

# Denmark's Security Starts in the Baltic States

By Amelie Theussen

Danish security and defense policy strongly builds on the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) as its cornerstone. Since the 1990s, Denmark has pursued an active military role in international missions. In line with its military activism and Atlanticist orientation, the United States, United Kingdom, and France are Denmark's closest strategic partners. Yet several developments in recent years have forced the country to question its partnerships and re-evaluate its military priorities: the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014, the election of Donald Trump as U.S. President in 2016, Brexit, and the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. These stand out as major external influences on Danish policies. Additionally, a changing threat environment with an aggressive posturing by Russia (and non-military threats in the cyber realm and of hybrid nature) means that Denmark has made moves to strengthen its military capacities, contributing to NATO's overall deterrence posture as well as its total defense capacities to deter and defend against unconventional threats. While Denmark does not consider Russia a direct military threat against its own territory, it does regard Russia as directly threatening its neighbors and European security, and the rules-based international order through actions which analysts refer to as "political warfare."<sup>1</sup> Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Denmark has joined with the vast majority of European Union (EU) and NATO members in supporting Ukraine and condemning Russia for raging violations of international law.

## Current Security and Defense Policy

### *Alliances*

NATO is seen as the guarantor of Danish security—it is without a doubt the country's most important alliance. NATO's essential role for Danish security and the Danish commitment to maintaining and contributing to the Alliance both shape and inform Danish security policy in all aspects.<sup>2</sup> As the most recent government strategy for foreign and security policy points out, "NATO and a strong transatlantic bond [to the United States]

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are the guarantors for Denmark's and Europe's security" and the United States as "unrivalled and crucial partner" for Denmark.<sup>3</sup> The Danish focus on NATO as the primary alliance and cornerstone for Denmark's security is strengthened by the fact that Denmark, despite being a longstanding member of the European communities since 1973, has opt-outs from the EU that limit the country's ability to cooperate with the EU and its other member states in a few crucial areas. Most notably, for the purpose of this article, are the opt-outs regarding cooperation on justice and home affairs and defense (abolished in June 2022; more on this below). Additional opt-outs exist for the areas of EU citizenship and the euro.

In June 1992, the Danish population rejected the Maastricht Treaty in a referendum. The treaty aimed to deepen and expand European cooperation and included (among others) provisions for a common foreign and security policy, cooperation on matters of justice and home affairs and a common monetary union. This meant that European cooperation was no longer limited to the economic realm but instead turned into a broader political cooperation. Denmark was only able to ratify the Maastricht Treaty in spring 1993, after the government and the EU had negotiated and agreed on the four opt-outs in the Edinburgh Agreement during fall and winter 1992, and the population accepted the agreement in another referendum in the following year.<sup>4</sup>

The opt-outs mean that Denmark remains outside of most EU cooperation regarding defense, justice, and home affairs and retains its own currency, the Danish krone, and an independent monetary policy. In the field of justice and home affairs, Denmark participated if the cooperation was intergovernmental. However, the changes introduced in the Lisbon Treaty from 2009 meant that justice and home affairs cooperation became supranational, barring Denmark from participating. In practice, Denmark only participates in the cooperation on visa rules and the Schengen Agreement,

where the country has a special agreement. For all other cooperation on border control, immigration policy, civil law, criminal justice, and the police, the country remains in general excluded. Yet for certain matters Denmark has parallel agreements (so-called *parallelaftaler*), for example, granting access to searches in Europol's database.

Furthermore, until the abolition of the defense opt-out in a referendum in June 2022, due to the opt-outs Denmark did not participate in parts of the EU's foreign and security policy that affect defense, and thus Denmark could not participate in military cooperation on the EU level (for example, the European Defense Agency). While the country thus did not participate in EU military missions, it does contribute to civilian missions (as well as missions where the civilian and military component can be clearly separated).<sup>5</sup> The consequences of the opt-outs have become more significant over the last decade as the EU has strengthened its cooperation on security and defense matters. A report by the Danish Institute for International Studies shows that the costs of the Danish opt-out were likely to rise over the coming years, as Denmark would have had no influence on decisions that directly affect the country's security interests or economic interests regarding defense industry cooperation. The defense opt-out does not prevent Denmark from making defense cooperation agreements with important partners outside of the EU framework. Moreover, Denmark already can take part in the areas of the new EU defense cooperation that fall under the European Commission's policy areas of industry, transportation, and research.<sup>6</sup> However, new security challenges (such as political warfare, cyber and hybrid threats, and the need for interoperability and mobility of forces) increasingly create areas where substantial ambiguity exists over the applicability of the opt-out.

