



THE UK, FRANCE, AND THE UNITED STATES IN SWEDEN'S VICINITY:

Strategic Interests
and Military Activities

Anna Wieslander and Viktor Lundquist

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Cover: Image shows RAF Typhoon deployed to Lithuania for Op AZOTIZE, on a flying sortie with a USAF B-52 Stratofortress and French Air Force Mirage 2000s in August 2020.

Source: RAF

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Introduction

This study analyzes the strategic interests and military activities of the United Kingdom, France, and the United States in Sweden's vicinity—mainly the Baltic Sea region (the Nordics, the Baltics, and Poland) and the Arctic, including the role of the UK-led Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF), the French-led European Intervention Initiative (EI2), and the bilateral defense cooperation between the United States and Sweden, as well as the trilateral defense cooperation between the United States, Sweden, and Finland. It identifies and analyzes current trends and future challenges that might affect Swedish security, its military international collaboration, and ultimately, its long-term defense planning, with the task of protecting the sovereignty of Sweden: its borders, population, and institutions. Scenarios are used in order to account for the interest and activities of the UK, France, and the United States in the Baltic Sea region and the Arctic in a long-term perspective. Possible responses to Russia's and/or China's power projections are central to this part of the study.

Security in Sweden's vicinity is dominated by Russia, whose increasingly assertive behavior and military modernization and buildup have caused a deteriorated security situation and a need for countries in the Baltic Sea region to adapt their defense postures accordingly. Of central importance for deterrence and defense is to maintain a high degree of engagement from, and interoperability with, Western great powers to deal with a potential adversary like Russia, who is regionally superior in terms of military capabilities. The UK, France, and the United States are the great powers with expeditionary forces, the highest capacity for reinforcement

for the Baltic Sea region and the Arctic, and the ability to assist states like Sweden, if necessary. Germany, despite its proximity, is not included in this study, as it still is developing a more forward-leaning posture in defense. In the long term, e.g., fifteen to twenty years, Germany is more likely to play a central role in the security of the whole Baltic Sea region.

The study is structured as follows. Current trends and commitments to the Baltic Sea region, the Arctic, and bilateral cooperation with Sweden are described for the UK, France, and the United States, respectively, followed by a section in which future challenges and strategic interests are identified and discussed. The study concludes with a set of scenarios, looking out fifteen years to 2035, in which likely security policy developments for each of the three actors are assessed, depending on the assertiveness of Russia and China, respectively. It is assumed that China will have such a position in the international system by 2035 that its power projection cannot be dismissed in Sweden's vicinity, given the strategic challenge it poses.

The descriptive part of the study is based on open source material such as research reports, official policy and strategy documents, speeches, and news articles. The scenarios have been developed by the authors, and then discussed with and evaluated by a group of distinguished international policy experts in a workshop. The authors are very grateful for the invaluable insights and time provided by Mathieu Boulegue, Heinrich Brauß, François Heisbourg, Ben Hodges, Julian Lindley-French, Martin Quencez, Olivier-Rémy Bel, Christopher Skaluba, and Jim Townsend.



The United Kingdom

As a nuclear state, one of five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council, and a nation whose \$64 billion in military expenditures ranks it among the top six in the world and as the leader in Europe, the United Kingdom is a security and defense actor of major importance and prominence. The UK retains widely capable and rapidly deployable armed forces, and British defense policy is based on using these capabilities to project stability abroad to reduce direct threats.¹ In November 2020, Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced the largest military investment in thirty years, with \$21.9 billion to be added to the defense budget over the 2021-2025 period, which allows for spending on new space and artificial intelligence (AI) capabilities, as well as shipbuilding and research.² This intention was confirmed in the recently released Integrated Review (IR) 2021, “Global Britain in a Competitive Age” (Her Majesty’s Government), as well as the defence command paper titled “Defence in a Competitive Age” (March 23, 2021). Both set the direction for

Five NATO warships led by the futuristic Swedish corvettes Nyköping and Karlstad (far left and third left) part of the Swedish 3rd Naval Warfare Flotilla during Exercise Trident Juncture 18. Source: Royal Navy

British security and defense in the coming decade. With the current capabilities and the upcoming investments, the UK fortifies its position as a decisive actor in European and global security and defense.

BALTIC SEA SECURITY

The UK and Sweden share values and understandings regarding several security policy issues, both in a global context, and on matters of direct concern to European security.³ Similarly to Sweden, the UK sees Russia as one of the main challenges relating to interstate rivalry and European stability.⁴ In the IR, the UK government defines Russia as a

1 IISS, *The Military Balance*, International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2020, 157.

2 Andrew Chuter, “UK to Boost Defense Budget by \$21.9 Billion. Here’s Who Benefits—and Loses Out,” *Defense News*, November 19, 2020, <https://www.defensenews.com/global/europe/2020/11/19/uk-to-boost-defense-budget-by-219-billion-heres-who-benefits-and-loses-out/>.

3 Swedish Ministry of Defence, “Sweden and the United Kingdom Enhances [sic] Defence Cooperation,” Government Offices of Sweden, 2016, accessed November 18, 2020, <https://www.government.se/articles/2016/06/sweden-and-the-united-kingdom-enhances-defence-cooperation/>.

4 Piotr Szymański, “The Consequences of Brexit for the UK’s Security Policy and NATO’s Eastern Flank,” Centre for Eastern Studies, *OSW Commentary*, no. 299 (2019): 1-2.

“systemic competitor” and foresees Russia to remain “the most acute direct threat to the UK” in the 2020s.⁵ The Ministry of Defence sees Russia and its behavior as the major geopolitical factor affecting security and stability in the Baltic Sea region in the upcoming years.⁶

Due to the Russian aggression against Georgia in 2008 and its annexation of Crimea in 2014—in combination with several disinformation campaigns and cyberattacks against the UK, as well as the 2018 Novichok poisoning in Salisbury—the UK has called for a strong united European stance against Russia. This has, for instance, been operationalized by British support to strengthen collective deterrence and defense at NATO’s eastern flank, in the Black Sea area, but even more so, in the Baltic Sea region. The UK has provided significant contributions by assuming framework nation responsibility for the enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) in Estonia, where roughly eight hundred troops from the British Army make up the bulk of the battle group; contributing 150 soldiers to the US-led battle group in Poland;⁷ participating in the Baltic Air Policing mission (BAP); and serving as one of the framework nations of NATO’s Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF).⁸ As a nuclear state, UK’s presence in the Baltic Sea region significantly contributes to NATO’s deterrence posture. All in all, the UK has committed to long-term engagement to security in the Baltics.

For Great Britain, the foremost political setting in which to develop Northern European relations is the Northern Group (NG). When the NG was founded in November 2010, upon a UK initiative of then-Defense Secretary Liam Fox, the members consisted of the Nordic and Baltic States plus Germany and Poland, soon joined by the Netherlands.⁹ The main driver was

Fox’s belief that Great Britain had not cared enough about its geographic position, hence diminishing its influence in an increasingly multipolar world. The NG aimed at creating a new and wider framework that made it easier for countries to have a closer relationship in the region, regardless of NATO and/or European Union (EU) membership.¹⁰ Starting off with a broad and tentative agenda, including international missions, cyber security, total defense and energy security, the illegal Russian annexation of Crimea and its aggression against Ukraine in 2014, provided a focus for the discussions in the group. Since then, it has served as an informal setting to discuss positions ahead of and the implementation after meetings such as the NATO summits in Wales in 2014 and Warsaw in 2016, discussions that have included nonallies such as Sweden and Finland, and served to push cooperation such as the Enhanced Opportunities Program with the alliance.¹¹ The NG has on average met twice a year at the level of defense ministers, often in conjunction with other meetings within NATO or the Nordic and/or Nordic-Baltic framework.

Moreover, the UK has also initiated and developed the JEF, a British-led expeditionary force that includes Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, and the UK as the framework nation. The JEF was initiated in the margins of the NATO Wales summit in 2014 and reached full operational capability in June 2018.¹² At the launch in 2015, UK Defense Secretary Michael Fallon clearly stated that the decision to implement the JEF was a result of growing threats and geopolitical uncertainty in the world.¹³ The JEF is built up around already existing rapid deployment capabilities, and Sweden has since joined in 2017 and contributed, for instance, with Visby-class corvettes to the maritime exercise Baltic Protector.¹⁴ The JEF is intended

5 Her Majesty’s Government, *Global Britain in a Competitive Age: The Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development, and Foreign Policy*, 2021, 26, 49, accessed April 20, 2021. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/969402/The_Integrated_Review_of_Security__Defence__Development_and_Foreign_Policy.pdf

6 Development, Concepts, and Doctrine Centre (DCDC), *Future Security Challenges in the Baltic Sea Region*, UK Ministry of Defence, 2015, 14.

7 UK Ministry of Defence, “Operation CABRIT: Detering Russia in Estonia,” *Voices of the Armed Forces*, August 12, 2020, <https://medium.com/voices-of-the-armed-forces/operation-cabrit-detering-russia-in-estonia-d85dff2d6773>.

8 Szymański, “The Consequences of Brexit,” 2.

9 Ministry of Defence and Liam Fox, MP, “Defence Secretary Launches New Forum of Northern European Countries,” UK Ministry of Defence, November 10, 2010, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/defence-secretary-launches-new-forum-of-northern-european-countries>.

10 UK House of Commons Defence Committee, *The Strategic Defence and Security Review and the National Security Strategy: Sixth Report of Session 2010-12, Vol. 1: Report, Together with Formal Minutes, Oral and Written Evidence* (London: The Stationery Office Limited, August 3, 2011), <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201012/cmselect/cmdfence/761/761.pdf>.

11 UK Ministry of Defence and Sir Michael Fallon, “Defence Secretary Meets with Nordic-Baltic Defence Ministers,” Her Majesty’s Government, November 12, 2014, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/defence-secretary-meets-with-nordic-baltic-defence-ministers>; Norwegian Ministry of Defence, “Standing Together for Stability in Northern Europe,” Ministry of Defence, November 13, 2014, <https://www.regjeringen.no/en/aktuelt/standing-together-for-stability-in-northern-europe/id2340434/>.

12 Eva Hagström Frisell and Emma Sjökvist, *Military Cooperation around Framework Nations: A European Solution to the Problem of Limited Defence Capabilities*, Swedish Defence Research Agency, 2019, 27.

13 UK Ministry of Defence and Sir Michael Fallon, “UK-led Joint Force Launched to Tackle Common Threats,” Her Majesty’s Government, November 30, 2015, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-led-joint-force-launched-to-tackle-common-threats>.

14 Swedish Ministry of Defence, “JEF—Partnership for Regional Security,” Government Offices of Sweden, July 2, 2019, <https://www.government.se/articles/2019/07/jef-partnership-for-regional-security/>.

to be able to respond quickly to a variety of threats across a full spectrum of military activities all over the world. However, in recent years, the JEF has clearly shifted from a global focus in favor of an increased emphasis on North European security.¹⁵ Five JEF member countries share a border with Russia (Finland, Norway, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania). The JEF is now mainly prepared for larger operations in Europe, able to reassure allies, and to deter Russia.¹⁶ Hence, the JEF actually has potential to contribute to Baltic Sea security. The fact that it combines strong defense ties between neighbors with access to high readiness capabilities, as well as regular training and exercises, strengthens deterrence and raises the threshold for an armed attack from a military antagonist in the Baltic Sea region.¹⁷ Fallon stated in 2017 that the JEF would support Sweden in case it was threatened by a crisis in the region,¹⁸ and as members of the JEF, Sweden and Finland could “consider the other seven countries their natural allies.”¹⁹ While Fallon’s argumentation indicates that close cooperation among like-minded nations creates a sense of solidarity in case of crisis, there are no binding mechanisms connected to the JEF. In fact, there are no guarantees that it will be activated at all in a crisis situation. The more near-term value of participating in the JEF is rather to maintain a high level of interoperability with key military partners, and to link into future NATO development of defense capabilities with an increased focus on larger formations.

Beyond cooperation within the JEF, Sweden and the UK also have a strong bilateral defense relationship. The Swedish government describes its cooperation with the UK as particularly important to Baltic Sea security. The two countries have notable defense-equipment cooperation, including significant British industrial content in the Swedish fighter jet JAS Gripen, and have signed a memorandum of understanding

on Future Combat Air Systems Cooperation (FCAS). Other areas in which there is close cooperation are exercises and training as well as research.²⁰ Sweden also has officers serving in the UK defense ministry’s think tank, the Development, Concepts, and Doctrine Centre (DCDC).²¹

THE ARCTIC

As for the Arctic, the UK is not as vocal or explicit as it is in matters on Baltic Sea security. The UK is not an Arctic state, but is a state observer to the Arctic Council. In 2018, the UK launched its most recent official policy regarding the Arctic, laying out the government’s perspectives on some central Arctic issues and challenges. The same year, the intention to produce a British Defence Arctic Strategy was announced, but it is yet to be presented.²² The policy from 2018 declares that the UK is the Arctic’s “closest neighbor” and hence the state is committed to preserving stability and security in the region. It has a strong focus on environmental challenges, and only includes a few short paragraphs on Arctic security. The UK’s three core interests in the Arctic, in order of importance are: science (e.g., climate change and environmental protection), commerce (e.g., trade as well as oil and gas), and defense and security.²³ The policy emphasizes that “the UK’s primary foreign policy objective remains maintaining the Arctic as a peaceful and stable region,” which will be achieved through cooperation with international partners and allies through defense engagement, as well as bilateral and multilateral security cooperation.²⁴

The policy does not put direct blame on any other state or actor for the increased tensions and instability in the Arctic region. However, it recognizes that China has announced and launched a Polar Silk Road, which could involve certain

15 Gunilla Herolf and Calle Håkansson, “The New European Security Architecture,” in *The Nordics and the New European Security Architecture*, ed. Björn Fägersten, Swedish Institute of International Affairs, 2020, 7, 12.

