Nordic Approaches to Total Defence and Comprehensive Security

Considerations for the Canadian Arctic and North

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Nordic Approaches to Total Defence and Comprehensive Security: Considerations for the Canadian Arctic and North

"The implications of our rapidly changing security environment make clear that we need to adjust our approach to defence," *Our North, Strong and Free* (2024) declares. "Our renewed vision is focused on preparing the military to meet these accelerating challenges, prioritizing those that most directly impact Canadians and Canada. It reaffirms that our insurance against instability and geopolitical uncertainty is a ready, resilient and relevant Canadian Armed Forces capable of defending Canada at home, ensuring security in North America, and contributing to an international order that is free and open, inclusive, stable, and governed by the rule of law."[1] Canada also continues to develop and advance "whole of government"[2] and "whole of society" approaches, acknowledging that "to address the complex range of threats faced in the Arctic, Canada must conceptualize security not only in military terms." Accordingly, Canada's recent *Arctic Foreign Policy* specifies that "security in the Arctic includes community security, research security, economic security, security against disinformation and any other form of interference and physical and digital infrastructure security."[3] This entails better internal coordination to strengthen national resilience to counter malign influence and activities of foreign powers, and to strengthen defence of critical infrastructure.[4] In Nordic discourse, this would be framed as total defence or comprehensive security.

This project assesses how Canada's Nordic allies perceive threats to and in the European Arctic and High North and how they conceptualize cooperation between the military and civilians to protect their countries from crises, conflicts, and war. As per the parameters of the contract, I begin with an analysis of threats to the Arctic that compares and contrasts the Canadian and European Arctics across all domains, discerning which sectors of security (military, political, economic, societal, environmental) are targeted and implications for the national defence and security community at various levels of analysis (domestic, continental, international). This includes a broad range of hybrid or "grey zone" threats, some of which apply across the Canadian and Nordic Arctics, and some particular to specific sub-regions. The aspect of the project looking at threats in the Arctic, such as environmental disaster response and human security challenges, also elucidates how the Nordic countries bring comprehensive approaches to managing challenges across the defence-security-safety mission spectrum.

Subsequently, I provide an overview of Nordic approaches to security, and particularly concepts of total defence and comprehensive security. This is based on a comprehensive literature review focused on official policies and academic and think tank literature, as well as presentations by and conversations with Nordic colleagues at the Arctic Security Conference in Oslo in September 2025; the Arctic Circle Assembly in Reykjavik in October 2025; a private roundtable hosted by the Macdonald-Laurier Institute (MLI) on the future of Swedish–Canadian co-operation in the Arctic with His Majesty King Carl XVI Gustaf of Sweden and other Swedish officials in Ottawa in November 2025; the third annual Gauntlet Seminar co-hosted in Ottawa with the Norwegian Embassy in Canada in

November 2025; the Northern Maritime Security: Threats In, To, and Through the Arctic and North Atlantic Workshop in Ottawa co-hosted by the North American and Arctic Defence and Security Network (NAADSN), the Canadian Maritime Security Network (CMSN), the Kingdom of Denmark's Embassy in Canada, and the Government of Greenland in November 2025; the Hybrid Threats in the Arctic Workshop in Ottawa in November 2025; and planning meetings for the Nordic-Canada Symposium in Ottawa in January 2026.

While Russia or China remain unlikely to seek or engage in direct military confrontation in the Canadian Arctic or European High North, the regions remain vulnerable to adversarial activities that seek to destabilize or weaken the Arctic states through other means, including hybrid and/or or "grey zone" threat activities that fall "below the threshold" of provoking the activation of Article 5 of the NATO Treaty. Short of war or a military attack, these synchronized actions are deployed in an attempt to increase the sense of existential threat within the target audience/community, by "exploit[ing] vulnerabilities or opportunities [and] to undermine the opponent's decision-making process, while maintaining a degree of deniable plausibility."[5] They deliberately target democratic states' and institutions' systemic vulnerabilities, exploiting thresholds of detection and attribution. Although individual activities (like information or intelligence gathering) may not constitute security threats in and of themselves, they can be combined with other activities to intentionally exacerbate instability to a state or destabilize society.[6] Over time, such activities can combine to exacerbate insecurity and influence geopolitical power dynamics.[7]

"Building resilience" has become a buzz phrase among policymakers and strategic analysts, alongside concepts of "whole-of-government," "whole-of-society," "total defence," and "comprehensive security." In Nordic approaches to defending sovereignty in the Arctic and High North, however, these concepts have taken tangible form. As this report reinforces, the Nordic countries recognize the importance of societal resilience and of carefully calibrated civil-military relations in their defence and preparedness strategies.[8] "Total defence is the sum of the country's civilian and military resources, which work together to prevent and manage crises, armed conflicts and war," the Norwegian Directorate for Civil Project (DSB) defines. It is thus "part of civil-military cooperation, but is limited to include mutual support and cooperation between the Armed Forces and civil society related to security policy crises and armed conflict."[9] This study offers a pioneering foray into how the Nordic countries build resilience and preparedness through military and other government capabilities, private sector partners, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and other partners. It ends with a preliminary list of areas where Canada might learn from its Nordic allies to improve its structures and capacities to address evolving Arctic security threats and resilience gaps.

Conceptualizing the Canadian Arctic Threat Environment

ONSAF places unprecedented attention on the Canadian Arctic, declaring that "the most urgent and important task we face is asserting Canada's sovereignty in the Arctic and northern regions, where the changing physical and geopolitical landscapes have created new threats and vulnerabilities to Canada and Canadians." I have argued in previous work that it is helpful, when conceptualizing Arctic security, to distinguish between threats "through, to, and in" the region[10] –

language that is officially adopted in this defence policy. Canada's major investments in NORAD modernization are largely dedicated to enhancing our ability to detect, deter, and if necessary defeat adversarial delivery systems that would pass through the Arctic en route to targets further south in North America.

For the purposes of this special report, I focus on threats *to* and *in* the Arctic – those that actually target the region or emerge from dynamics already there. Although the Trump Administration has declared its intention to make Canada the 51st state, thus representing a political sovereignty threat, and its coercive aspirations to annex Greenland against the will of Greenlanders undermine its credibility as a reliable ally, it is beyond the scope of this paper to consider a US military invasion of Canada.[11] Neither Russia nor China, for their parts, have the means or intent to conquer the Canadian Arctic for reasons that I have argued elsewhere. Furthermore, while the regional and global threat environments have changed since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, most official threat assessments do not suggest that Russia is more likely to attack the Canadian Arctic or North using kinetic military forces outside of a general war scenario.[12]

Security threats *to* the Canadian Arctic emanate from outside the region but target or affect the region itself. It is this category of threat that is often misconstrued in social and news media that conjures images of a Russian or Chinese invasion seeking to usurp Canadian sovereignty or steal our Arctic resources.[13] While the CAF must be prepared to defend all of Canada in case of a direct "kinetic" attack, more sober analysis suggests that our Arctic is not at acute risk of this happening in the immediate term. Instead, the threats to our Arctic tend to take the form of "grey zone" or hybrid threats, below the threshold of armed conflict, which seek to disrupt systems, undermine democratic institutions, and sow or exacerbate divisions amongst Canadians.[14] The European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats defines "grey zone" or hybrid threats as:

> An action conducted by state or non-state actors, whose goal is to undermine or harm a target by influencing its decision-making at the local, regional, state or institutional level. Such actions are coordinated and synchronized and deliberately target democratic states' and institutions' vulnerabilities. Activities can take place, for example, in the political, economic, military, civil or information domains. They are conducted using a wide range of means and designed to remain below the threshold of detection and attribution.[15]

By combining conventional and unconventional means (such as disinformation and interference in political debates or elections, disrupting or attacking critical infrastructure, cyber operations, and asymmetric military means), hybrid actors use ambiguity and intermediaries (or proxy actors) to make it difficult to attribute responsibility and respond. As a recent report notes, "resilience and defence against hybrid threats in Canada require greater integration of military and non-military discussions on Arctic vulnerabilities to better understand how they interact and expose Canadians to harm caused by adversarial states that seek opportunities to advance their interests in the Arctic to Canada's detriment."[16]

Despite a growing U.S. preoccupation with Chinese icebreakers or even submarines as real or potential capabilities designed to challenge Canada's Arctic sovereignty or launch attacks against the Arctic states,[17] it is important to remember that China's ability to project conventional military power into the Canadian Arctic remains minimal. It is likely to remain so, given the limited strategic

gains that it would realize by doing so compared to commensurate energies dedicated to other parts of the world, particularly in the Indo-Pacific region.[18] Apart from the speculation that China's naval expansion will support its ambition to become a "polar great power" (a concept that experts say is more nuanced that it might appear),[19] *ONSAF* describes various Chinese threats that are not primarily military: "dual-purpose research vessels and surveillance platforms collecting data about the Canadian North that is, by Chinese law, made available to China's military"; and its "expanding ... investments, infrastructure and industrial scientific influence throughout the Arctic region" (although this statement seems to overinflate the success of China's *attempts* to make these kinds of inroads in Arctic states other than Russia).[20] Recent incursions into the Canadian North by balloons and monitoring buoys also illustrate the need to enhance detection and enable responses to potential "hybrid threats" that blur the lines between civilian and military capabilities.[21] Accordingly, domain awareness is essential to ensure that foreign actors are not engaged in illegal behaviour in Canada's Arctic, which requires a Whole-of-Society effort to identify suspicious activities and pass along relevant information to the appropriate authorities at the speed of relevance.

The CAF recognizes that the threats to the Canadian Arctic invite a new approach to closing the gaps and seams in our systems that adversaries are exploiting. The *Pan-Domain Force Employment Concept* articulates the Canadian military's approach to competing with, contesting, confronting, and – when necessary – combatting Canada's adversaries who "are challenging us in the cyber and space domains as well as in the land, maritime, and air domains. They use information to sow confusion, mask their intentions, oppose our actions, and gain advantage over us. We must meet these challenges [by integrating effects] across domains and in the information environment." This approach also recognizes that military power alone is insufficient to deter and defeat the aggressive actions of Canada's adversaries, meaning that "the military instrument must coordinate more closely with other instruments of national power."[22]

Security and safety threats *in* the Arctic originate within and have primary implications for the region. Many of these relate to human and environmental security and are connected to climate and environmental change. For example, community first responders across the Canadian North often raise broader emergency management and community safety concerns, including the risks posed by fires, prolonged power outages, and other critical infrastructure failures. In particular, first responders flag the broad spectrum of natural and human-made hazards created or exacerbated by climate change: forest fires; unpredictable ice conditions; permafrost thaw risks; severe weather events; erosion, water level and ice flow risks; flooding; and myriad issues raised by increased outside human activity, including environmental pollution and the prospect of a major maritime or air disaster.[23]

The Arctic is warming much faster than the global rate, creating changes to the natural environment that affect the health and well-being of residents (both human and animal), as well as infrastructure and the economy. Canada's 2019 *Arctic and Northern Policy Framework* observes that "the qualities that make the Canadian Arctic and North such a special place, its size, climate, and small but vibrant and resilient populations, also pose unique security challenges, making it difficult to maintain situational awareness and respond to emergencies or military threats when and where they occur." Climate change compounds these challenges. "The effects of climate change are perhaps most pronounced in the Arctic," the Canadian Army's modernizations strategy notes. "Rising

activity levels in Canada's Arctic by state and commercial actors raise the potential for safety and security-related challenges," including "search and rescue operations, response to natural or man-made disasters, and response to actions by states with interests in the Arctic." The military is cast in a supporting role to other Canadian partners in a comprehensive Whole of Government approach, wherein the Canadian Armed Forces assist other government departments and agencies in fulfilling their mandates within the safety and security domains.[24]

While most strategic analyses of the Arctic stress the role that climate and environmental change will play in "opening" the region to the broader world, this must be counterbalanced by considerations of the heightened *constraints* that changing and increasingly unpredictable environmental conditions will have on operations in the Canadian Arctic. "Geography and seasonal changes in climate will affect the degree of risk to the integrity of sparse Northern infrastructure such as roads, airfields, port facilities, communications networks, or power plants," the 2013 Canadian Joint Operations Command Plan for the North noted. "The impacts of climate change are not only being observed from an economic vantage point but the environmental impacts will put enormous strains on how the CAF conducts operations in the north and will require a change in how operations are planned and conducted."[25] For example, permafrost degradation not only inhibits mobility but also affects physical infrastructure, thus exacerbating sustainment problems. The increased frequency and intensity of extreme weather also affects operational activities, while changing sea ice conditions, ocean currents, and temperature complicate acoustic modelling and other operational and strategic planning factors.[26] Consequently, the regional impacts of climate change over the short- to medium-term horizons are likely to exacerbate rather than alleviate operational challenges by increasing the level of uncertainty in the Canadian North and continuing to heighten the demand for CAF assistance in domestic emergencies.[27]

ONSAF also commits the Government of Canada to delivering its vision through collaboration "with Indigenous partners and northern communities to safeguard our security and assert our sovereignty" by "doing things differently—to an inclusive approach to national defence that recognizes that there is nothing to defend if we do not put our people first." To do so, DND/CAF will "rely on Indigenous expertise, experience and talent across the region." The policy update also emphasizes the value of working with allies to defend NATO's western and northern flanks, which builds from strength at home. While there is no direct reference to a "whole-of-society" approach, "total defence," or "comprehensive security" in *ONSAF*, its various elements and promotion of a "robust, world-class military and Defence Team that reflects the full diversity and talent that Canada has to offer" point in that direction.[28]

Framing the Nordic Threat Environment

If the Norwegian concept of "High North, Low Tension"[29] summarized the prevailing sentiment about the threat environment in the European High North for the first quarter century following the end of the Cold War, it is now *less* "low tension" than before. Any lingering notion of "Arctic exceptionalism," positing that the region's uniqueness makes it immune from broader geopolitical problems elsewhere in the world,[30] is a casualty of Russian aggression in 2014 and 2022. The Fenno-

Scandinavian peninsula (comprising Norway, Sweden, and Finland) has re-emerged as a geopolitical hotspot, with Russia intensifying both hybrid and conventional military pressure on what is now a unified NATO block on its northwestern front.