In the report's assessment, the opt-outs are progressively limiting Denmark.<sup>7</sup> The opt-outs can be removed, but only after another referendum. In



The main aim and purpose of the Nordic Defence Cooperation (NORDEF) is to strengthen the participating nations' national defence, explore common synergies and facilitate efficient common solutions. Image by: Johannes Jansson (Wikimedia Commons). August 17, 2009

2015, a referendum was held to change the opt-out for justice and home affairs into an opt-in model, where Denmark could choose to opt-in to existing and future justice and home affairs legislation. This would have allowed Denmark to assess participation on a case-by-case basis.<sup>8</sup> But the referendum failed, so the opt-out remains. While there is rather broad agreement among policymakers and experts that the opt-outs are hindering Denmark from beneficial cooperation with other EU countries, until the spring of 2022 it seemed unlikely that another opt-out referendum would be held soon, and polls suggested that abolishing an opt-out through a referendum would be unlikely. This, however, changed radically with the Russian aggression against Ukraine in February 2022. As reaction to the Russian aggression and the resulting war between Russia and Ukraine, the Danish government made an agreement together with several supporting and

opposition parties—the National Compromise on Danish Security Policy (*National kompromis om dansk sikkerhedspolitik*). The agreement, published on March 6, 2022, outlines a number of actions to strengthen Danish security and defense in light of the new security situation in Europe. These include, among others, increasing the defense budget to reach 2 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) in 2033 and a referendum to abolish the EU opt-out on defense. The referendum took place on June 1, 2022, and was successful in abolishing the opt-out; 66.9 percent of voters decided to get rid of the opt-out, with only 33.1 percent choosing to keep it in place. In fact, in all constituencies throughout Denmark, most voters voted to abolish the opt-out.<sup>9</sup>

Aside from being a staunch supporter of NATO, Denmark is active in a variety of defense cooperation initiatives outside NATO and EU frameworks, including the British Joint Expeditionary Force,

the French European Intervention Initiative, the German Framework Nation Concept, and the Nordic Defense Cooperation (NORDEFCO).

The UK has long been a close strategic partner for Denmark, visible in the close operational cooperation in Afghanistan and Iraq. The UK's decision to leave the EU, however, creates insecurity about the British contribution to future European security. That and the Trump Presidency turned Denmark's attention to France and Germany on security- and defense-related matters. Denmark and France share an active strategic military culture, characterized by the will and ability to conduct international interventions, and have shared operational experiences. Moreover, France has significantly increased its contribution and support for NATO, further aligning French and Danish interests.<sup>10</sup> Also, Germany is becoming a more interesting potential partner, albeit slowly. Germany does not share the same active strategic culture but instead has been passive in its security and defense policy, focusing on limited contributions to stabilization and reconstruction tasks. Nevertheless, Denmark and Germany have overlapping interests, especially regarding security in the Baltic Sea region (BSR). Germany is starting to take on a more active role. This creates potential for and an expectation of a deepening cooperation between the two countries in the future.<sup>11</sup>

Finally, Denmark participates in NORDEFCO together with the other Nordic countries. The relevance of NORDEFCO for Denmark has been debated over the years and complicated by diverging membership in NATO and the EU. Finland and Sweden are not members of NATO, and Norway and Iceland are not members of the EU. Danish interest in NORDEFCO has been rather limited until recently, but the changed threat perception of the BSR has changed this outlook to a certain extent.<sup>12</sup> Together with the Finnish and Swedish applications for NATO membership in 2022 and the abolition of the Danish defense opt-out from the EU, there is

substantial potential for increased Nordic defense cooperation.

### *Threats*

The current Danish Defense Agreement is from January 2018 and stretches until 2023. It represents a broad parliamentary consensus representing the views of the previous government (2015–2019) under Prime Minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen and the three major opposition parties. The agreement provides a clear picture of the threat environment Denmark faces, highlighting four issues:

- a challenging and assertive Russia in NATO's eastern neighborhood
- continued instability in the Middle East and North Africa that drives militant Islamism and creates the basis for terrorism and irregular migration
- increased activity and climate change in the Arctic
- threats from cyberspace can have serious security and socioeconomic consequences, and influence operations can challenge democratic principles.<sup>13</sup>

