

BRIEF

THE NB8 MODEL

EUROPEANISING NATO NO. 5

| PETER VIGGO JAKOBSEN |

The Nordic-Baltic Eight (NB8: Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Sweden) are emerging as a model for the Europeanisation of NATO. They have enhanced their political and military cooperation significantly since 2022 to address the growing threats of Russian aggression and the US abandonment of NATO. They seek to "keep the US in and Russia out" by taking the lead in supporting Ukraine militarily and by increasing their collective capacity to deter and defend against Russia with less American support.¹ Their progress in military integration is noteworthy and a source of inspiration for other NATO members, but their model is not easy to copy.

Prior to the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the NB8 was one of several institutions facilitating cooperation in the Baltic Sea region.² It was established in 1990 by the Nordic and Baltic states as a political forum to support the integration of the three Baltic countries into the EU and NATO. Once these goals were achieved, it functioned primarily as a political forum for promoting regional cooperation. Chairmanship of the NB8 rotates among the members on an annual basis and it has no permanent staff. With a combined population of approximately 33 million and a joint gross domestic product of nearly \$2 trillion, the NB8 has the tenth-largest population and the fifth-largest economy in Europe. It also has a strong industrial base and a well-educated population.³ Thus, the NB8 has the potential to make a difference in European security, as it has begun to realise since 2022. The NB8 are increasingly speaking with one voice in the EU, NATO and the UN and in the coalitions of the

willing supporting Ukraine. They are making a difference, both on Ukraine and in enhancing the capacity of the European Allies for deterrence and defence against Russia.⁴

LEADING ON UKRAINE

The NB8 quickly established themselves as leading Ukraine donors. By the end of 2026, their military, financial and humanitarian support for Ukraine will exceed 50 billion EUR.⁵ They are amongst the top 10 military contributors to Ukraine measured per capita and as a percentage of GDP, and the Nordic countries, except Iceland, are in the top 10 in absolute terms.⁶ They have made a difference by providing the type of equipment most urgently needed by Ukraine and by pushing other allies, including the US, to do more. They were early providers of advanced major weapons systems

The NB8 are amongst the top 10 military contributors to Ukraine per capita and as a percentage of GDP

such as Harpoon coastal defence missiles, self-propelled howitzers, Leopard 1 main battle tanks, F-16 fighter jets and air-defence missiles.⁷ The NB8 countries lead or co-lead five of the eight capability coalitions formed by Ukraine and its partners in the Ukraine Defence Contact Group.⁸ They pioneered direct investments in Ukraine's own defence industry through the so-called 'Danish model' and co-production of defence equipment with Ukrainian firms on their own soil.⁹ When the Trump Administration began to scale back its economic and military support for Ukraine in 2025, the NB8 jointly

financed a \$500 million package of US-sourced military equipment and munitions for Ukraine through NATO's Prioritised Ukraine Requirements List.¹⁰ That same year, the NB8 also launched a joint mission to train Ukrainian soldiers in Poland (Operation Legio).¹¹

Furthermore, the NB8 have consistently backed Ukraine in the debate on peace negotiations, rejecting any settlement imposed on Kyiv, insisting that borders cannot be changed by force, and that support for Ukraine must continue for as long as Russia refuses a genuine ceasefire. They continue to push allies to remove restrictions preventing Ukraine from striking military targets inside Russia with western-produced weapons, and they champion Ukraine's integration into the EU and NATO.

NATO DETERRENCE AND DEFENCE

The NB8 have also taken the lead in increasing Europe's ability to deter and defend against Russia. All NB8 members, except Iceland, which does not have standing armed forces, have more than doubled their defence spending measured in percentage of GDP since 2022. The three Baltic countries already meet NATO's new 5% spending targets, and Denmark, Norway and Sweden spend more than 3 % of GDP.¹² All NB8 members, except Iceland, support NATO's higher spending and capability targets and have pledged to meet them prior to the 2035 deadline adopted at the Hague summit in 2025.

The NB8 have taken the lead in increasing Europe's ability to deter and defend against Russia

In response to the Russian invasion, the Nordics initiated a process of military integration that is spearheaded by their air forces. Their ambition, expressed in the Nordic Defence Cooperation Vision 2030, is that their approximately 250 fighter aircraft (F-35 and Gripen) should be able to fight as one by 2030, on the basis of NATO procedures and standards and in cooperation with other NATO Allies.¹³ The Nordic air forces have thus developed a Nordic Air Power Concept and established a Nordic Division at the

Norwegian Joint Air Operation Centre in Bodø tasked with its development and operationalisation.¹⁴ It is co-located with the NATO Combined Air Operations Centre that opened in 2025 to oversee NATO air operations in the Nordic region, the Baltic Sea, the North Atlantic and the Barents Sea.¹⁵