Russia represents the primary external concern for the Nordic countries, with the Kremlin's 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine catalyzing Finland and Sweden's accession to NATO and a significant refocusing of all the Nordic countries on conventional defence.[31] The Kola Peninsula remains Russia's most strategically sensitive military zone, given the basing of the Northern Fleet's nuclear submarines (the maritime leg of Russia's nuclear triad), and the Russian military are reported to have expanded its missile storage footprint and strategic bomber deployments and cruise missile launches from Olenya air base over the last year.[32] Satellite imagery from mid-2025 also confirmed the reactivation of Soviet-era airbases and new troop deployments in Karelia, directly facing the Finnish border.[33]

The accession of Sweden and Finland to NATO have altered the strategic geography of the Baltic Sea region and the Nordic High North.[34] Swedish Minister of Foreign Affairs Tobias Billström noted in April 2024 that "all countries around the Baltic Sea, except Russia, are now members of the Alliance. This fundamentally redraws the security map in our part of Europe. Sweden and Finland will allow an increase of NATO's operational depth and tie the High North, the North Atlantic and the Baltic regions more closely together."[35] In turn, the Nordic Allies acknowledge that Russia's war against Ukraine and hybrid activities against various European countries aim to revise the regional security order and dismantle the European democratic model.[36] Accordingly, Nordic defence cooperation in NATO has accelerated in tandem with Russia's growing aggressiveness in Europe and its militarization and "grey zone" activities in the European Arctic and High North. For example, Swedish official documents perceive the Russian security threat in the Arctic as high and significant, a view that has intensified following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Swedish public support for joining NATO surged to its highest recorded levels that year,[37] and Sweden submitted its official letter of application to become a NATO ally that May – "a direct result of Russia's illegal, unprovoked and indefensible war of aggression."[38] Since that time, Swedish officials and security analysts, including in the Swedish Security Service (Säpo), explicitly identify Russia as the single greatest security threat, with the 2024 National Security Strategy identifying "an armed attack by Russia on Sweden or one of our Allies" as "the pacing threat for the total defence that is now being built up within the framework of NATO's collective defence."[39] The other Nordic countries' assessments reach similar conclusions.

Shared concerns relate to hybrid warfare and sabotage operation that intentionally erase any clear distinction between "peace" and "war," thus making detection and official response difficult. For example, intelligence services in Norway and Finland report the use of Russian fishing trawlers for underwater mapping and signal intelligence, and Russia has used real estate purchases near sensitive infrastructure and disinformation campaigns to attempt to influence local politics.[40] Nordic intelligence agencies also warn of ongoing Russian attempts to sabotage subsea communications cables and energy pipelines in the Baltic and Barents Seas.[41] Furthermore, frequent Russian electronic-warfare attacks have disrupted civilian aviation and maritime navigation throughout the Fenno-Scandinavian peninsula through Global Positioning System (GPS) and Global Navigation Satellite Systems (GNSS) jamming that demonstrate vulnerabilities in critical systems, pose direct

dangers to civilians, and seek to erode public trust in national safety.[42] Other escalations target societal cohesion and public trust, such as Russia's efforts to weaponize migration at the Finnish and Norwegian borders as a form of hybrid warfare designed to sow political division, undermine social stability, and demonstrate the inability of the Nordic states to protect their populations against "gray-zone" tactics.[43]

The military security of the Nordic countries is also linked to transatlantic security more generally, given that Nordic defence strategies rely on the "lifeline" that connects North America's military and economic power to Northern Europe. The GIUK (Greenland-Iceland-United Kingdom) Gap serves as the primary, high-latitude maritime chokepoint linking the Arctic with the North Atlantic, acting as both a gateway for Russian strategic maritime and aerospace forces to project power from the Arctic Bastion toward North America and as a critical defensive theatre for NATO. The resumption of extensive naval operations in the European Arctic has propelled the gap back to its earlier Cold War-level significance, forcing NATO to intensify anti-submarine warfare (ASW) and surveillance operations to track Russian submarines, protect underwater cables, and ensure the transatlantic sea lines of communication (SLOCs). Consequently, controlling this corridor is essential for defence of NATO countries in both North America and northern Europe.[44]

Within this overall picture, particular Norwegian and Kingdom of Denmark contexts warrant special attention. The Svalbard Archipelago, situated in the Arctic Ocean almost midway between the northern coast of mainland Norway and the North Pole, is an integral part of the Kingdom of Norway over which Norway exercises full and absolute sovereignty under the 1920 Svalbard Treaty. Security threats to the archipelago primarily relate to Russia's sustained hybrid warfare tactics and geopolitical maneuvering, aimed at undermining Norwegian sovereignty and testing NATO cohesion. Moscow leverages the legal ambiguity of the 1920 Svalbard Treaty—which grants Norway full sovereignty but limits military use and provides equal access to economic activities for signatory states—to justify its actions and challenge Norwegian jurisdiction. Key threats include the vulnerability of critical infrastructure, such as the undersea data cables connecting the islands to the mainland (one of which was cut in a suspected act of sabotage in January 2022), and ongoing information campaigns and diplomatic pressure that frame Norway as an aggressor. Russia also maintains a civilian presence in towns such as Barentsburg that intelligence reports suggest has become increasingly radicalized and is used for intelligence gathering. Furthermore, the archipelago's proximity to Russia's Northern Fleet bases and the critical "Bear Gap" shipping lane means that Russia treats any increase in NATO activity around Svalbard as a direct security concern. Accordingly, Svalbard is often depicted as a geopolitical flashpoint – and is a case study that falls beyond the scope of this contracted project as there is no analogy to Canada's Arctic sovereignty or security positions.[45]

The Kingdom of Denmark's status as an Arctic state is derived from the inclusion of Greenland and the Faroe Islands in the realm. While Greenland enjoys strong ties to the Nordic countries, its geographical location in the North American Arctic with its eastern coast directly facing the European Arctic across the Denmark Strait and Greenland Sea places it at a geostrategic crossroad that makes it distinct from the High North/Arctic parts of the Fenno-Scandinavian Peninsula. Politically, it is also distinct in terms of its "home rule" status since 1979 and the 2009 *Self-Government Act*, which

transferred new areas of domestic responsibility to the Naalakkersuisut (Government of Greenland) in Nuuk. Denmark retains control over Greenland's foreign, defence, and security policy, while Greenland manages most internal affairs – creating a cooperative framework where governance is undertaken as a partnership. Despite that constitutional framework, Greenland has steadily assumed more power and taken new initiatives in areas of security and foreign affairs as it seeks to assert more functional independence within the Kingdom. This question of responsibility and jurisdiction is important, as Nuuk continues to exploits its "Arctic advantage" in negotiations with Denmark, while "turning circumpolar events into strategic arenas for sovereignty games in the aim to move the boundary of what Greenland may do internationally without Danish involvement."[46] The recent threats by the Trump Administration to annex Greenland by "any means," although beyond the scope of this contracted research, pose a direct sovereignty threat to Greenland and the Kingdom of Denmark. The Trump Administration's hyperinflated rhetoric alleging Russian and Chinese "national security" threats related to Greenland, and related accusations that the Kingdom of Denmark and NATO are unable to defend the island sufficiently, have been declared as a pretext for seeking ownership of the island. This raises serious questions about the US as an Arctic sovereignty and security threat to its NATO Allies that are beyond the scope of the contract as originally conceived.

Comparing the Regions

Canadian Chief of the Defence Staff General Jennie Carignan has declared that "we can no longer rely on geography – what some have called 'our splendid isolation' – to provide the security our forebears enjoyed" in the Arctic.[47] It is important to not take this logic too far, however, and conclude that this renders geography as irrelevant. Distinct physical, political, and social geographies still factor heavily in specific domains, which makes the tendency in much of the general literature to overgeneralize "the Arctic" particularly problematic given that it is a diverse region comprised of distinct subregions. For example, although Canada and Russia are neighbours across the Arctic Ocean, they do not share a land border. Accordingly, both geography and geostrategic considerations mean there is no simple analogy to what has transpired in Ukraine when it comes to Russia's military threat to Canada's Arctic. Physical distance means that Russian hybrid threats to the Canadian Arctic are largely confined to the space, cyber, and information domains, with most Canadian attention directed instead towards Chinese activities in the economic, monitoring, and cyber spheres.[48] A similar logic can be applied to Greenland. For the Nordic countries, however, total defence must grapple with the prospect of Russian land, sea, and air invasion, given the proximity of their territories and susceptibility to both short- and long-range fires.

The Canadian and Nordic countries also face different physical operating environments. "The Arctic's North American and European sub-regions have vastly different operating environments," the US Department of Defense *Arctic Strategy* (2024) noted. "The former is dryer, colder, and sparsely populated with minimal infrastructure, whereas the latter, influenced by the Gulf Stream, is comparatively warmer, wetter, and more populous, with more robust roads, ports, and communications networks."[49] While Canadian Arctic waters remain frozen for most of the year and there are no year-round ice-free ports in that subregion, the situation is the opposite in the Nordic

Arctic, including Longyearbyen on Svalbard and various ports in Greenland that are open owing to the West Greenland Current.[50] In terms of human geographies, Inuit Nunangat (the Canadian Inuit homeland) is predominantly Inuit, such as in Nunavut where they comprise 86% of the population. In Kalaallit Nunaat (Greenland), the 50,000 Inuit representing about 90% of the population. The 80,000-100,000 Sámi living in Sápmi constitute small percentages of the overall population in their respective countries but constitute significant percentages of local populations in the northernmost regions (although the lack of official ethnic registries in Norway, Sweden, and Finland make exact numbers impossible to determine), although the overall number of Nordic residents in these areas means that they do not comprise a demographic majority as is the case in Nunavut or Greenland.[51]

The economies of the Canadian Arctic and the Nordic High North also exhibit fundamental differences in structural composition and integration into national transportation and communication systems, despite both regions being rich in natural resources and facing similar challenges from climate change. The Nordic Arctic is characterized by its deep integration into the diversified economies of its respective states, focusing on high-value, sustainable economic activities such as tourism, aquaculture, renewable energy, and advanced manufacturing. In contrast, the Canadian Arctic economy is largely driven by public sector employment and extractive industries. The Nordic High North is already well integrated into national rail, road, and air systems, and is transitioning toward a unified cross-border framework that seeks to enhance military mobility and economic resilience through strategic east-west corridors and joint infrastructure planning between Norway, Sweden, and Finland. By comparison, connectivity between Greenland and the Nordic countries remains primarily maritime and aerial, with container freight between Denmark and Greenland compensating for the total absence of inter-town road networks in the country. In the Canadian Arctic, transportation infrastructure is even more sparse, with no roads connecting communities in Nunavut, limited port and harbour facilities in the region, and many airports having gravel runways that can only accommodate specific aircraft.

