

NATO's Arctic Military Alliance

Britain Spearheads "Mini-NATO" In Arctic Ocean, Baltic Sea

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On January 19 and 20 British Prime Minister David Cameron hosted his counterparts from Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania at the first Nordic Baltic Summit to consolidate an “alliance of common interests.”

Cameron’s initiative followed by two months a two-day meeting of Nordic-Baltic defense ministers in Norway with the defense chiefs of the same nine nations that participated in the London gathering along with defense representatives from Germany and Poland.

A Russian commentary on the day of the opening of the Nordic Baltic Summit in the United Kingdom stated:

“Europeans have decided to watch the Russians in the Arctic and how they behave there closely. The idea of creating an Arctic ‘mini-NATO’ was discussed at the [Nordic Baltic] Summit in London on Wednesday. According to analysts, the heightened activity of North Europe is explained by an increased interest in the Arctic and its natural resources.”

In addition to economic and energy issues, “experts insist that British Prime Minister David Cameron will discuss with his counterparts a draft agreement on the foundation of a new military alliance.”

The author of the piece argued that as part of a Nordic-Baltic military structure stretching from the Barents to the Norwegian to the North to the Baltic Seas “a Scandinavian mini-NATO alliance has long been hovering in the air.” [1]

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization subdivision is to include Alliance members Denmark and Norway, partners Finland and Sweden, and non-contiguous outposts Greenland (Denmark), the Faroe Islands (Denmark) and the Aland Islands (Finland).

The project for a Nordic military pact, modeled after and in the long run subordinated to NATO, was taken up in earnest by former Norwegian defense and foreign minister Thorvald Stoltenberg in 2009 and “provides for the creation of a mini-NATO for Scandinavia and the Arctic.” [2] Stoltenberg’s son Jens is currently Norway’s prime minister.

The Stoltenberg report of 2009, whose formal name is “Nordic Co-operation on foreign and security policy,” focused on “13 areas of potential closer co-operation in the Nordic region, such as peace-building, air-policing and maritime monitoring, security in the High North, cyber-security, co-operation between foreign services and defence.” [3] More specifically, it called for “creating a military and civilian taskforce for unstable regions; a joint amphibious unit; a disaster-response unit; a coastguard-level maritime response force; joint cyber-

defence systems; joint air, maritime and satellite surveillance; co-operation on Arctic governance; and a war crimes investigation unit.” [4]

According to the EUobserver: “A Nato-style ‘musketeer’ clause and closer consular co-operation could form part of a new Nordic alliance, foreshadowing future developments inside the EU.” [5]

The Stoltenberg report’s recommendations served as the foundation for discussions between the foreign ministers of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden in Copenhagen last March which concentrated on “joint monitoring of the Nordic marine areas, the Nordic air space and the Arctic, as well as issues relating to search and rescue services.

“In addition, possible joint efforts against cyber attacks and a possible further development of the co-operation already established in the military area” were topics taken up. [6]

The five above-mentioned nations are to “sign a joint statement on security policy in April next year aimed at strengthening Nordic co-operation and joint actions in cases of peacetime catastrophes as well as military threats,” [7] following discussion of the subject at a meeting of the Nordic Council in Iceland last November. At the latter event Norwegian Foreign Minister Jonas Store stated: “Increased cooperation in Nordic and Baltic defense is an important step in the right direction. It’s now time to formalize this cooperation further and confirm Nordic unity in defense.” [8]

A week later the meeting of the defense ministers of Britain, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania met in Oslo. British Defence Minister Liam Fox said at the event: “The deepening of our bilateral and multilateral relationships with partners in the Nordic region is well worth exploring. We would like to create a broader framework that makes it easier for both NATO and non-NATO members to have a closer relationship in the region.” [9] Eleven months before Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden formalized a mechanism for collective military collaboration, the Nordic Defense Cooperation (NORDEF) agreement.

At the same defense chiefs gathering where the nine nations “discussed how they could cooperate more closely regarding security challenges in the High North” and “closer cooperation between the Nordic countries’ forces in Afghanistan, ” Norwegian Defense Minister Grete Faremo stated:

“I think we should work together more closely in areas such as operational capabilities, education and training/exercising . Norway would welcome more allied units to take part in exercises set in our demanding natural environment.

“We have already achieved good results through such measures as common transport and logistics solutions for our forces in Afghanistan. In addition we have a series of projects in the fields of education, training and defence equipment collaboration.”

