



# Tailoring Deterrence for the High North Nuclear Consequences of Sweden's Accession to NATO

Karl SÖRENSON

## ► Key Takeaways

- The Finnish and Swedish accessions to NATO enable the Alliance to play a more active role in the Baltic region. The underpinnings for a comprehensive NATO general deterrence posture in the High North with Sweden and Finland is, to a large degree, already in place.
- Russian behavior is increasingly relying on its nuclear weapons to further its security political aims in order to establish a new security order in Europe: from its leadership's rhetoric to its self-suspension from New START and possible basing of nuclear weapons in Belarus.
- For an integrated and tailored deterrence in the High North, Sweden and Finland must come to terms with the challenge of immediate deterrence with a nuclear dimension.
- A strategy that includes participation in the Nuclear Planning Group (NPG), flying conventional support for nuclear operations (CSNO), and, for Sweden, enabling dispersed basing would create the space needed for NATO to act in times of crisis. A more engaged approach would also add dual capable aircraft (DCA) and nuclear sharing arrangements (NSA) for Sweden and possibly for Finland, given that the latter makes the required adjustments to its current legislation.

## Introduction

With the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Russia has increasingly come to use nuclear posturing as a tool in their aim to reshape the security order – particularly in Europe. Consequently, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) needs to be able to address nuclear deterrence in a way that it has not done since the Cold War. This means reinforcing the general deterrence of NATO but also strengthening its ability to address escalating security situations where nuclear weapons may play a role. With the Finnish and Swedish NATO memberships, it is now possible to enforce more robust deterrence in the High North, but what should that look like and what capabilities can be built upon?

Finland and Sweden have had a long history of working together on security issues. In this sense, their joint application to NATO is just the most recent example of an awareness that their respective security is interlinked. Since the end of the Cold War, both countries have also worked closely with NATO in several capacities, from the Partnership for Peace (PfP) and participating in various exercises to deploying together with NATO to Kosovo and Afghanistan. While there is a need to shape a general deterrence posture for NATO in the High North, the underpinnings for a comprehensive

deterrence and defense strategy are already in place to a large degree. The immediate deterrence situation with a nuclear component is the challenge. This security gap needs to be addressed since this is what ultimately will strengthen Northern Europe's security.

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This article discusses how the issue of immediate deterrence with a nuclear dimension in the High North could be approached. There is a strategic choice to be made for Finland, Sweden, and NATO in the High North to maintain

a type of enhanced status quo in the region, where steps are taken in preparation for the possibility of nuclear support. This would mean participating in the NATO Nuclear Planning Group, training for conventional support of nuclear operations, enabling dispersed basing and continuing to add conventional capabilities, thereby creating sufficiently credible deterrence. Alternatively, a strategy that also actively addresses immediate deterrence with a nuclear dimension could be envisaged. Such a strategy would change the current order, but if done correctly, it could also fill the security gap that is currently missing.

The article starts by considering the security situation in the High North. It then moves on to discuss NATO's nuclear mission and strategic thinking on nuclear weapons. The article then precedes by taking stock of Swedish and Finnish capabilities and analyses what would be required to address immediate deterrence situations. Finally, some conclusions are presented.

## The shape of the threat in the North

Russian-initiated security incidents in the Baltic countries, Finland and Sweden, have occurred frequently over the years, whether in their airspace, underwater, or general grey zone activities. With the Russian invasion of Ukraine, security incidents have continued with a clear aim at the Nordic countries' security. These threats have increased in number, type, and severity. The hacking of central databases for salary payments,<sup>1</sup> the cutting of an undersea cable for communication<sup>2</sup> and a surge of refugees along the Finnish border are examples of how both cyber and hybrid threats have continued since the start of the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine.<sup>3</sup> The nuclear dimension became present when Russia violated Swedish aerospace with nuclear capable aircraft.<sup>4</sup> Add to that various statements from Russian leaders that Moscow may have to intervene to protect Russian minorities in the Baltic States or on Svalbard, and a picture of an aggressive Russia that constantly threatens its neighbors' security stands clear.<sup>5</sup>