These physical, military, political, economic, and human geographical contexts are relevant to assessing the defence and security threat environments in different parts of the Circumpolar Arctic, across various domains and sectors of security. Through the lens of total defence and comprehensive security in Canada and the Nordic countries, it is important to consider how different regions are potentially vulnerable to specific "grey zone" activities, and how threat actors seek to exploit distinct local, regional, and geopolitical factors. Furthermore, domestic political cleavages become crucial vectors of attack that have geopolitical effects and consequences, by attempting to weaken adversary states and their subsequent abilities to exert power outwards both defensively and offensively.[52]

NATO's seven baseline requirements for resilience also help to situate threats beyond the kinetic military sphere and establish how efforts to enhance civil preparedness and resilience (pursuant to the 1.5% of GDP commitment made at the NATO summit in The Hague in 2025) satisfy Alliance obligations. Article 3 of the North Atlantic Treaty encourages national resiliency by requiring that member states "maintain and develop their individual and collective capacity to resist armed attack." These requirements are as follows:

- **BLR 1 – Assured continuity of government and critical government services.** This includes developing a formalized plan, crisis communications, trained personnel to operate and restore critical infrastructure, and establishing a crisis management centre to ensure a civilian command and control capability.
- **BLR 2 – Resilient energy supply.** This entails secure access to energy, with diverse routes and suppliers. Redundancy should be built into these supplies with crisis management plans, trained staff, and secure monitoring systems. Single points of failure should be eliminated, and attention given to critical points in energy supply chains and how they interact with other sectors of the economy. How emergent technologies could compromise or enhance resiliency of energy supplies should be identified.
- **BLR 3 – Ability to deal effectively with uncontrolled movement of people**. This is based around a national plan to move more than 2% of the national population with food, water, shelter, transportation, security, and medical support.
- **BLR 4 – Resilient food and water resources**. This includes identifying and reporting contaminated food and water, a plan to ensure alternative sources are available, and a comprehensive contingency plan to account for a loss of labour enabling the production of both resources.
- **BLR 5 – Resilience to deal with mass casualties**. This entails having robust national supply lines for medical supplies, a database to monitor civilian medical capabilities, and early warning and reporting system to alert the population of mass casualties.
- **BLR 6 – Resilient civil communications systems**. This calls for access to secure and reliable communications infrastructure even during conflict. This infrastructure is to be protected against intrusion and disruption, which means building redundancies to respond quickly to failures.
- **BLR 7 – Resilient civil transportation systems**. This calls for national regulation of transport in the event of crisis or conflict, including civil-military coordination for military use of these systems.[53]

The NATO seven baseline requirements for resilience provide a standardized framework for member states to maintain essential societal functions during crises, serving as the functional foundation for a Total Defence model that integrates military and civilian assets. By synchronizing these requirements with the broader concept of Comprehensive Security, nations ensure a whole-of-society response that bridges the gap between frontline defense and community-level endurance.

Finland

In 2023, Minister Tavio framed the "Russian war of aggression against Ukraine" as central to "the return of geopolitical tensions," noting that it has accelerated great power competition and polarization. This great power competition has had "a significant impact on the Finnish security,

economy, technology, security of supply, industry and trade," presenting challenges to Finnish foreign and security policy by contributing to "the crumbling of the rules-based world order" and creating obstacles to free trade.[54] Many of these challenges apply globally, but Finland's long border with Russia means that they have more immediate implications for it than for most other European states.

Finland's perception of the Arctic region has changed significantly since the 2022 invasion of Ukraine. The crumbling of the rules-based order and intensifying great power competition led to the country's ascension to NATO in April 2023, the rapid expansion of its military spending, and the invitation to allied powers to establish bases in northern Finland.[55] Minister Tavio's 2023 speech to the Annual Meeting of Heads of Mission, for instance, described this "return of geopolitical tensions," strategic great power rivalry, and "global polarisation, increasing tensions between the great powers and technological race" as factors that "have a significant impact on the Finnish security, economy, technology, security of supply, industry and trade."[56] The region is therefore "more vulnerable" because of Russia's behaviour and because it is attracting a broader global interest while losing some of its cooperative nature.[57] As such, although Finland wants to keep the region cooperative and rules-based it also recognizes that the Arctic is being pulled into wider tensions.[58]

Finnish policy therefore characterizes the Arctic as both exceptional and endangered. The Ministry for Foreign Affairs' Arctic and Antarctic cooperation overview describes the Arctic as "still one of the purest and most pristine regions in the world" but one that is "facing rapid and partly controversial changes."[59] These changes are linked to climate change and its regional impacts, the new logistics opportunities presented by melting sea ice, the tension with Russia, and the region's natural resources, which have made the Arctic "increasingly interesting, but also more vulnerable on the international arena."[60] This framing suggests that Finland sees the Arctic as a globalized risk and opportunity space in which environmental, health, economic, and geopolitical dynamics intersect. The role played by the Sámi also features heavily in this vision. Finland makes it plain that the well-being of the region's inhabitants is a strategic priority and that broader Sámi rights are central to regional policy.[61]

Within the domain of total defence, Finland maintains a formidable deterrent posture characterized by one of Europe's largest conscript-based reserve forces and extensive civil-military integration. Having never demobilized its strong military forces after the end of the Cold War, Finland boasts one of the most capable armed forces on the European continent. Defence spending is projected to reach at least 3% of GDP by 2029 to fund major modernization efforts, including the delivery of the first F-35A Lightning II fighters.[62] This military capacity is supported by dedicated civil defence infrastructure, including a nation-wide network of 50,000 bedrock shelters capable of housing over 80% of the population. Since joining NATO, Finland has increasingly integrated this national resilience model into the Alliance's northern flank, advocating for a "360-degree" European preparedness union based on its own principles of cross-administrative cooperation and mandatory strategic stockpiling.[63]

Conscription, established as a constitutional obligation under Article 127, serves as the fundamental cornerstone of the country's Total Defence. Finland's model, which dates back to the end of the nineteenth century (when Finland was still an autonomous Grand Duchy of the Russian

Empire), is designed to maintain a massive reserve to protect territorial integrity while minimizing peacetime standing costs. Mandatory for male citizens between the ages of 18 and 60, and open to female volunteers since 1995, the system provides high-quality military training for periods of 165, 255, or 347 days depending on the complexity of the assigned role. Following initial service, conscripts are transferred to an auxiliary reserve with its upper age limit for mobilization recently extended from 60 to 65 years (as of 1 January 2026), thereby increasing the potential pool of trained personnel to approximately one million citizens.[64] The model enjoys high levels of political and public support,[65] and recent legislative updates have provided legal clarity for "gender-recognized individuals" (people who have changed their gender) to align with the Finnish *Act on Legal Recognition of Gender* (2023), as well as merging upper secondary student health checks with pre-conscription examinations to improve the early monitoring of youth well-being and to facilitate the transition into service.[66] The Finnish government has also announced that it will pilot joint call-ups whereby by men and women in an age cohort will be invited to the same informational events, seeking that this will encourage higher female voluntary enlistment.[67]

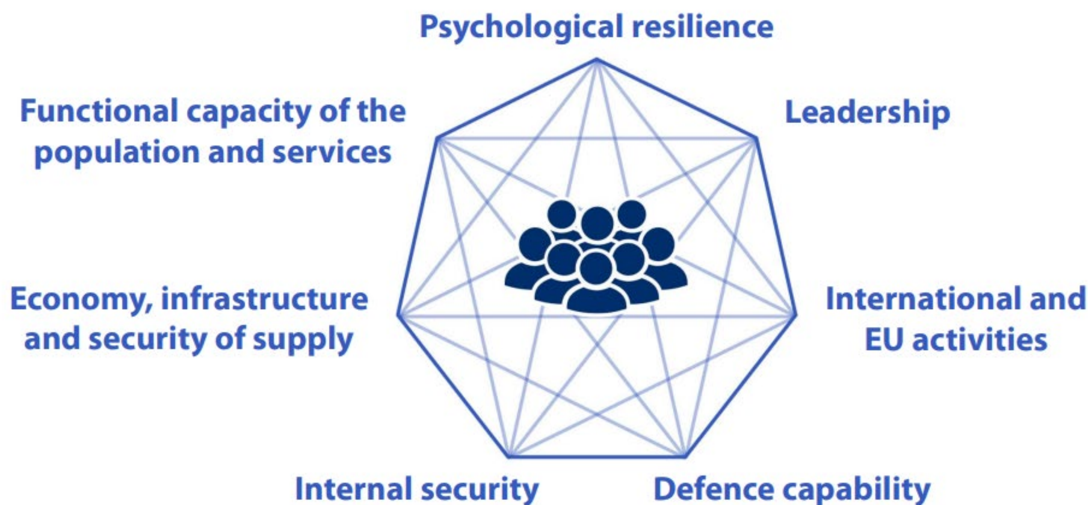

Figure 1: Vital Functions of Society. *Source:* Turvallisuuskomitea, "Security Strategy for Society" (2025).

The Finnish approach to comprehensive security (*kokonaisturvallisuus*) is defined by a deeply institutionalized "whole-of-society" framework that treats national resilience as a permanent, cross-sectoral ecosystem rather than a temporary emergency posture. Finland's *Security Strategy for Society* (SSS) model synchronizes the activities of government authorities, the private sector, NGOs, and individual citizens to safeguard seven vital functions: leadership; international and EU activities;

defense capability; internal security; economy, infrastructure and security of supply; functional capacity of the population; and psychological resilience.[68] Last updated by the Finnish Government in January 2025 (in its fifth revision since 2003), the current iteration places a new, explicit emphasis on response to disruptions and crises alongside traditional preparedness. This expanded focus includes "all-hazard" readiness, addressing traditional military threats alongside hybrid challenges like cyber warfare, climate-induced risks, and systemic supply chain vulnerabilities. It also heightens the role of the individual and household, insisting that a secure Finland requires every citizen to possess the skills and attitude to care for their own household (such as maintaining at least a 72-hour supply of food and water) to build national resilience.[69]

The National Risk Assessment serves as the foundation of preparedness outlined in the SSS. Conducted through broad-based collaboration between various ministries and agencies responsible for national security. "Our operating environment is constantly changing," the Finnish Ministry of the Interior (which participates extensively in the handling of national security matters and guides and directs the activities of the Finnish Security and Intelligence Service) observes. "These changes are reflected in different policy sectors, which is why the actions of only one ministry or government agency are not sufficient to protect national security." Accordingly, the government highlights the imperative for continuous cooperation on national security issues, such as ensuring that legislation is up-to-date and sharing a current, common situation picture amongst actors.[70]

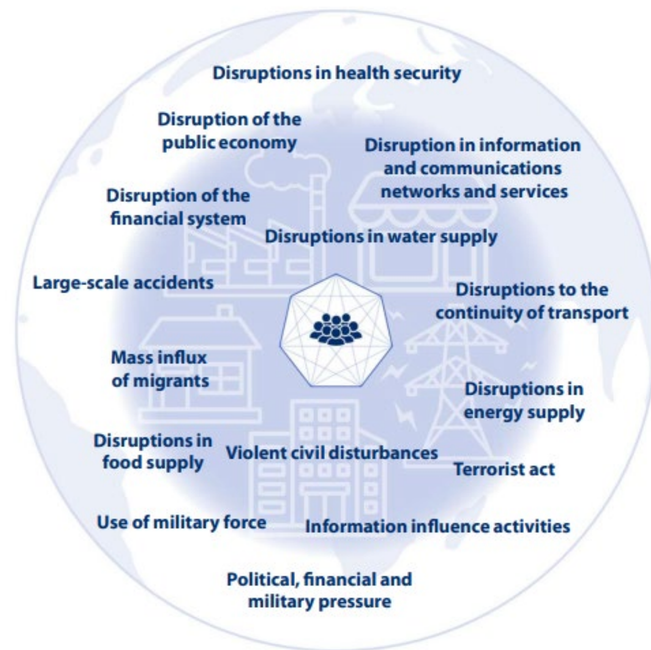

Figure 2: Threats and Risks. *Source:* Turvallisuuskomitea, "Security Strategy for Society" (2025).

