

Nordic countries respond to deepening Europe-US rift with calls for European military capabilities, rearmament

Jordan Shilton
6 March 2025

The Nordic countries have responded to the deepening conflicts within the NATO alliance between American imperialism and its erstwhile European allies over recent weeks with calls for more European military “independence” and rearmament. Northern Europe and the Arctic contain various points of dispute that could rapidly sharpen under conditions in which Washington views the continent’s imperialist powers as competitors and even adversaries, rather than allies.

Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen, Finnish President Alexander Stubb, Norwegian Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Støre and Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson all attended the emergency summit called by British Prime Minister Keir Starmer in London Sunday.

The gathering was organised after US President Donald Trump engaged in a shouting match with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky at the White House last Friday and continues to pursue talks with Russia. After Starmer’s announcement of a “coalition of the willing” to strengthen support for Ukraine against Russia and deploy ground forces to the country to oversee a ceasefire, both Frederiksen and Kristersson indicated their openness to consider deploying troops.

Former Swedish Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Karl Bildt said that the shouting match between Trump and Zelensky was a “provocation from the US side.” In an interview on Swedish radio, Bildt argued that, taken together with the American vote at the United Nations with Russia to pass a resolution in the Security Council calling for an end to the war that did not mention the Russian invasion, Friday’s clash pointed to a fundamental shift in US foreign policy. “We have to try and help Ukraine stand against both Moscow and Washington in this new world,” he added.

Bildt has for decades been one of the most pro-US politicians in Sweden. He was one of the most vociferous advocates of Sweden joining NATO, which was viewed above all as facilitating a closer military alliance with Washington. When Kristersson formally finalised the country’s NATO membership, he did so in Washington, not at NATO’s headquarters in Brussels.

The Nordic countries in particular have long viewed close relations with Washington as fundamental to their military and security interests. Denmark, Iceland and Norway were founding members of NATO. Sweden and Finland, notwithstanding their official “neutrality” during the Cold War, were key to American spying on the Soviet Union and diplomatic activities. Over recent years, all of the Nordic countries have signed bilateral defence cooperation agreements (DCAs) with Washington, giving American troops unrestricted access to dozens of bases from Denmark in the south to locations above the Arctic Circle in Norway and Finland near the Russian border.

But the breakdown in relations between America and Europe is having a major impact in the Nordic and Baltic regions, which could well emerge as a significant flashpoint in future conflicts over spheres of influence. Although government officials continue to repeat at every opportunity that the US remains a “reliable” or “close” ally, they are being forced to acknowledge that this is no longer the case. The Norwegian Armed Forces’ Defence Research Establishment released its 2025 defence update last month, in which it noted for the first time that the US could no longer be considered a secure ally.

The Nordic and Baltic countries joined with Germany and other European NATO states at a summit in Helsinki that agreed in January to a new operation to militarise the Baltic Sea, “Baltic Sentry.” The air and naval surveillance activities, initially planned for a three-month period but expected to be extended, are being coordinated from a NATO base in Rostock, Germany and do not include prominent American involvement. Britain has its own presence in the Nordic and Baltic regions outside of NATO structures with the Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF), which includes the Netherlands, Nordic and Baltic countries. While this initiative has long been viewed as a compliment to NATO, this could change if the NATO alliance continues to drift apart.

In a comment published over the weekend by Danish public broadcaster DR, EU and NATO correspondent Ole Ryborg argued that European military dependence on the US, long held up as an expression of the solid Transatlantic

partnership, is now a major security and political risk. He noted that the F-35 fighter jets purchased by Denmark could be rendered inoperable “at the push of a button” in Washington. As Ryborg explained, “Ukraine is not alone in being in a vulnerable situation. President Trump has said he will not rule out the use of economic or military force to gain control of Greenland. And right now, the United States has such power.”

He therefore urged two strategic conclusions: first, the European powers must continue to militarily back Ukraine and secondly, “Europe is about to embark on a major rearmament and it must take place outside the normal defense structures that have been built up within NATO over the past 80 years.”

European commission president Ursula Von der Leyen unveiled Tuesday a plan to invest €800 billion in defence. The EU plans to facilitate this with €150 billion of loans and by relaxing debt rules to allow member states to spend more on their war budgets. Europe’s ruling elites expect the largest contributor to this mad rearmament plan to be Germany, where discussions are ongoing to remove all military spending worth more than 1 percent of GDP from the country’s debt brake rule, which prevents the government from borrowing to fund spending. A separate special fund to support key military and defence infrastructure to the tune of €500 billion is also being finalised. Paying for these investments will entail a massive onslaught on the working class.

Compared to these vast sums, the contributions from the Nordic countries are relatively modest, though still considerable given these countries’ size.

Denmark’s Social Democratic-led government unveiled last month a significant boost in military spending over the next two years. The coalition government, which also includes the right-wing Liberal and Moderate parties, will spend an additional 50 billion kroner (approximately €6.7 billion) on defence equipment and ammunition in 2025 and 2026. Sweden committed in late 2022 to hike its military spending by over 60 percent by 2028, while the Norwegian parliament unanimously adopted a massive 12-year expansion of defence spending last year that will almost double defence spending by 2036. Sweden’s defence industry has exports of over \$2 billion annually and includes the production by Saab of the Gripen fighter jet, submarines, armoured vehicles, anti-tank weaponry and ammunition.

A significant element of Denmark’s new spending plan will involve strengthened defence production cooperation within Europe. Frederiksen met with Støre in February to agree to a cooperation agreement on defence with Norway, which is slated to be publicly unveiled at an event later this spring. In addition to joint operations in the North Sea and Arctic, the agreement will focus on procurement and production. As Støre said, “We are agreed that we must strengthen the military industries so that they can produce what we need. We will investigate whether there are specific possibilities for cooperation between Norwegian and Danish industry and

research communities.”

A similar bilateral deal was signed between Denmark and Finland on Tuesday.

Denmark’s rearmament announcement comes on top of a 2023 package committing an additional 200 billion kroner (about €27 billion) to defence spending by 2033 in order to increase Danish military spending beyond the threshold of 2 percent of GDP required by NATO. Both the 2023 agreement and the latest plan were finalised in cross-party agreements, with the opposition Conservatives, Socialist People’s Party, Social Liberals and Liberal Alliance as well as the far-right Denmark Democrats and Danish People’s Party backing them.

Explaining the purpose of the latest announcement last month, Frederiksen stated that Denmark was in the most dangerous position it had experienced for many years due to the threat posed by Russia. She urged the chief of the military, who has received more powers to decide on equipment purchases, to “buy, buy, buy” new equipment.

The additional spending is intended to cover the cost of new missile and air defence systems, including against drones and offensive military equipment for the Danish Armed Forces depleted by its significant military assistance to Ukraine. In December, the government already presented a plan to invest 15 billion kroner (€2 billion) in Arctic defence, specifically new ships, drones and personnel for Danish operations in and around Greenland. Danish control over Greenland is crucial for Copenhagen’s role as an Arctic power, including its claims to significant areas of the Arctic seabed for economic exploitation.

Underscoring their readiness to collaborate with the most reactionary forces to achieve their interests, last month’s military spending increase coincided with a standing ovation in the Danish parliament for a member of Ukraine’s fascist Azov Battalion.

Dmytro Kanuper, who boasted in now deleted social media profiles that he read Hitler’s *Mein Kampf* and fought as an Azov Battalion member in Mariupol, addressed the event alongside Danish Foreign Minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen and Defence Minister Troels Lund Poulsen.



To contact the WSW and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact