Northern response: Nordic states revive defences against Russian aggression

[Content preview – Subscribe to Jane’s Defence Weekly for full article]

Increased tension with Russia has prompted Nordic states to re-assess their defence and security requirements, increasing their engagement and co-operation with NATO and other Western partners. Tim Ripley reports

For almost 25 years after the fall of the Berlin Wall the Nordic states thought little about direct military threats to their homelands. The end of the Cold War encouraged the region to participate in United Nations- and NATO-led peacekeeping, humanitarian, and stabilisation efforts in Afghanistan, Africa, and the Balkans, while Finland and Sweden joined the European Union and its foreign and security initiatives, ending long-established policies of neutrality.

HSwMS Gotland is expected to remain in service to 2030, with a further refit potentially extending this to 2035. Following years of relative peace, Nordic states have begun reviewing their defence postures in response to Russian aggression in Ukraine. (Saab Kockums)

The 2014 conflict in Crimea and the Donbass in Ukraine, however, raised fears across Europe regarding a resurgent Russia. Nordic states began reviewing the defence of their borders, sea zones,
and air spaces, as well as looking to enhance their military capabilities. The countries have also realised that to counteract the strength of a Russian military that boasts large conventional forces and nuclear weapons they need the support of strong allies through EU, NATO, or bilateral arrangements.

Some enduring factors underpin Nordic security planning, including a common desire to be self-reliant and build their defence around strong and effective armed forces. However, the new Russian threat is distinct from that of the Cold War, leading the Nordic states to adopt new and individual approaches.

**Russia**

The Ukrainian conflict has prompted talk of a new Cold War in the Nordic region but Russian military capabilities and deployments are significantly smaller than those that existed in the days of the Warsaw Pact.

At the height of Cold War the Soviet Union and its allies close to the Baltic – namely Poland and the East Germany – fielded forces that could launch a theatre-level offensive across the land, sea, and air domains against the Nordic states. Subsequently de-classified Warsaw Pact war plans showed that several Soviet-led divisions initially planned to seize Denmark to open naval routes into the North Sea; neutralise Swedish air and naval bases to prevent military interference; and push along Norway’s long coast from north and south to secure air and naval bases for use against NATO fleets in the Atlantic. The final phase of these operations would have been the physical occupation of most of Scandinavia by Soviet-led forces.

Russia’s current armed forces are a shadow of their Soviet predecessors. In the Baltic region they are confined to the semi-exclave of Kaliningrad and a naval base at Kronstadt, situated on an island outside St Petersburg. Kaliningrad is home to about 25,000 Russian military personnel, including a naval infantry brigade, a motor rifle brigade, air-defence regiments equipped with S-400 surface-to-air missile (SAM) systems, and a coastal defence brigade with K-300P Bastion-P (SSC-5 ‘Stooge’) and 3K60 Bal (SSC-6 ‘Sennight’) anti-ship missiles.

Air assets include naval aviation regiments, with about 50 Sukhoi Su-27, Su-30SM, and Su-24 fighters, as well as some 30 Mil Mi-24, Mil Mi-8, Kamov Ka-27, and Kamov Ka-29 helicopters and Forpost tactical unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs). Russia’s Baltic Fleet has some 30 naval vessels, including 10 frigates and large corvettes, four amphibious landing ships, two large hovercraft, and two conventionally powered submarines. Berlin, Copenhagen, and Warsaw are also within the range of Iskander-M tactical ballistic missiles based in Kaliningrad.

The Western Military District’s 6th Combined Arms Army, based in St Petersburg, has a motorised rifle brigade based just south of the Finnish border that can be supported by artillery and other specialist units positioned around the city. There are three Russian Aerospace Forces (VKS) fighter regiments based around St Petersburg equipped with about 70 Sukhoi Su-27, Su-35S, Su-24, and
Mikoyan MiG-31BM fighters. The city is also protected by a major cluster of SAM regiments with S-400 and S-300PM systems.

In the Kola Peninsula the Russian Northern Fleet Joint Strategic Command boasts powerful land, naval, and air forces that can intervene across the Nordic region. Naval forces include about 30 nuclear- and conventionally powered submarines, as well as the aircraft carrier Admiral Kuznetsov, with its air group of two dozen Su-33 and MiG-29K fighters and battlegroup of 12 major surface combatants. These are backed up by coastal defence forces of some 10 smaller corvettes and missile boats and nine mine counter-measures vessels, as well as support from anti-submarine helicopters, maritime patrol aircraft, and fighters based on airfields around Murmansk.

[Continued in full version...]

(687 of 4608 words)

For the full version and more content:

Intelligence that Matters

With more than 100 years of experience in factors such as shifting defence spending and the capabilities of the world’s militaries, Jane’s delivers unparalleled data and insight. Our renowned open-source intelligence and potent analytical tools, backed by our deep industry expertise, is used by militaries, national security and defence industry organisations across the world to anticipate and respond to threats; identify and capture new business opportunities; and sustain defence capabilities.

To learn more visit http://janes.com/products