Although Finland maintains that it does not currently face a military threat, the risks of hybrid influence activities against Finland have increased in the forms of information influence, disruption of critical infrastructure, cyber-attacks, and instrumentalized migration.[71] Because most of Finland's critical infrastructure is privately owned and operated, the government cooperates closely across sectors pursuant to the 2025 *Act on the Protection of Infrastructure Critical to Society and on the Improvement of Resilience* which aims to ensure that essential services operate with as few disruptions as possible in all circumstances. The legislation governs eleven sectors: energy, transport, banking, financial market infrastructure, health, drinking water, wastewater, digital infrastructure, public administration, space, and the production, processing and distribution of

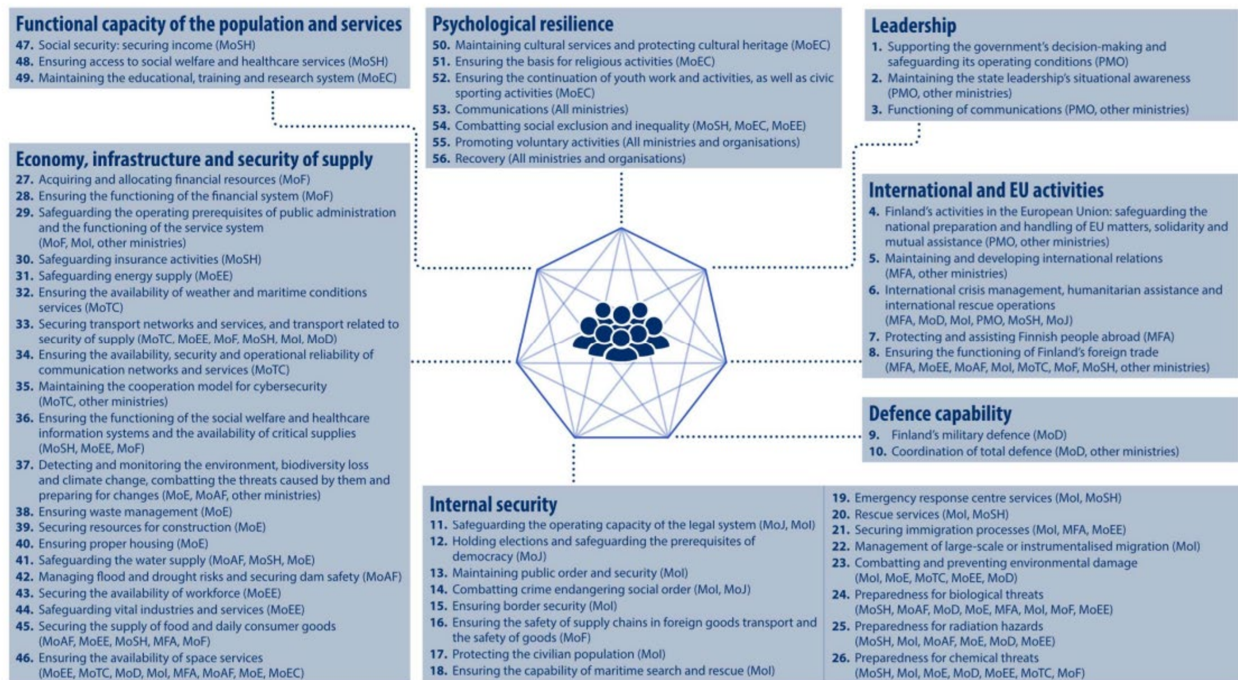

Figure 3: Allocation of Lead Responsibilities across the Finnish Government. *Source:* Turvallisuuskomitea, "Security Strategy for Society" (2025).

food.[72] Ministries are responsible for identifying critical entities in their sectors, with the risk assessment of critical infrastructure and implications for societal resilience not made public but informing national planning.[73]

Finland's approach to countering disinformation is grounded in its comprehensive security model, which treats information resilience as a shared responsibility across government, private sector, civil society, and individual citizens.[74] Rather than relying on centralized debunking, Finnish authorities emphasize whole-of-society coordination and public education, recognizing that disinformation targets societal trust and democratic participation broadly, not only state institutions. Authorities actively monitor the information environment during crises to detect manipulation and support coordinated official communication, while integrating counter-disinformation efforts into the country's broader psychological resilience and national security frameworks.[75] Preparedness is further reinforced through training programs and long-term education strategies that aim to build cognitive resilience against influence operations.[76]

At the societal level, Finland prioritizes media literacy as its primary line of defence against disinformation, embedding source criticism and digital literacy into national curricula across all education levels and age groups.[77] Media education has been a state-funded pillar of Finnish schooling since the 1970s and is supported by non-governmental organizations, public libraries, and volunteer initiatives that provide hands-on digital skills training, particularly for vulnerable populations such as the elderly.[78] The National Audiovisual Institute (KAVI) coordinates media literacy efforts at the national level, while public libraries serve as legally mandated hubs for promoting access to information, democratic participation, and freedom of expression.[79] The Finnish

government also partners with the private sector to strengthen resistance to disinformation through the National Emergency Supply Agency's Mediapooli, which supports media industry preparedness and disinformation response.[80] Together, these measures reflect Finland's long-term strategy of strengthening democratic resilience by equipping citizens with the skills needed to identify and resist disinformation.

Sweden

"Overall, Swedish society's resilience is strong," the country's 2024 *National Security Strategy* notes. "Civil society plays an important role in Sweden's collective total defence capability and helps build community and trust, which form the basis of individual willingness to defend the country." Its core national security interests are: to safeguard Sweden's territorial integrity, "democratic form of governance, freedom, independence, sovereignty and freedom of action; to protect the lives and health of the population; to defend Sweden and its Allies against armed attacks and uphold its territorial integrity; to maintain critical supplies and the functioning of society; and to uphold its fundamental values such as democracy, the rule of law, and human rights and freedoms."[81]

Sweden's *Strategy for the Arctic Region*, released in September 2020, set targets for Arctic security and stability. "This development reflected Sweden's growing awareness that accelerating Arctic climate change was opening the region to increased economic extraction, including the exploitation of mineral and hydrocarbon deposits, and extending the navigation period for shipping," Stefan Lundqvist, a researcher at Swedish Defence University, notes. It also reflected a broader recognition of the Arctic's rising geostrategic importance "for both Arctic and non-Arctic states," resulting in "increased military presence and activity" which posed "security policy consequences" for Sweden. Acknowledging that deteriorating international relations had "repercussions at [the] regional level in the Arctic", the strategy identified "three overall trends" to be addressed by "relevant international mechanisms": increased competition for resources and navigational access; the growing "military strategic importance of the Arctic", exemplified by Russia's investments in its "bastion defence" concept and its "submarine-based second-strike capability" in Murmansk; and China's expanding strategic interests in the Arctic. Thus, while Sweden's 2011 Arctic strategy "focused on regional economic, environmental, and human security," Lundqvist observes, the 2020 iteration "leveraged the concept of state security – i.e., Swedish sovereignty and defence – conceptualising human security as a means to achieve the desired end state."[82]

Although the Russian war against Ukraine affects Sweden's security, the Swedish government assesses the risk of an armed attack against Sweden as low – but the general security situation is serious.[83] Lundqvist suggests that Sweden has relearned three lessons from the Cold War. First, armed conflict on Swedish territory will be associated with war on the Scandinavian Peninsula and in Finland. Second, Stockholm has awakened to the need for realistic threat assessments in its defence planning, Third, Sweden has revitalized its concept of Total Defence to maintain a sufficient level of social resilience to discourage Russian attempts to attack, control or exploit Swedish territory.[84] Sweden is highly alert to Russian intelligence activities, cyber-attacks, disinformation campaigns, and other hybrid threats aimed at destabilizing its society and critical infrastructure.

Furthermore, it remains concerned about Russia's growing military capabilities in the Arctic, especially its Northern Fleet and nuclear assets on the Kola Peninsula. "We must plan and prepare for a prolonged confrontation with Russia," Swedish Foreign Affairs Tobias Billström emphasized in April 2024. "We must counter Russia's expansion of power by constraining its influence, its freedom of action, and – ultimately - its ability to do harm."[85]

Figure 4: Swedish Total Defence. *Source:* Ministry of Defence, *Defence Resolution 2025-2030* (2025).

This has prompted the Swedish government to significantly increase its defence spending, expand its armed forces in the High North, become part of NATO Joint Force Command (JFC) Norfolk, and participate in joint NATO drills to bolster its total defence and resilience against potential Russian aggression. In October 2024, it introduced a comprehensive defence bill that allocated approximately US$36 billion between 2024 and 2035 to enhance military capabilities, focused on modernizing assets, strengthening readiness, and improving technologies (including space capabilities and satellites) that will serve as critical enablers in Arctic security. Highlighting NATO as a key security partner, the bill signalled that Sweden would assume a secondary role in the Arctic, with its primary focus remaining on securing the Baltic region.[86] Sweden also has substantively reformed its domestic administration to better respond to international developments, strengthen national security, and meet NATO membership requirements. It established a National Security Council, a ministerial post for civil defence, and a National Security Adviser position in 2022. It has also reorganized the Ministries for Foreign Affairs and Defence, and has introduced a higher regional level for civil defence with new preparedness sectors and emergency preparedness authorities, allowing it to act proactively and during times of heightened alert.[87]

On 17 December 2024, the Swedish parliament unanimously adopted the country's defence resolution (*Försvarsbeslutet* legislation) for 2025–2030, outlining strategic direction for military cooperation and defence capability development in both military and civilian spheres. This marks a paradigmatic shift in Sweden's security policy over the last decade from a focus on global challenges and crisis management operations to defence and deterrence in Northern Europe. The pledge to increase defence spending by 50%, raising it to 2.6% of GDP for military purposes by 2030, also marks a new phase in rebuilding the country's land forces (including expanding the selective conscription system reinstated in 2017) and civil defence, as well as completing naval and air force modernization programs. Additional civil defence funding will enhance support and coordination of the crisis management system to ensure uninterrupted crisis and wartime operations of energy services, food and water, healthcare, social services, transport, and law enforcement. The strategic direction also aims to bolster cyber and cognitive defence (psychological operations) capabilities,[88] and promises "a substantial reinforcement of Sweden's total defence, consisting of both military and civilian activities."[89]

The Swedish approach to total defence (*totalförsvar*) is a holistic security doctrine that integrates military and civil defence to safeguard national sovereignty and societal functionality. Reinvigorated following Russia's unprovoked 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine and Sweden's 2024 accession to NATO, the model operates on a "whole-of-society" mandate that requires all citizens (living in the country or abroad) and residents aged 16 to 70 to be available for national service during emergencies in one of three types of duty: military service, civilian service (such as rescue services or childcare), or general national service obligation. This includes Swedish conscription, which is a gender-neutral system. Reintroduced in 2017 after a seven-year hiatus, the modernized model mandates that all eighteen-year-olds complete an enlistment questionnaire, from which the Swedish Defence Conscription and Assessment Agency selects a portion for physical and psychological mustering. While the system is compulsory and enforceable by law, it is highly selective, prioritizing candidates who demonstrate high motivation and specialized skills. Conscripts typically serve for nine to fifteen months before being placed in the reserve until age 47, though recent proposals have explored recalling retired officers up to age 70 to address personnel shortages during this phase of rapid military expansion.[90]

The total defence strategy also has evolved into an "all-hazard" framework that addresses both traditional armed conflict and hybrid threats, such as cyberattacks and disinformation, by synchronizing the efforts of government agencies, municipalities, the private sector, and individual households. In a speech at the annual Folk och Försvar National Conference in January 2026, Minister for Civil Defence Carl-Oskar Bohlin noted that his budget had increased from SEK 2.7 billion in 2023 to SEK 13 billion this year, with plans to add SEK 20 billion annually to civil defence in two years. "Real money is what really distinguishes the civil defence of a few years ago that existed only in rhetorical figures and PowerPoints from the civil defence that is now growing strong in the physical reality," he emphasized:

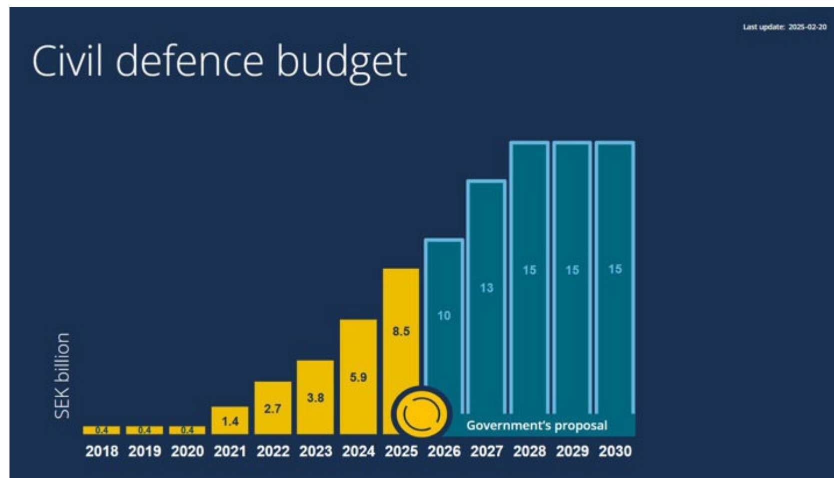

Figure 5: Swedish Civil Defence Budget. *Source:* Ministry of Defence, *Defence Resolution 2025-2030* (2025).