16 Håkon Lunde Saxi, “The UK Joint Expeditionary Force,” *IFS Insights* (2018): 1, accessed December 9, 2020, <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/327039892>.

17 Hagström, Frisell, and Sjökvist, *Military Cooperation around Framework Nations*, 44.

18 Mikael Holmström, “Brittiskt löfte om militär hjälp till Sverige vid kris,” *Dagens Nyheter*, July 1, 2017, <https://www.dn.se/nyheter/sverige/brittiskt-lofte-om-militar-hjalp-till-sverige-vid-kris/?forceScript=1&variantType=large>.

19 Lauri Nurmi, “Defence Secretary of the UK: JEF Forces Ready to Assist Finland-“Finland Is Not Alone,” *Kaleva*, June 30, 2017, <https://www.kaleva.fi/defence-secretary-of-the-uk-jef-forces-ready-to-as/1930901>.

20 Ministry of Defence, “Bilateral Cooperation,” *Government Offices of Sweden*, June 12, 2020, <https://www.government.se/government-policy/international-defence-cooperation/bilateral-cooperation/>.

21 “Development, Concepts, and Doctrine Centre” Homepage, UK Ministry of Defense, accessed December 9, 2020, <https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/development-concepts-and-doctrine-centre>.

22 UK Ministry of Defence and Gavin Williamson, CBE MP, “Defence Secretary Announces New Defence Arctic Strategy,” Ministry of Defence, September 30, 2018, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/defence-secretary-announces-new-defence-arctic-strategy>.

23 Sean F. Fahey and Tomas Jermalavicius, “Increasingly ‘Slippery’ Arctic: The United Kingdom in the Arctic and the Future of Arctic Security,” International Centre for Defence and Security, November 5, 2019, <https://icds.ee/en/increasingly-slippery-arctic-the-united-kingdom-in-the-arctic-and-the-future-of-arctic-security/>.

24 Polar Regions Department, UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office, *Beyond the Ice: UK Policy towards the Arctic*, Her Majesty’s Government, 2018, 7, 21, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/697251/beyond-the-ice-uk-policy-towards-the-arctic.pdf.

risks.²⁵ Another concern for the UK is Russian submarine activity, as Russia could access UK maritime territory through Arctic waters. Therefore, in recent years, the UK has increased military activities and training in the region, such as under-ice submarine operations, air patrolling over the North Atlantic and the High North, and annual training with Norwegian forces in the Arctic.²⁶ In September 2020, the UK led the largest NATO task force into the Barents Sea since the Cold War, which was followed by a Royal Navy statement declaring that the security environment in the High North is changing, and that Russian attempts to control freedom of navigation and access in the Arctic is a matter of concern to the UK and its allies.²⁷ Also, the IR emphasizes UK commitment to work with partners to ensure that “access to the region and its resources is managed safely, sustainably, and responsibly.”²⁸

British interests are vested into the broader area of the High North, which includes the Arctic, but also more southern areas of strategic interest in the North Atlantic, such as the GIUK gap.²⁹ The GIUK gap is the access to the North Atlantic for the powerful Russian Northern Fleet, which hosts two thirds of its navy’s second-strike capability. The West has major interests in the North Atlantic in order to safeguard reinforcements, security of supply, and a vast number of undersea cables of telecommunication.

Since 2014, Russia’s assertive behavior has increased the UK’s interest in its northern vicinity given concerns regarding threats that could emerge.³⁰ This could affect Sweden and security in Sweden’s vicinity both positively and negatively. On the one hand, the UK could come to focus on threats and security in the North Atlantic, rather than in the Arctic. On the other hand, it could create opportunities for future cooperation between the UK and Sweden, in order to secure sea lines of communication and important harbors, such as the port of Gothenburg, which is vital to supply chains all across the Baltic Sea region.

FUTURE TRENDS AND CHALLENGES

Sweden and the UK have a strong bilateral relationship on defense and security, and cooperate within the JEF and through NATO, to which Sweden is a close partner. A key factor bringing the two countries together is the common and mutual threat perception of Russia as an antagonist, especially in the Baltic Sea region. Nevertheless, there are issues that in the forthcoming years will challenge the British security policy strategy, which in turn could affect engagement in the Baltic Sea region and bilateral cooperation with Sweden, in particular related to effects of Brexit, the notion of Global Britain, and the risk of overstretch.

Brexit

Although five years have passed since the result of the EU membership referendum was announced, the long-term implications of Brexit are still uncertain. When Brexit was a fact, many decision makers and scholars feared that the UK would retreat back from European security. To some extent, this concern has continued to be salient, more so on the European than the British side, since a formal comprehensive agreement on defense and security cooperation between the UK and the EU has not been agreed upon. To reach such an agreement would require a significant amount of political will which, at least in the short run, is lacking on both sides.³¹ This means that important foreign policy tools are unregulated and undeveloped, such as sanctions coordination, UK participation in the EU’s Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) operations and missions, as well as capability development within the European Defence Agency (EDA), European Development Fund (EDF), and the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) projects including military mobility, which is highly relevant for the defense of the eastern flank.

25 Polar Regions Department, *Beyond the Ice*, 25.

26 Richard Clifford, “What Are the UK’s Interests in the Arctic?,” Polar Connection (think tank’s website), May 11, 2017, <https://polarconnection.org/uks-arctic-interests/>.

27 Thomas Nilsen, “London Calling to the Faraway North, Leads Largest NATO Task Force into the Barents Sea Since Last Cold War,” *Barents Observer*, September 11, 2020, <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/security/2020/09/london-calling-faraway-north-leads-largest-nato-task-force-barents-sea-last-cold>.

28 Her Majesty’s Government, *Global Britain*, 26, 64.

29 GIUK is an acronym for Greenland, Iceland, and the UK, and it is used to describe the gap that exists in the northern Atlantic between the aforementioned countries.

30 Anna Knack, James Black, and Ruth Harris, “Standing Together on NATO’s North Flank: UK-Norwegian Defence Cooperation,” RAND Corporation (blog), December 9, 2020, <https://www.rand.org/blog/2020/12/standing-together-on-natos-north-flank-uk-norwegian.html>.

31 General (ret.) Stéphane Abrial, Sir Peter Westmacott, and Olivier-Rémy Bel, *Toward a Future EU-UK Relationship in Foreign Policy and Defense*, Atlantic Council, February 12, 2021, 10 <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/toward-a-future-eu-uk-relationship-in-foreign-policy-and-defense/>.

Looking ahead, one scenario would be that the EU treats the UK as any third state and that the relationship would rely on using existing possibilities such as a framework participation agreement for CSDP operations and missions, or an EDA administrative arrangement. As the United States recently did with success, the UK could also apply for third state participation in PESCO projects.³² This kind of limited framework for cooperation means that an overall mechanism to ensure coherence is lacking. Still, it is preferable to the third option, which would be a future relationship which lacks any form of negotiated agreement, but simply relies on ad hoc consultation, cooperation, or joint actions on a case-by-case basis. The IR gives little guidance in which direction the UK is heading, merely stating that as a European state, the UK will “enjoy constructive and productive relationships with our neighbours in the European Union, based on mutual respect for sovereignty” and that it “will find new ways of working with it on shared challenges.”³³

The uncertainty that characterizes the future UK-EU relationship on security and defense is a disadvantage for Sweden, which participates in both the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and CSDP with an ambition to be at the core of the EU. As EU defense cooperation deepens and political solidarity clauses in the Lisbon Treaty, such as Article 42.7 on security guarantees and Article 44 on entrusting CSDP operations to a group of member states, are being further explored, it would be preferable for Sweden to have a like-minded, powerful actor, with a strong voice on Russia, such as the UK, as much involved as possible. Likewise, the UK would provide highly valuable input to the capability development within EDF and PESCO and strengthen the necessary framing of these EU efforts in a NATO context in order to make defense and deterrence efforts credible.

However, the perceived threat of Russia keeps the UK's attention on Sweden's vicinity high. Already in 2017, Johnson, who was then foreign secretary, reassured Britain's commitment to security and defense in the Baltic Sea region, in the wake of increased Russian antagonism.³⁴ In the IR, Russia is defined as the most “acute direct threat to the UK” in the coming decade, an assessment that serves as a

glue in Northern Europe. The IR also asserts that the UK will remain “the leading European ally” in NATO and maintain its contribution to the eFP and the NATO Response Force, continue to serve as a framework nation, and preposition more UK equipment in Germany to facilitate rapid response. In addition, the JEF and strong bilateral relations, where Sweden is explicitly mentioned, are emphasized as instruments of British commitment to European security. The UK will work with allies and partners to deter threats, “particularly from Russia,” across the full range: nuclear, conventional, and hybrid.³⁵ Additionally, regardless of the state of UK-EU defense policy cooperation, the bilateral defense agreement between Sweden and the UK will not be affected.³⁶ Accordingly, in contrast to the initial fears from 2016, despite concerns amid the Brexit referendum, the UK may be more active in Sweden's vicinity, using informal formats such as the NG and the JEF as a way of enhancing cooperation between states in the vicinity that cannot be done through either NATO or the EU.³⁷

Global Britain

In the wake of Brexit, an old idea of “Global Britain” has reemerged. The concept involves exploiting UK potential in fields of military, diplomacy, and finance on a global scale.³⁸ In the IR, entitled “Global Britain in a Competitive Age,” the idea is fleshed out in terms of foreign, security, defense, and aid policy implications. Global Britain entails a couple of themes of particular importance for Sweden's security. One is the special bilateral relationship with the United States, and the other is a British “tilt” to the Indo-Pacific region.

A central idea of Global Britain is to strengthen the special bilateral relationship with the United States. This has consequences both for future UK security policy priorities, and for countries in the North who are dependent on UK presence and protection in their neighborhood. The IR is crystal clear on the supreme importance of the UK-US relationship. Not only will the United States “remain the UK's most important strategic ally and partner,” but the UK will also strive to deepen the relationship even further, especially on emerging technologies, future nuclear deterrent, and the carrier strike group. As for security, the cooperation ranges “across the full spectrum of defense, intelligence, cyber power, counterterrorism, and nuclear.”³⁹

32 Sebastian Sprenger, “EU and US Defense Leaders Pounce on New Pet Project: Military Mobility,” *Defence News*, March 6, 2021, <https://www.defensenews.com/global/europe/2021/05/06/eu-and-us-defense-leaders-pounce-on-new-pet-project-military-mobility/>.

33 Her Majesty's Government, *Global Britain*, 6, 60.

34 Reuters Staff, “UK Says Defence Commitment in Nordic and Baltic States Won't Waver after Brexit,” Reuters, September 4, 2017, <https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-britain-eu-security/uk-says-defence-commitment-in-nordic-and-baltic-states-wont-waver-after-brexit-idUKKCN1BE16T>.

35 Her Majesty's Government, *Global Britain*, 11, 20, 26, 61, 72.

36 Ministry of Defence, “Bilateral Cooperation.”

37 Robin Niblett, *Global Britain, Global Broker: A Blueprint for the UK's Future International Role*, Chatham House, January 11, 2021, 53-54, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2021/01/global-britain-global-broker>; this development also would be consistent with *Integrated Operating Concept*, a UK Ministry of Defence report, September 30, 2020, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-integrated-operating-concept-2025>.

38 Szymański, “The Consequences of Brexit,” 3.

39 Her Majesty's Government, *Global Britain*, 60; Alex Hollings, “The US and UK Are Teaming Up to Form a Joint Carrier Strike Group. Here's What It'll Look Like,” *Business Insider*, January 24, 2021, <https://www.businessinsider.com/what-joint-us-uk-carrier-strike-group-will-look-like-2021-1?r=US&IR=T>.

With the push on science and technology investments, the UK is sending a signal to the United States that it will maintain high-end interoperability with the United States future force working in a multidomain setting across hybrid, cyber, and hyperwar challenges from China and Russia, as well as lesser powers and terrorism.⁴⁰ The effort comes at the expense of land forces, and indicates that the UK could be much less of a partner in Europe in the future on division-sized army contributions to reinforce the eastern flank, if necessary.⁴¹

For other European states, this means that if they do not invest substantially in future technologies as well, they risk losing interoperability with both the United States and the UK, that is, the biggest military powers that guarantee European security. In that scenario, lack of plug-in capability would be a major risk to the defense of Northern Europe. In addition, the shift in UK defense policy away from land forces could have severe implications for reinforcement planning of the eastern flank, which is central to the defense of the Baltic Sea region, and put heavier pressure on countries in the vicinity to provide more army troops.