In fact, three of these four aspects are relevant to the security situation in the BSR and the Danish security and defense approach to the region. Denmark's perception of Russia as a threat substantially changed after the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014, the situation in Eastern Ukraine, and the nerve gas attack in Salisbury. In the most recent strategy for foreign and security policy, the Danish government points out that Russia continues to threaten its neighbors and actively undermines the European security architecture and democratic processes through various means, including cyberspace. The strategy states, "Russia has not changed its aggressive conduct in the Baltic Sea Region, and it is clear that the political leadership in Russia

wants a different Europe than the Europe built upon cooperation after the fall of the Berlin Wall.”<sup>14</sup> The Danish government describes the situation with Russia and the Russian attempts to undermine the European order as “serious”<sup>15</sup> and notes that Russia works against the Danish interest of maintaining the rules-based international order. This position was strengthened further after Russian aggression against Ukraine and the resulting full-scale war. Nevertheless, the assessment remains that Russia does not pose a direct military threat to Denmark because it is not seen as willing to risk a military confrontation with NATO, even though Russia invaded Ukraine. Indeed, the Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen stated, “I strongly condemn Russia’s attack. It’s a terrible and unprovoked act that goes against the [United Nations] Charter and International Law.”<sup>16</sup> The Danish government also deployed fresh forces to Eastern Europe as part of both the NATO Air Policing and the Enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) programs.<sup>17</sup>

The security situation in the Baltic Sea, North Atlantic, and Arctic is of direct relevance to the security of the Danish realm. It is in Danish interest to ensure free navigation in the BSR and to minimize tensions. Denmark’s location has a crucial strategic role regarding access to the Baltic Sea; together with Sweden and Norway, it controls the main route of access to the BSR, the Øresund, as well as the Great and Little belts. Also, the island of Bornholm (and the archipelago Ertholmene) in the Baltic Sea between Sweden and Poland belongs to Denmark and is the country’s eastern-most territory. Historic fortifications in Elsinore, Copenhagen, and Bornholm illustrate the enduring importance of geography for anti-access/area-denial (A2/AD), even though it is usually the Russian A2/AD capabilities in the BSR that are being considered.<sup>18</sup> Denmark would most likely not be a frontline state in a possible military confrontation with Russia but would instead serve as a troop staging area.<sup>19</sup> The North

Atlantic is of strategic interest to ensure the safe passage of NATO troop reinforcements from North America and due to its connection to the Arctic region, where Greenland and the Faroe Islands are both autonomous territories within the Kingdom of Denmark. The rising geopolitical uncertainty and the Russian military buildup in the region are thus viewed with concern about rising tensions.<sup>20</sup>

Contrary to other states in the BSR (especially the Baltic states), Denmark does not focus exclusively on the BSR, but rather on Russian political warfare in general (for example, cyber attacks and disinformation operations). Furthermore, the country’s security and defense policy is to a large extent focused on the North (that is, the Arctic and North Atlantic) and the Middle East and North Africa (that is, security concerns related to terrorism and migration).

## Danish Approach to Maintaining BSR Security

The 2018 Defense Agreement set the goal of increasing the annual defense budget up to 4.8 billion kroner by 2023,<sup>21</sup> and an additional agreement in January 2019 added another 1.5 billion kroner for 2023. This means that Denmark will spend 1.5 percent of its GDP on defense in 2023, compared to 1.2 percent in 2018.<sup>22</sup> These financial resources were meant to strengthen the Danish military’s contribution to NATO’s collective deterrence, support international operations, ensure the country’s national security, and bolster total defense (for example, cyber capabilities and rescue and emergency services). Yet despite this increase, under the last defense agreement Denmark would not have reached NATO’s 2 percent GDP spending target. First the national compromise on Danish security policy—agreed on March 6, 2022, in the wake of the Russian aggression against Ukraine—explicitly states that Denmark will reach the 2 percent spending target in 2033. While this provides a concrete

target to achieve the 2 percent, it is also criticized for not being fast enough considering the changed security situation. Instead, the country emphasizes its active contributions and high levels of involvement in a variety of international missions as its important contributions to NATO. While Denmark had parliamentary elections on November 1, 2022, and negotiations about the formation of a new governing coalition are ongoing at the time of writing (December 2022), the fact that these agreements are generally made by a broad parliamentary consensus means that the likelihood of any additional renegotiations before the defense agreement ends in 2023 is rather small. However, once the new government has been formed, negotiations for the new defense agreement will commence and most likely be a major priority in the spring of 2023.