> Let me give a few examples. As we are sitting here, grain stores are being procured in northern Sweden. During the past year, central government ensured the capability and resourcefulness to be able to produce antibiotics within our national borders. Now there are stockpiles of medical products for care that cannot wait. We have increased stockpiles of primary goods for the purification of drinking water and begun reinforcing preparedness wells. We are now starting to support the municipalities by building up

> meal supply operations for crisis and war. We are initiating decentralised stockpiling under the Swedish Civil Defence and Resilience Agency, which will support the municipalities in meeting the demands of war. We are building up national reinforcement resources at the National Board of Health and Welfare, which includes new field hospitals. Several agreements have been signed between civil defence authorities and volunteer defence organisations on duties arising in the event of war. Mobile communications trailers to reinforce the mobile network have now been produced in series. The new national cybersecurity centre is now operational and will expand over the course of the coming year. The Swedish Food Agency has established a new depot for the national water disaster group. The banks have been required to draft contingency plans for processing cash. 12 000 protective shelter inspections were carried out in 2025, to mention just a few measures.[91]

In the context of comprehensive security, Sweden has shifted from a post-Cold War management of international crises to a robust posture of national and collective deterrence. By 2026, Sweden's defence expenditures are projected to reach 2.8% of GDP, with a strategic focus on modernizing both "muscles" and "resilience" through substantial investments in space-based surveillance, expanded conscription, and decentralized supply chains for food and medicine. This approach emphasizes societal resilience as a primary deterrent; by ensuring that critical infrastructure—such as energy grids and financial systems—can withstand disruption, Sweden aims to make an invasion or hybrid coercion prohibitively costly for an aggressor.[92]

This Total Defence integration is institutionalized through entities like the Swedish Civil Defence and Resilience Agency (Swedish: *Myndigheten för civilt försvar* or MCF), which serves as the primary coordinator for civilian preparedness and emergency management.[93] Renamed from the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency (MSB) on 1 January 2026, the agency now operates with a sharpened mandate that prioritizes war as the defining threat scenario.[94] The MCF ensures that critical societal functions—such as energy, water, and transport—remain operational during peacetime crises, heightened states of alert, and armed conflict. Working across all levels of government and the private sector[95] to protect the civilian population and maintain the national will to defend, Sweden's County Administrative Boards are divided into six civil defence regions, including the North region in covering Jämtland, Norrbotten, Västerbotten and Västernorrland counties. Each is tasked with ensuring that civil defence within the region has a unified focus by: coordinating the planning between public authorities; coordinating the planning between the public authorities and the Swedish Armed Forces; cooperating with the Swedish Armed Forces to answer questions about the total defence; and preparing civilian aspects of host country support. The Swedish Armed Forces' North region covers a similar geographical area, with its regional action plan covering: contingency plans and war organization; management and collaboration; supply readiness; support planning; and information and cyber security.[96]

Civil preparedness sector	Responsible agency
Economic security	Social Insurance Agency
Electronic communications and postal services	Swedish Post and Telecom Authority (PTS)
Energy supply	Swedish Energy Agency
Financial services	Swedish Financial Supervisory Authority
Basic data	Swedish Tax Agency
Healt, medical care and wellfare	National Board of Health and Welfare
Industry, building and commerce	Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth
Food supply and drinking water	Swedish Food Agency
Public order and security	Swedish Police Authority
Civil protection	Swedish Civil Defence and Resilience Agency
Transport	Swedish Transport Administration
Foreign trade	National Board of Trade Sweden

Figure 6: Swedish Civil Preparedness Sectors. *Source:* Swedish Civil Defence and Resilience Agency, *In Case of Crisis or War* (2026).

The Swedish total defence model is both broad and deep in its coverage of societal responsibilities. "To succeed, everyone must contribute: every municipality, every business, every citizen," a pamphlet circulated to Swedish businesses in January 2026 explains. "This includes all government agencies, all regions, and all organisations." Towards this end, there are twelve civil preparedness sectors, each with a designated government agency responsible for coordinating and leading efforts with it. By design, the Swedish military "both provides and receives support from civil defence, but is not part of any single civil preparedness sector." For its part, the private sector is considered a core part of the total defence team, given that "a functioning business sector, financial stability, and international trade are fundamental to keeping society functioning." Furthermore, companies "prepared to operate under the threat of war" are "also better equipped to manage pandemics, natural disasters, and other peacetime crises."[97] Similarly, Swedish civil defence emphasizes the importance of strengthening capacity within rescue services and taking measures to protect the civilian population to build "the population's will to defend itself and its resilience." are particularly urgent. The measures that have the greatest capacity-increasing impact in the short term should be prioritised. Initiatives already under way with the aim of strengthening capacity within these areas need to continue and be enhanced further.

The Swedish Government considers it necessary to increase capacity within municipal rescue services through training and investments in additional human and material resources. For example, a fundamental capacity to manage tasks such as identifying, marking out and clearing dangerous areas, and the capacity to signal, clean up and take other protective measures against nuclear or chemical weapons are needed. To enhance protection of the civilian population during an armed attack, the central government's assessment is that protective measures should be viewed as a cohesive whole comprising a warning system, protective shelters and spaces, evacuation and quartering. Existing protective shelters should be utilised, and it is therefore necessary to accelerate the pace of inventory and inspection.

Sweden's approach to countering disinformation is anchored in the concept of psychological defence, which frames society's capability to detect and resist malign information influence as a

core component of national security and societal preparedness.[98] Through nationwide public outreach campaigns, including crisis and war preparedness pamphlets distributed to households, Swedish authorities encourage citizens to verify information, rely on trusted sources, and avoid sharing emotionally manipulative or unverified content, especially during a crisis.[99] At the institutional level, the Swedish Psychological Defence Agency plays a central coordinating role by leading interagency cooperation, identifying and analyzing foreign malign information influence, producing threat assessments, and proposing countermeasures. The agency works closely with the Swedish Armed Forces, the Security Service, the Police Authority, and the Civil Contingencies Agency to integrate disinformation defence into Sweden's broader total defence framework.[100]

At the societal level, Sweden prioritizes media and information literacy as a long-term resilience strategy, focusing on strengthening critical thinking, democratic awareness, and public trust. The government supports nationwide coordination through MIK Sweden, a multi-stakeholder network led by the Swedish Media Authority that brings together public agencies, academic institutions, civil society organizations, and media actors to standardize best practices and expand public education efforts.[101] Collaboration with non-governmental organizations further strengthens outreach, particularly among youth, as demonstrated by partnerships such as the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency's cooperation with Fryhuset to promote democratic participation and crisis preparedness.[102] Together, these measures reflect Sweden's emphasis on combining centralized institutional capacity with broad societal engagement to reduce vulnerability to foreign influence and disinformation campaigns.

Norway

The citizens of Kirkenes, living on Norway's northeastern most coastline, well north of the Arctic Circle, find themselves on "the Frontline of Russian Hybrid War," reporter Anastasiia Lapatina observed in August 2025. "Civilian aircraft flying into Kirkenes no longer use GPS because of constant Russian jamming," she explains. "Russian fishing vessels, which the Kremlin uses for intelligence gathering and sabotage, regularly dock in the Kirkenes port" – one of three European ports that is still open to these vessels. Russian and Norwegian intelligence agencies frequently approach local residents for information. Formerly a "hub for cross-border cooperation between Norway and Russia," the city is now a "microcosm of Russia's constant hybrid warfare on Western soil."[103] Tormod Heier, Professor of Military Strategy and Operations at the Norwegian Defense University College, suggests that the hybrid threat level is particularly high in northern Norway, targeting the local or municipal level. "At the top of the Russian list of targets is not the Finnmark Land Defence [now Finnmark Brigade] or the Brigade Nord, but the trust between citizen and state," he asserts. "The social contract that allows us citizens to have faith in the authorities to bring us daily safety where we live. If we don't experience that, we will gradually lose trust."[104]

The Norwegian High North (*nordområdene*), corresponding to the part of Norway that extends into the Arctic, is an integral part of Norwegian security and foreign policy. The population is small but diverse, including Sámi (Indigenous People), Norwegians and Kvens, Forest Finns (people of Finnish descent in Northern Norway), as well as Russians and other minorities and immigrants. The region

plays a central role in NATO defence, both through maritime access and control in the Norwegian and Barents Seas and through its function as a critical overland corridor enabling "railroad reach" into northern Sweden and Finland in the event of disruption or blockade in the Baltic Sea.[105] While the corridor constitutes an attractive target due to its strategic value, the enlargement of NATO to include Finland and Sweden alters the deterrence calculus. Any kinetic attack on this infrastructure as part of Russia's bastion defence strategy in the Kola Peninsula would directly implicate three NATO members—Norway, Sweden, and Finland—thereby raising the threshold for overt military action and keeping the immediate risk of direct attack relatively low. Nevertheless, the continued reliance on fragile, non-redundant rail and cross-border connections represents a persistent vulnerability below the threshold of armed conflict, where disruption, coercion, and pressure can occur without triggering collective defence mechanisms.[106]

Norway articulates the need to strengthen preparedness, situational awareness, and response capacity the Norwegian High North, in collaboration with Allies, to adapt to the realities of both "total defence" and "total preparedness."[107] Its posture is backed by a historic increase in defence spending, projected to reach 3.4% of GDP in 2026, focused on strengthening "three lines of effort": robust national defence; active participation in NATO collective security; and bilateral reinforcement arrangements with key allies like the US and UK. Towards this end, Oslo proposes to increase defence spending by 600 billion NOK between 2025 and 2036, to a total of 1624 billion NOK. Major priorities include a new maritime surface fleet to enhance maritime security and situational awareness in Arctic waters, along with new undersea, intelligence, and digital and space-based surveillance in the High North, stronger air defence and drone capabilities, and growth and enhancement of the Army and Home Guard.[108] The overall Norwegian effort also involves integrating both civilian and military and civilian resources to enhance maritime domain awareness, including monitoring ship traffic through the Northern Sea Route and areas off the Norwegian coast, including movements of the Russian shadow fleet and other vessels of interest.[109] In the border region with Russia, Norway also is improving infrastructure, border controls, sensor and surveillance systems, and mobility in collaboration with its Swedish and Finnish Allies.

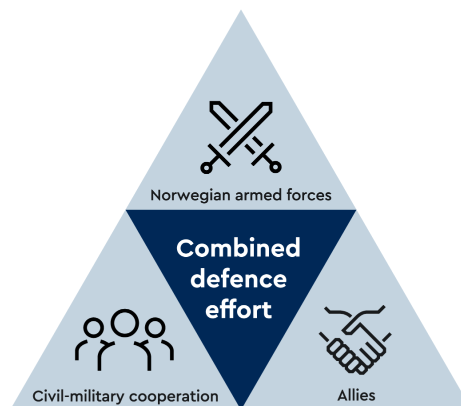

Figure 7: The Norwegian Defence Concept. *Source:* Ministry of Defence, "The Norwegian Defence Pledge."

In terms of direct military service, Norway operates a selective universal conscription model where all citizens, regardless of gender, are legally obligated to serve but only a small percentage is ultimately chosen. Every year, approximately 60,000 17-year-olds are required to complete an online self-assessment, after which roughly 20,000 candidates are invited for physical and psychological testing. From this pool, the Norwegian Armed Forces select about 9,000 to 11,000 of the most qualified and motivated recruits (approximately 15%-17% of the annual cohort) to complete a primary service period of typically twelve months, followed by a total obligation of nineteen months through reserve duties in the Home Guard until age 44.[110] This model, which marked Norway as the

first NATO country to introduce gender-neutral conscription in 2015,[111] focuses on elite selection and motivation rather than mass mobilization. This has produced a system so prestigious that young people often compete for a spot, and about one-quarter of the conscripts opt for a career in the armed forces.[112]

In the face of a complex threat landscape that transcends all sectors of security, Norway places a high priority on total defence (*totalforsvar*), encouraging closer civilian-military and public-private cooperation to address interdependencies in civil and military emergency preparedness and crisis management. First developed after the Second World War, the concept in Norway has concept has evolved into a "modernized Total Defence" (often referred to as Total Defence 3.0) that emphasizes mutual civil-military support in armed conflict as well as in peacetime and grey-zone crises. This framework rests on the principle that the military can support civilian authorities during domestic emergencies—such as natural disasters or pandemics—while civilian sectors provide essential logistics, healthcare, and infrastructure to sustain national and allied military operations during security crises.[113] The Ministers of Defence and Justice and Public Security explained in *Support and Cooperation: A Description of the Total Defence in Norway* (2018) that:

> There is a clear division between civil and military responsibilities that is built on solid political and constitutional foundations. The Government has the overall responsibility for upholding public- and national security. Civil authorities and agencies are responsible for ensuring public safety. The Norwegian Armed Forces are primarily responsible for the preservation of Norway's independence and sovereign rights, and for maintaining national security by defending the country from external attacks. However, civil and military emergency preparedness and crisis management are interdependent, and continuing cooperation is therefore a necessity. Civil-military cooperation is also important in maximising the utilisation of society's total resources, and thereby contributing to good social economy.[114]