Global Britain also implies a tilt to the Indo-Pacific, for the same reasons as the United States is shifting: the rise of China as the strategic global challenge in the coming decade and the evolvement of the Indo-Pacific as the geopolitical and economic center of the world. In the IR, China is defined as both the “biggest state-based threat” to the UK’s economic security and a systemic competitor, whose “military modernisation . . . will pose an increasing risk to UK interests.”⁴² The UK has already increased its naval presence in Southeast Asia. In 2018, for the first time in five years, the UK sent three warships to the Indo-Pacific, and it has also expanded training exercises and patrolling missions in the area.⁴³ In 2021, the first deployment of the Royal Navy’s new aircraft carrier, the HMS Queen Elisabeth, will take place in the region and the “Indo-Pacific tilt,” as it is called in the IR, also implies that the UK will deploy patrol vessels and frigates in Asia on a permanent basis.

Accordingly, the United States and the UK are reinforcing each other’s policies on the Indo-Pacific and China. The UK is shifting its policy to put more of a spotlight on Asia, both as a way of enhancing bilateral relations with the United States, but also as a strategy within Global Britain.⁴⁴ However, in the end, the tilt is rather modest and the UK remains focused on the Euro-Atlantic area, clearly anchored in collective defense efforts through NATO. The UK’s China policy carries nuances that resemble those of the EU member states, where China is described both in terms of partner and of competitor and systemic rival. Thus, the UK will “continue to pursue a positive trade and investment relationship with China, including deeper trade links and more Chinese investments,” while at the same time striving to protect sensitive technologies, critical infrastructure, and supply chains.⁴⁵ The policy frankly states that “open, trading economies like the UK will need to engage with China.”

On balance, the Global Britain ambitions do not seem to result in a less active stance in the Baltic Sea region or the Arctic, at least not in the short term. The JEF remains a tool primarily focused on Northern Europe, and could even be developed to create a first responder force below the threshold for Article 5, although its ambition is to be deployable anywhere on the globe. The challenge of Global Britain’s ambition to be close to the United States lies less in the pivot to Asia and more in the high-end interoperability quest that allies and partners must keep pace with in order to ensure compatibility with British and US forces in the future, in combination with uncertainties regarding future quantities of British land troops to reinforce toward the eastern flank, if necessary.

Overstretch

Another challenge related to Global Britain and a UK pivot to Asia is the risk of an overstretch. In a not-too-distant future, the UK could find itself in a position where it does not have the capacity to strengthen forces and presence in Southeast Asia, while at the same time taking a leading role in deterring Russia in Europe. The UK, like other states, faces limitations in resources, and an endeavor to succeed in both of these

40 Hyperwar is understood as warfare with “unparalleled speed enabled by automating decision-making and the concurrency of action that will become possible by leveraging artificial intelligence and machine cognition.” See General John R. Allen and Amir Husain, “On Hyperwar,” *US Naval Institute Proceedings* 143, no. 7 (2017), <https://www.usni.org/magazines/proceedings/2017/july/hyperwar>.

41 Julian Lindley-French, “Global Britain or Little Britain? Extended Briefing,” Commentary, *Speaking Truth unto Power* (blog), March 24, 2021, <http://lindleyfrench.blogspot.com/2021/03/global-britain-or-little-britain.html>.

42 Her Majesty’s Government, *Global Britain*, 26, 29, 62.

43 Louisa Brooke-Holland, “Royal Navy: A Return to the Far East?” UK House of Commons Library, Insight webpage, May 24, 2018, <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/royal-navy-a-return-to-the-far-east/>.

44 Anisa Heritage and Pak K. Lee, “Global Britain: The UK in the Indo-Pacific,” *Diplomat*, January 8, 2021, <https://thedi diplomat.com/2021/01/global-britain-the-uk-in-the-indo-pacific/>.

45 Her Majesty’s Government, *Global Britain*, 62.

objectives might lead to an overstretch, where neither is successful nor satisfactory.⁴⁶ The risk of an overstretch would be greater in a scenario where both of the systemic competitors to the UK, Russia and China, act assertively in various theaters, thus forcing the UK to prioritize its efforts. In Sweden's vicinity, there could be maritime and amphibious trade-offs among the Baltics, North Atlantic, and the Arctic, with the UK resistant or unable to reinforce with any endurance in the Baltics or to operate in the Arctic, but rather opting to work with the United States and its Second Fleet to secure the sealines of communication, reinforcements, and supply chains across the North Atlantic.

The credibility of NATO's posture to deter and defend against a potential Russian threat depends on a large amount of allied land forces to ensure the reinforcement eastward. The UK, as a nuclear power and the largest European ally, is crucial in this regard. In 2017, when NATO assigned capability targets to all allies to help implement its new posture, the UK committed to providing two land divisions for NATO. Given the potential of the Russian threat, there was also a need to have forces available in theater in thirty days or less, which led to the launch of the NATO Readiness Initiative in 2018. Through this initiative, allies committed to providing a number of high readiness combat brigades, enhanced air wings, and maritime task groups. It is obvious that such high-end forces require the commitment particularly of the bigger European nations. As

the UK shifts toward investments in high-tech areas, previous levels of land forces will not be maintained, which profoundly affects the possibility for allied land reinforcement on the eastern flank.⁴⁷

CONCLUSION

The UK, much like Sweden, sees the Baltic Sea region and Northern Europe as areas of strategic importance, and Russia as the main challenge to stability and peace in the region. It is dedicated to the collective defense of the Baltic Sea region and the Arctic through NATO, but also as a Northern European state with some proximity to Russia, not least in the North Atlantic. Its regional initiative, the JEF, combines strong defense ties between neighbors with access to high readiness capabilities, thus supporting security in the Baltic sea area. Although a comprehensive agreement on defense and security between the UK and the EU is lacking, the trend in the short term is that the UK maintains its regional engagement and possibly even strengthens it, as the Arctic becomes increasingly important from a strategic standpoint. While the UK is tilting toward the Indo-Pacific, it remains focused on the Euro-Atlantic area. The potential risk with its "special relationship" with the United States lies less in distraction due to Asia and more in future interoperability gaps as a consequence of British investments in high-end defense, as well as fewer land troops ready to reinforce toward the eastern flank, if necessary.

⁴⁶ Szymański, "The Consequences of Brexit," 4.

⁴⁷ Lindley-French, "Global Britain or Little Britain?"



France

Much like the UK, France is an important and powerful defense and security policy actor. As a result of Brexit, France is the only nuclear power within the EU, and its only permanent member of the UN Security Council. France is the foremost EU member state with expeditionary capabilities and distinguishes itself by having significant forces on high alert for deployment both nationally and internationally.⁴⁸ After a few years of declining defense spending, France began in the mid-2010s to scale up its defense spending: expenditures are set to increase 40 percent over the course of the 2019-2025 military programming law;⁴⁹ as of 2021, expenditures have already increased 22 percent since 2017.⁵⁰ France plans to further develop its capabilities within cyber and space, for example, but also through a complete overhaul of its army vehicles and connectivity.⁵¹ France also is rethinking the role of its nuclear force.⁵² France has Europe's third-largest defense

A French Leclerc battle tank fires its main gun during Exercise Furious Hawk in Ādaži, Latvia. The French tanks are deployed to NATO's enhanced Forward Presence Battlegroup in Estonia. Source: NATO

expenditure, after the UK and Germany, of approximately \$48.4 billion, and the second-highest number of active military personnel, after Turkey, with approximately 204,000.⁵³

BALTIC SEA SECURITY

During the French presidential election campaign in 2017, which was the target of a Russian "hack and leak" operation, Emmanuel Macron described the Russian foreign policy as threatening, in violation of both international law and human rights; this has been the official stance since, with

48 Anna Sundberg, "Frankrikes säkerhetspolitik och militära förmåga," Swedish Defence Research Agency, 2018, 3.

49 News Wires, "France to Hike Defence Spending by over 40 Percent," *France 24*, February 8, 2018, <https://www.france24.com/en/20180208-france-hike-defence-military-spending-over-40-percent-nato>.

50 Emmanuel Huberdeau, "France Plans 4.5% Defence Budget Increase for 2021," *Janes* (website of Jane's Information Group), October 2, 2020, <https://www.janes.com/defence-news/news-detail/france-plans-45-defence-budget-increase-for-2021>.

51 Harry Lye, "Scorpion: New Vehicles for a New Era," *Army Technology* (newsletter), March 24, 2020, <https://www.army-technology.com/features/scorpion-new-vehicles-for-a-new-era/>.

52 Interview with Marc Henry, Defence Attaché, Embassy of France, Stockholm, Sweden, January 15, 2021.

53 NATO, "Defence Expenditures of NATO Countries (2013-2020)," NATO, March 19, 2021, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_182242.htm; IISS, *The Military Balance*, 64.

several official documents outlining the worrying behavior of Russia.⁵⁴ Russia is, alongside China, viewed as a strategic competitor that bases its “strategic intimidation posture” on both nonmilitary as well as sophisticated military capabilities.⁵⁵

In official documents from the French Ministry of Armed Forces, France acknowledges recent years’ revived tensions and security challenges in the Baltic Sea region and describes them as caused by Russian remilitarization and assertive behavior.⁵⁶ France emphasizes that it has increased its presence in the Baltic Sea region as a result of Russia’s actions. The French military presence in the Baltic Sea region is first and foremost located within various NATO operations and missions, such as the eFP and BAP.⁵⁷ France, like the UK, is one of the framework nations for VJTF. However, in contrast to the UK, Germany, and the United States, France is not a framework nation for any of the battle groups in the Baltic states and Poland, but instead regularly contributes a contingent of roughly three or four hundred troops, alternating between Estonia and Lithuania. As a nuclear state, France’s presence in the Baltic Sea region significantly contributes to NATO’s deterrence posture. Since the mid-2010s, France has created the Franco-Baltic Security Seminar, and signed several intergovernmental agreements and letters of intent, with a specific bilateral focus on Estonia, currently deploying forces in Mali. In partnership with Finland, France has been fostering a discussion on the use of the mutual defense clause calling for solidarity, Article 42.7 in the EU’s Lisbon Treaty. Based on experience in activating it in 2015, France believes that Article 42.7 can be used to reinforce European responses to threats, especially subthreshold, and bolster the resilience of EU member states.

A recent French initiative which could affect its engagement in the Baltic Sea region is the European Intervention Initiative (EI2). The French Ministry of Defense describes EI2 as aimed at facilitating the emergence of a European strategic culture—particularly by reinforcing the ability that Europeans have to act together—and creating settings to conduct jointly prepared commitments on the whole spectrum of possible crises.⁵⁸ The current participants are France, the UK, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Finland, Sweden, Estonia, Denmark, Belgium, Germany, Portugal, and Spain. Consequently, due to participation by many states with proximity to the Baltic Sea and three that border Russia, Baltic Sea security is one of the EI2’s natural areas of focus.⁵⁹ However, the fact that the EI2 is not intended to be used as a deployable force generates some uncertainty about its value for deterrence and defense in Sweden’s vicinity. It has been described as “more akin to a club.”⁶⁰ Sweden, like some of the other participating states, joined primarily to strengthen cooperation with France.⁶¹ In France’s recent strategic update, the EI2 is mentioned as an instrument to enable Europeans to “respond to the challenges they face,” or else risk a “genuine strategic downgrade,” given instability on Europe’s doorstep and in the Mediterranean, and pressures on defense budgets.⁶² Thus, the value of EI2 in terms of Baltic Sea security can be found in the ability to forge common threat perceptions, as well as increased agility in joint responses to crises.

The main practical defense cooperation between France and Sweden occurs within different international multilateral operations, such as the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA). Additionally, Sweden

54 Jean-Baptiste Jeangène Vilmer, “The ‘Macron Leaks’ Operation: A Postmortem,” Atlantic Council, June 20, 2019, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/report/the-macron-leaks-operation-a-post-mortem/>; and Ministry of the Armed Forces, *Strategic Update 2021*, Government of France (2021), <https://www.defense.gouv.fr/content/download/605304/10175711/file/strategie-update%202021.pdf>.

55 Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, “Defence—2021 Strategic Renewal/Summary,” Communiqué of Florence Parly, French minister for the Armed Forces, January 22, 2021, <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/french-foreign-policy/security-disarmament-and-non-proliferation/news/article/defence-2021-strategic-renewal-summary-communiqué-issued-by-mme-florence-parly>.

56 Directorate General for International Relations and Strategy, “France and the Security Challenges in the Baltic Sea Region,” French Ministry of the Armed Forces, 2019, 3, https://www.defense.gouv.fr/content/download/551359/9392196/file/DGRIS_France%20and%20the%20security%20challenges%20in%20the%20Baltic%20Sea%20region_vEN%20-%202019.pdf.

