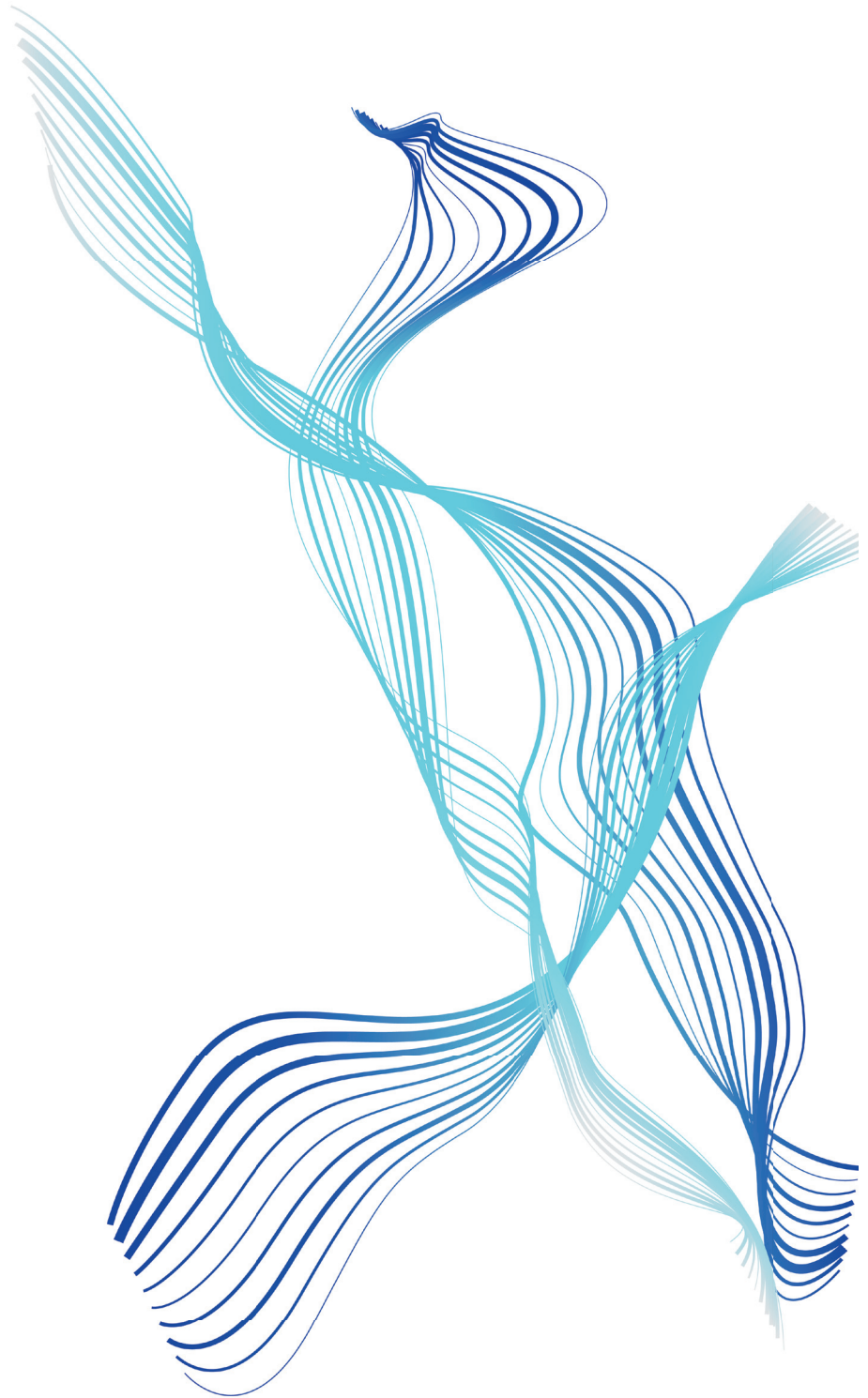


NORDEFSCO Annual Report 2023



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NORDEFECO

Sweden held the NORDEFECO chairmanship in 2023 and this report is produced by the Government Offices of Sweden.