The explicit goal of the current defense agreement is to ensure that “together with NATO, the Danish Armed Forces have sufficient potency, weight and robustness to deter and prevent other countries from attacking our allies—and ultimately ourselves.”<sup>23</sup> Already in 2017, then Danish Defense Minister Claus Hjort Frederiksen made clear that “as close NATO allies, [Denmark’s] security starts in the Baltic States.”<sup>24</sup> This clearly shows the Danish understanding that the measures undertaken are meant to deter Russian (and other) aggression, to avoid the “bang,” so to speak. For this purpose, under the current agreement that ends next year, a deployable brigade has been established, frigates are equipped with area air defense missiles, an anti-submarine capacity will be established, and special operations strengthened. Demonstrating that it is a committed and engaged NATO core member state is crucial for Denmark, considering that the country’s security is guaranteed by the Alliance. Hence, the ability of Danish forces to contribute substantially and purposefully to international operations is improved through increasing air transport capacity, the financial reserves for international operations,

and the Peace and Stabilization Fund. Additionally, a light infantry battalion was established to serve both collective defense efforts and international operations.<sup>25</sup>

If deterrence fails, there is a clear understanding that NATO’s collective defense requires Denmark (together with its Allies) to be able to defend the Baltic countries. The geographic position of the country means that it might serve as a staging area for troops and reinforcements, while Danish forces are deployed abroad. Thus, there is a need to strengthen domestic structures to protect allied soldiers, Danish territory, and crucial infrastructure. Consequently, the Home Guard and the Total Defense Force have been strengthened. While the negotiations for the next defense agreement have not yet officially started, a further strengthening of Danish capabilities and the country’s security and defense posture with a focus on the BSR and Arctic is expected.

### *Military Presence*

To help strengthen NATO’s deterrence posture in the BSR, Denmark is actively contributing with its armed forces. Denmark provides up to 200 troops to the British-led eFP in Estonia, together with France, Belgium, and Iceland.<sup>26</sup> Such a contribution was made in 2018, 2020, and again in 2022 with around 200 soldiers stationed in Tapa, about 70 km outside of Tallinn. In 2021, as in all uneven years, Denmark contributed with a smaller number of staff officers.<sup>27</sup>

Denmark also serves as a framework nation together with Estonia and Latvia for the Multinational Division North Headquarters (MND-N), with participation from Canada, the UK, and Lithuania. The headquarters is in two places: Ādaži, Latvia, and Karup, Denmark. Based on existing extensive bilateral cooperation between Denmark and the Baltic states (the so-called Brigade Project), the Danish division was transformed into MND-N in the spring of 2019, and

in October 2020 NATO approved MND-N as a NATO Headquarters and as part of the NATO force structure. Its main purpose is to support defense planning of the Baltic states, and the coordination of regional military activities, including eFP forces.<sup>28</sup> Similarly, in 1999 Denmark, together with Germany and Poland, founded a multinational corps headquarters in Poland, which later became part of NATO's force structure and today is known as Multinational Corps Headquarters North East.<sup>29</sup>

Additionally, Denmark regularly leads NATO's Baltic Air Policing mission.<sup>30</sup> Denmark contributed with 4 F-16 aircraft and around 60 personnel from September to December 2021 and again in early 2022. Denmark also participates regularly in Standing NATO Maritime Group 1 (SNMG1) and NATO Standing Mine Counter Measures Group 1. The Danish frigate *Peter Willemoes* participated in SNMG1 from January until the end of April as an extra contribution, additional to Denmark's planned contributions. Moreover, the country deploys one officer each to both the Latvian and Lithuanian NATO Force Integration Units and one senior adviser each to the Estonian-led NATO Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence (CoE) and the Latvian-led NATO Strategic Communication CoE.

Denmark is also part of the British-led Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF). Although seen as a supplement to NATO, it became fully operational in 2017 as part of NATO's Very High Readiness Joint Task Force.<sup>31</sup> In the context of the JEF and NATO, Denmark also has participated actively in a range of exercises focusing on the BSR over the past years.

After the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, Denmark took concrete steps to increase its contributions to NATO's deterrence and defense posture. The country got parliamentary approval to offer for deployment a battalion battle group up to 1,000 personnel; a frigate contribution; air force contributions, such as a surveillance aircraft, radar operators, and a mobile air defense

radar; support forces and staff contributions to NATO headquarters; and an adapted mandate for the use of force for deployed troops.<sup>32</sup> In autumn 2022, the Danish frigate *Esbern Snare* participated in NATO's Task Group 441.01, which is part of NATO's Very High Readiness Joint Task Force.<sup>33</sup> In May 2022, Denmark deployed an 800-personnel strong battalion battle group to Latvia to contribute to NATO's defense plans and readiness.<sup>34</sup>

## Total Defense

Denmark's multiple military contributions in NATO's defense and deterrence posture in the BSR are one way of addressing the threat of an aggressive Russia, but its threat assessment also pointed at Russia's cyber and disinformation operations and attempts to undermine the rules-based international order and European security. Therefore, Danish officials do not consider it sufficient to only rely on military tools in addressing such political warfare.<sup>35</sup>