The military situation in Ukraine has proved challenging for Russia's armed forces. However, its overall geostrategic situation remains unaffected by the war. The Kola Peninsula and the Arctic continue to be central to Russian security.<sup>6</sup> The majority of Russia's nuclear strategic forces are based in these locations, and the regions have come to play an increasingly important economic role for Russia.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, military units like the Northern Fleet and the Kola bases have largely been left unaffected by the war in Ukraine. A clear change, however, is the importance of the Baltic region, as Russia now finds itself surrounded by NATO members. Therefore, the military buildup in St. Petersburg and Kaliningrad is expected to be reinforced. In light of the Russian losses in Ukraine and the renewed importance of the Baltic Sea area, it could be argued that the Russian security challenges in the High North happen not in spite of Russian problems in Ukraine but because of them.<sup>8</sup>

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1. "Russian Group Behind Hacker Attack on Swedish Authorities and Retailers", *The Local Sweden*, January 22, 2024, available at: [www.thelocal.se](http://www.thelocal.se).

2. I. Vock, "Sweden Investigating Damage to Baltic Undersea Cable", BBC, October 18, 2023, available at: [www.bbc.com](http://www.bbc.com).

3. I. Vock, "Finland to Close Entire Russian Border After Migrant Surge", BBC, November 28, 2023, available at: [www.bbc.com](http://www.bbc.com).

4. J. Dunne, "Russian Planes Armed with Nukes Chased Out of Swedish Airspace", *The Standard*, March 31, 2022, available at: [www.standard.co.uk](http://www.standard.co.uk).

5. A. Staalesen, "Deputy Prime Minister Sends Warning to Oslo: Russian Rights at Svalbard Must Not Be Challenged", *The Barents Observer*, February 13, 2024, available at: [thebarentsobserver.com](http://thebarentsobserver.com).

6. H. M. Kristensen, M. Korda and E. Reynolds, "Russian Nuclear Weapons, 2023", *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, Vol. 79. No. 3, pp. 174-199, 2023, available at: [thebulletin.org](http://thebulletin.org).

7. K. Spohr, "Russia and China Are Opening a New Anti-western Front in the Arctic", *Financial Times*, November 9, 2023, available at: [www.ft.com](http://www.ft.com).

8. G. Miller et al., "'Wiped Out': War in Ukraine Has Decimated a Once Feared Russian Brigade", *The Washington Post*, December 16, 2022, available at: [www.washingtonpost.com](http://www.washingtonpost.com).

An additional consequence of the problems the Russian Armed Forces have experienced in Ukraine is that Russia is leveraging its conventional shortcomings with its nuclear forces. This strategic shift is noticeable. The more frequent verbal threats alluding to possible nuclear use made by Russian politicians, out-of-schedule nuclear exercises, and possibly sharing its nuclear arsenal with Belarus are clear changes in the Russian nuclear posture.<sup>9</sup> Russia's "self-suspension" from the New START Treaty and its "deratification" of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), provide the ground for Russia to increase its nuclear arsenal and resume nuclear testing if it so chooses. Such events are additional markers of a Russian policy shift where Russia actively uses its nuclear arsenal to shape the world as it sees fit.

The re-emergence of Russian nuclear threats and posturing in times of war – coupled with the fact that China is seeking nuclear parity with the US – has created a new urgency in NATO concerning its nuclear mission. The nuclear powers in NATO, especially the United States (US), but also the UK and France, have started to rethink their nuclear capability as well as their nuclear strategy and how it connects to the Alliance.<sup>10</sup> How can NATO organize and rethink its nuclear component? And what role should the new members Sweden and Finland have within NATO's nuclear structure?

## The nuclear dimension of NATO deterrence

The three nuclear-capable members of NATO, the US, France, and the United Kingdom (UK), operate and maintain their own nuclear weapons programs. Two of them, the UK and the US, extend their nuclear deterrence to the members of NATO. France's nuclear dyad is not integrated into the NATO command structure, i.e., it lies outside NATO's Nuclear Planning Group. However, France's vital interests have been identified as having a European dimension,<sup>11</sup> and its nuclear contribution to NATO has been recognized in several statements.<sup>12</sup> From a planning and organizational perspective, France's outside position is not ideal. Still, from a deterrence perspective, it is not necessarily wrong as it introduces an additional element of uncertainty for an adversary.