This means prioritizing a whole-of government approach and extending civil- military cooperation to international cooperation and collaboration between governmental agencies, businesses, NGOs, and the general population.[115] The Norwegian Total Defence response to COVID demonstrated the need for a complexity-oriented approach to operationalize resource mobilization and management, with all agencies proactively sharing information and embracing joint decision making.[116]

The total defence system is now built around both "the worst-case scenario" in which Norway experiences armed conflict or war as well as a preparedness model designed around total defence resources being used to respond to natural disasters, major accidents, and other serious security incidents. "The preparedness measures in place since the 1990s and the fall of the Berlin Wall were based on deep peace," Minister of Justice and Public Security Emilie Enger Mehl declared in 2024. "That period is behind us, and we must now plan for a new era."[117] Accordingly, Norway's 2024–2025 *Report to the Storting (White Paper) on Total Preparedness* proposed a strategic shift towards a wartime mindset due to increased geopolitical instability and hybrid threats, focusing on three key objectives: ensuring civil society's readiness for crisis or war, strengthening resilience against hybrid aggression, and enhancing civilian support for military efforts. The policy statement mandates

greater inter-governmental coordination and requires all municipalities to establish or join a municipal preparedness council to formalize local civil protection duties. The White Paper focuses on established civil society actors such as rescue organizations (e.g. Hovedredningssentralen), the police, fire and rescue units, health and welfare organizations, and Civil Defence.[118] Furthermore, in designating 2026 as the "Total Defence Year," the Norwegian government has intensified efforts to mobilize the private sector, municipalities, and individual citizens through large-scale exercises like COLD RESPONSE 2026 and the systematic registration of over 13,000 "preparedness requisitions" for civilian assets.[119]

Box 1.1 Seven strategic priorities for the Government's work on security and preparedness

The Government will:

1. ensure settlement, good basic preparedness and vibrant local communities throughout Norway.
2. make better use of society's collective resources in prevention and crisis management, including involving the business and voluntary sectors in preparedness work at the local, regional and national levels.
3. strengthen cyber resilience and national control over critical infrastructure and strategically important undertakings, natural resources, property and assets.
4. strengthen the population's resilience and maintain a high level of trust in society.
5. strengthen security of supply, including food security.
6. ensure closer cooperation between the civilian sectors and the defence sector.
7. strengthen civilian capability to support allied military efforts within the framework of NATO and through enhanced Nordic and European preparedness cooperation.

Figure 8: Strategic Priorities to Strengthen the Resilience of Civil Society. *Source:* Norwegian Ministry of Justice and Public Security, *Total Preparedness* (2024), 13.

The Norwegian approach to comprehensive security is defined by a deep integration of national resilience into society, particularly through its strategic focus on the High North. Central to this strategy is the protection of critical infrastructure (specifically in the energy, maritime, and telecommunications sectors) which serves as both a national necessity and a vital contribution to European energy security. Its whole-of-society doctrine emphasizes economic security by reducing dependencies on non-allied nations and strengthening control over strategic value chains, while simultaneously fostering vibrant local communities in northern regions like Finnmark to serve as human anchors for national sovereignty. [120] Accordingly, the Norwegian Government is working to strengthen Norway's ability to counter complex threats such as cyberattacks, disinformation, sabotage, and the use of migration as a tool to exert pressure on the Schengen external border. Furthermore, the Coast Guard collaborates with other authorities to ensure responsible, integrated resource management and to uphold Norway's sovereignty and sovereign rights.[121]

The Norwegian government also recognizes that the population distribution across the country is integral to national security, particularly in the strategic region of North Norway. Accordingly, Norwegian total defence assigns comprehensive preparedness responsibilities along the entire crisis spectrum to municipalities, predicated on the idea that "crisis and conflict solutions need to be determined at the local level, where each municipality needs to determine its own needs according to its own contexts." In turn, this distribution of responsibility provides "sufficient flexibility with regard to the municipality's resource situation, own characteristics, and capacity for self-determination." During armed conflict or war, with military resources focused on kinetic operations,

the Norwegian concept emphasizes that the civilian population must "be prepared to a much larger degree to handle serious events on its own." [122]

While the Norwegian Armed Forces' Joint Operational Doctrine of 2019 (FFOD) claimed that total defence rested on the two pillars of state security and societal security, the Norwegian Government now complements this was a greater focus on the role of individual security perspectives to provide a more comprehensive approach to Norwegian security and defence. In Norway, and in Northern Norway in particular, hybrid threats are typically characterized as intelligence gathering (hacking and espionage), influence operations, and sabotage by the Russian Federation,[123] as well as "hidden investments in strategic business ventures, disruptions in supply chains, insiders in private or public enterprises, combined with increases in digital attacks."[124] Growing recognition that malign actors often target individuals with hybrid threat activities[125] has led to Norwegian state programs aimed at promoting civic literacy about how to understand, recognize, and withstand disinformation, as well as expectations that individuals will be prepared by ensuring access to water and food for at least seven days.[126]

Norway's approach to countering disinformation is grounded in a whole-of-government preparedness strategy that treats influence operations as long-term security challenges requiring civilian and institutional resilience.[127] In its white paper on total preparedness, the Norwegian government clarifies responsibilities across ministries to ensure coordinated responses to combatting disinformation, with the Ministry of Justice and Public Security overseeing national coordination and crisis management, the Ministry of Culture and Equality leading public resilience efforts, the Ministry of Defence addressing influence operations targeting the defence sector, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs managing diplomatic and international dimensions of disinformation.[128] Legal reforms further reinforce these responsibilities by criminalizing participation in foreign intelligence-directed influence operations, strengthening Norway's ability to deter and prosecute malicious actors that spread disinformation.[129] At the regulatory level, the Norwegian government has also strengthened media oversight, supported editorial independence through arm's-length public funding, and introduced EU-aligned AI regulations to limit manipulation technologies such as deepfakes and automated influence campaigns.[130]

At the societal level, Norway emphasizes education, media literacy, and public awareness as core defensive tools. National curricula now integrate democracy education, critical thinking, and source evaluation to help children and youth identify and resist disinformation.[131] Independent fact-checking organization Faktisk.no also plays a central role in verifying public discourse and delivering large-scale educational programming through its Tenk (Norwegian for "Think") Initiative, which provides digital literacy resources to schools and educators nationwide.[132] During election periods, authorities distribute targeted pamphlets to political candidates on cybersecurity practices, campaign data protection, reporting false information, and avoiding the spread of unverified content.[133] Together, these measures reflect Norway's strategy of strengthening institutional coordination, legal deterrence, technological regulation, and citizen resilience to reduce vulnerability to disinformation.

While Norway continues to enjoy relatively high levels of trust between governments and citizens, "centre-periphery" dimensions and tensions over questions of (in)adequate representation and

regional inequalities are present. Disconnects between groups of people, and between centre and periphery, and north and south, can be targets for influence operations, including disinformation campaigns aimed at further polarizing existing social and political cleavages.[134] Accordingly, the three annual Norwegian threat assessment reports released by the police security service (PST), the national security authority (NSM), and the intelligence service (*Etterretningstjenesten*) recognize how adversaries are targeting societal vulnerabilities.[135]

Critical societal functions and areas	Lead responsible Ministry	Executive agencies/ administrative levels	Other Ministries with responsibility
Electronic communications networks- and services	SD	National Communication Authority, Directorate for Civil Protection, The Norwegian Armed Forces, Ekom providers	MOJ, MOD
ICT security in the civil sector	MOD	National Security Authority, Center for Information Security, Data Protection Authority, National Communication Authority, Directorate for Civil Protection, owners of critically important ICT systems, digital records and archives, Agency for Public Management and eGovernment	SD, KMD, other Ministries
Satellite communication and navigation	SD	Space Centre, Coastal Administration, National Communication Authority, Mapping Authority	MOJ, MOD, KMD, NFD
Power supply	OED	Water Resources and Energy Directorate, The Power Supply Preparedness Organisation, Statnett SF, Statkraft, district heating companies, power- and network companies, Directorate for Civil Protection, Meteorological Institute	MOJ
Water- and sewerage	HOD	Food Safety Authority, Directorate of Health, Board of Health Supervision, National Institute of Public Health, Environment Agency, Radiation Protection Authority, waterworks owners (public and private waterworks), the Counties Governor, municipalities	KLD
Supply security	MOD	Agriculture Agency, Directorate of Fisheries, Directorate for Civil Protection, Petroleum Safety Authority Norway, the food industries, fuel industries, building- and construction industry, transport industry, Counties Governor, municipalities, The Norwegian Armed Forces	LMD, SD, HOD, ASD, MOJ, MOD, OED
Transport	SD	Roads Authority, Avinor, Bane NOR SF, Aviation Authority, Coastal Administration, Railway Authority Maritime Directorate, Ports Authority, The Shipowners' Association, Meteorological Institute, Directorate for Civil Protection, county municipalities, municipalities, transport companies	MOD, KD, MOJ, NFD
Financial stability	FIN	Central Bank of Norway, Financial Supervisory Authority of Norway, financial institutions, Banks	

Figure 9: Division of Responsibilities between Norwegian Ministries for Cross-Sectoral Areas in Civil Protection. *Source:* Norwegian Ministry of Defence and Norwegian Ministry of Justice and Public Security, *Support and Cooperation* (Olso: 2018)

Figure 9: Division of Responsibilities between Norwegian Ministries for Cross-Sectoral Areas in Civil Protection. *(continued)*

Critical societal functions and areas	Lead responsible Ministry	Executive agencies/ administrative levels	Other Ministries with responsibility
Health and care services	HOD	Board of Health Supervision, National Institute of Public Health, The Directorate of e-Health, Radiation Protection Authority, Medicines Agency, Institute of Nutrition and Seafood Research, Food Safety Authority, Scientific Committee for Food Safety, the Veterinary Institute, Labour and Welfare Administration, Directorate of eHealth, Directorate for Civil Protection, Civil Defence, the regional health enterprises, health enterprises, Counties Governor, municipalities, The Norwegian Armed Forces	ASD, LMD, MOD, MOJ, NFD
Law and order	MOJ	Norwegian Police Directorate/the Police, Police Security Service, Directorate for Civil Protection, Civil Affairs Authority, Director of Public Prosecutions, Directorate of the Correctional Service, National Courts Administration, Data Protection Authority, Directorate of Immigration, The Directorate of Customs/Norwegian Customs Service, the Norwegian Armed Forces	FIN, MOD, KMD, HOD
Rescue Service	MOJ	The Joint Rescue Coordination Centres, Norwegian Police Directorate/the Police, Directorate for Civil Protection, Civil Defence, Directorate of Health, regional health enterprises, health enterprises, The Norwegian Armed Forces, Industrial Safety Organisation/ industrial safety, Directorate for Civil Protection, Avinor, rescue helicopter service, air ambulance services, Counties Governor, municipalities, voluntary organisations	MOD, HOD, SD
Management and crisis management	MOJ	Police Directorate/the Police, Police Security Service, The Norwegian Directorate for Civil Protection, National Security Authority, Directorate of Health, Radiation Protection Authority, the Norwegian Armed Forces, Norwegian Broadcasting Authority, Mapping Authority, other agencies, the Counties Governor, municipalities	SMK, MFA, MOD, HOD, KUD, KMD, SD, KMD, other Ministries
Defence	MOD	The Norwegian Armed Forces, National Security Authority, Defence Research Establishment, Defence Estates Agency, Defence Materiel Agency	MOJ, SD, OED, NFD, HOD, MFA
Nature and the environment	KLD	Directorate of Fisheries, Coastal Administration, Norwegian Environment Agency, Meteorological Institute, Water Resources and Energy Directorate, Geological Survey of Norway, Petroleum Safety Authority, Polar Institute, Radiation Protection Authority, Agriculture Agency, Institute of Bioeconomy Research, Institute of Nutrition and Seafood Research, Institute of Marine Research, Food Safety Authority, Veterinary Institute, Directorate for Civil Protection, The Norwegian Armed Forces, Counties Governor, municipalities	NFD, SD, OED, KD, ASD, LMD, MOJ, HOD, MOD

Greenland/Kingdom of Denmark

The Kingdom consists of three parts – Greenland, the Faroe Islands and Denmark – and, by virtue of Greenland, is centrally located as a coastal state in the Arctic. "The three parts of the Realm share a number of values and interests and all have a responsibility in and for the Arctic region," the Kingdom of Denmark's official statement on the Arctic Council website explains. "Greenland is the world's largest non-continental island and is geographically located on the North American continent," but "in terms of geopolitics, it is a part of Europe." The Faroe Islands, "a cluster of 18 mountainous islands in the North Atlantic Ocean," are "well-positioned in the middle of the shipping route between Europe and North America, and a short flight away from major cities in Northern Europe." Denmark itself is the southernmost of the Scandinavian countries, and consisting of the Jutland peninsula and an archipelago of 443 named islands.[136] Given that both the Faroe Islands and Denmark fall below the Arctic Circle, I will limit my assessment to Greenland for the purposes of this report.