“We must continue to cooperate within UN, NATO and EU operations,” she added in conclusion. [10]

The Russian analysis cited earlier concluded by stating: “The organizers make no secret that the idea of a Scandinavian mini-NATO alliance is a response to Russia’s efforts to survey and develop the Arctic shelf. According to experts, about 25 percent of the world’s oil and gas resources are in the Arctic shelf, besides other natural resources.” [11]

On the day after the London Nordic-Baltic Summit ended, another article in the Russian press stated:

“The United Kingdom is no doubt one of NATO’s strongest members and would be the largest power in any Nordic NATO. It has long been interested in these northern areas and, because of its traditionally rocky relations with Russia, would be likely to back the initiative.

“Nor is the Baltic republics’ involvement surprising: their political elites tend to be keen to support any anti-Russian initiative. In this particular case, there was no attempt to hide it – Thorvald Stoltenberg said outright that the idea was a direct response to Russian efforts.

“The political picture might...change if Sweden and Finland, two neutral countries, were to join the alliance.” [12]

Speaking before the House of Commons the day before the Nordic-Baltic defense ministers meeting in Norway last November, British Defence Minister Fox said:

“I shall point out our commitment to the submarine programme and to the aircraft carrier programme, and explain how we intend to ensure that across the range of capabilities the United Kingdom is a sound and secure NATO partner. The purpose of the meeting in Norway is to ensure that we deepen our bilateral relationship with Norway, that we create a NATO entity that Finland and Sweden feel a little more comfortable with, that we give further security to article 5 in the Baltic states by being a nuclear power as part of that grouping, and that as a NATO grouping we are better able to deal with regional disputes with Russia.” [13]

On August 1 2009 Norway shifted its Operational Command Headquarters from Stavanger to Reitan in the north, becoming the first nation to locate its military leadership structure in the Arctic.

The Russian writers quoted above expressed scepticism regarding the prospects for a NATO regional command in the Arctic and Baltic regions, but that project is not solely a British-Norwegian enterprise.

It is part of a broader strategy for the Arctic Ocean and the seas south of it.

Two years ago Washington released the National Security Presidential Directive 66 which stated in part:

“The United States has broad and fundamental national security interests in the Arctic region and is prepared to operate either independently or in conjunction with other states to safeguard these interests. These interests include such matters as missile defense and early warning; deployment of sea and air systems for strategic sealift, strategic deterrence, maritime presence, and maritime security operations; and ensuring freedom of navigation and overflight.”

Later in January of 2009 NATO conducted what it called a Seminar on Security Prospects in the High North in the capital of Iceland which was attended by among others the military bloc’s secretary general, the chairman of its Military Committee and its Supreme Allied Commander Europe and Supreme Allied Commander Transformation. [14]

Last August the U.S. and Denmark participated for the first time in Canada's annual Operation Nanook military exercise in the Arctic, although both fellow NATO members are involved in territorial disputes with Canada in the region. [15]

NATO has intensified its campaign to recruit Finland and Sweden into its ranks in recent years. Both nations supply troops for the Alliance's International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan, where Finland has suffered its first combat deaths since World War Two and Sweden in two centuries. [16]

Two years ago NATO held ten-day military exercises in Sweden, codenamed Loyal Arrow 2009, with the involvement of ten countries, 2,000 troops, an aircraft carrier and 50 jet fighters. [17]

Last year's BALTOPS (Baltic Operations) exercise conducted with U.S., NATO and NATO partnership nations was held in Estonia and Latvia with over 3,000 troops and military hardware - including 36 ships and two submarines - from ten nations, among them Finland and Sweden.

Finland and Sweden are the only non-NATO nations (they are Partnership for Peace members) to have joined Alliance states Bulgaria, Estonia, Hungary, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Romania, Slovenia and the U.S. in running the first multinational strategic airlift operation, the Heavy Airlift Wing at the Papa Air Base in Hungary used for the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Last September 50 warships and 4,000 navy personnel from the U.S., Denmark, Finland, Norway, Sweden, Britain, France and Germany participated in the two-week Northern Coasts military exercise in and off Finland's coast, the largest war games ever staged in Finnish territorial waters.

Three months earlier the Finnish government presented a proposal to parliament to participate in the 25,000-troop, globally deployable NATO Response Force.

In the same month, June, Finnish Foreign Minister Alexander Stubb advocated a multinational deployment to the former Soviet Central Asian republic of Kyrgyzstan.

"The Nordic and Baltic countries are proposing a civilian rapid-reaction force be sent to southern Kyrgyzstan, where ethnic violence has left well over 100 people dead. Finnish Foreign Minister Alexander Stubb proposed the mission at [the June 14th] meeting of EU foreign ministers in Luxembourg." Stubb "compared the situation to that in Georgia in August 2008, when an international police mission was sent." [18]

The first target of a NATO-EU Nordic-Baltic (inclusive of Poland) military intervention is likely to be Belarus.