In Denmark, *TotalForsvaret* (Total Defense) is a cooperation among four components: the Danish military, the Home Guard, the police, and emergency services. The origins of the Danish Total Defense can be traced to World War II when it became clear that the defense of the country could not rely solely on the military but also needed to include other parts of society. By coordinating civilian and military efforts, it aims to ensure the effective and balanced use of resources during a catastrophe, crisis, or war, with the overall purpose to keep Danish society functioning.<sup>36</sup> Total Defense has always been a part of Danish emergency preparedness. In the absence of a conventional military threat after the Cold War, it focused on how military resources can support civilian society in peacetime in case of large-scale accidents, natural disasters, and other catastrophes,<sup>37</sup> and on how military and civilian cooperation can support international operations in war and peacetime.<sup>38</sup> An example of this are the varying responsibilities given to the Home Guard, a volunteer organization. Part of



Danish Home Guard 1st Lt. Tim Dalvang Andersen instructs a 50-minute presentation on orienteering during the U.S. Army Basic Instructor Course at Nymindegab Camp in Norre Nebel, Denmark. Image by: 2nd Lt. Rebecca Linder (Wikimedia Commons). July 7, 2016

Denmark's armed forces, it is similarly divided into three branches: army, navy, and air force. Founded in the aftermath of World War II by a group of resistance fighters, the Home Guard served to support the Danish armed forces during the Cold War, with a clear focus on territorial defense. However, in the 1990s the focus shifted to include more civilian support functions in line with the changed threat environment.<sup>39</sup> Today, its main tasks are to support the military forces, both domestically and internationally, as well as the policy, emergency services, and other Danish authorities.<sup>40</sup>

The notion of Total Defense received renewed attention in the aftermath of the terror attacks on the World Trade Center in 2001 in Bali in 2002,

with a focus on unconventional threats. Traditional territorial defense had become less important and was replaced with a focus on international operations to defend Denmark from unconventional threats where they originated. Accordingly, the 2005 Defense Agreement focused on restructuring conscription away from traditional territorial defense focused on mobilization, as other skills and competences had become more important in the context of the fundamentally different threat environment in the early 2000s.<sup>41</sup>

Recently, however, considering the ever-changing threat environment, the focus has shifted again toward increased political warfare in the gray zone between peace and conflict as well as Russia's



assertive behavior. This is reflected in the move to establish a total force concept, *Totalstyrkekoncept*, as the organizational basis for integrating reserve forces into the established structures of the armed forces and Home Guard in 2014.<sup>42</sup> The Total Force concept and its integration of full-time employees, reservists, and volunteers allow the Danish armed forces a more effective and flexible way to collect, adapt, provide, and deploy the necessary competences to meet the different tasks and challenges covering the whole spectrum from peace to war.<sup>43</sup> Additionally, Danish Total Defense received renewed attention in the last defense agreement: an increased intake of up to 500 additional conscripts per year provides more conscripts for the national emergency preparedness service and the obligation to serve another six months in the Total Defense Force was expanded to 5 years after completing conscription.<sup>44</sup> If necessary, in the event of crisis or war, the Total Defense Force can be activated together with the Home Guard to undergo further security and force protection training. This includes an ability to call on former employees should the need arise. This is part of a larger initiative to strengthen the Home Guard's and Total Defense Force's ability to mobilize. In an exceptional situation, such as a large-scale crisis or war, the two forces could mobilize around 20,000 troops that could be deployed for host-nation support on 30-day notice,<sup>45</sup> signifying a return to traditional territorial defense focused on mobilization capabilities. Especially in the context of a potential conflict with Russia, it is crucial that Denmark provide host-nation support for the Allied forces, serve as troop-staging area, and protect Danish infrastructure at the same time.<sup>46</sup>

However, Denmark's new approach to Total Defense is plagued by several limitations, especially in comparison to other Nordic countries. The current structure is a set of ad hoc ministerial relationships rather than its own organizational structure. The approach is based on the principle of

sectoral responsibility, where each individual sector and its respective authorities ensure emergency preparedness in maintaining critical infrastructure and societal functions during a crisis or conflict. While the Danish Security and Intelligence Service (*Politiets Efterretningstjeneste*, PET) offers advice to the individual sectors based on its threat assessments,<sup>47</sup> there is no overarching organizational structure in place. Only the prime minister's office and its emergency response group<sup>48</sup> can change and direct the individual ministry's planning and prioritization. Additionally, it is characterized by a mismatch between the lofty political ambitions and limited financial framework: Risking "the Total Defense Force . . . being undermanned, sparsely equipped, and lacking the core military capabilities to fill its role in the host nation support operation."<sup>49</sup> For successful implementation of the new total force concept, it is crucial that a more specific political and legal framework is devised, preferably locating the responsibility for the Total Defense Force clearly with the Danish armed forces to establish clearer priorities and an understanding of its role and importance in ensuring Denmark's security and societal resilience in the future.<sup>50</sup>