Finland, Norway and Sweden are also integrating their land forces in the North Calotte by aligning national defence plans, procuring the same equipment, and establishing transport corridors and new NATO regional commands. In support of NATO Defence Plan North-West, Sweden will lead NATO's new Forward Land Force Finland, a multinational battlegroup tasked to reinforce the Finnish army.¹⁶

The move to greater Nordic defence integration is underpinned by a constantly growing number of defence industrial and joint procurement projects that will result in increasing interchangeability among the Nordic Armed Forces in all domains. Denmark, Finland and Norway all operate F-35, the Nordic armies all operate Leopard 2 tanks, Swedish CV-90 Infantry Fighting Vehicles and Finnish Patria 6x6 armoured vehicles.¹⁷

The Baltic countries are also intensifying their military cooperation. They coordinated the purchase of HIMARS (High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems) in 2022–23 and agreed to create a framework for the joint use of the weapon system in both peace and wartime.¹⁸ In 2023, Latvia and Estonia purchased IRIS-T air defence systems, also purchased by Denmark and Sweden.¹⁹

In early 2024, the three Baltic states agreed on the construction of the Baltic Defence Line: a joint regional security initiative to construct a coordinated network of physical fortifications along their borders with Russia and Belarus.²⁰ The most recent joint initiative to deepen Baltic military integration, launched in early 2026, is the establishment of the Baltic Military Mobility Area, the objective of which is to streamline procedures and facilitate the movement of troops and equipment across the three nations.²¹

However, the process towards greater Nordic–Baltic military cooperation and integration has

not just been plain sailing. Their cooperation is hampered by the "stopping power of water" and, the Nordics and the Balts have been assigned to different NATO Joint Force Commands and different regional defence plans at Nordic request.²² The Nordic preference to place Finland and Sweden under Joint Force Command Norfolk was frowned upon in the Baltic countries, as they wanted the newcomers assigned to Joint Force Command Brunssum to enhance Nordic-Baltic cooperation even further.²³ This risk should not be overblown, however, as Nordic air, land and naval forces remain assigned to the Baltic countries. The Danish, Finnish and Swedish navies are assigned to the Baltic Sea as are Danish, Norwegian and Swedish army units. Sweden has now joined Denmark and Norway in contributing forces to NATO's Forward Land Forces in the Baltic countries. NATO's new command structure and defence plans have thus increased the Nordic military presence in the Baltic countries.²⁴

CAN THE NB8 MODEL TRAVEL?

NB8 cooperation and leadership on Ukraine and NATO burden-sharing have had a positive impact on European security by helping to keep Russia out and the US in. European security would be greatly strengthened if other European states took inspiration from the NB8 and created similar coalitions of the willing to address the host of pressing security problems facing the EU and NATO.

The NB8 members are sufficiently strong to make a difference when they speak and act as one

Unfortunately, the NB8 act is not easy to copy as it will require the presence of at least three factors. The first is a shared sense of threat and urgency. It was Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine that prompted Finland and Sweden to join NATO, thus enabling the NB8 to act as one within the Alliance. The Nordic-Baltic region has a 2 555-kilometre border with Russia from the Barents Sea to southern Latvia, and the invasion created a shared fear that they might be next unless they enhanced their national defence capabilities, and increased NB8 cooperation and cooperation with other Allies.

The second is the realisation that NB8 cooperation is a *sine qua non* for making a difference. Cooperation is facilitated by the common realisation that the NB8 members are too small to make a difference on the European scene individually, but sufficiently strong to do so when they speak and act as one. They need each other to matter, and none of them is big enough to dominate the others.

The third is capacity. The NB8 have been able to make massive investments in Ukraine and national defence because of their strong economies and high levels of domestic support. All the NB8 countries, except Finland, have far lower levels of government gross debt than the EU average of 83%.²⁵ This enables them to spend substantially on Ukraine and defence without cutting welfare directly and helps to explain why the level of public and political support for Ukraine in the NB8 is among the highest in Europe.²⁶