Foreword



Photo: Kristian Pohl/Government Offices



Pål Jonson
Minister for Defence
Sweden

2023 was a transformative year for the Nordic Defence Cooperation (NORDEFCO). Russia's continued war of aggression against Ukraine has had far-reaching consequences for European security and beyond. Tensions are also rising in the global arena, which further adds to the complex and challenging security environment we are facing.

The Nordic countries have responded swiftly to these developments over the course of 2023 by deepening our defence cooperation on a number of fronts. Great effort was put into developing a new long-term vision for the Nordic Defence Cooperation - Vision 2030. Agreed on by the Nordic defence ministers in Reykjavik, it sets high but appropriate policy ambitions for our cooperation and covers multiple areas including joint operations, Host Nation Support, capabilities, defence material and total defence. The Vision will guide our cooperation in the coming years and allow us to tackle both current and future challenges.

We have also strengthened our cooperation at the military level by developing structures for enhanced operations, thereby enabling a higher level of collaboration in the fields of capability development, joint procurement, security of supply and exercises. This will strengthen the Nordic countries' national defence efforts and the security environment of the whole northern European region, while also complementing the work of NATO.

To ensure that NORDEFCO as an organisation is suited to face this complex security environment, we have initiated a process to examine if and how its organisational structure and working methods could be updated. This work will continue in 2024.

I would like to thank all Nordic colleagues for their valuable efforts made during this past year. Our cooperation is stronger than ever before, and we stand ready to address current and future challenges together. I look forward to continuing our important work in 2024 under Denmark's excellent leadership.

Nordic Defence Cooperation at the policy level

Sweden had an overarching ambition to bring the NORDEFECO cooperation into a new and complex reality in 2023. A year into Russia's invasion of Ukraine, with international law and European security facing its biggest challenge yet, significant changes had been made to the security architecture of the Nordic region. Finland's and Sweden's NATO applications brought about a new reality where, for the first time, all the Nordic countries had chosen the same path for their defence, enabling new and ambitious possibilities for enhanced cooperation. Hence, a new political and practical framework was needed for NORDEFECO.

Seven priorities guided the Swedish Chairmanship in 2023:

- enhanced Nordic defence cooperation in a new security context;
- support to Ukraine;
- Nordic-Baltic cooperation;
- operational cooperation;
- capability cooperation;
- training and exercises; and
- armaments cooperation.

At policy level, the primary focus has been to set an updated framework for the Nordic Defence Cooperation going forward in a new strategic reality. Following the ministers' task to the Political Steering Committee (PSC) in 2022, focus was put on drafting a new long-term vision to adapt to current developments in the security context of Northern Europe and the world. Reiterating the Nordic countries' commitment to strengthening the deterrence and defence of the Nordic region and the Euro-Atlantic Area, the Vision states that we are prepared and able to conduct combined joint military operations to manage both present and future challenges together and with NATO Allies.



The NORDEFCO defence ministers' meeting in Stockholm, Sweden in November 2023.

Photo: Niklas Forsström/Government Offices

Vision 2030 sets out eight objectives for the enhancement of Nordic Defence Cooperation, in order to operationalise the ambition:

1. Strategic dialogue and consultations on current issues and the security situation, including cooperation on situational awareness and escalation management.
2. Ability to conduct, and command, combined joint operations, through common operations planning, complementary to national and allied planning.
3. Host Nation Support and logistical support to enable common operations and facilitate allied military support and reinforcement.
4. Military mobility to, between and through the Nordic countries by ensuring minimal restrictions of movement.
5. Capabilities, based on strategic and operational requirements, in alignment with NATO processes, and opportunities in relation to EU tools and initiatives.
6. Defence materiel cooperation for increased interchangeability, including joint acquisitions, based on capability development and requirements, in alignment with NATO processes, NORDEFCO operational needs, and opportunities in relation to EU tools and initiatives.
7. Military security of supply for improved resilience, e.g. by strengthening the Nordic defence industrial base.
8. Total defence to secure adequate support from all sectors of society to the defence sector in all threat scenarios and situations.