Interestingly, the newest defense agreement also considers how to strengthen national emergency management in order "to utilize the full potential of overall resources and capabilities."<sup>51</sup> More resources in terms of additional conscripts and money have been granted. The emergency services used to have their own political agreements,<sup>52</sup> and their inclusion in the current defense agreement is another sign that the importance of a comprehensive, whole-of-society approach to contemporary security challenges has been recognized. Also, the agreement's considerations on the threat in cyberspace bridge the public and private space and exhibit a Total Defense approach. Danish society is one of the most digitalized societies in the world, making it dangerously vulnerable to cyber attacks on the public and private

sector and individual citizens for both political and economic goals. These attacks threaten to undermine the foundations of democracy. Defense in cyberspace must thus be “based on closer interaction between both the public and the private sector, with a view to enhancing the protection of critical national infrastructure, e.g. within telecommunications, energy, health, finance, and transportation.”<sup>53</sup>

There are two main Danish intelligence services: the PET as part of the police handling domestic matters and the *Efterretningstjenste* (FE) as part of the armed forces handling foreign intelligence. Additionally, there is the Intelligence Regiment (*Efterretningsregimentet*, EFR), which is part of the Royal Danish Army. To address cyberspace threats, the Center for Cyber Security was set up in 2012 as part of the FE.

The Center for Cyber Security advises public authorities and private companies on how to prevent, respond to, and protect against cyber attacks. Among its chief responsibilities are threat assessments; the supervision of the telecommunication sector regarding information security and preparedness; as well as the provision of information, advice, and guidelines regarding preventive measures strengthening cyber security. The center’s Network Security Service monitors Internet traffic and reports and assists in cases of possible attacks.<sup>54</sup> As part of the defense agreement, in 2018 the center created the Cyber Situation Centre under its existing Network Security Service, with the aim to provide a 24/7 situational awareness and serve as the national contact point in relation to the EU Network and Information Security Directive.<sup>55</sup>

Since 2015, Denmark has had a national strategy for information and cyber security. The most recent strategy from December 2021 aims to strengthen Danish cyber capabilities (in line with the defense agreement) through four strategic objectives: protecting vital societal function, improving and prioritizing levels of skills and management, strengthening the

cooperation between the public and private sectors, and participating in the international fight against cyber threats.<sup>56</sup> The strategy is to be implemented through 34 initiatives, to which the government has allocated 270 million kroner (about \$38 million).<sup>57</sup>

In terms of critical functions, Denmark has one of the highest levels of security in the world regarding its energy supply. It has been energy self-sufficient since 1997, and half of the country’s demand for electricity is met by renewable sources such as wind and solar power. The country also has some of Europe’s strongest supply links to neighboring countries.<sup>58</sup> Since 2006, Denmark has imported 1.72 billion cubic meters of gas from Russia through Germany. Until recently, Denmark resold the gas. Due to a renovation of Denmark’s largest gas field (Tyra Field) between 2019 and 2023, however, the country relied on this Russian supply to cover somewhere between 35 to 50 percent of the Danish demand.<sup>59</sup> The Tyra Field is expected to reopen in winter 2023/2024 and its production capability will exceed Danish demand. Additionally, Denmark is increasing its production of bio-gas and will resume its role as energy exporter once the Tyra Field is reopened.<sup>60</sup> Energy security has been the subject of a high-profile debate surrounding the construction of the gas pipeline Nord Stream 2, which serves to export Russian gas to Germany through the Baltic Sea. Since this pipeline runs through Danish waters near Bornholm, Denmark had the possibility to veto the construction of the pipeline through its territorial waters. After the Ukraine crisis, the Danish Parliament decided that security concerns and foreign policy interests should be a part of the planned project’s assessment, together with environmental and economic concerns. Under unofficial American pressure, Denmark resisted approving the route for 2 ½ years, but finally endorsed the pipeline in 2019.<sup>61</sup> In any case, even continued Danish resistance would most likely not have meant the end of the pipeline project, but a re-routing instead. With the opening

of the Baltic Pipe pipeline in the autumn of 2022, Norway is Denmark's primary source for gas.<sup>62</sup>

Despite the Center for Cyber Security, national strategies, and the country's (near) energy self-sufficiency, Denmark is challenged by the lack of a concrete definition of critical infrastructure, the principle of sectoral responsibility, and coordination issues. The debate about Huawei and the 5G network also highlighted the issue of ownership of critical infrastructure. Currently, Denmark has no answers to these questions,<sup>63</sup> but answers are urgently needed to ensure Denmark has the right tools to address political warfare and other threats.

