welcomed the rapid progress towards the full integration of Finland into NATO's deterrence and defence" at the Vilnius Summit, and "agreed to complete this process as soon as possible" (NATO, 2023d). These efforts could include Finland hosting a new NFIU, Allied forward-

positioned equipment, and myriad other new deterrence and defence roles in the Baltic Sea region.

- Beyond the region, Finland will have to take decisions about the role it will play in the Alliance's new baseline for defence and deterrence; from supporting the multinational battalions on the eastern flank to the operations on the southern flank, as well as the cooperative security initiatives outside the Alliance's territory. These are decisions to be taken in concert as new Allies.
- Continue to work together to support Sweden's accession into NATO as a top priority – a point upon which all Allies agreed at the Vilnius Summit, as they welcomed the "agreement reached between the NATO Secretary General, the President of Türkiye, and the Prime Minister of Sweden" (NATO, 2023d). This includes working to support Türkiye's remaining legitimate security concerns. It also includes finding the ways and means to continue to incorporate Sweden closer into the Alliance as it gets closer to joining.
 - When Sweden joins NATO, Allies will need to work with Stockholm on how to use/upgrade base infrastructure for Allied air operations in defence of the Baltic Sea region. Such measures would likely require the expansion and hardening of Sweden's air force bases and the investment in additional air defences.
- Allies must not just maintain, but also look to increase their presence in the Baltic. As NATO Maritime Command noted during the Defence Committee's visit earlier this year, Allies surged an unprecedented level of maritime assets into the Baltic Sea just prior to and after the outbreak of the war in Ukraine. This effort was part of what made NATO maritime forces the second largest navy in the Alliance, second only to the United States – it also sent a strong forward maritime signal to Russia. This forward presence must be maintained and anchored with a new NATO maritime strategy and new regional assets and be in line with NATO's newly adopted regional defence plans, such as:
 - Improved and increased regional intelligence gathering assets (cyber, signals intelligence platforms, satellite, as well as other manned and unmanned ISR aerial systems) in the Baltic Sea region by both BSR states and Allies. Doing so will bolster early warning capabilities to prevent potential surprise attacks, and serve as a method of permanently updated target acquisition to enable stand-off strikes against troop concentrations and logistical hubs in the case of a conflict.
 - Increased investments in long-range precision strike capabilities. The Russian challenge in the region, while a serious threat, also poses potential points of logistical weakness, as Allies have learned by Ukrainian forces' effective strikes against Russian logistical hubs behind their forward lines. The Baltic States are taking the correct approach via their recent High Mobility Artillery Rocket System (HIMARS) investments, but their combined efforts need to be bolstered by additional purchases by regional states and forward-positioned assets by Allies.
 - Improved coastal defence systems, new layered air defences, increased air policing, and surface and subsurface vessels (manned and unmanned) to increase situational awareness and protect the region's skies, lands, and sea.
 - Allies should focus their planning on how to use their stand-off weapons, such as air and sea-launched cruise missiles to slow any potential future

Russian attack from the start. These weapons can be employed out of range of Russian air and defence assets.

- Given the reality of Russia's declared threats to Allied critical seabed infrastructure, Allies must underwrite the nascent Critical Undersea Infrastructure Coordination Cell at NATO. The decision to establish NATO's Maritime Centre for Critical Undersea Infrastructure within NATO Maritime Command is an important additional asset for Allies related to this challenge. The parallel network gathering NATO officials, Allied governments, and private sector actors will further help bolster awareness of this critical threat.
 - Faced with the reality of Russia's nuclear sabre rattling, Allies must consider renewed investment and expansion of its existing ballistic missile defence architecture to signal to Russia the Alliance's uncompromising deterrence posture and unwillingness to accept any form of nuclear threat.
- Encourage the Baltic States to continue taking the steps necessary to reinforce Allied regional deterrence via assisting with their force modernisation for increased territorial defence capacity.
 - Allies must continue to push for better interoperability at all levels, particularly higher echelon systems and supplies, to move toward joint all-domain integrated deterrence.
 - Further, Allies must continue to solidify and articulate the evolving NATO-EU strategic security partnership, ensuring effective cooperation playing to each organisation's strengths, and avoiding unnecessary duplication.
 - With Finland and, in the likely near term, Sweden's accession, approximately 96 percent of the European Union's population will live in a NATO country. This reality will only further overlap the security interests of each organisation – further entrenching NATO's role as the cornerstone of Euro-Atlantic.

76. These steps will help not only ensure a secure Baltic Sea region as it continues to evolve, but it will also play an integral part in NATO's implementation of its new deterrence and defence baseline.

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