A soldier in Hammerfest, Norway, during the Nordic Response 24 exercise.

Photo: Tord Romundstad/Norwegian Armed Forces

There has also been a strong focus on the war in Ukraine, with joint and individual efforts to support Ukraine high on the agenda.

The defence ministers met in Reykjavik in June, and in Stockholm in November. The Nordic state and permanent secretaries had a meeting in Lund in May, in connection with the Aurora exercise. Throughout the year, close consultations were conducted at all levels to share information and discuss current events.

Nordic-Baltic cooperation was an important part of NORDEFSCO's work throughout the year, with shared meetings at policy and ministerial level enabling valuable dialogue and exchange of information on current issues and regional security.

Policy cooperation

In light of the new direction for NORDEFSCO, cooperation at policy level has been close and consistent. The Nordic Defence Policy Directors (DPDs) had meetings in Gothenburg in March and Uppsala in October, in addition to regular virtual meetings.

Work has begun on the ministerial task of updating NORDEFSCO's current working methods, structures and organisation. The dramatic changes in the security environment since its 2009 establishment, as well as the ambitious goals in the new Vision 2030, highlighted the need for an organisational structure fit to meet both current and future needs. Against this backdrop, a review process was initiated, and initial findings were discussed at both the joint PSC meeting in October and the ministerial meeting in Stockholm in November. This work is continuing during the Danish Chairmanship in 2024.

Extensive discussions have also been conducted regarding opportunities for enhanced Nordic defence cooperation. The fact that all Nordic countries are now members of NATO, together with the agreed Vision 2030, has provided a foundation for new and deepened opportunities for cooperation. Following an overview of the Nordic countries' long-term defence planning processes at the NORDEFECO ministerial meeting in June 2023, the defence ministers noted the opportunity for enhanced cooperation. This will be further explored under the Danish Chairmanship in 2024, when a roadmap for the operationalisation of Vision 2030 will be discussed.

Noting the benefits of a common framework for strategic communications, a communications framework has been developed in order to facilitate coordinated external information about the work of NORDEFECO.

The Nordic DPDs have also used the NORDEFECO structure for consistent dialogue on current and relevant policy matters throughout the year. Discussions on continued support to Ukraine have been held continuously, as has exchange on policy issues such as transatlantic partnerships, critical infrastructure and developments within NATO.

Capabilities cooperation

The cooperation within Nordic capability development took substantial steps forward during the past year, following the progress with Finland's and Sweden's applications to NATO. Three priorities were launched in 2023: firstly, to promote Nordic defence capability cooperation in relation to NATO processes, such as the NATO Defence Planning Process (NDPP); secondly, to review ongoing capability formats and projects in NORDEFECO; and thirdly, to promote work that improves the capability to receive and move military units and formations within our region. This will build upon and complement ongoing work on improving military mobility.



Military mobility in practice – a snapshot from the Nordic Response 24 exercise.

Photo: Catharina Molland Dale/Norwegian Armed Forces

The Nordic nations have agreed that NDPP and the Nordic Defence Concept (NDC) are the main drivers for Nordic capability cooperation and that further cooperation within NDPP should be encouraged. The Nordic nations also acknowledge Nordic troop contribution to the NATO Force Model as essential for the deterrence and defence of the Alliance. Going forward, ongoing capability cooperation formats will continue to be reviewed.

The work on military mobility was expanded during the year to include a broader enablement perspective. The Nordic nations agreed to continue to improve aspects of enablement in a Nordic context with the long-term goal of 'Seamless Logistics in a Borderless Nordic'. The future work on Nordic enablement depends on national actions being coordinated in a Nordic context. Future work on enablement and military mobility should also be aligned with NATO and EU frameworks.

Armaments cooperation

A focus area for the Nordic armament cooperation has been the shortage of ammunition, made evident by the security situation and Russia's aggression against Ukraine, highlighting the shortage.

