

Sweden and Finland: towards Defence Cooperation Agreements with the US

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At the annual security conference held in Sälen on 9 January, Swedish defence minister Pål Jonson announced that the government had begun talks with the US on concluding a Defence Cooperation Agreement (DCA), which is designed to enable faster and more effective US support in the event of crisis or war. Although negotiations are at an early stage, Jonson has already declared that the Pentagon may be granted the right to store military equipment and invest in military infrastructure on Swedish territory. Finland also began talks on signing a DCA in September 2022, while Denmark – which has never signed a comprehensive agreement in this area despite more than 70 years of military alliance with the US, and making a series of arrangements during that time – entered into such talks in February 2022. Norway signed a Supplementary Defence Cooperation Agreement with the US in April 2021.

Commentary

- For both Sweden and Finland, the further deepening of bilateral relations with the United States is a follow-up to the launch of the process of their accession to NATO. Both countries are transitioning from being just close partners of Washington to becoming its allies. The DCA will provide a legal basis for US investments in selected military infrastructure on their territories. In addition, US forces will gain greater freedom to move and station their units in both countries. The agreement will also regulate the legal status of US service members deployed on Swedish and Finnish territory and the issue of criminal liability for any crimes committed there. This is important in view of the growing presence of US troops in these countries: in fact, US forces have been regularly exercising on Finnish and Swedish territory since 2022 (for more details, see [‘NATO countries increase military activity in Finland’](#)).
- Negotiating a DCA is a time-consuming process, usually taking between one and two years. Given the broad political consensus in Sweden and Finland, it should proceed quite smoothly, and a possible change of government in Helsinki after the parliamentary elections in April 2023 will have little impact on it. The DCA agreement was also discussed by US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and the Finnish foreign minister Pekka Haavisto during the latter’s visit to Washington in December. Denmark had previously felt no need to supplement the military cooperation agreements it had already signed with the United States, but Russia’s aggressive policy prompted a revision of its position. The conclusion of DCAs between the US and Sweden, Finland and Denmark

over the next two years will result in a stronger US military presence throughout the Nordic region.

- As mentioned above, Oslo signed a Supplementary Defence Cooperation Agreement (SDCA) with Washington in April 2021, in a follow-up to an earlier agreement from 2009. On its basis, the presence of the US Air Force and US Navy in Norway has been significantly expanded. They have gained the right to use the air force bases at Rygge, Sola and Evenes and the navy base at Ramsund. The US will be able to build additional infrastructure for its own use and station its units at these locations (P-8 maritime patrol aircraft at Evenes). Interest in the wider use of military installations on Norwegian territory has also been signalled by the US Marine Corps, which has equipment depots there (the Marine Corps Prepositioning Program-Norway, MCPP-N) for a brigade-sized force (for more detail, see [‘USA-Norwegia: wzmacniona obecność wojskowa USA na północnej flance NATO’](#)).