Despite its weaknesses, the Danish approach to Total Defense has shifted in line with the threats the country is facing and returned to territorial defense and strengthening military and civilian cooperation. Denmark's contemporary Total Defense addresses the new security challenges in two ways: deterrence and response. Total defense increases "deterrence by denial" by strengthening society's resilience and contributes to deterrence through punishment by mobilizing larger forces and offensive capabilities. In addition, reaction capabilities to such attacks are improved, mitigating their effects on society. However, to ensure its security in the future, Denmark should test its new Total Defense set-up with exercises. Likewise, it is crucial that Denmark continues to strengthen and streamline cooperation and coordination between the different sectors and respective authorities.

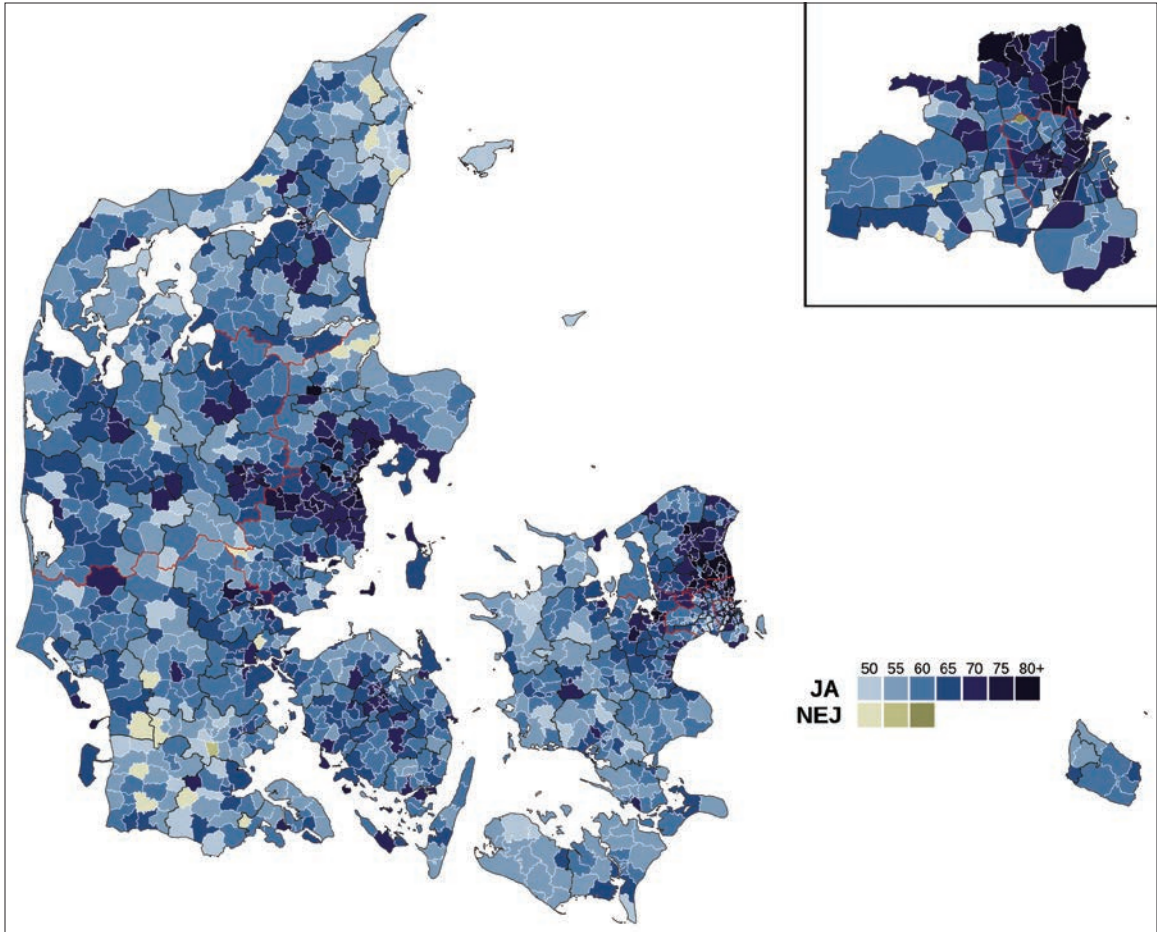
## The Effect of the Russian Invasion of Ukraine on Denmark