In NATO, two mechanisms oversee the nuclear weapons issue: the High-Level Group and the Nuclear Planning Group. The Nuclear Policy Directorate under the Nuclear Planning Group oversees the practical aspects of NATO's nuclear capabilities, prepares NATO's strategic concept concerning nuclear weapons and plans exercises.

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9. A. Fink, "The Wind's Rose Directions: Russia's Strategic Deterrence during the First Year of the War in Ukraine", *Proliferation Papers*, No. 65, Ifri, August 2023.

10. Weaver, "The Urgent Imperative to Maintain NATO's Nuclear Deterrence", NATO, September 29, 2023, available at: [www.nato.int](http://www.nato.int).

11. "Speech of the President of the Republic on the Defense and Deterrence Strategy", Élysée, February 7, 2020, available at: [www.elysee.fr](http://www.elysee.fr).

12. M. Vaïsse, "France and NATO: An History", *Politique étrangère*, Vol. 74, No. 4, Ifri, 2009, pp. 139-150.

Besides extending its nuclear deterrence to its fellow Alliance members, the US also shares a particular part of its nuclear capability, the B-61 nuclear gravity bomb, with certain member states, referred to as Nuclear Sharing Arrangements (NSA). These bombs can be carried by modified fighters, known as Dual Capable Aircraft (DCA), and pilots are certified through a special process to fly nuclear missions.<sup>13</sup> Release of the capability to Alliance members with DCA is commanded, controlled and conditioned by the US and authorized by the American President. Still, the decision to use the bomb if needed is made both by the US and the host country through a political process at the North Atlantic Council.

NATO has two types of nuclear exercises: STEADFAST NOON, a nuclear air raid exercise, and CSNO (Conventional Support of Nuclear Operations). While both exercises are open to all members, STEADFAST NOON naturally focuses on member states with DCA.<sup>14</sup> Other options are open to Alliance members without NSA or DCA, such as dispersed air basing, where landing strips are opened and optimized to DCA, and storage facilities that would enable nuclear storage in times of war.

While it is the nuclear sharing arrangements coupled with the DCA that make up the nuclear capability of NATO (added to the US, UK, and France national deterrents), the exercises and force posture are perhaps the most important tools NATO has to show its credibility in the nuclear domain. Its capability is how NATO views its mix of conventional and nuclear forces to make an opponent refrain from challenging the Alliance and its members. Its credibility is the key to show a would-be challenger that a NATO threat is believable and will be executed. Central to the issue of NATO's credibility is whether it should be regarded as the sum of its parts or something larger than that – or smaller than that.

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Conceptually, NATO relies on the distinction between general and immediate deterrence. General deterrence is the ongoing posture of the Alliance that also encompasses non-military means to deter. Immediate deterrence is the acute deterrence situations that quickly escalate. If the focus of general deterrence is to keep adversaries in a status quo, the immediate deterrence pertains to how the Alliance will reestablish the status quo if someone challenges it. The distinction between immediate and general deterrence is fundamental for the argument in this article as it, in part, requires quite different tools to be credible and, therefore, successful.

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13. NATO members are currently updating their aircraft to the F-35A capable of carrying the B-61/12 (the updated version of the low-yield nuclear gravity bomb). See also H. Kristensen et al., "Nuclear Weapons Sharing, 2023", *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, Vol. 79, No. 6, pp. 393-406, available at: [thebulletin.org](https://thebulletin.org).

14. E. M. Bunn, "Extending Nuclear Deterrence and Assuring U.S. Allies", in C. Glaser, A. Long and B. Radzinsky (red.). *Managing U.S. Nuclear Operations in the 21st Century*, Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2022.

