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## DEFENSE COOPERATION AGREEMENTS IN NORTHERN EUROPE

### STRENGTHENING THE UNITED STATES' GLOBAL POSITION, TRANSATLANTIC RELATIONS, AND REGIONAL DETERRENCE AND DEFENSE

*The US has concluded or updated bilateral Defense Cooperation Agreements (DCAs) with all Nordic states. These DCAs enhance regional deterrence, enable operational and tactical cooperation from day one in the event of war, and provide broader regional and global benefits.*

The United States now has bilateral Defense Cooperation Agreements with all five Nordic countries – Finland, Sweden, Denmark, Norway, and Iceland – as well as with other countries on NATO's eastern flank, extending down to the Black Sea. These agreements enhance the military effectiveness of the political alliance commitment provided by NATO membership. They facilitate the development of certain defense-related infrastructure, such as the prepositioning of equipment, and promote more effective cooperation in terms of training, capability development, and defense and deterrence operations.

The US has a range of defense-related agreements around the world, with widely varying commitments. Becoming a formal ally has generally

come about in one of two ways: In Asia and the Middle East, for example, a “hub and spoke” model has seen the United States sign a number of bilateral agreements over the decades. Cooperation has generally been between the hub (the United States) and one of the spokes (Japan, South Korea, Australia, and so on). More recently, some of the spokes have increased cooperation among themselves. In Europe, the only way to become a US ally has been to join NATO and its collective security approach to military cooperation.

To understand why the United States wanted to sign these additional defense cooperation agreements with all Nordic countries – each involving explicit additional commitments – it is essential to adopt the perspective of a global

power with a network of partners and allies, and multiple overlapping and competing interests and commitments. From the US perspective, these recent DCAs contribute to its own security and strengthen its security commitments in at least four different ways.

First, the Defense Cooperation Agreements significantly increase tactical and operational options for deterrence and defense. US and regional military planners are no longer as constrained by national borders, allowing plans to fully utilize dozens of basing options and the prepositioning of equipment. This can increase the resilience, speed, and effect of any deterrence or defense operation. The string of DCAs across NATO's eastern flank, which the 2024 NATO Summit

identified as facing “the most significant and direct threat to Allies’ security”, allows the United States and its Allies to create additional problems for Russian military planners. For example, by using long-range precision strike weapons to put Russian war-making assets at immediate risk from Murmansk to the Black Sea and from Kaliningrad to the Ural Mountains.

The DCAs enable the United States to draw up better plans, make preparations and, if necessary, conduct immediate operational-level deterrence and defense efforts at a sub-regional level with Nordic and Baltic Allies. This should alleviate concerns among countries south of the Baltic Sea about all Nordic countries eventually joining the Joint Force Command in Norfolk. The DCAs effectively help ‘sew up the seams’ between different NATO commands and defense plans.

Second, while bilateral in nature, the agreements as a package enable better and more effective cooperation across the entire European military theater. Improved sub-regional collaboration thus contributes to regional security. The DCAs effectively serve as a

crucial link between NATO member states’ national defense responsibilities (Article 3) and collective defense (Article 5), significantly improving the ability of the states in question (a sub-group of all NATO Allies) to deter and, if necessary, immediately defend each other. From the US perspective, this increased collaboration strengthens NATO and European deterrence and defense, improving European security as a whole and making it easier for the United States to meet its commitments.

Third, from the US perspective, bilateral DCAs have the potential to contribute to a better transatlantic security relationship. This is simply because more effective collaboration among NATO’s European members means that they can take greater responsibility for Europe’s conventional defense – especially if plans are increasingly coordinated with the European Union’s efforts regarding military mobility, procurement, and societal resilience. In effect, the DCAs contribute to potentially fairer burden-sharing within the Alliance, which has been a long-standing demand across the political spectrum in the United States.

Fourth, both directly and by virtue of strengthening Europe’s own defense, the DCAs enable the signatories to cooperate on broader global security issues, and thus contribute to US global deterrence and defense efforts. Few in the United States would expect the Nordic and other regional countries that have signed DCAs to contribute directly to an ‘Asia contingency’, but the agreements do implicitly bind the signatories closer together in various situations where security interests are mutual.

Considering the benefits that the Defense Cooperation Agreements provide, it is not surprising that the United States has pursued them. With the DCAs within NATO, the United States has effectively created a hybrid of the two Alliance models. With the new set of DCAs, the United States can now benefit from deeper bilateral defense collaboration across NATO’s eastern flank while still operating under the umbrella of regional collective defense. In sum, while contributing to broader security goals, the DCAs enhance the national deterrence and defense efforts of all signatories, including the United States. /