

Denmark, Eyeing Russia, Likely To OK 20% Spending Boost; What It Means

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on November 17, 2017 at 4:01 AM

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Denmark is a small country, but an important player in the NATO Alliance and the resurgent Nordic defense group of Norway, Sweden and Finland to deal with [the rumbling Russia](#). And it will grow more important as it implements an impressive 20 percent increase in defense spending over the next six years.

The increase was announced in mid-October 2017 [when the Danish government](#) released its proposed new six-year defense guidance and defense spending guidelines. The new agreement is for 2018-2023 and for six years and is expected to pass Parliament. The government is very clear about the threats facing Denmark, the importance of allies modernizing and of effective interdependence in the defense of the North Atlantic and beyond.

Here is how the Danish government describes the country's way ahead:

"Denmark faces more serious threats than in any other period following the fall of the Berlin Wall. The freedom and security we value so highly cannot be taken for granted.

“To the east, [NATO faces](#) a confrontational and assertive Russia. Instability in the Middle East and North Africa is fuelling militant Islamism, sowing the seeds for the threat of terror and irregular migration flows. Propaganda campaigns challenge our democratic principles and established rules, while in the Arctic, there is increased activity and military presence.

“These are challenges which we cannot afford to ignore. That is why the Government wishes to substantially increase military spending over the next six years.

“The substantial increase will be gradually phased in and ultimately result in the Danish Defence’s annual budget in 2023 [being increased by DKK 4.8 billion](#).

This amounts to an increase of 20% compared to current military spending.

Threats in cyberspace have serious security and socio-economic consequences.”



Rear Adm. Wang

During my visit to Copenhagen, which coincided with the release of the new defense guidance, I spoke with a number of Danes and various experts about Danish thinking and the approach they had in mind to deal with shaping a deterrent strategy. My discussion with Rear Adm. Nils Wang, former head of the Danish Navy and now head of the Danish Royal Military Academy, was particularly helpful in both characterizing the nature of the Russian challenge as well as a way ahead for the Danish forces.

Wang clearly argued that the Russian challenge has little to do with the Cold War Soviet-Warsaw Pact threat to the Nordics. The Soviet-Warsaw threat was one of invasion and occupation, and then using Nordic territory to fight U.S. and allied forces in the North Atlantic. In many ways, this would have been a repeat of how the Nazis seized Norway during a combined arms amphibious operation combined with a land force walk into Denmark.

In that scenario, the Danes and their allies were focused on sea denial through use of mines, with fast patrol boats providing protection for the minelayers.

Aircraft and submarines were part of a defense in depth strategy to deny the ability of the Soviets to occupy the region in time of a general war.

He contrasted this with the current situation in which the Russians are less focused on a general war, and more on building capabilities for a more limited objective, controlling the Baltic States. He highlighted the arms modernization of the Russian military focused on ground-based missile defense and land- and sea-based attack missiles, along with airpower, as the main means to shape a denial-in-depth strategy which would allow the Russians significant freedom of maneuver to achieve their objectives within their zone of strategic maneuver.

A core Russian asset is the Kalibr cruise missile, which can operate off of a variety of platforms. With a dense missile wolf pack, so to speak, the Russians provide a cover for their maneuver forces. They are focused on using land-based mobile missiles in the region as their key strike and defense asset. “The Russian defense plan in the



F-35A four flight

Baltic is all about telling NATO, we can go into the Baltic countries if we decided to do so. And you will not be able to get in and get us out. That is basically the whole idea,” the admiral said.

Wang argued for a reverse engineering approach to the Russian threat. He saw this as combining several key elements: a combined anti-submarine (ASW), [F-35 fleet](#), frigate- and land-based strike capabilities, including from Poland.

The admiral’s position is based in part on the arrival of the F-35 and notably the F-35 as a core coalition aircraft designed to work closely with either land-based or sea-based strike capabilities. “One needs to create air superiority, or air dominance as a prerequisite for any operation at all, and to do that NATO would need to assemble all the air power they can actually collect together, inclusive carrier-based aircraft in the Norwegian Sea,” he told me.

“This is where the ice free part of the Arctic and the Baltic gets connected. We will have missions as well in the Arctic at the northern part of Norway because the Norwegians would be in a similar situation if there is a Baltic invasion.”

The rear admiral argued as well for a renewal or augmentation of ASW capabilities by its allies to deal with Russian submarines in the Baltic there to support operations, notably any missile-carrying submarines. He saw a focused Danish approach to frigate/helo-based ASW in the region as more important than buying submarines to do the ASW mission.

The importance of using the F-35 as a trigger force for a sea-based missile strike force suggests that one option for the Danes will be to put new missiles into their MK-41 tubes which they have on their frigates. They could put SM-2s or SM-3s or even Tomahawks onto their frigates dependent on how they wanted to define and deal with the Russian threat.

The ongoing work on Aegis integration with F-35 or the US Marines work on integrating their [High Mobility Artillery Rocket System \(HIMARS\)](#) launchers is suggestive of their approach. And leveraging the F-35 as the flying combat system part of the overall strike and defense force is a key part of Danish thinking. During my stay in Copenhagen, I discussed this with the new head of the Royal Danish Air Force, Col. Anders Rex.

“When I talk with F-35 pilots, the same message is drilled into me – this is not a replacement aircraft; this is not like any aircraft you have flown before. The aircraft enables our air combat forces to play a whole new ballgame.

“And from my discussions with Australians, the Norwegians, the Dutch and the Brits, it is clear that the common drive is to shape a fifth-generation combat force, not simply fly the current 256 F-35s as cool, new jets.”

He clearly had in mind working on leveraging the introduction of the F-35 to trigger a broader transformation. And this makes sense, because in large part the F-35 is not simply a fighter which you define but what it does by itself organically, but, rather by what it can trigger in the overall combat fleet, whether lethal or non-lethal payloads.

“We need to focus on the management of big data generated by the F-35 and other assets that will come into the force. How do we do the right kind of command and control within a rich information battlespace?” Rex wondered. “We need to build self-learning systems as well. The F-35 is a revolutionary man-machine system and sets in motion not only the challenge of new approaches to working information and C2, but new approaches to combat learning. How do we get there? That is what [generating a fifth-generation combat force](#) is all about.”

An American colleague who has worked in Denmark for several years at the University of Copenhagen’s Center for Military Studies highlighted the growing cooperation among the Nordics and how that cooperation was reshaping their operational approaches to dealing with the Russian threat. The Swedes are introducing conscription, the Norwegians are boosting their defense spending and the Finns are working new relationships in the region.

As Gary Schaub Jr. put it during our meeting in Copenhagen:

“The Nordics are looking for practical ways ahead on credible deterrence with regard to the Russians. In this collaborative environment between equal—but small—powers, the suggestions of a Britain or US could smooth over the small barriers that might keep these otherwise pragmatic nations from doing what is in their own, and their region’s, common interests.

“There is a huge opportunity for the new administration to shape a thoughtful proactive NORDIC agenda as the Nordics themselves seek a more regional approach. And as F-35s and P-8s come into the region, there is an opportunity to leverage common assets to shape a more proactive and common effort towards regional defense and security. The administration should seize it.”