In November Finnish President Tarja Halonen, Defense Minister Jyri Häkämies and Foreign Minister Stubb attended the NATO summit in Lisbon, Portugal for strategy talks on the Afghan war.

Much the same situation obtains in Sweden [19], whose parliament last month extended the nation's military deployment in Afghanistan and raised the troop ceiling from 500 to 855.

In fact what Al Burke at his Stop the Furtive Accession to NATO website [20] has assiduously

argued and struggled against for years, the surreptitious accession of Sweden to NATO, has been proceeding steadily. A recent survey showed support for NATO membership more than doubling from 17 percent in 2005 to 35 percent in 2009. [21]

Last month Swedish Defense Minister Sten Tolgfors stated that “capital investments in defense will prioritize weapon procurement and infrastructure improvements to strengthen the military’s air and naval capability in the High North.”

He added that “Sweden intends to maintain 100 Gripen C/D combat and reconnaissance aircraft, a capability that is at least twice as large as its Nordic neighbors Finland, Norway and Denmark....Investments also are planned to strengthen Sweden’s conventional submarine fleet in 2011-2014 to ensure security in the High North.” [22] The ongoing program to modernize the country’s submarine fleet alone will cost \$1.6 billion.

Swedish Foreign Minister Carl Bildt stated at the Nordic Council meeting last November that “better Nordic-Baltic cooperation will strengthen the region’s position within the European Union and globally, and facilitate joint participation in peacekeeping. “

In his own words: “This region of Europe has everything to gain from a closer cooperation in defense between the Nordic countries and its Baltic neighbors. There are real issues, such as Arctic security, where such a cooperation will be advantageous. ” [23]

The meeting also endorsed all its eight members (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, Greenland, the Faroe Islands and the Aland Islands) joining the European Union Nordic Battle Group this year. The Nordic Battle Group currently consists of 1,600 troops from Sweden, 250 from Finland, 150 from Ireland and 100 from both Estonia and Norway. The last-named is not a member of the EU but is a NATO member state.

The Nordic contingent is one of 18 EU battlegroups which achieved full operational capacity on January 1, 2007 and are linked to NATO through the 1999 Berlin Plus agreement, “a comprehensive package of agreements between NATO and EU” which includes the provision of “NATO assets and capabilities” for EU missions. [24]

The Nordic Battle Group, which is “on stand-by for six months for deployment at five days’ notice to trouble spots around the world,” [25] has its headquarters in Sweden.

Last month the defense ministers of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania met to “discuss defence cooperation among the Baltic States and relevant issues of NATO and regional cooperation with the Nordic countries.” They also deliberated over “developing joint air forces, special operations forces and energy security projects” and “the need to continue to develop and strengthen cooperation with the Nordic countries.”

“The ministers discussed the possibilities of improving conditions for the NATO contingents in the Baltic air space to ensure that this mission would involve more and more NATO countries.” [26] The reference is to the seven-year-old NATO Baltic Air Policing mission, subsumed under NATO Quick Reaction Alert and until the first of the year composed of U.S. F-15C Eagle fighters.

This month several high-level NATO officials travelled to Lithuania for the opening of a new Energy Security Centre in the capital. The facility, which “will contribute to international initiatives with a special emphasis on cooperation with NATO,” is to graduate to the level of a NATO Centre of Excellence like the Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence

established in nearby Estonia in 2008. [27]

The Baltic-Scandinavian region, especially the Arctic at its northernmost extreme, is the last spot on Earth where alleged threats from Iran, North Korea, al-Qaeda and pirates can be invoked to justify unprecedented military expansion and integration. That the latter is occurring at a breakneck pace belies NATO's and the EU's claims concerning the rationale for collaborating with the world's sole military superpower both at home and throughout the world.

Notes

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2) Ibid

3) Analys Norden, December 15, 2010

4) EUobserver, December 6, 2010

5) Ibid

6) Analys Norden, March 11, 2010

7) Analys Norden, December 12, 2010

8) Defense News, November 15, 2010

9) Ibid

10) Norwegian Ministry of Defence, November 12, 2010

11) Voice of Russia, January 19, 2011

<http://english.ruvr.ru/2011/01/19/40383377.html>

12) Ilya Kramnik, Northern NATO: Tracking polar bears and Russians?

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19) Pentagon's New Global Military Partner: Sweden

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Defense News, November 8, 2010

22) Sweden To Boost High North Air, Naval Defenses

Defense News, December 2, 2010

23) Defense News, November 15, 2011

24) Berlin Plus agreement

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Supreme Headquarters Allied Command Europe

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25) RTE News, September 14, 2010

26) Baltic Course, December 17, 2010

27) North Atlantic Treaty Organization, January 14, 2011

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