Denmark assists Ukraine with both substantial financial humanitarian aid (so far over 650 million kroner through a variety of measures) and military equipment, such as anti-tank weapons, security equipment, first-aid kits, and a mobile hospital. Already before the Russian invasion, the Danish military was involved with instructors, advisers,

officers, and interpreters in training and advising Ukrainian forces under the Canadian-led Operation *Unifier* and the British-led Operation *Orbital*.<sup>64</sup> While the training on Ukrainian territory was suspended, Denmark contributes to a British-led training project for Ukrainian recruits and will also assist Ukraine by training Ukrainian soldiers in Denmark.<sup>65</sup>

A short time after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the Center for Cyber Security came out with a warning about the possibility of increased cyber attacks in the context of the war between Russia and Ukraine and requested Danish companies to strengthen their IT security. In May 2022 the Center raised the level of threat for a destructive cyber attack against Denmark to medium, after cyber attacks had been reported by European NATO Allies.<sup>66</sup> The Center also indicates that any escalation of the conflict toward a military confrontation between NATO and Russia would increase the threat significantly.<sup>67</sup>

On the political level a significant change happened with the *National Compromise on Danish Security Policy* from March 6, 2022, mentioned above. In the agreement the Danish government and a broad majority of parties represented in the Danish parliament<sup>68</sup> agreed on a range of measures to ensure Denmark is equipped to handle the changed security situation and to address Russia's aggression. The measures include an increase in the defense budget of an additional 3.5 billion kroner per year for the next 2 years, the aim to reach the goal to spend 2 percent of GDP on defense agreed upon within NATO by 2033, and most significantly to hold a referendum to abolish the Danish defense opt-out from the EU.<sup>69</sup> As described herein, the referendum was held on June 1, 2022, and the abolition of the defense opt-out signifies a major change in Danish security and defense policy. This change in Denmark's security and defense alliances and the massive shift of European security caused by the war between Russia and Ukraine will have a major effect



A map showing the results of the 2022 Danish referendum to abolish the Danish “Opt-out” from EU cooperation on security and defense matters. Image by: Gust Justice (Wikimedia Commons). March 6, 2022

on the negotiations of the new defense agreement in 2023. Denmark has taken concrete steps and increased its contributions to NATO’s deterrence and defense posture, and it is widely expected that the next defense agreement will signify a further strengthening of Danish security and defense.

## Conclusion

The new threat environment—with an increasingly aggressive Russia that is clearly willing to violate international law—requires a comprehensive approach. This is reflected in the current defense agreement, which represents a substantial boost of

resources for Danish security and defense policy. It has strengthened the Danish contribution to NATO’s collective deterrence and defense posture and refocused the Danish approach to Total Defense by strengthening societal resilience and mobilization readiness.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine and resulting war has caused a significant change in the perception of the European security environment. Consequently, Denmark made the choice to abolish its opt-out from EU cooperation on security and defense matters, increased defense spending, committed to reach the 2 percent target in 2033, and increased its contributions

to NATO's deterrence and defense posture. In 2023, the Denmark's major political parties will negotiate the country's new defense agreement. It was already determined that the agreement will reach over a 10-year period, in contrast to the more usual 5 years of the past defense agreements. A substantial increase in budget and capabilities is expected, but its extent and the prioritization of tasks and capabilities remains to be seen. **PRISM**

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Douglas A. Livermore, "A Primer on Understanding the Threat—Russian, Iranian, and Chinese Political Warfare," *Small Wars Journal*, January 12, 2018.

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<sup>6</sup>Cecilie Felicia Stokholm Banke et al., "Europæisk Forsvarssamarbejde Og Det Danske Forsvarsforbehold" [European defense cooperation and the Danish defense opt-out] (Copenhagen: Danish Institute for International Studies, December 2019).

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<sup>14</sup>Danish Government, "Foreign and Security Policy Strategy 2019–2020," 12.

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<sup>64</sup> “Ukraine—støtte til træning og reformer” [Ukraine—support for training and reforms], *Forsvaret*, n.d., available at <<https://www.forsvaret.dk/da/opgaver/internationale-opgaver/ukraine/>>; “Danmark støtter Ukraine med 668 millioner kroner i humanitær bistand, donationer og mikrofinansiel støtte” [Denmark supports Ukraine with 668 million kroner in humanitarian aid, donations, and microfinancial support], Udenrigsministeriet, n.d., available at <<https://um.dk/danida/lande-og-regioner/ukraine>>.

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