A central issue for NATO has always been how it should view the escalation continuum in deterrence, from conventional to nuclear. A general problem in nuclear deterrence is that massive nuclear engagement lacks credibility when a threat is not of an existential nature. The issue, therefore, seems to be how to navigate the reliability of conventional forces to deal with certain types of threats and escalate, if so required, to the nuclear level. Credible deterrence can be executed through an appropriate mix of help from the US and its allies. Therefore, The Alliance has entertained the idea of tailored deterrence, whereas the NATO strategy has always been adapted to a particular time, place and opponent.<sup>15</sup>

Finding the appropriate response is the crux when dealing with a security situation, but the dynamics that govern nuclear threats add a layer of complexity. If the general deterrence posture of NATO is challenged and the status quo is broken by conventional forces or nuclear aggression, then the nuclear part of NATO could be called upon to bring the situation back to the status quo. This could be done either by signaling or executing limited strikes to bring the immediate deterrence situation back to the status quo.<sup>16</sup>

An integrated operational plan that does not directly call for total nuclear engagement but relies on conventional forces and allows for limited nuclear use would provide both the US and NATO with a type of flexibility in how to respond. This idea is sometimes referred to as integrated deterrence. The integrated deterrence concept emphasizes that all capabilities must be integrated to operate together for an intended effect: from horizontal escalation, i.e., the addition of various parts of different capabilities, to vertical escalation, where conventional kinetic potential can be increased all the way to the nuclear level.<sup>17</sup> When well executed, such an integrated deterrence posture gives a potential adversary no security gaps to explore.<sup>18</sup> But how can it be tailored for the High North? What capacities are there in the High North to build upon?

## Tailoring deterrence for the High North

As mentioned before, Finland and Sweden have a tradition of security cooperation with one another. Together, they run a joint naval task group (SFNTG), a sea surveillance cooperation (SUCFIS) and a Swedish-Finnish Amphibious Task Unit (SFATU) in the Baltic.<sup>19</sup> Both countries also regularly operate with NATO, for instance, with the Air Forces of the High North.<sup>20</sup> Finland and Sweden are part of the Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF),

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15. NATO Allied Joint Doctrine (AJP -01) compare for instance with P. Morgan, *Deterrence: A Conceptual Analysis*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, New York: Sage Publishing, 1983.

16. See R. Powell, *Nuclear Deterrence Theory: The Search for Credibility*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990. Powell describes the escalatory steps that are likely to be involved in a nuclear crisis.

17. *Fact Sheet: 2022 National Defense Strategy*, US Department of Defense, March 23, 2022.

18. See for instance B. Roberts, *The Case for U.S. Nuclear Weapons in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press, 2016.

19. M. Villikari, "Finnish-Swedish Naval Co-operation", *Baltic Rim Economies Review*, May 29, 2019.

20. G. O'Dwyer, "Nordic Nations Move to Link Air Forces into 250-strong Aircraft Fleet", *Defence News*, March 23, 2021.

a Framework Nations Concept led by the UK. Integrating into the joint command and control structure of NATO will come with its own set of challenges, but once Sweden and Finland understand NATO, and when NATO recognizes the type of assets these two countries bring to the Alliance, it should be relatively straightforward.

The Finish Defense Forces (FDF) focus on ground operations. During the Cold War, the FDF operated a large conventional army. Because of the peace terms with the Soviet Union after the Second World War, Finland was restricted from high-end weapon systems, such as submarines and torpedoes. Therefore, the FDF's Air Force and Navy have been relatively modest in size and technological advancement. Since the end of the Cold War, the FDF has modernized and added valuable military assets. Among its more potent weapons systems, the FDF operates the rocket artillery (M270 MLRS). The Finnish Navy operates 4 *Rauma*- and 4 *Hamina*-class corvettes, and the FDF is acquiring four multirole corvettes of *Pohjanmaa*-class, with medium-range air defense and anti-ship missiles, planned to be delivered by 2028. The FDF Air Force operates 62 F/A-18 C/D *Hornet*, multi-role fighters, which will be replaced with F-35A *Lightning II*.

Prior to joining NATO, Finland's focus was to avoid a potential invasion over land and deny its coast and airspace to an enemy. Operationally, Finland has had a defensive position relying on a large army to meet challenges across its land border, sea mines to deny enemy access from the sea, and interceptors to meet threats in the air domain.