"The whole world's eyes are on the Arctic, and in the last few years we have noticed a growing interest in the Arctic and Greenland," Greenlandic Prime Minister Múte Egede told the Arctic Circle Greenland Forum in October 2022. "Apart from considerations regarding buying Greenland, which is not possible at all, the opportunities in the Arctic are great. Critical minerals, new opportunities due to climate change – including navigation opportunities where it was not possible before and not least our geographical location." He explained that his country is inextricably Arctic: that "Greenland is the Arctic – and the Arctic is Greenland." Accordingly, he told the international audience that "you are welcome to have an opinion about geopolitics and Greenland, but decisions concerning Greenland must be made here. Nothing about us – without us."[137] Despite the Trump Administration's abject disregard for Greenlandic self-government and its right to self-determination in its coercive attempts to acquire the territory in early 2026, these considerations factor heavily into the Kingdom of Denmark's approach to total defence and comprehensive security with respect to Greenland.

In February 2024, Nuuk published its second (and most comprehensive) strategy on foreign, security, and defence policy: *Greenland in the World: Nothing About Us Without Us*. As the title implies, the strategy asserts that Greenland must be included in all decisions in all areas that affect it. More eloquently, the policy insists that "if it involves our role in the world, we must have a seat at the table."[138] This basic principle frames Greenland's engagement with the world. Even though the Danish Government constitutionally conducts the foreign and security policy of the Kingdom of Denmark, it does so in close cooperation with the Governments of Greenland and the Faroe Islands. Nuuk has become more vocal on security matters since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, which prompted Naalakkersuisut (the Government of Greenland) to articulate its position clearly. "An unambiguous alignment with the Western alliance came early and promptly when Greenland joined the sanctions against the Kremlin, while pulling out its government-owned fisheries businesses in Russia," Greenlandic academic and Inuit Circumpolar Council chair Sara Olsvig noted.[139]

Denmark believes that Russia will continue to behave aggressively, which will carry risks of greater escalation in the Arctic.[140] As such, it places a higher priority on regional security and the Danish Armed Forces undertake important tasks in the Arctic, including the enforcement of sovereignty.

Following the Danish Defence Agreement 2024–2033, defence spending is projected to exceed 3% of GDP in 2026, funded by a DKK 50 billion "acceleration fund" specifically for the North Atlantic.[141] This includes an additional 2.75 billion allocated to Arctic and North Atlantic surveillance as part of the Danish military's efforts to provide "more muscle in the region." [142] In 2023, Greenland's foreign minister accepted that the island will have to host more military activity,[143] and "will continue to cooperate with the defense authorities of Denmark and the United States."[144] Specifically, Greenlandic policy has tended to support regional surveillance and monitoring but adamantly opposes "any measures that would contribute to an arms race in the Arctic."[145]

Figure 10: Possible paths for long-range missiles in the event of war. *Source:* Danish Defence Intelligence Service, *Intelligence Outlook 2025*, 33.

While the Kingdom of Denmark assesses that the kinetic military threat to its territory from non-NATO actors is low (with Trump bizarrely requiring that qualifier to be added in late 2025 and early 2026[146]), both Denmark and Greenland see new hybrid security risks coming from foreign actors. Danish policy identifies its position in the Arctic as a motivating factor for Russian and Chinese cyber espionage, and the Danish Centre for Cyber Security has also placed the threat against Greenland at "very high." Its March 2023 report warned that adversaries can use cyber espionage as a tool to widen "political manoeuvre room and further their interests in the Arctic, potentially at the expense of Greenlandic interests." [147] Greenlandic policy also recognizes that "human threats no longer always appear at our borders wearing uniforms and military insignia, but now come in the form of covert operations that strike civilian infrastructure and communications with no respect for international law."[148] Furthermore, in December 2025 and January 2026, the Danish Defence Intelligence Service (DDIS) (*Forsvarets Efterretningstjeneste* or FE) annual *Intelligence Outlook* report took the unprecedented step of classifying the United States as a potential security risk. It observed that Washington "now uses its economic and technological strength as a means of power," including the weaponization of tariffs and the potential use of military force even against its closest allies.[149] Furthermore, Danish authorities have expressed concern over alleged "covert influence operations" in Greenland, including attempts by Americans to infiltrate society and identify residents who might "create discord in the relationship between Denmark and Greenland."[150] In short, while Russia and China have been identified as the primary military threats in Danish national security assessments, the U.S. inclusion as a sovereignty and security threat marks a historic turning point – with the implications for total defence and comprehensive security models remaining to be seen.

Although both Denmark and Greenland are part of the same Kingdom, their total defence models are not the same. Denmark's Total Defence (*Totalforsvaret*) is a comprehensive security framework designed to safeguard the nation's sovereignty and societal continuity by integrating all national

resources—military, civil, and private—into a unified response system. Rooted in the post-Second World War realization that modern conflict transcends conventional battlefields, this "whole-of-society" approach coordinates the Danish Defence, the Home Guard, the Danish Emergency Management Agency (DEMA), and the police to protect the population and critical infrastructure. In contemporary practice, it serves as a mechanism for both deterrence by denial, by hardening societal resilience against hybrid and grey-zone threats, and deterrence by punishment, through the rapid mobilization of reservists and civilian assets to support military operations.[151] To support this model, Denmark transitioned to a fully gender-neutral conscription system effective 1 July 2025, requiring both Danish men and women who turn eighteen to participate in a lottery-based draft. Concurrent with this change, the standard duration of military service has been extended from four months to eleven months.[152] These mandatory requirements do *not* extend to citizens living in Greenland, however, who are exempt from the Danish conscription law but have the right to serve in the Danish Armed Forces on a voluntary basis.

The military defence of Greenland falls primarily within the responsibility of the Kingdom of Denmark, which maintains surveillance and military presence through the Joint Arctic Command, as well as the collective security provisions of NATO and the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) given the role of Pituffik Space Base (formerly Thule Air Base) in missile warning. In close collaboration with the Government of Greenland (Naalakkersuisut) and the Government of the Faroe Islands, the Government of Denmark has taken steps to significantly strengthen the Kingdom's Arctic capabilities through the 2025 Second Agreement on the Arctic and North Atlantic, with investments totaling approximately DKK 27.4 billion to secure Greenland and the Faroe Islands. Key components of this and the 2021 Arctic capabilities package focus on enhancing surveillance and operational presence, including the addition of new Arctic-capable naval vessels to the existing fleet, long-range maritime surveillance drones, and enhanced satellite capabilities. Furthermore, the plans involve constructing a new Joint Arctic Command (JACO - *Arktisk Kommando*) headquarters in Nuuk, establishing a new military unit under JACO based in Greenland and a new unit under Special Operations Command that specializes in Arctic operations (Jaerger Corps[153]), and continuing to strengthen the Sirius Special Operations Forces who conduct the famous dog sled patrol in Northeast Greenland.[154] This strong contradicts assertions by the Trump Administration in January 2026 that Greenland in undefended within the Kingdom, as does the reality of the Kingdom of Denmark's membership in NATO and recent efforts to monitor and secure the Arctic region as part of that Alliance. Furthermore, various initiatives under the Danish Defence Agreement 2018-2023 focused on broader societal security seek to enhance the resilience of civil society in the Faroe Islands and Greenland and strengthen cooperation on emergency preparedness.

There are strong indications that Greenlanders are increasingly interested in contributing to their own defence and security. In 2019, scholar Rasmus Rasmussen noted that Greenlandic politicians have traditionally expressed little interest in defence and military spending, given that military security falls outside of the Greenland self-government's constitutional authority and officials in Nuuk tended to "rhetorically downplay security aspects of defense and foreign policy by referring to either economic self-sufficiency or identity politics of the Inuit."[155] This appears to have changed. In

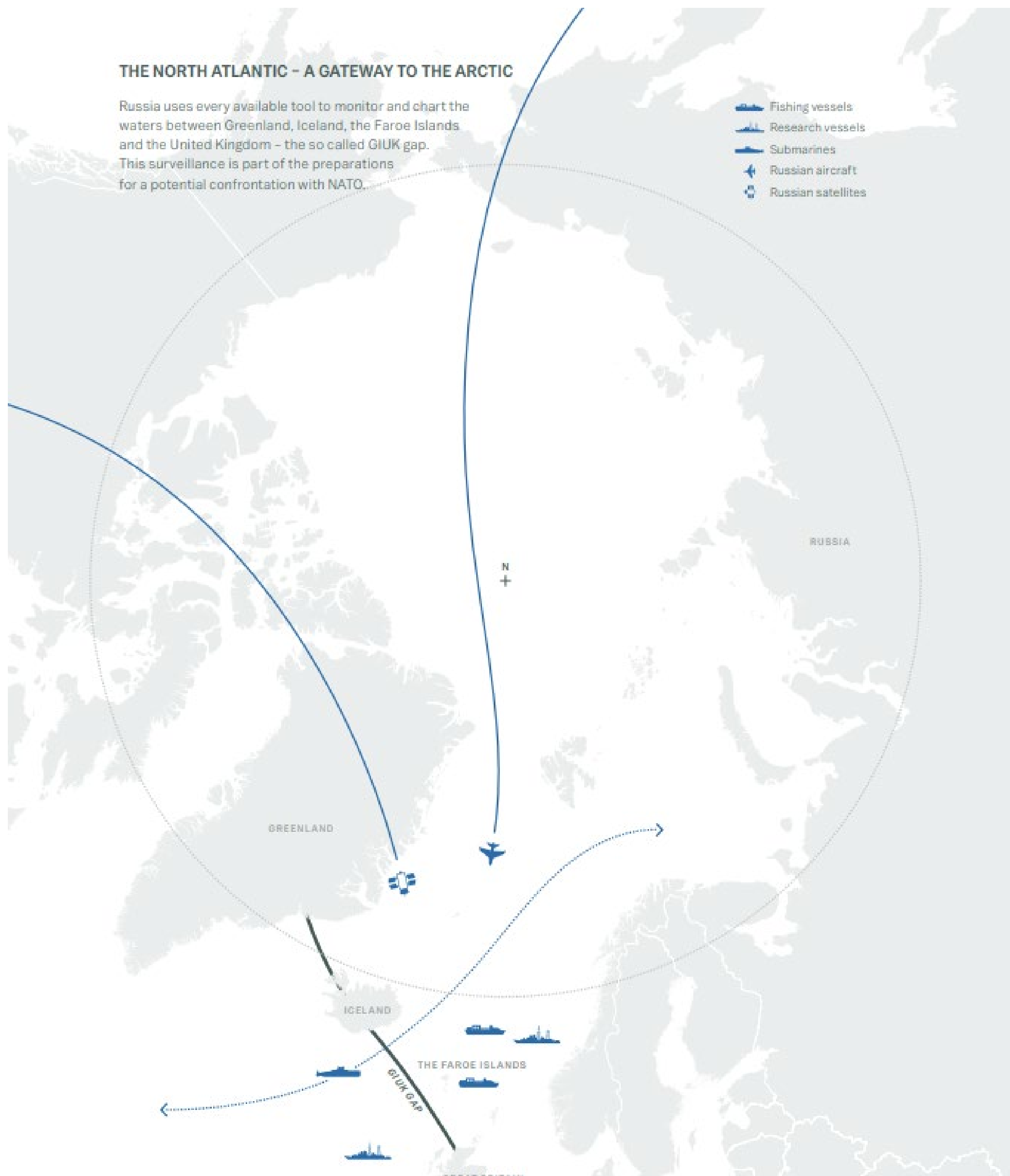

Figure 11: The North Atlantic: A Gateway to the Arctic. *Source:* Danish Defence Intelligence Service, *Intelligence Outlook 2025*, 34.

August 2020, the Danish defence minister opened a Nuuk liaison office connected with his military's intent to establish a reserve force in Greenland that will assist with non-combat operations.[156] The led to the official launch in May 2021 of the Grønlandsvogter (Greenland Guardian), a civil-military volunteer program managed by JACO that enlists local residents to serve as "eyes and ears" across Greenland's vast territory. Using a dedicated mobile app, volunteers report environmental hazards such as oil pollution, maritime distress, and unusual activities directly to authorities.[157] The program

has continued to evolve, with specialized training sessions for members (such as avalanche safety workshops held in early 2024) and support to military exercises.