The Nordic National Armament Directors (NADs) gathered key stakeholders involving the Baltic states, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and the defence industry for a direct dialogue format in order to identify ammunition production bottlenecks and implement measures to increase short and long-term production, in the north as well as in support for Ukraine. Marking the expansion of already well-established armaments cooperation among the Nordic-Baltic countries, a working group was formed, and in late 2023 the work resulted in a historical signing of a Nordic Agreement on Joint Procurement of Ammunition later in 2023.

The Agreement consisted of three tracks:

1. short-term support to Ukraine via coordinated donations from warehouses;
2. medium term support and capacity building by reordering and increasing the order from industry; and
3. long-term capacity-building through strengthened cooperation and integration of the industry in the Nordic-Baltic region, through a strategic partner agreement.

Connected to the Agreement, a successful initial first joint order for artillery ammunition was placed for a total value of SEK 604 million. The Agreement and the joint order envision the importance and utility of the NORDEFSCO Armament collaboration. The Nordic NADs also engaged in discussions on more long-term and strategic measures for armaments cooperation, resulting in an initiative to develop a strategic screening model with the aim of strengthening Nordic security of supply, harmonising military requirements and increasing interchangeability.

Military Coordination Committee activities

The past year has marked a significant milestone for NORDEFCO, as we witnessed a convergence of efforts across working groups and cooperation areas. At military level, the Nordic countries have stated their commitment and determination to strengthen the deterrence and defence of the Nordic region, as well as the ability to act together. Northern Europe – including the High North, the North Atlantic and the Baltic Sea region – is to be considered as one entity, uniting the Nordic countries not only in geography but also in a strategic context. This necessitates close cooperation between not only the Nordic countries but also other regional stakeholders, such as the Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF) and other neighbouring countries. Against this backdrop, the Nordic and Baltic countries continued to meet at the level of both Chiefs of Defence (CHODs) and Chiefs of Strategy level in 2023.

In recent years, the development of NORDEFCO has been rapid and moved from its origin – a structure for smart-defence and pooling and sharing – towards a deeper operational cooperation. Looking forward, Finland's and Sweden's NATO memberships, the removal of Denmark's opt-out of the EU defence cooperation as well as the incorporation of Iceland in the NORDEFCO military-level structures provide greater prospects for enhanced coordination.

In a NATO context, the Nordic defence cooperation will, through the renewed level of ambition and more operational focus, ease the burden for the whole region and simultaneously contribute to the deterrence and defence of the Euro-Atlantic Area. Joint Nordic operational planning will highlight joint capability needs and bring about incentives for



JAS 39 Gripen at Uppland Wing,
Ärna Airbase in Sweden.

Photo: Petra Blomqvist/Swedish Armed Forces

cooperation in capability development, joint procurement, security of supply and exercises, which will ultimately strengthen the Alliance and enable a particular regional responsibility. A strong Nordic defence cooperation benefits and complements NATO and other cooperative formats, such as European defence initiatives and the JEF. We can make effective common contributions to the Alliance, particularly in our area of expertise, and shoulder a particular regional responsibility.

The adopted operational-driven focus has proven instrumental in fostering a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities inherent in our joint deterrence and defence approach. Efforts towards deepened operational cooperation has thus far provided invaluable insights into critical issues, such as military mobility and security of supplies, and will serve as a foundation for further efforts to enhance our collective preparedness and response capabilities. Looking ahead, the development of a Nordic Logistics Concept and a Nordic Training and Exercise Concept will emerge as a natural progression.

Military Coordination Committee priorities 2023

1. Deepened Nordic operational cooperation
2. A new structure for Nordic defence cooperation
3. Nordic training and exercises
4. Nordic capability cooperation

Deepened Nordic operational cooperation

Planning and conducting common operations in areas of strategic importance is necessary in order to meet the demands of NATO Article 3. By aligning national and Nordic plans with those of NATO, harmonisation of Nordic activities are harmonised with those of Allies while facilitating a seamless transition from Article 3 until a regional plan is activated and executable. Other cooperation formats will also be a part of the planning process in order to ensure fulfilment of all possible security gaps.