57 Directorate General for International Relations and Strategy, “France and the Security Challenges,” 5.

58 Directorate General for International Relations and Strategy, “European Intervention Initiative,” French Ministry of the Armed Forces, April 17, 2020, <https://www.defense.gouv.fr/english/dgris/international-action/i-ei/i-initiative-europeenne-d-intervention>.

59 Interview with Marc Henry, January 15, 2021.

60 Olivier-Rémy Bel, “Can Macron’s European Intervention Initiative Make the Europeans Battle-Ready?,” *War on the Rocks*, October 2, 2019, <https://warontherocks.com/2019/10/can-macrons-european-intervention-initiative-make-the-europeans-battle-ready/>.

61 Herolf and Håkansson, “The New European Security Architecture,” 8.

62 Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, “Defence—2021 Strategic Renewal/Summary.”

is part of the French-led Operation Barkhane in Mali and, as part of Task Force Takuba, provides a Quick Reaction Force with 150 soldiers and helicopters.⁶³ Beyond this, France and Sweden also cooperate in the defense material area.⁶⁴ In 2019, France and Sweden issued a joint declaration as an initiative to further increase bilateral cooperation, both nationally, within the EU, and globally. The declaration encouraged the EU's ambition and efforts to take greater responsibility for its own security by enhancing military capability and ability to act across a broad spectrum of crisis management, as well as the enhanced capability to act autonomously when necessary.⁶⁵

THE ARCTIC

Like the UK, France is not an Arctic state, but it is a major European actor with security interests beyond its national borders. In the 2016 national roadmap for the Arctic, the French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs asserts that France's primary interests in the region are related to environment, economy, and security, rather than defense. However, the roadmap also emphasizes that any threat to stability and security in the Arctic would affect French interests, and that France always will ensure security of energy supply, for example, and access to strategic minerals, which are critical to the high-tech defense sector. The document also highlights that a security threat or crisis in the Arctic region could prompt France to make stability-reassuring contributions, since the country has obligations within both the EU and NATO, and is one of the few countries with the capability to deploy resources in this area.⁶⁶ In a strategy document from 2019, French Minister of the Armed Forces Florence Parly accentuated the increased interstate rivalry and competition in the region, and the potential risks involved.⁶⁷ As a result, France is involved in several Arctic forums, such as the Arctic Council and the Arctic Forces Security Roundtables, and participates in exercises such as Arctic Challenge (with fifteen fighter planes and around three hundred personnel in 2019). In the same year, the French Navy sent a ship to transit through the entire Northern Sea Route to increase its understanding of the geographic and meteorological constraints of the region.⁶⁸

In sum, France increasingly recognizes the Arctic as an area of potential conflicts. The government describes Russian remilitarization—with Chinese investments—as challenging.⁶⁹ However, although the region has gained in importance in recent years, the Arctic is not a region of primary concern for French foreign and defense policy.

FUTURE TRENDS AND CHALLENGES

On the one hand, conditions for a fruitful and prosperous defense cooperation between Sweden and France seem to prevail. On the other hand, there are challenges which could divert French interest, and/or complicate cooperation in four major areas: the striving for dialogue with Russia, jihadist terrorism as a major threat, strategic autonomy, and nuclear deterrence.

The striving for dialogue with Russia

As previously described, France does not hesitate to depict Russia as an assertive actor. However, France has a different approach than Northern European states on how to deal with it. Ever since taking office, President Macron has been keen to explore dialogue with Russia, which has attracted criticism in Central and Eastern Europe, where the emphasis is on deterrence and on meeting Russia from a position of strength. For these states, dialogue, without concessions from Russia for the harm caused by its previous assertive behavior, is viewed as dangerous. Macron sees dialogue with Moscow as a necessity, not an option. In his view, the results of avoiding dialogue with Russia have shown that communication is necessary for European security.⁷⁰ Macron also has called for dialogue on the future security architecture of Europe, while Baltic Sea states say architecture is not the problem—it is Russia's unwillingness to comply with it. Despite concrete measures against Russian behavior, such as participation in eFP, support of sanctions, etc., the French policy creates uncertainty among allies in close proximity to Russia about France's commitment to their defense and understanding of their situation, as well as fear that France in a conflict situation would be tempted to negotiate a "deal" with Russia. Fundamentally, this dilemma

63 Swedish Ministry of Defence, "Task Force Takuba in Focus at International Meeting on the Sahel," Government Offices of Sweden, March 10, 2021, <https://www.regeringen.se/artiklar/2021/03/task-force-takuba-i-fokus-vid-internationalt-mote-om-sahel/>.

64 Ministry of Defence, "Bilateral Cooperation."

65 Swedish Prime Minister's Office, "Declaration between France and Sweden on Cooperation in European Affairs and an Update of the French-Swedish Partnership for Innovation and Green Solutions," Government Offices of Sweden, 2019, 1, 10, accessed November 18, 2020 <https://www.government.se/information-material/2019/06/Declaration-between-France-and-Sweden/>.

66 Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Development, *The Great Challenge of the Arctic: National Roadmap for the Arctic*, French Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Development, 2016, 33-34, https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/frna_-_eng_-_interne_-_prepa_-_17-06-pm-bd-pdf_cle02695b.pdf.

67 Directorate General for International Relations and Strategy, "France and the New Strategic Challenges in the Arctic," French Ministry of the Armed Forces, 2019, Foreword, https://www.defense.gouv.fr/content/download/565142/9742558/file/France%20and%20the%20New%20Strategic%20Challenges%20in%20the%20Arctic%20-%20DGRIS_2019.pdf.

68 Directorate General for International Relations and Strategy, "France and the New Strategic Challenges in the Arctic," 7.

69 Directorate General for International Relations and Strategy, "France and the New Strategic Challenges in the Arctic," 2.

70 Romain Le Quiniou, "Mission Unaccomplished: France's Monsieur Macron Visits the Baltics," Commentary, Royal United Services Institute (RUSI), October 09, 2020, <https://rusi.org/commentary/mission-unaccomplished-france-monsieur-macron-visits-baltics>.

is a matter of trust, and it is evident that some allies lack trust in France when it comes to dealing with Russia. The French approach causes concern for Sweden as well.

Hence, France often finds itself in solitude, proposing that Europe promote dialogue while also calling out Russia for its violations of human rights and international law and its aggressive posture. Furthermore, although France perceives the hostile intents and actions of Russia against French interests, France does not perceive Russia as a direct threat to French territory, which has led to situations where French representatives tend to downplay what alarms Eastern European allies.⁷¹ In October 2020, Macron visited the Baltic states and tried to persuade his partners, with limited success, of the benefits of a dialogue with Russia. Lithuanian Foreign Minister Linas Antanas Linkevičius clearly stated that dialogue for the sake of dialogue is not what the Baltic countries want to see, as it creates an impression of “business as usual” with Russia.⁷² NATO, in its Brussels Summit Declaration, collectively abandoned the idea of returning to “business as usual” with Russia until it demonstrates its compliance with international law and its international obligations and responsibilities.⁷³

However, it should also be noted that France has strong relations, both bilaterally and through various multilateral organizations and agreements, to several Baltic Sea states. Overall, France is committed to Baltic Sea security and deterrence against Russia, and the country has a strong sense of solidarity with many of these states and to European security in general.⁷⁴ For France, being present in the Baltic Sea region sends a signal that European security is indivisible. Parly affirmed France’s commitment to the Baltic during a speech in Helsinki in 2018, stating that “your security is our security.”

Jihadist terrorism as a major threat

Notwithstanding France’s growing interest in security challenges in the Baltic Sea region and in the Arctic, its primary security policy focus is oriented toward areas, issues, and actors elsewhere, mainly in Africa and the Middle East. Following the 2015 Paris attacks, jihadist terrorism has been articulated as the main threat against France.⁷⁵ Looking ahead, the fight against terrorism will continue to be the main focus of French security policy.⁷⁶ Hence, the increased French military expenditures of recent years can to a certain degree be explained by the many major terrorist attacks that have been carried out in and against France during the last decade. France perceives a direct connection between national security and developments in parts of the Middle East, such as Syria, Libya, and Iraq, as well as the Sahel region in Africa.⁷⁷ These areas are likely to continue to be prioritized, especially since the fall of 2020 was characterized by new jihadist terror attacks on French territory.

France feels a strong commitment to European security and solidarity with Baltic Sea states that has increased as a result of a more hostile and assertive Russia. This will not be overlooked in the endeavor to combat terrorism in the South.⁷⁸ In a worsening security situation in the Baltic Sea region, it is likely that France would increase its military presence, although it is limited by the fact that French armed forces are deployed in and burdened by other operations, some of them at far distance from the region.⁷⁹

France is often described as having a transactional approach in security policy cooperation, wanting something in return for its contributions.⁸⁰ France is a prioritized partner for Sweden, but in order for Sweden to enjoy the benefits of this cooperation, increased efforts and contributions to issues that

71 Sundberg, “Frankrikes säkerhetspolitik och militära förmåga,” 6-7.

72 Le Quiniou, “Mission Unaccomplished.”

73 NATO, “Brussels Summit Declaration,” NATO, July 12, 2018, Paragraph 9, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_156624.htm.

74 Interview with Marc Henry, January 15, 2021.

75 Élysée, “Speech of the President of the Republic on the Defense and Deterrence Strategy,” Government of France, February 7, 2020, accessed January 11, 2021, <https://www.elysee.fr/en/emmanuel-macron/2020/02/07/speech-of-the-president-of-the-republic-on-the-defense-and-deterrence-strategy>.

76 Interview with Marc Henry, January 15, 2021.

77 Sundberg, “Frankrikes säkerhetspolitik och militära förmåga,” 3-5, 14.

78 Interview with Marc Henry, January 15, 2021.

79 Anna Sundberg, “France,” in *Western Military Capability in Northern Europe 2020. Part II: National Capabilities*, eds. Eva Frisell Hagström and Krister Pallin, FOI Report, FOI-R-5013—SE, Swedish Defense Research Agency, March 11, 2021, 117-118.

80 Sundberg, “Frankrikes säkerhetspolitik och militära förmåga,” 27.

are important to France are likely to be required and requested more often in the future. Examples of efforts of this kind are the Swedish Armed Force's new role within MINUSMA in Mali, in which Sweden is changing its commitments and now is contributing to a mobile task force, a capability that the UN operation previously lacked; another is Sweden's involvement in Task Force Takuba.⁸¹

Strategic autonomy

A third challenge can be identified in relation to perceived uncertainty of French political and strategic intentions. When discussing France and its defense policy, it is impossible to circumvent the concept of strategic autonomy. As described by Maxime Lebrun (in 2018), it first appeared as a concept in a French defense white paper in 1994, referring to a combination of nuclear deterrence and conventional intervention capabilities. In the European context, France is emphasizing the second element and "the ability to act alone if need be—swift decision-making, reliable and independent intelligence, theatre entry capabilities—but most importantly the ability not to remain alone. The gist of strategic autonomy is that it is ultimately the capacity to federate partners into a coalition."⁸² Strategic autonomy has been put forward as desirable in many areas, but defense and security has been discussed in particular.⁸³ The EU Global Strategy from 2016 clearly highlighted the ambition of strategic autonomy as important for Europe's ability to promote peace and security, both within and beyond its borders.⁸⁴ In 2020, the president of the European Council, Charles Michel, stated that strategic autonomy is more than just words—and is about "less dependence, more influence."⁸⁵

Thus, the concept is well-rooted in both France and the EU, but still disputed. Despite years of discussions and debate, the EU has not yet been able to agree on a common definition, or in particular its implementation. Many states, such as Sweden, are not as keen as France is on European strategic autonomy. The concept has an inherent problem connected to the degree

of independence from the United States. Hence, beyond confusion on what the concept actually infers, the dividing line on independence from the United States is another factor that is troublesome. France, which enjoys a particularly deep bilateral defense relationship with the United States, underlines that Washington might not always be willing to shoulder the burden of European security and asks Europeans to do more. For Sweden and its neighbors in the Baltic Sea region, the transatlantic link is crucial for security, and dependency on the United States is fundamental. Processes and structures that work in the direction of less dependency are counterproductive, and even dangerous, in this regard. Rather than focusing on autonomy from the United States, the important matter is to maintain US interest and engagement for the security of the region.

Nuclear deterrence

Another important development that will affect European security policy in the upcoming years is the role of French nuclear deterrence in European security. In 2020, Macron presented his fellow Europeans with an unexpected suggestion, as he offered a strategic dialogue on the role of French deterrence in European security for those who are willing to engage in such a discussion.⁸⁶ Macron made this statement in a speech on nuclear deterrence, a reoccurring speech given by each French president. In his speech, Macron emphasized the fundamental role of nuclear deterrence in maintaining international security and peace, saying that France's nuclear forces have a deterrent effect in themselves, particularly in Europe.⁸⁷

At the same time, Macron also made clear that France's vital interests—the interests that the country's nuclear deterrence help protect and ensure—have a European dimension. While this is not per se a new development, it was more clearly formulated than in the past, with more specific proposals.⁸⁸ In relation to this, Macron expressed a desire to develop a

81 Försvarsmakten, "Sverige tar tåten för ny taktik i Mali," Swedish Armed Forces, September 29, 2020, <https://www.forsvarsmakten.se/sv/aktuellt/2020/09/sverige-tar-taten-for-ny-taktik-i-mali/>.