The Swedish Armed Forces (SAF) have had their focus on naval and air force capabilities. After the end of the Cold War, Sweden significantly reduced its military power but retained some of its higher-end capacity systems. Currently, the Swedish army operates the *Patriot* GEM-TPAC-3 and MSE 90. The Swedish Royal Navy operates 5 *Visby*-class (stealth) corvettes, 2 *Gävle*-class corvettes, 3 *Gotland*-class diesel-electric submarines and one *Södermanland*-class submarine. The new A-26 submarine is scheduled for 2026. The Navy is also acquiring four large-sized corvettes, known as the *Luleå*-class. The SAF Air Force operates 90 JAS39C/D *Gripen* multi-role fighters integrated with a high-end command and control system, StriC. The fighter force will be upgraded to consist of 50 JAS-39D and 50 JAS-39E. The SAF also plan to launch their first satellite in 2030.

With its long coast, Sweden focuses on denying an enemy access to its territorial waters and air space. In addition, its multi-role fighters, submarines, and stealth corvettes, together with its integrated command and control structure, mean that Sweden can run denial operations with combined weapons relatively far out in the Baltic Sea.

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Sweden has a mature defense industry, producing capabilities spanning from fighters, ships, and submarines to armored fighting vehicles and anti-ship missiles.<sup>21</sup> Initiated in 1945, Sweden ran its own nuclear weapons program combined with a civilian nuclear power program. The programs were terminated in the 1960s due to high costs, low results and US guarantees for protection and civilian nuclear power. The Swedish Defence Research Agency (FOI) that ran the program retained its knowledge and today uses it for countermeasures (bomb shelters, an army unit specializing in CBRN protection, etc.) as well as expert advice on arms control issues. FOI's CBRN laboratories also develop and run several programs for monitoring and verification.<sup>22</sup>

Taken together, the Swedish intelligence capabilities, CBRN knowledge and command, and control platforms allow Sweden to have an independent understanding of global nuclear threats as well as those in its own region.<sup>23</sup> With these capabilities in mind, what can Sweden and Finland bring to the table for a tailored and integrated deterrence posture within NATO?

## The chink in the armor

Viewing the Finnish and Swedish capabilities in light of integrated and tailored deterrence, where forces are integrated horizontally, i.e., jointly over membership borders and between the various domains (land, sea, air, cyber and space), Sweden and Finland seem to pass the first test of operating jointly and together with NATO forces. While much remains to be done, Sweden, Finland and NATO are on their way to sufficiently create the capability of a general deterrence posture. When coupled with robust defense planning, regular exercises and a recognition of what role each country will play, this will add to the Alliance's credibility.<sup>24</sup>

The chink in the armor is the vertical escalation, i.e., the immediate deterrence situation with a nuclear component. This is because neither Sweden nor Finland have had to concern themselves with this dimension of deterrence. During the Cold War, the two countries either had to deal with escalating situations on their own, though these tended to be of a conventional nature, or were simply a third party to some larger tension between the East and the West. In the 1981 "Whiskey on the Rocks" incident, Sweden had to reestablish the status quo in its southern archipelago after a Soviet *Whiskey*-class

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21. M. Lundmark, "The Swedish Defence Industry", in K. Hartley and J. Belin, *The Economics of the Global Defence Industry*, New York: Routledge, 2021.

22. For instance, FOI provides CTBTO (the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty Organisation) with technical support in the form of fixed and mobile measurement equipment. FOI confirmed the North Korean nuclear tests in 2006.

23. P. M. Cole, *Sweden Without the Bomb: The Conduct of a Nuclear-Capable Nation Without Nuclear Weapons*, Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 1994.

24. This is not to say that everything is ready for implementation. For instance, it is still unclear whether Sweden and Finland will belong to the Joint Forces Command (JFC) Norfolk, like Norway, or JFC Brunssum, like the Netherlands.



submarine ran aground.<sup>25</sup> In the Berlin and the Cuba crises, both Sweden and Finland could only hold their breath together with the rest of the world.