A new structure for Nordic operational cooperation

The changing security context will affect us over time and determine how we structure the Nordic cooperation to optimise our defence efforts. In 2023, a Nordic Strategic Planning Group (SPG) and a Joint Operational Planning Group (JOPG) were established, forming the basis for further development and contributing to the preparations for the Nordic Response 24 exercise.



Soldiers during the Nordic Response 24 exercise.

Photo: Kim Atle Kleven/Norwegian Armed Forces

Nordic training and exercises

The military-level training and exercise community has successfully developed a Nordic Training and Exercise Concept, which aims to assess how future Nordic training and exercise cooperation can contribute to the development and enhancement of the operational cooperation, as well as to the development of the Nordic countries' total defence systems. This format has proved an appropriate framework to maintain a matrix for alignment of training and exercises, thereby providing an opportunity for a joint Nordic approach to NATO exercise planning.

Nordic capability cooperation

With all Nordic countries in NATO and a stronger operational focus within NORDEFECO, Nordic capability development cooperation has better preconditions to deliver results. In 2023, an analysis was conducted on how the Nordic collaboration on capabilities can be improved to better support a context in which the Nordic countries are all part of NATO and, to some extent, the EU's defence cooperation.

The results show that Nordic capability development, in coherence with the rest of NORDEFECO, needs to be operational-driven. The work will continue in order to design a new structure for capability cooperation within NORDEFECO, ensuring alignment with the NATO NDPP.

A need was also identified for aligning the NDPP process with joint Nordic procurement. By establishing a basis for acquisitions of strategic importance for the Nordic countries' armed forces, using NATO capability targets, the interchangeability between the countries could be enhanced and operational cooperation strengthened.



Political Steering Committee meeting at Uppsala Wing, Årna Air Base, in October 2023.

Photo: Petra Blomqvist/Swedish Armed Forces

Logistics cooperation

The development and operational focus of NORDEFECO has also highlighted the importance of logistics. Seamless and easy access for border crossing is a key enabler for security of supply, in and between the Nordic countries. In early 2023, the military level was tasked with analysing the reception and sustainment of forces in operations in the Nordic area, especially measures to improve national resilience and logistical support to operations in the Nordic countries. The Nordic Logistics Forum report highlighted the importance of developing a Nordic Defence Logistic Concept (NDLC) as the foundation for robust and resilient support to operations in the Nordic region.

The operational focus in NORDEFECO in 2023 also highlighted that seamless and easy access for border crossing is a key enabler for security of supply, in and between the Nordic countries. By using Live and Command Post (CPX) exercises including border crossing, the deployment and sustainment of forces can be tested and rehearsed. In addition, the Nordic Veterinarian Forum developed a framework for biological border protection in 2023, aiming for improved military mobility and border crossing.

Denmark's chairmanship of NORDEF 2024

Russia's brutal attack on Ukraine is a landmark event for the international security architecture with significant implications for European security. The Nordic countries are committed to supporting Ukraine politically and financially, as well as with military training and equipment, for as long as it takes.

With the accessions of Finland and Sweden to NATO, the Nordic countries will cooperate closer than ever before on matters of security and defence. This has provided new impetus for the Nordic defence cooperation.