82 Maxime Lebrun, "Strategic Autonomy? France, the eFP and the EII," Commentary, International Centre for Defence and Security, October 12, 2018, <https://icds.ee/en/strategic-autonomy-france-the-efp-and-the-eii/>.

83 Sundberg, "Frankrikes säkerhetspolitik och militära förmåga," 12.

84 The European External Action Service, "Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe. A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy," European Union (website), 2016, 9, https://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/top_stories/pdf/eugs_review_web.pdf.

85 European Council, "'Strategic Autonomy for Europe: The Aim of Our Generation'—Speech by President Charles Michel to the Bruegel Think Tank," European Council (press release), September 28, 2020, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2020/09/28/l-autonomie-strategique-europeenne-est-l-objectif-de-notre-generation-discours-du-president-charles-michel-au-groupe-de-reflexion-bruegel/>.

86 Tara Varma, "The Search for Freedom of Action: Macron's Speech on Nuclear Deterrence," European Council on Foreign Relations, February 7, 2020, https://ecfr.eu/article/commentary_the_search_for_freedom_of_action_macrons_speech_on_nuclear_deter/.

87 Élysée, "Speech of the President of the Republic on the Defense and Deterrence Strategy."

88 Carlo Trezza, "Macron's Vision: A European Role for the French Nuclear Deterrent," European Leadership Network, March 31, 2020, <https://www.europeanleadershipnetwork.org/commentary/macrons-vision-a-european-role-for-the-french-nuclear-deterrent/>.

strategic dialogue with his European allies to discuss the role this nuclear deterrence can play in European collective security.⁸⁹ He also suggested that cooperation on this could go further, and include an association of European partners with exercises of French deterrence forces. Macron sees the proposed strategic dialogue as a way of developing a true strategic culture among the European allies.⁹⁰

The offer from Macron could yield decisive developments within European security policy, hence inherently affecting Swedish security. Regardless of the final outcome, a debate on the role of France's nuclear deterrence within European security might emerge in the upcoming years. Sweden has a long tradition of promoting nuclear disarmament, but the nation could face a situation in which this stance would need to be weighed against the bilateral relations with France, security guarantees, and Sweden's role within European security cooperation.⁹¹

CONCLUSION

France recognizes Russia as a strategic competitor and has increased its engagement and presence in the Baltic Sea region, as well as its gaze toward the Arctic in recent years, as a response to Russian remilitarization and assertive behavior. As a member of NATO and the EU, it is important for France to signal European solidarity and commitment to collective defense. The French initiative E12 has Baltic Sea security as one of its focus areas, but since it is not a deployable force, but more of a club to foster a common strategic culture, its contribution to regional security remains to be developed. France's engagement in the region is persistent and likely to continue, and as a nuclear power it provides high deterrence value with its presence, alongside the UK and the United States. Nevertheless, there is a sense of ambiguity on several of France's security policy positions and attitude—on dialogue with Russia, the meaning of strategic autonomy, and a French nuclear deterrent for Europe—which hampers trust-building efforts with Sweden and other Baltic Sea states. Furthermore, as jihadist terrorism is the main threat against France, and large amounts of troops hence are deployed in France's southern vicinity this could put limits on France's ability to provide reinforcements for the Baltic Sea region and the Arctic, should the security situation worsen.

89 Élysée, "Speech of the President of the Republic on the Defense and Deterrence Strategy."

90 Élysée, "Speech of the President of the Republic on the Defense and Deterrence Strategy."

91 Lars-Erik Lundin, "Utredning Av Konsekvenserna Av Ett Svenskt Tillträde till Konventionen Om Förbud Mot Kärnvapen," Government Offices of Sweden, 2019, 24, accessed March 29, 2021, <https://www.regeringen.se/rattsliga-dokument/departementsserien-och-promemorior/2019/01/utredning-av-konsekvenserna-av-ett-svenskt-tilltrade-till-konventionen-om-forbud-mot-karnvapen/>.



The United States

The United States is the undisputed greatest military power of the world, based on expenditures, technology, and actual capability. The United States spends approximately 3.73 percent of national gross domestic product (GDP) on defense, which equals almost \$717 billion.⁹² In comparison, the combined spending of China, Russia, the UK, France, and Germany equals approximately \$400 billion. The United States is a supreme nuclear power and has a unique ability to project power all over the world.⁹³ During the Cold War, the United States perceived the Soviet Union as the main threat against both national security as well as world peace, which created strong incentives for the United States to have an extensive and fully capable military presence in Europe. This focus has shifted: In the first decade of the new millennium, national security was mainly devoted to combatting global terrorism. In recent years, the strategic focus has shifted toward Asia—with China as the emerging global competitor.

A U.S. Marine approaches a forward observation post in Setermoen, Norway, March 4, 2019, during artillery training before Cold Response 20, a Norwegian-led exercise designed to enhance military capabilities and allied cooperation in a challenging Arctic environment. Source: U.S Department of Defense/ Marine Corps Lance Cpl. Zane Ortega

BALTIC SEA SECURITY

For the United States, security in the Baltic Sea region is about the credibility of its foreign policy and its superpower status. With binding security commitments to the three Baltic states and Poland, it is unlikely that the United States would leave the region completely in either the near or long term. While it never can solely focus on the region, it is important for the United States from a strategic perspective. The 2014 Russian annexation of Crimea took NATO by surprise. Back then, NATO still lacked a common assessment of the Russian

92 NATO, "The Secretary General's Annual Report 2020," NATO website (speeches and transcripts), March 16, 2021, 50, 122, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_182236.htm.

93 IISS, *The Military Balance*, 21, 45–46.

threat in the region, as well as a common military strategic perception. The United States responded without waiting for joint NATO action by sending F-15 fighters to step up NATO's Air Policing mission over the Baltic states and increasing its troop presence in Poland and the Baltic states.⁹⁴ This swift reaction showed European allies that the United States was ready to act and take responsibility when needed, despite having focused on combating terrorism for many years. It also illustrated that NATO is a major instrument in the US toolbox, although not the only one available to the United States to scale up its engagement in the Baltic Sea region, depending on the perceived threat level.

Since 2014, allies have come to perceive the Baltic Sea region as a military area of strategic importance, as a result of a far more assertive and active Russia.⁹⁵ For the United States, Russia is seen as a revisionist power and strategic competitor which, like China, strives to shape a world order consistent with its authoritarian model. Russia seeks to divide the United States from its allies and partners, and to establish spheres of influence near its borders. For the Department of Defense, the long-term strategic competitions with China and Russia are the principal priorities.⁹⁶ The Biden administration is currently assessing the US global force posture; already, however, the interim national security guidance indicates more of a differentiation between China as the sole strategic competitor and Russia as the "disruptive" actor, albeit still on a global scale.⁹⁷ At the virtual Munich Security Conference, held February 21, 2021, President Biden addressed the need to meet the threat from Russia, which seeks to weaken the EU and NATO, and undermine transatlantic unity and resolve through its "recklessness."⁹⁸

In response to Russian aggression in 2014, the United States created the European Reassurance Initiative (ERI) to increase

the US presence in Europe for security purposes, particularly in Eastern Europe. During the Obama administration, the ERI was given annual funding of approximately \$1 billion. In 2017, the ERI changed its name to the European Deterrence Initiative (EDI), and during President Trump's first years in office, its funding drastically increased (\$3.4 billion in 2017, \$4.8 billion in 2018, and \$6.5 billion in 2019). Currently, the United States has approximately seventy thousand personnel permanently assigned to the US European Command.⁹⁹ The United States has worked to strengthen European security in Central and Eastern Europe by more rotational force presence, exercises and training, prepositioning of equipment, improving infrastructure to facilitate preparedness, and strengthening of partner capacity. As part of Operation Atlantic Resolve (OAR), approximately six thousand US military personnel are present in Eastern Europe at any given time. In the Baltic Sea region, US engagement to deter Russia is focused on Poland, as it provides land access to the Baltic states. The Baltic states would prefer to have permanently rotational US troops on their ground, as the United States is the supreme deterrent against Russia, but they have so far not been successful in this request.¹⁰⁰ The United States has deployed an Armored Brigade Combat Team of some five thousand troops on a rotational basis in Poland, which includes the leadership for the eFP battlegroup in Poland, with roughly seven hundred US troops. The US-Poland joint declaration, signed June 12, 2019, envisions an additional one thousand rotational US military personnel and, among other initiatives, an army division headquarters in Poland.¹⁰¹ In 2020, Trump decided to decrease the EDI's spending and suggested that approximately twelve thousand troops should be withdrawn from Germany, with about 50 percent to be deployed to other NATO member states and the rest to be sent home.¹⁰² The Biden administration has reversed the troop withdrawal and will instead send an additional five hundred troops to Germany later in 2021.¹⁰³

94 Anna Wieslander, "NATO, the U.S., and Baltic Sea Security," Swedish Institute of International Affairs, 2016, 9-12.

95 Anna Wieslander, "A New Normal for NATO and Baltic Sea Security," Swedish Institute of International Affairs, 2015.

96 Then-President Donald J. Trump, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, White House (archives), 2017, 25, <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf>; and James Mattis, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America: Shaping the American Military's Competitive Edge*, US Department of Defense, 2018, 4, <https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf>.

97 President Joseph R. Biden, Jr., *Interim National Security Strategy Guidance*, White House (website), 2021, 8, 14, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/NSC-1v2.pdf>.

98 Biden, "Remarks by President Biden at the 2021 Virtual Munich Security Conference," White House (website), February 21, 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2021/02/19/remarks-by-president-biden-at-the-2021-virtual-munich-security-conference/>.

99 Jonathan Masters and William Mervin, "How Is the US Military Pivoting in Europe?," Council on Foreign Relations, September 23, 2020, <https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/how-us-military-pivoting-europe>.

100 Andris Banka, "The Baltics Missed Out This Time but the Long Pursuit of US Troops in the Region Will Pay Off," *Euronews*, August 8, 2020, <https://www.euronews.com/2020/08/08/the-baltics-missed-out-this-time-but-the-long-pursuit-of-us-troops-in-the-region-will-pay>.

101 Congressional Research Service, "US Military Presence in Poland," In Focus, IF11280, Version 4, Updated August 4, 2020, <https://fas.org/srg/crs/natsec/IF11280.pdf>.

102 Paul D. Shinkman, "Trump Proposes 25 Percent Drop in Fund Designed to Deter Russia," *U.S. News*, February 10, 2020, <https://www.usnews.com/news/world-report/articles/2020-02-10/trump-seeks-steep-cut-to-fund-designed-to-deter-russia-from-threats-to-europe>; Masters and Mervin, "How Is the US Military Pivoting in Europe?"; and BBC News, "US to Withdraw 12,000 Troops from Germany in 'Strategic' Move," July 29, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-53589245>. BBC News, "US to withdraw 12,000 Troops."

103 Laurenz Gehrke, "US to Deploy Another 500 Troops in Germany This Year," *Politico Europe*, April, 13, 2021, <https://www.politico.eu/article/us-to-deploy-another-500-troops-in-germany-this-year/>.

The US military has in recent years also scaled up its presence in Norway.¹⁰⁴ During 2017-2020, the United States permanently stationed around seven hundred US marines in Norway, with rotation on a six-month basis. Despite the pullout of almost all of the force in 2020, as part of a plan to be more unpredictable under the concept of Dynamic Force Employment, the United States still will keep its hardware storage in Norway and participate in exercises.¹⁰⁵ The United States also will invest in airfield infrastructure at various locations in Norway.¹⁰⁶ In March 2021, a US B-1 bomber made a stop at the Norwegian Bodø Air Force Station, which was the first time a bomber of that type landed inside the Arctic Circle. The B-1 bomber was escorted there by four Swedish JAS-39 Gripen fighter jets, after training with Norwegian and Swedish joint terminal attack controllers as well as US special operations forces, illustrating the close partnership between the countries.¹⁰⁷

Although not a formal member of NATO, Sweden has a strong bilateral defense relationship with the United States. In 2016, the United States and the Swedish defense ministers signed a statement of intent (SOI), as a process to further strengthen the cooperation between the two countries by enhancing operability, exploring possible new areas for military cooperation, strengthening capabilities through training and exercises, and deepening armament cooperation.¹⁰⁸ In 2018, Sweden, the United States, and Finland signed a trilateral SOI aimed at reinforcing and enhancing the countries' defense relationships. The SOI's objectives include intensified trilateral dialogue on defense policy, development of practical interoperability at both the policy and military level, and improvement of ability to conduct combined multinational operations.¹⁰⁹

Sweden and Finland hold the status of Enhanced Opportunities Partners with NATO, which allows them to participate in many important working procedures of the Alliance. An example of

this was the 2018 NATO collective defense exercise called Trident Juncture, where Sweden and Finland not only made substantial troop contributions but participated in the planning process from an early stage. Both countries have signed host nation support treaties with NATO. This sort of engagement has strengthened the US perception of the countries: in 2017, then-Defense Secretary James Mattis said that Sweden, although not a NATO ally, still was “a friend and an ally,” and that the United States would stand by Sweden.¹¹⁰

THE ARCTIC

Since 2018, the United States has been increasingly vocal on the Arctic as an area of strategic importance. Government representatives have made clear that the United States in the coming years will become a more active and present actor in the Arctic, both within civilian and military issues. This increased strategic interest from the US can to a large extent be explained by increased Russian, but also Chinese, interests and activities in the region.¹¹¹ While Russia strives to “consolidate sovereign claims and control access to the region,” China seeks to “get access to Arctic resources and sea routes to secure and bolster its military, economic, and scientific rise.”¹¹² The United States is by its Alaskan territory an Arctic state, and the most recent Department of Defense Arctic Strategy states that “the Arctic security environment has direct implications for US national security interests.”¹¹³ The United States emphasizes that it only recognizes interests from the eight nations with sovereign territory in the Arctic—hence, not China—and that it maintains a strong and fruitful defense relationship with six of the seven other Arctic nations (with the seventh being Russia).¹¹⁴

The United States points at Russia and China for increasing tensions in the region. Chinese and Russian attempts to strengthen their positions and gain leverage have turned the Arctic into an arena for great power competition and possible

104 Daniel Kochis, “2021 Index of US Military Strength—Europe,” Heritage Foundation (website), November 17, 2020, <https://www.heritage.org/2021-index-us-military-strength/assessing-the-global-operating-environment/europe>.