Immediate deterrence is, in a sense, the most challenging form of deterrence since it entails the re-establishment of a lost status quo. To succeed in such contingencies, NATO needs to have a good understanding of various scenarios and retain an appropriate mix of high-end capabilities and systems, enabling strategic flexibility. It is crucial for the force structure to be integrated so that the nuclear component with NATO can augment the conventional forces, while the conventional forces can enhance the nuclear forces. This is key, as it will enable the Alliance to hold an adversary's strategic capabilities at risk, thereby deterring further escalation. As NATO works on this type of mix, how can Sweden and Finland engage with this capability-in-being?

Finland's stated position upon joining NATO was that it would not allow nuclear weapons to be stationed on Finnish territory but that it otherwise would participate in the NPG. This position is similar to that of Norway, which also forbids the presence of nuclear weapons on its territory in times of peace.<sup>26</sup> A report from the Finnish Institute of International Affairs (FIIA) views the Finnish commitment as potentially ranging from participation in NPG to possibly partaking in exercises such as CSNO.<sup>27</sup>

Sweden made the decision to join NATO without any caveats, nuclear or otherwise, and recently signed a bilateral Defense Cooperation Agreement with the US. Its nuclear policy and involvement in NATO nuclear missions have not yet been defined: the stated Swedish position is that once privy to all the details of NATO nuclear planning, Sweden will study the issues and then decide. Such a decision will not be made only in Stockholm but just as much in Brussels and Washington.<sup>28</sup>

Participation in NPG seems already to be something both countries aim for. Given the Finnish decision of no nuclear weapons on Finnish territory, nuclear sharing is not going to be a part of Finnish commitments. Finland is acquiring the F-35A, which can carry the B61/12. It could, therefore, quite easily participate with DCA. Whether it would make sense to have a DCA capability but no nuclear capability within reach is, of course, also a relevant issue to consider. Changing the law so that nuclear weapons could be stored in Finland is possible but may take a while. Participating in CSNO, the NATO conventional

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**NATO needs to retain an appropriate mix of high-end capabilities and systems, which would enable strategic flexibility**

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25. E. Stern and B. Sundelius. "Managing Asymmetrical Crisis: Sweden, the USSR and, U-137", *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 35, No. 2, 1992, pp.213-239.

26. "New Member Finland to Take Part in NATO's Nuclear Planning", *Reuters*, April 13, 2023, available at: [www.reuters.com](http://www.reuters.com).

27. M. Pesu and T. Juntunen, "Finland in a Nuclear Alliance – Recalibrating the Dual Track Mindset on Deterrence and Arms Control", Finnish Institute of International Affairs, November 16, 2023, available at: [www.fia.fi](http://www.fia.fi).

28. Statement by the Swedish Ministry of Defence during the seminar: "Nuclear Deterrence Policy – Perspectives from the UK and Sweden" organized at *Folk och Försvar Symposium*, Stockholm, June 16, 2023.

support exercise for nuclear missions, is a distinct possibility. Sweden could integrate by flying support missions to NATO DCA-mission (CSNO), or it could apply for the capability itself, possibly also with a nuclear sharing agreement.

An issue for NATO is that the US nuclear mission is becoming overstretched. At current levels, the US can address both the threats in Europe and Asia. However, given that China continues to add nuclear capability and that Russia is focusing on its nuclear forces, the nuclear reality of Europe is changing. If a security contingency in Asia arises, and the US mobilizes to address it, what is left in Europe will be thinly stretched. Therefore, active Swedish and Finnish participation in NATO's nuclear missions would enable the Alliance to make the most of the rather small DCA fleet from fellow Alliance members.

Given the idea that NATO's mission should be integrated, conventional capabilities could be put to use in an immediate deterrence situation. For instance, the Finnish M270 MLRS system would add important capability since it could be used to hold Russian nuclear forces on the Kola Peninsula at risk. The relatively large Swedish Air Force could be used to fly escort missions to NATO aircraft or be deployed to suppress Russian air defense systems. CSNO would, therefore, make sense for NATO and Sweden. Given a seaborne component equipped with sufficient air defense and integrated into a command-and-control system, it could allow for sea control operations in the Baltic Sea. Coupled with the Swedish submarines and other allied capabilities in the region, this would create additional capacity to deter aggression.