While the NB8 model is hard to copy, there is one key takeaway from their success that other EU and NATO partners should note: coalitions of the willing are key to overcoming the collective action problems plaguing the EU and NATO. It takes too long to agree and act when numerous states sit around the negotiation table. Leadership by like-minded coalitions of the willing inside both organisations is necessary to implement the changes required to keep EU and NATO members safe. These should not be regarded as a threat to organisational cohesion, but as a necessary condition for success.²⁷ In this way, the NB8 has shown a path to success that can be employed to address other challenges.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ NATO, "[After-Dinner Speech by Admiral Giampaolo di Paola, Chairman of the Military Committee, honouring SHAPE Officers' Association's 50th Annual Symposium in Mons](#)," 16 October 2010.
- ² For an overview, see: Henrik Ø. Breitenbauch et al., "[Options for Enhancing Nordic–Baltic Defence and Security Cooperation. An Explorative Survey](#)," *Centre for Military Studies*, 2017.
- ³ Stefan Hedlund, "[The Nordic-Baltic Eight: A new security actor?](#)," *Geopolitical Intelligence Services AG*, 25 May 2025.
- ⁴ Piotr Szymański, "[The NB8 group and other formats of security cooperation in the Baltic Sea region](#)," *Centre for Eastern Studies*, 29 May 2025.
- ⁵ Government Offices of Sweden, "[Joint Statement of the Leaders of Ukraine and the Nordic Baltic States \(NB8\) to mark four years of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine 24 February 2026](#)," 24 February 2026.
- ⁶ "[Ukraine Support Tracker](#)," *Kiel Institute*, 13 August 2026.
- ⁷ Peter Viggo Jakobsen, "[Military activism in pursuit of security and status – why Denmark became a frontrunner on Ukraine after the Russian invasion](#)," in CFS Banke, J Larsen and MR Olesen (eds), *Danish Foreign Policy Review 2026* (Danish Institute for International Studies, 2026), 22–51.
- ⁸ Lesia Ogryzko and Liudmyla Porokhova, "[Strengthening Ukraine's Defence Through NB8 Cooperation](#)," *Ukrainian Prism*, 19 December 2024.
- ⁹ Defence Ukraine, "[The Danish Model](#)."
- ¹⁰ NATO, "[NATO Allies Denmark, Norway and Sweden announce \\$500m package of support for Ukraine](#)," 5 August 2025.
- ¹¹ Norwegian Armed Forces, "[Operation Legio](#)."
- ¹² NATO, "[Defence Investment of NATO Countries \(2014–2026\)](#)," Press Release, 7 July 2026.
- ¹³ Troels Lund Poulsen, Antti Häkkinen, Thórdís Kolbrún Reykjaförð Gylfadóttir, Bjørn Arild Gram, and Pål Jonson, "[Vision for Nordic Defence Cooperation \(NORDEFECO\)](#)," 2024.
- ¹⁴ Nordic Air Forces, "[Four Nordic Air Forces Fighting as One](#)," *Norwegian Armed Forces*, 3 March 2025.
- ¹⁵ Hilde-Gunn Bye, "[CAOC Bodø Completes First Major Exercise as a Fully-Fledged NATO Headquarters](#)," *High North News*, 21 April 2026.
- ¹⁶ Iro Särkkä, Jakob Gustafsson, Joel Linnainmäki and Anna Savolainen, "[NATO's Forward Land Forces in Finland Defending the northeastern frontline](#)," *FIIA*, Briefing Paper 439, June 2026.
- ¹⁷ For an overview of the growing number of joint projects initiated since 2022, see: Peter Viggo Jakobsen, "Nordic military integration: From nice to necessary - Plan B if NATO doesn't work," in R Johnson and JH Matlary (eds.) *Meeting the Threat: The Power of Northern European Allies* (London: Hurst & Co., forthcoming 2026).
- ¹⁸ Ministry of Defence (Estonia), "[Baltic countries to build defensive installations on their borders](#)," 19 January 2024.
- ¹⁹ Peter Viggo Jakobsen, "[Sailing Through Uncertainty: Nordic-Baltic Military Integration as Plan B](#)," *Diplomaatia*, 21 May 2026.
- ²⁰ Lukas Šimonis, "[Maginot or Mannerheim? The Baltic defense line analysis](#)," *Militarnyi*, 19 March 2026.
- ²¹ Anton Saifullayev, "[A 'Military Schengen Area' in the Baltic States](#)," *Instytut Europy Środkowej*, Commentaries 1522, 10 February 2026.
- ²² John J Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: WW Norton & Company 2001), 114.
- ²³ Piotr Szymański, "[The NB8 group and other formats of security cooperation in the Baltic Sea region](#)," *Centre for Eastern Studies*, 29 May 2025.
- ²⁴ Government Offices of Sweden, "[Swedish Armed Forces to contribute forces in Latvia](#)," 29 April 2024.
- ²⁵ "[Government debt at 88.9% of GDP in euro area](#)," *Eurostat*, 21 July 2026.
- ²⁶ Ogryzko and Porokhova, "Strengthening Ukraine's Defence."
- ²⁷ On this point, see: also Hiski Haukkala and Kristi Raik, "[The Circles of Security: The Role of the NB8 in \(Northern\) European Security](#)," *ICDS*, 17 April 2026.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

PETER VIGGO JAKOBSEN

Peter Viggo Jakobsen is an Associate Professor at the Royal Danish Defence College.

Disclaimer: The views and opinions contained in this paper are solely of its author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official position of the International Centre for Defence and Security or any other organisation.

-  ICDS.TALLINN
-  @ICDS-TALLINN.BSKY.SOCIAL
-  @ICDS_TALLINN
-  ICDS-TALLINN
-  WWW.ICDS.EE



INTERNATIONAL CENTRE FOR DEFENCE AND SECURITY
63/4 NARVA RD., 10120 TALLINN, ESTONIA
INFO@ICDS.EE

ISSN 2228-2076