105 Atle Staalesen, “Washington Pulls 700 US Marines out of Norway,” *Barents Observer*, August 6, 2020, <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/2020/08/washington-pulls-700-us-marines-out-norway>.

106 Thomas Nilsen, “US Navy Will Build Airport Infrastructure in Northern Norway to Meet Upped Russian Submarine Presence,” *Barents Observer*, April 16, 2021, <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/security/2021/04/us-navy-build-airport-infrastructure-northern-norway-meet-increased-russian>.

107 Jennifer H. Svan, “Air Force B-1 Bomber Makes Historic Arctic Circle Landing,” *Stars and Stripes*, March 9, 2021, <https://www.stripes.com/theaters/europe/air-force-b-1-bomber-makes-historic-arctic-circle-landing-1.665032>

108 Ministry of Defence, “Minister of Defence Peter Hultqvist Signed US-Swedish Statement of Intent,” Government Offices of Sweden, June 8, 2016, <https://www.government.se/articles/2016/06/minister-of-defence-peter-hultqvist-signed/>.

109 Ministry of Defence, “Minister of Defence Peter Hultqvist Signs Trilateral Statement of Intent.”

110 Anna Wieslander, “What Makes an Ally? Sweden and Finland as NATO’s Closest Partners,” *Journal of Transatlantic Studies* 17 (2019), accessed March 16, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.1057/s42738-019-00019-9>.

111 Viktor Lundquist, “Varför riskerar Arktis att bli 2020-talets mest intensiva konfliktområde?,” in *En ny generations röster om fred och säkerhet*, Swedish Defence Association, 2020, 42-43, https://aff.a.se/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/AFF-Bok_Sidor_Webb.pdf.

112 US Army, *Regaining Arctic Dominance: The US Army in the Arctic*, US Army Chief of Staff Paper #3, January 19, 2021, 15-16, <https://api.army.mil/e2/c/downloads/2021/03/15/9944046e/regaining-arctic-dominance-us-army-in-the-arctic-19-january-2021-unclassified.pdf>.

113 Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, *Department of Defense Arctic Strategy: Report to Congress*, US Department of Defense, 2019, 3, <https://media.defense.gov/2019/Jun/06/2002141657/-1/-1/1/2019-DOD-ARCTIC-STRATEGY.PDF>. This report to Congress was required by Section 1071 of the John S. McCain National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2019 (P.L. 115-232).

114 US Department of Defense, *Department of Defense Arctic Strategy*, 3.

aggression. Increased military presence from antagonists in the region is described as threatening US homeland security. According to the Arctic strategy, the United States must be prepared to defend the homeland and American sovereignty in the Arctic.¹¹⁵ While the main focus is on cooperation, the United States is prepared to compete efficiently to maintain a “favorable regional balance of power” in the Arctic and to ensure that “common domains remain free and open.”¹¹⁶

The United States will, in several ways, enhance its Arctic operations and presence. A main area is regular exercises and deployments in the Arctic region. These will be done independently as well as with allies. Some exercises will be conducted within NATO, while others will be bilateral or multilateral. The United States also will develop its deterrence capability by ensuring that the joint force has the necessary proficiency to respond to regional contingencies, both alone and in cooperation with others.¹¹⁷ The US Army will develop forces that conduct multidomain operations under extreme conditions, using the Multi Domain Task Force (MDTF) set up in Alaska as a first step.¹¹⁸ Furthermore, the United States also is increasing its icebreaker fleet, which currently only has one heavy icebreaker and one medium icebreaker. The United States is looking to acquire at least three additional heavy icebreakers and three additional medium vessels.¹¹⁹

FUTURE TRENDS AND CHALLENGES

The United States is tied to the Baltic Sea region, as well as the Arctic, by its NATO commitments and to the Arctic by its position as an Arctic state. Hence, the superpower never completely leaves Sweden's vicinity, but it does not fully focus on it either. The degree of attention depends on how vested the dynamics of the region are within global strategic considerations and, ultimately, the United States' ability to dominate the international rules-based order. Such considerations include the future value of alliances, including

NATO, the perceived threat level from Russia, and the importance of the Indo-Pacific in the competition with China.

The future of NATO

NATO holds a special position as the main arena for US foreign and defense policy cooperation. While President Trump repeatedly questioned and disputed the value of NATO, President Biden extols the value of NATO and underscores the US commitment to the Alliance, which has bipartisan support in the Congress and among most Americans.¹²⁰ However, Biden is also calling on allies to recommit to their responsibilities and commitments as well.¹²¹ The importance of US contributions to NATO cannot be overestimated, as the United States provides nearly 70 percent of NATO's defense budget.¹²² For Washington, regardless of whether the president is a Democrat or Republican, increased burden-sharing is an issue that has been, and will continue to be, high on the agenda.¹²³ The fulfillment of the 2 percent of GDP target for defense spending in 2024 by allies is viewed as “crucial,” while the United States opens to a “holistic view” of burden-sharing, including the argument that more decision-sharing should go along it.¹²⁴ In 2020, roughly one-third of the US allies met the 2 percent criteria, while nearly two-thirds reached the target of spending 20 percent of the defense budget on new equipment.¹²⁵ For the foreseeable future, the US commitment to NATO will be in doubt as the 2024 presidential election could once again stage the return of a president hostile to the alliance and consumed by burden-sharing grievances. There is at least a possibility this could result in a US withdrawal from the Alliance as a response to insufficient commitments by European members, although strong bipartisan commitment to NATO in the US Congress might limit presidential ambitions in this regard.

Other tendencies, perhaps less dramatic yet profound, could undermine the Alliance including drifts away from core values of democracy and rule of law among member states: Turkey,

¹¹⁵ US Department of Defense, *Department of Defense Arctic Strategy*, 3-6.

¹¹⁶ US Department of the Navy, *A Strategic Blueprint for the Arctic*, 2021, 1-2, <https://media.defense.gov/2021/Jan/05/2002560338/-1/-1/0/ARCTIC%20BLUEPRINT%202021%20FINAL.PDF/ARCTIC%20BLUEPRINT%202021%20FINAL.PDF>.

¹¹⁷ US Department of Defense, *Department of Defense Arctic Strategy*, 7-8.

¹¹⁸ US Army, *Regaining Arctic Dominance*, 21.

¹¹⁹ Connie Lee, “New Coast Guard Icebreaker Remains on Tight Schedule,” *National Defense* magazine, May 21, 2020, <https://www.nationaldefensemagazine.org/articles/2020/5/21/new-coast-guard-icebreaker-remains-on-tight-schedule>.

¹²⁰ Kimberly Dozier and W. J. Hennigan, “Donald Trump's Foreign Policy Leaves Behind Destruction—and Opportunity—for Joe Biden,” *Time*, December 3, 2020, <https://time.com/5917389/joe-biden-foreign-policy/>; Antony J. Blinken, “Reaffirming and Reimagining America's Alliances,” US Department of State (press release), Office of the Spokesperson, March 24, 2021, <https://www.state.gov/reaffirming-and-reimagining-americas-alliances/>.

¹²¹ Joseph R. Biden, Jr., “Why America Must Lead Again. Rescuing U.S Foreign Policy After Trump,” *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2020, accessed January 15, 2021, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2020-01-23/why-america-must-lead-again>.

¹²² Reality Check Team, “Trump: What Does the US Contribute to NATO in Europe?,” BBC News, July 30, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-44717074>.

¹²³ Karsten Friis, “Conclusions. Looking towards Brussels 2017 and Istanbul 2018,” in *NATO and Collective Defense in the 21st Century. An Assessment of the Warsaw Summit*, ed. Karsten Friis (Abingdon, England: Routledge, 2017): 97-98.

¹²⁴ Blinken, “Reaffirming and Reimagining America's Alliances.”

¹²⁵ NATO, “Defence Expenditures of NATO Countries (2013-2020),” NATO (press release), March 16, 2021, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_182242.htm.

Hungary, and Poland constitute worrisome examples.¹²⁶ NATO has managed nondemocratic members in the past, such as Portugal until 1975 and Greece during the 1967-1974 period; however, as global competition increasingly is defined in terms of democracy versus autocracy, trade-offs and unity could become harder to find.

Another risk lies in innovation and capability development, where lack of sufficient European investments in science and technology for high-end defense could cause a severe interoperability gap between European allies (probably with the exception of the UK) and the United States, as it transforms its future forces into a multidomain joint force in 2035 (across air, sea, land, cyber, space, information, and nuclear warfare).

In sum, while NATO is more likely to prevail than to vanish in the coming decade, there are quite substantial challenges, both politically and militarily. NATO's new strategic concept, to be presented in 2022, and its implementation will be crucial in this regard, including how to deal with China as the major systemic competitor in the coming decade.

Russia as a systemic threat

Russia is viewed by the United States as a strategic competitor on a global scale, not by its combined powers, but by its disruptive behavior and its attempts to create an international order which fragments the West, favors autocracy and threatens the sovereignty of others, especially in its close neighborhood. At the time of the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014, then-President Obama viewed Russia as a regional power acting assertively out of weakness; a few years later, then-President Trump's 2017 National Security Strategy deemed both China and Russia as revisionist powers engaged in global power competition with the United States.¹²⁷ This in turn has motivated a substantial US engagement in Europe and especially in the Baltic Sea region, as its strategic importance has grown in the renewed contest between East and West.

Will the United States maintain its high threat perception of Russia? In the short term, the answer is yes, but in the long term, there are more uncertainties. China is escalating its assertiveness and is nowadays described by the White House's interim national security strategy as "the only competitor

potentially capable of combining its economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to mount a sustained challenge to a stable and open international system" while Russia rather plays "a disruptive role on the world stage."¹²⁸ In his Senate confirmation hearing, Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin stated that Russia was "in decline," and not a concern in the same way as China, pointing at cyber and disinformation as the main domains where Russia could cause damage.¹²⁹ A degradation of Russia from a strategic to regional competitor would have major negative implications for the force presence and engagement of the United States in the Baltic Sea region, although Russia's nuclear option is a mitigating factor.

Pivot to Asia

For the United States, interstate strategic competition is the primary national security challenge. In this regard, China is especially described as an increasing challenge and a threat, and the United States recognizes that its own competitive military advantage is eroding.¹³⁰ Interests and goals in the Indo-Pacific region are ranked higher than Europe, which may weaken the strong relationship between Europe and the United States. So far, there has been limited coordination and cooperation across the Atlantic on what the rise of China as a strategic competitor means for the transatlantic community and for US engagement in European security. NATO is a regional organization, by its foundation limited to address collective defense within certain set boundaries. Hence, it is natural that NATO has not gone to China, but rather, the opposite has happened: China is coming to NATO through its Belt and Road Initiative, investments in critical physical and digital infrastructure, strengthened trade relationships with European states, and regional forums like its Seventeen Plus One (17+1) initiative with Central and Eastern European nations. Furthermore, militarily, China is increasing its presence, and in 2017 China and Russia held joint exercises in the Baltic Sea. These developments led to the historic mention of China in a declaration of a NATO summit. In late 2019, the heads of state and governments participating in NATO's meeting of the North Atlantic Council in London officially declared that China presented both opportunities and challenges that the Alliance must address together.¹³¹ The strategic competition posed by China was a major theme for the reflection group's report on NATO 2030 and will be a key element of the new strategic

126 European Commission, *2020 Rule of Law Report*, EUR-Lex (access to EU law), September 30, 2020, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1602583951529&uri=CELEX%3A52020DC0580>; and EU, "Statement by the Spokesperson on the Rule of Law and Human Rights Situation in Turkey," European Union External Action Service (press release), December 25, 2020, https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/91036/statement-spokesperson-rule-law-and-human-rights-situation-turkey_en.