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**A more engaged approach would have Sweden and possibly Finland seek DCA for themselves with an NSA**

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The core question about the various NATO nuclear initiatives is how risk-seeking Sweden and Finland – and ultimately NATO itself – want to be. A preparatory strategy would be for Sweden and Finland to partake in the conventional exercise CSNO and for Sweden to enable dispersed basing of NATO DCA (and other allied capabilities), but otherwise try to

avoid upsetting the status quo in the High North. The downside to such an approach is that it requires other countries to solve an immediate deterrence situation with a nuclear element for the High North. It also leaves Russia to explore the status quo as it pleases since it does not need to adjust or recalibrate its nuclear strategy or conventional capabilities to a new challenge.

A more engaged approach would have Sweden and possibly Finland seek DCA for themselves with an NSA. This would address the security gap of insufficient capability in an immediate deterrence situation, claim ownership of the region's own security challenges and put pressure on Russia. If carried out smoothly, such an approach would also make use of conventional capabilities, and there would be no security gap for Russia to explore. This type of stratagem would make the deterrence posture in the High North

more than the sum of its parts. It would, and this should also be the point of such an approach, increase pressure on Russia.

Conditional for any such wider engagement is how and to what extent the Finnish and Swedish populations are comfortable with an active engagement with NATO's nuclear missions. So far, little is known about how they stand. A Swedish poll from June 2023 showed that 65% of the respondents approved of NATO membership, 20% were unsure, and 15% were against NATO membership. The poll did not specifically ask about attitudes regarding nuclear weapons. Still, when asked to list negative issues with NATO, the respondents did not list nuclear weapons (although it may have figured under the column "other").<sup>29</sup> Traditionally, there has been a strong anti-WMD sentiment in both countries. On the other hand, the war in Ukraine and the Russian threats are what triggered both Sweden and Finland to seek membership. The post-world war generation in Sweden was in favor of Sweden seeking the bomb on its own. The following generation made it a point to be against it. How the current generations stand is more unclear. It will be a question of political leadership to explain which of the two strategic choices Sweden will opt for and why: membership and a role in NPG, CSNO, and perhaps dispersed basing, or a more engaged approach and a wider mission that can address immediate deterrence situations with a nuclear component directly. While the former will be a substantial improvement of the current strategic situation, it is the latter that will be the creation of truly integrated deterrence, where the deterrence in the High North could actually be tailored for the High North.

## Conclusion

Swedish and Finnish accession to NATO enables the Alliance to play a more active role in the Baltic. For the first time, NATO can tailor a comprehensive deterrent in the High North. The underpinnings for a NATO general deterrence posture in the High North with Sweden and Finland are largely in place due to Finland's and Sweden's close defense cooperation and previous work with the Alliance. The Russian nuclear threat, which has increased with its war in Ukraine, is, however, a challenge that Sweden, Finland and NATO need to address. For an integrated and tailored deterrence in the High North, Sweden and Finland must come to terms with the challenge of immediate deterrence with a nuclear dimension. A strategy with participation in NPG, flying CSNO and, for Sweden, enabling dispersed basing would create room for NATO to act in times of crisis. A more engaged approach would also add DCA and NSA for Sweden and possibly for Finland, given that the latter makes required adjustments to its current legislation. It is not until the missing pieces of nuclear immediate deterrence are in place that NATO deterrence in the High North will become greater than the sum of its parts.

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29. F. Westling, "Aftonbladet/Demoskok: 2 av 3 svenskar vill gå med i Nato", *Aftonbladet*, June 7, 2023.

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**Karl Sörenson (PhD)** is a research director and deputy director for the Department of Strategy and Policy at FOI – Swedish Defence Research Agency. At the agency, Dr. Sörenson heads FOI's nuclear weapons analysis program.

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27 rue de la Procession  
75740 Paris cedex 15 – France

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