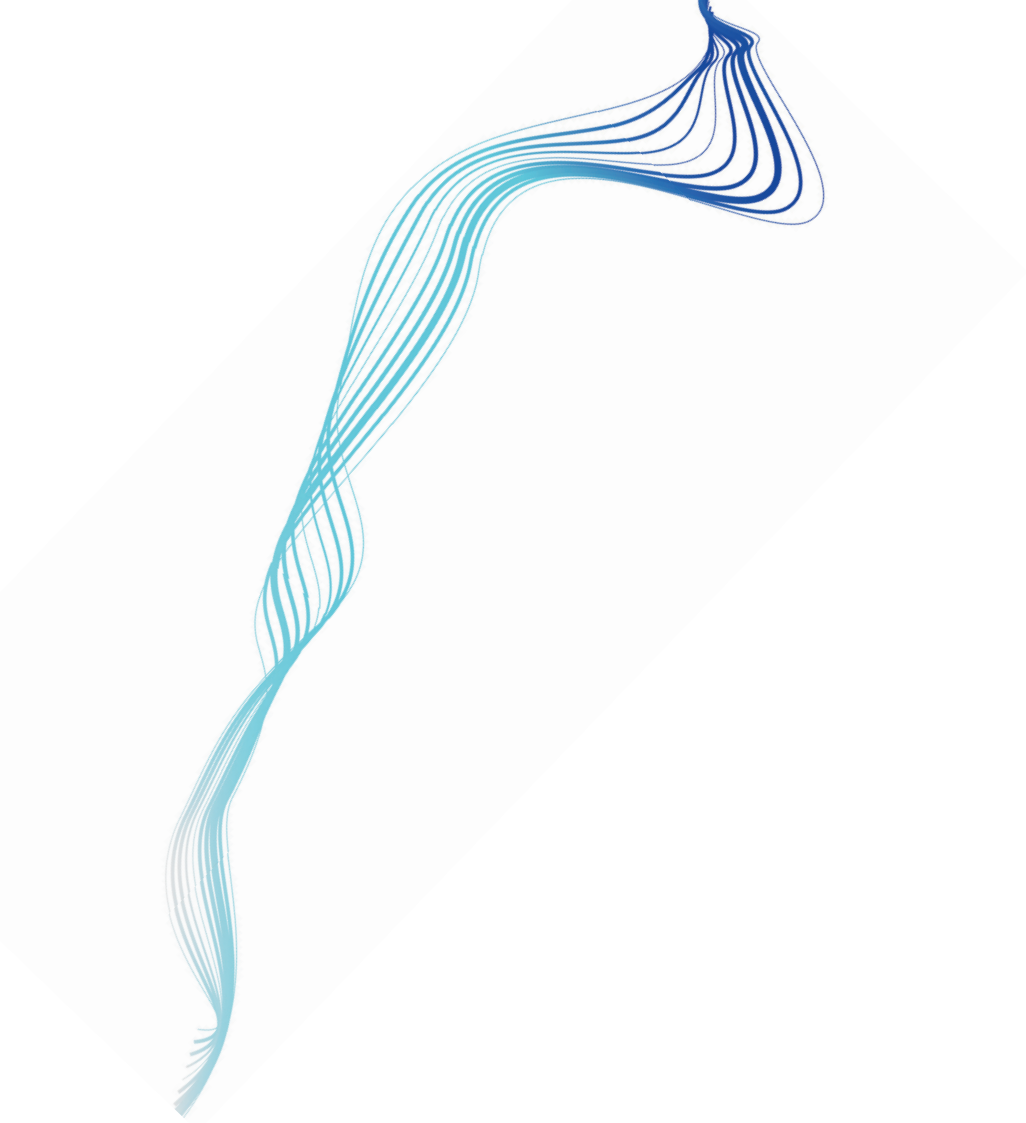
Building on the work undertaken by Sweden in 2023, the main task for NORDEF 2024 is to build on and implement recent decisions, while maintaining a close cooperation internally and with partners on security challenges, in particular the continued support to Ukraine and the implications of NATO membership.

In the Nordic region, we expect new and old actors to act increasingly unpredictably in the Baltic Sea, the Arctic and the North Atlantic. While strengthening NORDEF cooperation to face the task of these challenges, NORDEF should also strengthen dialogue with NATO Allies in the region and closely align all initiatives with NATO plans and concepts.

The Nordic countries are facing new and special challenges in the North Atlantic and the Arctic region. This is important for strategic lines of communication and supply, as well as for capabilities and operational cooperation. Closer Nordic cooperation and coordination within the overall NATO framework will be of importance.

NORDEF should continue to increase our ability to conduct and command combined joint operations through common operations planning, complementary to national and allied planning within the NDC framework.

Among other areas of priority for 2024 are a refocused capability cooperation with an emphasis on the NDPP, closer cooperation on exercises and initiatives to further contribute to NATO armaments cooperation.



Government Offices of Sweden

Ministry of Defence

Switchboard: +46 8 405 10 00

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