Another prime example of direct efforts to bolster societal resilience and local emergency preparedness in Greenland is the Arctic Basic Training (ABU) program, a six-month educational initiative that the Danish Armed Forces launched in collaboration with Naalakkersuisut and local authorities in May 2024. Aimed at young Greenlandic residents aged 18 to 25, the program is designed to build local competencies to carry out rescue and emergency response tasks in Greenland.[158] The first module, offered in Kangerlussuaq, provides intensive training in basic military skills such as weapon handling, drone training, and navigation, alongside civil emergency response disciplines like firefighting and first aid. This is followed by maritime instruction in Denmark to prepare recruits for service aboard the Joint Arctic Command's ships. Beyond technical skills, the initiative functions as a significant social project, offering a salary, lodging, and academic credits that can serve as a stepping stone into careers within the Danish defense or Greenlandic civil services.[159] The program has proven immensely popular, with applications far exceeding available spots.

Both the Naalakkersuisut and the Danish Armed Forces have also committed to pursue the formation of "Greenlandic Rangers" based on the model of the Canadian Rangers. I was invited to brief the Greenlandic Constitutional Committee on this idea in March 2022, which has gained significant traction since that time following analysis initiated as part of the First Agreement on the Arctic and North Atlantic. The Second Agreement "accelerates the process" to complete the analysis and choose a model to implement a new unit of Greenlandic Rangers in 2026. Towards this end, 1st Canadian Ranger Patrol Group hosted a delegation of Danish and Greenlandic researchers to meet with Canadian Rangers on Operation NANOOK-NUNALIVUT in Inuvik, Northwest Territories, in February 2026.

The Kingdom of Denmark's approach to countering disinformation is centered on security-led coordination and intelligence-based monitoring, with a strong emphasis on protecting democratic institutions from foreign influence.[160] Because Denmark does not have an official policy of total defence, its strategies for countering disinformation tend to rely primarily on the state as opposed to a whole-of-society approach. Rather than establishing a standalone counter-disinformation agency, Denmark operates an inter-departmental task force to counter foreign influence, chaired by the Ministry of Justice and involving the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Defence, the Danish Security and Intelligence Service (PET), and the Defence Intelligence Service (FE).[161] PET and FE regularly publish public threat assessments on foreign interference, particularly around elections, and provide intelligence-based situational awareness to policymakers and the public. During election periods, Danish authorities also provide targeted guidance and advisory support to political parties on foreign influence risks, cyber threats, and protective measures aimed at safeguarding democratic processes.[162]

At the societal level, Denmark relies on legal deterrence, media accountability, and public awareness rather than direct content regulation. For instance, Danish law criminalizes cooperation with foreign intelligence services to conduct influence activities targeting decision-making or public opinion, including during elections.[163] Independent fact-checking organization TjekDet plays a key role in strengthening public debate by identifying and debunking false narratives and collaborating

with European fact-checking networks.[164] Together, Denmark's model prioritizes institutional coordination, intelligence-driven threat awareness, legal safeguards, and support for independent verification as the primary tools for countering disinformation.

Figure 12: The Kingdom of Denmark's Defence of Greenland. *Source:* Danish Ministry of Defence, *Fact Sheet: The Second Agreement on the Arctic and North Atlantic* (2025).

Comparing Regions and National Approaches: Lessons for Canadian Defence and Security

"We call it a total defence approach, making the whole of society – not just government on different levels – prepared for any kind of emergency or crisis," Sweden's ambassador to Canada, Signe Burgstaller, explained to an invitation-only audience of municipal, Indigenous, territorial leaders, and Defence Team representatives in Yellowknife in January 2026. "It means to be ready to defend your nation, your territory or the Arctic." Towards this end, Danish ambassador to Canada Nikolaj Harris insisted that "we must look at security broadly. Security is not only defence and military capabilities … [which is] important – and increasingly important – but it is also economic development, it is resilience, it is education, it is all these things. It's climate change." Burgstaller added that it also means "private enterprises and civil society … and it boils down, actually, to individuals. How can you prepare for any kind of emergency situation?" In articulating their respective countries' "whole-of-society" approaches, they highlighted the centrality of public trust, of balancing deterrence with reassurance, and of transparent responsibilities for military and civilian actors. "We've been building this whole-of-society model for, I would say, a century," explained Finnish ambassador to Canada Hanna-Leena Korteniemi. Yellowknife mayor Ben Hendriksen replied that Canada remained "at the infancy stage in terms of what we can learn from the other Nordic countries," but that the event had set the stage "to actually start to have those conversations on a more meaningful basis."[165]

This NAADSN special report seeks to set a similar stage for further inquiry into what Canada can learn from its Nordic Allies as it continues to develop and refine its own whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches to Arctic security. As discussed in the preceding sections, the Nordic countries operationalize Total Defence and Comprehensive Security through a mix of mandatory service for citizens and deep public-private partnerships that are aimed at meeting NATO's seven baseline requirements. In their work on Norway, Gunhild Hoogensen Gjørv and her colleagues observe that:

> A secure and resilient society depends on several interconnected elements that strengthen collective and individual capacity to respond to crises. Trust is foundational; it is fostered through a solid and open public debate about the challenges that NATO states face today and the measures needed to address them. Equally vital is preparedness at the individual level — everyone should be able to manage for at least seven days on their own. This goes hand in hand with media literacy, ensuring that people understand how disinformation works and the role communication platforms play in spreading or countering it.[166]

These observations resonate in a Canadian context. Most of the action to date has been military-focused or aspiring to improved whole-of-government practice through fora like the Arctic Security Working Group (ASWG). Unlike the Nordic countries, the Government of Canada has done little to encourage individual preparedness amongst Northern Canadians as part of a total defence or comprehensive security effort. The Nordic cases offer examples of how the state, private sector

partners, NGOs, and other partners can synchronize efforts to build resilience and preparedness. The following is a preliminary list of areas where Canada might learn from its Nordic allies to address evolving Arctic security threats and internal resilience gaps by involving every level of government, the private sector, and individual citizens into the Total Defence Team:

- *Broaden security definitions without diluting the importance of investments in National Defence:* The Nordic models also show that expanding models of security need not come at the expense of national defence and can be mutually reinforcing. While Finland, Sweden, Norway, and Denmark are renowned for their social democratic systems, they are also deeply committed to national defence and security. Echoing Canadian analyst Alex Dalziel, the Nordic examples could prompt Canadian politicians to move past the view that an expanded military presence is inherently provocative and instead see it as a necessary deterrent that goes hand-in-hand with civil preparedness.[167]
- *Enhance Whole-of-Government practice:* Canada can glean insights from its Nordic counterparts on how to horizontally and vertically structure and manage total defence efforts within and across governments.
- *Consider new forms of national service and/or training:* As Canada considers ways to grow its military, Nordic-style conscription models characterized by their selective, gender-neutral, and highly competitive and popular nature (and thus differ significantly from twentieth century universal drafts that have made conscription a deeply divisive issue in Canada, particularly in Quebec and amongst Indigenous Peoples) may invite consideration. The Nordic model of national service often integrates military service with a Total Defence culture that involves training citizens for civil defence roles, such as responding to wildfires, drone attacks, or environmentally-induced disasters, that may prove less politically controversial in Canada. The Danish Armed Forces' voluntary Basic Training program in Greenland is a case in point. By framing service as a shared civic responsibility both within and beyond the military, this may help to foster a culture of preparedness.
- *Educate the public on civil defence responsibilities:* The Nordic countries provide models for public information campaigns that explain to citizens why people must be able to secure their basic needs during a crisis, whether on their own or together with family and neighbours. For example, Sweden and Finland distribute survival guides to ensure citizens can manage the first three days of any emergency, from power outages to hybrid warfare.
- *More systematically involve private industry in Arctic preparedness:* Canada can learn from Nordic models that factor in how security of supply can be maintained through formal partnerships with businesses to ensure that essential services (e.g. energy, food, digital connectivity) remain functional during crises.
- *Anticipating and Countering Hybrid Threats:* Nordic countries are leaders in countering hybrid threats like disinformation and cyberattacks. Canada can learn best practices and deepen intelligence cooperation with Nordic allies.

- *Improve whole-of-government coordination to counter malign influence and interference:* Canada can emulate the Norwegian approach by clearly assigning counter-disinformation responsibilities across federal departments (e.g. Public Safety Canada, DND, Global Affairs Canada, Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs, Heritage Canada), as called for in recommendations 8 and 9 of Canada's Foreign Interference Commission Final Report.[168]
- *Integrate counter-disinformation into national security and emergency preparedness frameworks:* Sweden and Finland in particular treat information resilience as part of total defence and comprehensive security. Canada should embed disinformation preparedness into national emergency planning, civil defence, and crisis management frameworks rather than treating it as a communications issue.
- *Enhance psychological defence efforts:* Psychological defence is an important component of a strong total defence by strengthening and maintaining the population's will to defend itself, build resilience, and maintain personal preparedness. Sweden's Psychological Defence Agency provides a model of centralized monitoring, threat assessment, and coordination that seeks to effectively defend against cognitive warfare.[169] Canada might benefit from a similar agency focused on detecting foreign influence operations and coordinating cross-government responses to maintaining public trust and resisting malign efforts seeking to sow division.
- *Strengthen public education and media literacy as part of a long-term defence strategy:* Finland and Norway demonstrate that embedding media literacy, critical thinking, and source evaluation into national curricula builds durable societal resilience. Canada could expand standardized media literacy programming across Inuit Nunangat and the territorial north, which would address recommendations 47 to 50 of Canada's Foreign Interference Commission Final Report.[170]
- *Support independent fact-checking and verification institutions:* Nordic governments actively support independent fact-checking organizations such as Faktisk.no and TjekDet. Canada could increase stable funding and institutional partnerships with domestic fact-checking organizations to strengthen public trust.

"I've often said we're carved from the same block of ice," Finnish ambassador Hanna-Leena Korteniemi told her Northern Canadian audience at a press conference in Yellowknife in January 2026. "We share the same landscape, we share the same values, we share the harsh conditions … I think there is a lot we can learn from each other."[171] The exchange of best practices is not a one-way street. For example, the Canadian Rangers' established role, presence, and relationships in communities across the Canadian Arctic and North represents an enduring form of locally-based and culturally-attuned resilience. The Rangers are ideally suited to identify when something is not right in their homeland – whether a strange vessel or aircraft, suspicious persons or behaviour, or a change in the tenor of conversation that could indicate interference. They are also uniquely placed to mobilize a local response to an emergency with available resources, and to advise, guide, and mentor outside military or security elements that arrive to assist in and around their community. As respected members of the CAF, they are also important ambassadors for the military in their communities, as

well as for their communities and peoples within the military.[172] These substantive contributions cannot be overstated in the hybrid threat environment in which Canadians and their allies find themselves today, and explain why various Nordic countries have expressed an interest in this as a model for Greenlandic and Sámi service in their respective armed forces.

In a landmark speech at the World Economic Forum in Davos in January 2026, Prime Minister Mark Carney declared that the world has entered a period of "rupture." He called on middle powers like Canada and its Nordic allies to form new coalitions to counter the rise of hard power and great power rivalry, insisting that "middle powers must act together, because if you are not at the table, you are on the menu."[173] For Canada, this means moving beyond an overwhelming North American focus and tightening coordination and cooperation with our European allies to ensure a cohesive NATO posture in the Arctic. Looking to the Nordics and learning from their deep, practical experience in conceptualizing and implementing total defence and comprehensive security is a natural step in this direction.

Endnotes

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[2] See P. Whitney Lackenbauer, "Toward a Comprehensive Approach to Canadian Security and Safety in the Arctic," in *Understanding Sovereignty and Security in the Circumpolar Arctic*, ed. Wilfrid Greaves and P. Whitney Lackenbauer (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2021), 137-167.

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[4] Specific tools specified include the *Investment Canada Act*; by strengthening Canadian cyber security systems; and through new legislation to address foreign interference.

[5] Georgios Giannopoulos, Hanna Smith, and Marianthi Theocharidou*, The Landscape of Hybrid Threats: A Conceptual Model* (European Commission, 2020), 18, https://www.hybridcoe.fi/publications/the-landscape-of-hybrid-threats-a-conceptual-model/.

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[7] It is important to discern at what phase of a hybrid threat/warfare campaign they are being delivered: in the initial priming (testing which threat activities will work) phase, the more intense destabilization phase, or the more substantial conflict or coercion phase. Giannopoulos et al, *Landscape of Hybrid Threats*, 18.

[8] Gunhild Hoogensen Gjørv et al., "Revisiting Hybrid Threats: The Eighth Baseline Requirement and Resilient Civilians in Norwegian Total Preparedness," in *The Eighth Baseline Requirement: Resilient Civilians in Hybrid Threats and Warfare*, eds. Gunhild Hoogensen Gjørv, Serghei Glebov, and Christopher Holshek (Amsterdam: IOS Press, 2025), 118.

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[12] This assessment is supported by the research conducted by the North American and Arctic Defence and Security Network (NAADSN) at www.naadsn.ca.

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