



Denmark Increases Its Contribution to the Deterrence of Russia

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Denmark has announced a significant increase in its combat capabilities for NATO collective defence and deterrence. The Danes' importance to the security of the Nordic-Baltic region may increase further with the construction of the Baltic Pipe gas pipeline, which could limit Central Europe's dependence on Russian energy resources. This creates new opportunities for Poland to deepen security cooperation with Denmark.

A six-year defence agreement between Denmark's government coalition and the main opposition parties and approved in January (the Danish Defence Agreement 2018–2023) envisages that the country will establish a brigade (about 4,000 troops) for joint NATO operations. The medium-heavy brigade consistent with Alliance standards will require investment in tanks and artillery, unmanned reconnaissance systems, ground-based air defence systems, and electronic-warfare capabilities. In addition, the Danish armed forces will maintain a light infantry battalion (up to 500 troops) in a state of high readiness, including arming them with anti-tank missile launchers. Denmark also has announced the development of a medium-range air-defence system (using SM-2 missiles) and that it will strengthen its anti-submarine warfare capability. The agreement confirms a 2016 decision to replace F16 aircraft (30 in operational readiness) with F35 multirole fighters (planned purchase of 27 units).

Operational Significance. The 2018–2023 plan assumes a gradual increase in the defence budget from DKK 22 billion (€2.8 billion) this year to DKK 26.8 billion (€3.4 billion) in 2023. In absolute numbers, this means an increase of 20%, which will allow Denmark to support rotations of NATO forces on the Eastern Flank (Poland and the Baltic States), now the main mechanism for deterring Russia. The light infantry battalion can augment NATO's immediate response force (VJTF), which can be transferred to a threatened region when necessary. The new brigade will provide support capability for a large NATO collective defence operation should deterrence fail. With three modern frigates planned to be armed with SM-2 missiles and the purchase of the F35 fighters, Denmark will be able to support NATO operations in the Nordic-Baltic region despite the threat from Russia's modern weapons systems and attempts to limit the Alliance's freedom of action (Anti Access/Area Denial, or A2/AD). The enhanced anti-submarine capability will also be key to controlling maritime transport routes in the Baltic and between Greenland, Iceland, and the United Kingdom, which if Russia were able to block them would impede the transfer of U.S. support forces to Europe.

At the same time, Denmark will assess the possibility of acquiring a long-range air-defence system (with SM-6 missiles), which would allow it to combat short-range ballistic missiles and cruise missiles. This would be a major contribution to the Alliance's ability to neutralise Russian political and military pressure in Europe. Although SM-2 and SM-6 missiles offer the possibility of attacking both naval and ground targets, the Danish authorities signal that they are prepared to consider the development of a long-range, precision-strike capability (possibly Tomahawk missiles) to further strengthen the national and Allied

deterrence potential. They also have declared that the Russian threats will not affect their decision to strengthen the NATO missile-defence system with ship-based sensors. Although the system is designed to defend Europe against missile attack from the Middle East, Russia considers it a threat to its security interests and warned in 2015 that Danish vessels could become targets for Russian nuclear attacks if participating in the system.

Change in Threat Perception. Post-Cold War Danish defence and security policy is based on the alliance with the U.S. and membership of NATO. Denmark consistently supported the construction of a new security architecture based on Alliance enlargement, including the Baltic States. Together with Poland and Germany, it established the Headquarters Multinational Corps Northeast in Szczecin, which could be used by the Alliance for collective defence and crisis-response operations. It was also looking for new areas of cooperation with Russia, including in the Arctic. Hence, before the annexation of Crimea, Copenhagen was sceptical about increasing the role of the HQ in Szczecin for collective defence. On the other hand, Danish leaders consistently demonstrated their readiness to use armed force in missions outside NATO territory. They deployed troops on combat operations in Kosovo, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Libya. In 2014, Denmark, one of the few European NATO countries to do so (alongside the UK, France and the Netherlands), joined the combat operations against the so-called Islamic State. In this way, Denmark strengthened its image as a credible ally that, despite its small potential, is ready to bear the risks and costs associated with strengthening common security.

Russia's annexation of Crimea and aggressive policy aimed at undermining the European order has changed the Danish threat perception. Danish territory, including Copenhagen is within reach of Russian short-range Iskander missiles capable of carrying nuclear warheads. Russia also has practiced aerial attacks on the island of Bornholm and the Danish capital. Those capabilities and signals may indicate that during a crisis between Russia and NATO, Denmark would be at least a target of intimidation to paralyse the Alliance's ability to react.

That is why the Danish authorities have actively supported NATO policy to send a clear signal to Russia that the Alliance will defend its territory and will not be subjected to political coercion attempts. In 2017, Copenhagen sent 850 soldiers to the VJTF. After completing VJTF duty, the Danish army increased the number of troops in the NATO battalion battlegroup in Estonia from five to 200. At the beginning of the year, the Danish air force also began another Baltic Air Policing mission. Denmark aims to strengthen cooperation through the regional NORDEFCO (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden) and extends it to the Baltic States (Nordic-Baltic 8). Denmark is an EU member but has the right not to participate in the EU Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) through a so-called opt-out but has tightened its defence cooperation with Sweden and Finland, which both remain outside NATO. Such cooperation facilitates surveillance of airspace and maritime transport routes. The change in threat perception also has influenced the assessment of the risk related to the energy dependence of Europe on Russian energy resources and infrastructure. In December 2017, Denmark adopted a law that could provide the basis to block the construction of the controversial Nord Stream 2 pipeline in Danish territorial waters.

Conclusions and Recommendations. The implementation of the defence agreement will significantly increase the combat potential of Denmark, which until now had been able to allocate only one operational battalion (from 300 to 800 soldiers), ships, combat aviation, helicopters and transport planes to Alliance operations. The importance of Denmark on the security of the Nordic-Baltic region may increase with the construction of Baltic Pipe, which would supply Norwegian gas to Denmark and Poland and reduce the region's dependence on Russian gas. This offers a chance for Poland to deepen security cooperation with Denmark. New areas of cooperation should include anti-submarine warfare and the protection of critical infrastructure. It is in Poland's interest to maintain Danish involvement as a framework state in the Corps Command in Szczecin. The Danish presence, combined with its influence in NATO, enhances the Alliance's ability to assess the situation on the Eastern Flank.

Despite the clear turn in Danish politics, however, the country must be prepared for criticism in NATO. As a percentage of GDP, expenditures will only increase from 1.2% in 2017 to 1.3% in 2023, well below the 2% of GDP target recommended by NATO. However, Denmark's military activity in all directions, crucial for strengthening NATO's political cohesion and investments in new capabilities in accordance with the Alliance's guidelines, will allow Denmark to partially neutralise this criticism.