127 Julian Borger, "Barack Obama: Russia Is a Regional Power Showing Weakness over Ukraine," *Guardian*, March 5, 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/mar/25/barack-obama-russia-regional-power-ukraine-weakness>.

128 Biden, *Interim National Security Strategy Guidance*, 8.

129 Jeff Seldin, "Defense Secretary Nominee: US Faces Enemies Both Home and Abroad," VOA News, Voice of America, January 19, 2021, <https://www.voanews.com/usa/defense-secretary-nominee-us-faces-enemies-both-home-and-abroad>.

130 Mattis, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America*, 1-2.

131 NATO, "London Declaration," NATO (press release), December 4, 2019, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_171584.htm.

concept which NATO will prepare for 2022.¹³² However, NATO has yet to develop a coherent strategy on how to address the challenge from China. While the United States is clear on China as its primary national security threat, the European stance is more varied and nuanced, and economic interests still tend to prevail. There is an urgent need to level the ground on threat perceptions of China.

What will the China challenge mean for capability developments and operations? Two main alternatives can be discerned. In a transactional approach, the US conditions more support from European allies and partners in the Indo-Pacific region in order to maintain the transatlantic premise that the United States will come to Europe's support in case of a major conflict or war. For European allies and partners, this would imply more patrolling, freedom of navigation manifestations, and exercises and training in Asia. For Sweden, with limited national military resources, mainly shaped to operate in Sweden and its vicinity, this would pose a particular challenge. In turn, it could generate incentives for Russia to act in ways that it otherwise would be hesitant to do, causing an increased level of insecurity in the Baltic Sea region.

Another approach would be that the United States and Europe agree on a more even sharing of responsibility. This would imply that the Europeans would be first responders to conflict or war on the European continent, providing the core of European military. European allies would still have the strategic shield of the United States, including its nuclear security guarantee and some enablers, but the US forces would be more focused on Asia and the United States would downgrade its ambitions of rapid reinforcement in Europe.¹³³ To some extent most European allies are—or should be—prepared to respond first. As reflected in Article 3 of the North Atlantic Treaty, allies should maintain and develop their individual, as well as, collective capacity to resist armed attack. Norway, for instance, has an explicit policy of shaping its defense as a first line of defense for NATO, able to readily start war fighting and meet an adversary on Norwegian territory while waiting for reinforcement from allies. However, the planning horizon for reinforcement has usually been

about days, not weeks, or months—if at all. Handling a major crisis or war in Europe requires that the United States bring in (from abroad) substantial troop contributions and provide enablers at a very early stage. The Europeans have no capacity, now or in the coming ten to fifteen years, to deal with such a situation by themselves.

For Europe to become a first responder, strong leadership, both politically and militarily, is required. Europe needs to be much more self-sufficient and able to do more, faster. Like-mindedness must be increased and decision-making prepared to handle worst-case scenarios. Militarily, defense investments need to increase, focus on the greater good, and fill the capability gaps so that European allies have the capacity to at least prevail in a limited regional war in Europe against a peer adversary. The sum for such a scenario, according to a study by the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), is estimated to range between \$288 billion and \$357 billion.¹³⁴ Capability gaps include airlift, air-to-air refueling, intelligence/surveillance/reconnaissance (ISR), cruise missiles, enhanced logistics, mobility, cybersecurity, and ground combat capabilities. Plans must be in place across all domains, including cyber.¹³⁵ More capabilities must be deployable so that the levels of readiness and reinforcement increase. Larger, heavier formations must be created. Currently, both the forces and formats are small and adapted for out-of-area use. In order to succeed, bilateral and multilateral formats with true plug-in capacity must become the norm rather than the exception. The JEF, and possibly EI2, could set an example in this regard.

Overstretch

Related to the above is the risk for US overstretch. The world is becoming increasingly unstable, and challenges are increasing in both numbers and complexity. The United States still has an ambition to play a central part in world politics, which means that it must be ready to adapt to and handle several of these challenges. Setting aside its current relatively superior economy and military expenditures and capability, US resources are limited and resource competition with domestic priorities, such as infrastructure, is increasing. At the same time as tensions are rising in both Europe and

132 Reflection Group Appointed by the NATO Secretary General, *NATO 2030: United for a New Era*, coauthors Thomas de Maiziere and A. Wess Mitchell, November 25, 2020, https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2020/12/pdf/201201-Reflection-Group-Final-Report-Uni.pdf.

133 "Dr. Andrew Michta on Marshall Center Voices," episode five of an interview series hosted by Dr. Valbona Zeneli, George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies, March 11, 2021, <https://www.marshallcenter.org/en/event/dr-andrew-michta-marshall-center-voices>; Dr. Michta is dean of the College at the Marshall Center.

134 Douglas Barrie et al., *Defending Europe: Scenario-based Capability Requirements for NATO's European Members*, IISS, 2019, accessed March 29, 2021, <https://www.iiss.org/blogs/research-paper/2019/05/defending-europe>.

135 Anna Wieslander, "How France, Germany, and the UK Can Build a European Pillar of NATO," Atlantic Council, November 23, 2020, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/commentary/article/how-france-germany-and-the-uk-can-build-a-european-pillar-of-nato/>.

Asia, the United States has abandoned its traditional capability requirement for the Armed Forces to handle two major regional conflicts simultaneously, and replaced it with a formula that includes “defeating aggression by a major power; deterring opportunistic aggression elsewhere; and disrupting imminent terrorist and WMD (weapons of mass destruction) threats.”¹³⁶ This shift means that even if the United States would like to act quickly to reinforce security in either the Baltic Sea or Arctic region, capabilities could be locked up far away from Europe.

CONCLUSION

The United States is committed to security in Sweden’s vicinity through its global alliance structure, which includes NATO and security guarantees given to the majority of Sweden’s neighboring states, and upholding a major peacetime footprint centered in Germany and Poland. Close cooperation and plug-in capabilities with Sweden and Finland facilitate the United States’ ability to live up to these commitments in case

of a crisis in the region. The United States also is an Arctic state in an increasingly competitive environment, and it is responding accordingly by strengthening its regional defense posture, for instance through the MDTF in Alaska. For Sweden, the High North and the Arctic region are therefore likely to be of growing importance in the bilateral collaboration with the United States. Russia is seen as a revisionist power and a strategic competitor, but the main focus for the United States in the coming decade will be the challenge posed by China and how Washington’s allies and partners will be engaged in this regard. A transactional approach, in which the United States expects substantial presence of European allies and partners in Asia, would risk diverting defense capabilities away from Sweden and its vicinity. A responsibility-sharing approach, in which Europe becomes a first responder under the strategic shield of the United States, would require not only more investments in defense (i.e., burden-sharing), but also better preparedness to respond to and endure in a contested environment.

¹³⁶ Mattis, *Summary of 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America*, 6.



Scenarios

INTRODUCTION

The following scenarios have been developed in order to analyze the interest and activities of the United States, UK, and France in the Baltic Sea region and the Arctic looking ahead toward 2035. In doing so, some *guiding assumptions* have been made:

- The study and the following scenarios are based on assumptions of balancing state behavior in case of an external threat, with a focus on great powers as the primary actors. Institutions such as NATO and the EU are recognized as important in calibrating national interests, reducing transaction costs, increasing information sharing, and promoting compliance with international law.
- Due to its geographical proximity to Sweden, Russia can never be dismissed as a dominating actor and potential adversary when discussing Baltic Sea or Arctic security.
- At the same time, the study wants to take into account the systemic shift in international relations caused by the rise of China, with an ambition to be a world leader by 2050. Although China is geographically distant from the Baltic Sea region and the Arctic, it is increasingly present in Europe and in the High North. As an autocracy with global ambitions, China is likely to play a prominent role in world affairs for many years ahead and could be a potential adversary, either directly or indirectly.
- Although there might be convergent interests and joint activities, it is assumed that there will be no formal China-Russia political and/or military alliance in place.
- In case of rising tensions and an immediate risk of conflict, the countries in the Baltic Sea Region will be dependent on great power support from the outside to handle the situation.
- Smaller states in need of assistance must take into consideration that for great powers with expeditionary forces and capabilities, regional intent and engagement are always scalable and driven by self-interest in a larger game of great power competition.
- Consequently, a key question for states like Sweden is how to gain or maintain regional great power support, engagement, and interoperability for its security.
- Cooperation will, in the end, be more important for smaller states like Sweden than for the great powers, in order to secure state survival.

Marines from China take part at the International Army Games 2019 at the at Khmelevka firing ground on the Baltic Sea coast in Kaliningrad Region, Russia August 5, 2019. Source: Reuters / Vitlay Nevar

Should a crisis or war emerge in its vicinity, the United States, the UK, and France are the great powers with expeditionary forces and the greatest capacity to assist states like Sweden. As permanent members of the UN Security Council, they possess a special responsibility for international peace and security. All three are nuclear states, with deterrence capability vis-à-vis other nuclear states such as Russia and China. The United States is, in addition, an Arctic state, in contrast to the UK and France. The UK is a Northern European state, with close intersections with Russia in the North Atlantic/High North.

The following section analyzes the consequences of a set of scenarios in which the potential risks of assertive behavior from Russia and/or China are at the center.

- What would be the reactions of the UK, France, and the United States, respectively?
- What would be the consequences in terms of those nations' military presence and activity in Sweden's vicinity?
- How would that in turn affect regional and Swedish security and defense?

The analysis is looking ahead toward 2035. Each actor is analyzed in four scenarios, and its activity in the Baltic Sea and Arctic region is examined along three dimensions: political engagement; permanent troop presence; and readiness for reinforcement (to the extent that it is of substantial value to regional security).

DEFINITIONS

Assertive in this case alludes to aggressive behavior in combination with substantial military capabilities, to the extent to which it dominates the national security strategies and operational planning of the UK, France, and the United States.

Cooperative in this case means that the state is largely perceived as a trustworthy partner in security and defense, hence it is not a focal point in the national security strategies or operational planning of the UK, France, and the United States.

THE UNITED KINGDOM

Assertive China, Cooperative Russia

	Baltic Sea Region	The Arctic
Politically engaged	YES	YES
Permanent troop presence	NO	NO
Readiness for reinforcement	YES	YES

In this scenario, the UK is likely to shift its focus toward and increase its presence in Asia, potentially at the cost of its engagement in Sweden's vicinity. Permanent troop presence in the Baltic states would thus be at risk. However, as a major European actor with close ties to many Baltic Sea states, the UK presence in the region would probably be maintained through exercises, patrolling, and other forms of defense cooperation. The Baltic Sea states, like Sweden, would face a challenging situation in which they must figure out ways to ensure that the UK does not take to rather large steps in a shift from the vicinity toward Asia or other parts of the world. The Arctic region could be particularly interesting with a potential upswing in UK engagement if China emerges as an assertive actor within the military sphere, as melting ice changes the landscape and operational conditions in the High North.

Cooperative China, Cooperative Russia

	Baltic Sea Region	The Arctic
Politically engaged	YES	NO
Permanent troop presence	NO	NO
Readiness for reinforcement	YES	YES

With both China and Russia perceived as mainly cooperative, the international climate would resemble the post-Cold War years and pave the way for a new era of international crisis management, as well as a renaissance for the UN and regional efforts through the EU, NATO, or coalitions of the willing. UK defense capability, and initiatives such as the JEF, would be redirected to focus more on peace support missions in which the UK, with its substantial capacity, would play a major role. Cooperation with Sweden and its regional neighbors and development of interoperability would also move in this direction and focus less on collective defense measures;

within NATO, however, UK cooperation with Nordic allies would continue albeit in a less intense manner. The Arctic region could enter a new era of “exceptionalism” with very low, if any, levels of tensions, which would lead to diminished UK attention.

Assertive China, Assertive Russia

	Baltic Sea Region	The Arctic
Politically engaged	YES	YES
Permanent troop presence	NO	NO
Readiness for reinforcement	NO	YES

In this challenging scenario, the UK would want to deter both adversaries, which means that it would need to be ready to act both in Europe and in Asia. The risk of an overstretch becomes apparent, and the UK would be forced to prioritize even if it has made substantial increases in its military capabilities and readiness. Smaller states like Sweden would come under pressure to be more of first responders to a potential conflict with Russia. In addition, increased endurance in the Swedish Armed Forces will be key as assistance could take a long time. There also would be risk of a Chinese threat emerging from the High North as it guards its interests in the Arctic. NATO would be the main arena for the UK to anchor these efforts, at least in Europe. The main UK reinforcements would be maritime and amphibious forces, and land-based contributions would be limited. Due to this, the UK could withdraw from the Baltic Sea region, and in addition lose focus above the Arctic Circle, instead concentrating on North Atlantic security, the GIUK gap, and guarding sea lines of communication with the United States.

Cooperative China, Assertive Russia

	Baltic Sea Region	The Arctic
Politically engaged	YES	YES
Permanent troop presence	YES	NO
Readiness for reinforcement	YES	YES

This situation would allow the UK to focus on its position as a European and Northern European state. An active engagement along all dimensions in the Baltic Sea and the Arctic could be expected, with the UK playing a leading role in collective

defense and deterrence measures together with allies and partners, using both NATO and other formations, such as the JEF and the NG, to execute its influence.

FRANCE

Assertive China, Cooperative Russia

	Baltic Sea Region	The Arctic
Politically engaged	NO	YES
Permanent troop presence	NO	NO
Readiness for reinforcement	YES	NO

With an assertive China, France would engage in collaborative efforts to counter Chinese ambitions, most likely alongside the United States and possibly the UK. However, France would also be keen to develop a common European stance on how to deal with China and, at least politically, frame it within the EU. Operationally, France would probably want to anchor its actions within a tighter European group of like-minded nations, for which the E12 could serve as a platform. At the same time, France would pay less attention to the developments in Northern Europe, given that Russia would mostly be viewed as a partner and not a disrupter to European security. France would preserve some commitment through NATO activities, but at a moderate level. Such a development would present Sweden and the other Baltic States with dilemmas about which military resources could be diverted to Asia or other theaters—to keep French engagement for their security—and which to maintain at home.

Cooperative China, Cooperative Russia

	Baltic Sea Region	The Arctic
Politically engaged	NO	NO
Permanent troop presence	NO	NO
Readiness for reinforcement	YES	NO

With both China and Russia perceived as mainly cooperative, the international climate would resemble the early post-Cold War years and pave the way for a new era of international crisis management and a renaissance for the UN, as well as regional efforts through the EU, NATO, or coalitions of the

willing. France would likely put a lot of effort into developing European positions and capabilities in this regard, both within and outside of the EU, and push for international actions in areas of its concern, primarily Africa and the Middle East. Sweden and its neighbors would increase their participation in such missions. Interoperability with, and the engagement of, France would mostly be maintained in this sphere, rather than through collective defense efforts in the Baltic Sea region and the Arctic area. As in the above scenario, French commitment to security in Sweden's vicinity would be limited, and general concerns among Baltic states to maintain an adequate level of deterrence against Russia in the region would probably not be acknowledged. France would maintain some presence through NATO activities such as exercises and patrolling, but its attention would be elsewhere.

Assertive China, Assertive Russia

	Baltic Sea Region	The Arctic
Politically engaged	YES	YES
Permanent troop presence	YES	NO
Readiness for reinforcement	YES	YES

In this challenging scenario, France has to make some difficult decisions about priorities. With an assertive Russia, France would be expected to act in Europe with contributions and efforts intended to deter Russia from aggressive actions. Yet at the same time, with an assertive China, France would also want and be expected to aid its oldest ally, the United States, in Asia, and to secure its own territories in the Indo-Pacific region. The main factor that will determine French actions would be US actions, and how the United States would want to deal with the situation. A situation in which Washington takes responsibility for deterring China in Asia, and Europe takes care of its own protection, could occur. Thus, given France's ambition to strengthen Europe's independence and sovereignty, Paris could be expected to choose to focus on leading the defense of Europe, possibly in alignment with the UK through a European pillar in NATO, paving the way for Europe as a first responder to an antagonistic threat. That would imply a substantial presence and engagement of France in the Baltic Sea region and toward the High North as well. However, in addition to this, France has long-term interests in Africa, and even in the Indo-Pacific region, which poses further dilemmas on how to divide its engagements. The risk of overstretch is apparent.

Cooperative China, Assertive Russia

	Baltic Sea Region	The Arctic
Politically engaged	YES	YES
Permanent troop presence	YES	NO
Readiness for reinforcement	YES	YES

In this situation, France would divide its attention between its southern neighborhood and Northern Europe, and engage in the security of the Baltic Sea region through both NATO activities and bilateral efforts. France could be expected to lead on efforts to develop more independent European capabilities to meet a peer adversary, partly through the EU defense cooperation, and to use the E12 as a bridging platform where both collective defense and crisis management issues would be on the agenda. France would expect Sweden and other Baltic Sea states to contribute also to international missions in the South in return for its engagement in Northern Europe.

THE UNITED STATES

Assertive China, Cooperative Russia

	Baltic Sea Region	The Arctic
Politically engaged	NO	YES
Permanent troop presence	NO	YES
Readiness for reinforcement	YES	YES

This scenario would substantially strengthen the ongoing US pivot to Asia and draw US attention and resources away from Europe and deterrence measures against Russia. Not only would the United States hand over much more responsibility for European security to Europe itself, but the United States could also request European support in Asia, as China would be perceived as the main global threat against peace and security. A fundamental US commitment in Sweden's vicinity would remain as long as the North Atlantic Treaty is in place, but the US strategic gaze would likely wane, which would pose a greater burden on Sweden and its neighbors to uphold

regional deterrence. Possibly, the Arctic region would be an exception if China were to become more present there, including with military resources. In order to compensate for a lack of engagement from the United States, the Northern European states might push to strengthen the EU defense dimension through Article 42.7, though a majority of EU member states would likely refrain from supporting it, given a cooperative Russia.

Cooperative China, Cooperative Russia

	Baltic Sea Region	The Arctic
Politically engaged	NO	YES
Permanent troop presence	NO	YES
Readiness for reinforcement	YES	YES

With both China and Russia perceived as mainly cooperative, the international climate would resemble the early post-Cold War years and pave the way for a new era of international crisis management and a renaissance for the UN, as well as regional efforts through the EU, NATO, or coalitions of the willing. The United States would likely scale down substantially on its deterrence measures in Europe and the Baltic Sea region, and turn its strategic gaze and attention to various hot spots in other parts of the world. Interoperability would mainly be maintained and developed through international missions, not through collective defense efforts. Sweden and its neighbors would be expected to contribute to these missions and to assume greater responsibility for security and deterrence in its vicinity.

Assertive China, Assertive Russia

	Baltic Sea Region	The Arctic
Politically engaged	YES	YES
Permanent troop presence	NO	YES
Readiness for reinforcement	YES	YES

In this challenging scenario, the United States would be obliged and expected to act and lead against both China and Russia, which it is not fully prepared for, compared to the Cold War period when the US Armed Forces were dimensioned to handle two regional conflicts simultaneously. European allies and partners would be under great pressure to support and cooperate with the United States in managing both these adversaries, and NATO would be the main vehicle to coordinate these efforts. Unlike a scenario in which the United States would demand assistance in other parts of the world as a precondition for maintaining a strong engagement in Europe, it is more likely that in this case, the United States would want Europe to be responsible for European security and deterrence against Russia, while US forces would handle China. Hence, Sweden and its neighbors would be more inclined and encouraged to deploy capabilities intended to deter Russia, and would also come under pressure to be first responders. In addition, increased endurance in the Swedish Armed Forces would be essential, as assistance would be more limited and could take a long time.

Cooperative China, Assertive Russia

	Baltic Sea Region	The Arctic
Politically engaged	YES	YES
Permanent troop presence	YES	YES
Readiness for reinforcement	YES	YES

This scenario would imply fewer incentives for a continued US pivot to Asia and most likely firmly anchor a continued US engagement and presence in European security and in the Baltic Sea region and the Arctic. Yet in this scenario, US presence and contributions would not come “free of charge.” The United States would persist in its demands on European allies and partners to enhance capabilities and defense spending, possibly by supporting the development of a European pillar in NATO, congruent with and supported by EU defense cooperation.

Concluding Remarks

The strategic interests of the UK, France, and the United States in Sweden's vicinity are mainly connected to Russia—to counter its assertive behavior and provide stability and security in the Baltic Sea region and the Arctic. In addition, as leading members of the UN, NATO, and in France's case, the EU, these states have strategic interests to uphold the principles of collective security and defense through their institutional commitments. Furthermore, although China is far away geographically, it is increasingly a factor influencing strategic considerations in Sweden's vicinity: either in terms of causing pivots to Asia, or by appearing in the transatlantic area, not least in the Arctic.

As a response to the deteriorated security situation, following Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea and war in eastern Ukraine, the UK, France, and the United States have substantially increased their presence and engagement in Sweden's vicinity. This has been done as part of NATO and its enhanced forward presence, with the United States serving as framework nation in Poland and the UK in Estonia, and through activities such as participation in BAP, the VJTF, and exercises and training. It also has been executed through so-called minilateral initiatives such as the JEF and EI2, of which the JEF has a clear Northern European and operational component, providing both deterrence value as well as a potential defensive value in early conflict stages, while the EI2 remains to be developed as a contributor to regional security. The United States has engaged bilaterally

with allies such as Norway, by prepositioning materiel and during 2017-2020 rotating seven hundred troops on a six-month basis. It also has cooperated extensively with partners Sweden and Finland, not least in exercises and training, where in addition to bilateral arrangements a trilateral cooperation also has been initiated, unique of its kind.

The United States, being the only Arctic state among the three, is becoming increasingly present and more active in the region also when it comes to defense, in light of increased competition from both Russia and China. While the Arctic security environment has direct implications for US national security interests, the UK has interests vested into the broader area of the High North, including the North Atlantic and the GIUK gap, and France recognizes the effects that conflicts in the Arctic could have on European security as a whole, which would trigger a French response.

In case of rising tensions and an immediate risk of conflict, the countries in the Baltic Sea region will be dependent on great power support from the outside to handle the situation. Consequently, a key question for states like Sweden is how to gain or maintain regional great power support, engagement, and interoperability for its security. In the longer term, there are a range of challenges which could affect Sweden in this regard. The dominating tendencies for the UK, France, and the United States, as illustrated by the scenarios in part 2 of the report, are summed up in the following graph:



The y-axis represents how each actor perceives China (from cooperative to assertive, increasing vertically). The x-axis represents how each actor perceives Russia (from cooperative to assertive, increasing horizontally).

The center of gravity in world politics is moving to Asia. With both the United States and the UK tilting toward the Indo-Pacific, there is a risk of less political attention as well as military capabilities available for reinforcement into the Baltic Sea region. France is likely to be responsive, but at the same time transactional in its requests for capability support in Asia or elsewhere. The United States is not likely to retain the heavy lifting for European defense at current levels, but rather put greater burden and responsibility for readiness and first response on Sweden and its neighbors, in collaboration with the great powers of Europe: the UK, France, and potentially Germany. In sum, this will be a demanding shift in several dimensions. Like-mindedness must be increased and decision-making prepared to handle worst-case scenarios. Militarily, defense investments need to increase, be smarter for the greater good, and directed primarily to fill the capability gaps allowing European allies and partners at least to prevail in a limited regional war in Europe against a peer adversary. At the same time, a more cooperative international environment, although less likely, cannot be ruled out. It could lead to a renaissance for the UN and peace support missions, with Europe assuming lead responsibility for peace and security in

its immediate neighborhood, while the United States turns its gaze elsewhere.

For Sweden, with its proximity to Russia, a central interest would be to secure the survival of the strategic shield which the transatlantic framework provides, and to safeguard that attempts toward European strategic autonomy and a new European security architecture are not counterproductive in this regard. The development of a European pillar in NATO could serve as a pathway also for close partners Sweden and Finland. The solidarity clause of the EU, Article 42.7, could gradually come to play a more prominent role, at least politically.

Finally, from a long-term perspective, China is likely to be a major factor for security and defense not only in Asia, but on the European theater as well, as a consequence of its increasing power projection and presence on the Continent, including Sweden's vicinity. As China's power is vested into trade, technology, research, and critical infrastructure, mastering the gray zone in multidomains and maintaining interoperability with the United States, the UK, and France in these fields will be crucial for Sweden.

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Anna Wieslander serves as director for Northern Europe at the Atlantic Council and head of the Atlantic Council office in Stockholm. She is also the president of the Institute for Security and Development Policy (ISDP). Ms. Wieslander concurrently serves as secretary general of the Swedish Defence Association, a non-political NGO which for more than 130 years has promoted knowledge on defence and security among the Swedish public. She is as a member of the Royal Swedish Academy of War Sciences and an Alumni Scholar at George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies.

Wieslander is an experienced manager, speaker, moderator, and writer who has published extensively. Wieslander is a frequent commentator in both national and international media, such as the BBC, the New York Times, Reuters, Politico and the Atlantic. She analyzes international trends with a special focus on the security situation in the region and how it relates to transatlantic and global geopolitical developments. Her expertise covers security and defence policy, NATO, the transatlantic link, and European security and defence cooperation.

Wieslander has previously held positions as deputy director at the Swedish Institute of International Affairs, Head of Speaker's Office at the Swedish Parliament, Deputy Director at the Swedish Ministry of Defence, and Secretary of the Swedish Defence Commission. She started her career as a newspaper journalist in 1987 and has also served as Communication Director in the private sector.

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Viktor Lundquist previously worked as Project Coordinator at the Atlantic Council's Northern Europe Office in Stockholm. He has written extensively about issues related to the Arctic, Baltic sea and Nordic security. Prior to joining the Atlantic Council, he interned at the Swedish Defence Research Agency (FOI) where he co-authored the report "Western Military Capability in Northern Europe 2020". At FOI, he also published the memo "Danish security policy in a changing environment".

Viktor has also worked as project manager at the Swedish foreign policy think-tank Free World Forum, and was deputy editor of Sweden's largest defense and security policy forum – The security council – for almost four years.

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