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# Arctic Sentry: NATO strengthens its polar flank

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On 11 February, Allied Command Operations launched NATO's enhanced multi-domain Vigilance Activity (eVA) on the northern flank – Arctic Sentry. It will cover areas of the European Arctic, namely the High North, and the non-European Arctic within the area of responsibility of Allied Joint Force Command (JFC) Norfolk, which leads Arctic Sentry. Communications from NATO structures and the Secretary General indicate that these measures are intended to counter Russia's military activity in the Arctic and China's growing interest in the region.

Several Allies have already declared their participation in Arctic Sentry, including Denmark with F-35 aircraft, Sweden, which is currently conducting the Icelandic Air Policing mission with a detachment of six JAS 39 Gripen fighters, Germany, which, according to German media, will initially deploy four Eurofighter jets to Iceland supported by an A400M tanker aircraft, and the United Kingdom. London has announced Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF) exercises on the northern flank in September this year. The JEF comprises the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and the Nordic and Baltic states. The UK also plans to expand its year-round rotational military presence in Norway's High North from 1,000 to 2,000 personnel over the next three years. The deployment includes Royal Marines bolstered by other commando units operating from Camp Viking near Tromsø.

Arctic Sentry has been designed primarily as a tool to improve coordination of existing Allied activity in the Arctic, without establishing an additional permanent NATO military presence in polar areas at the expense of other theatres. The reinforced engagement in the Arctic draws on NATO's activities in the Baltic Sea to protect critical undersea infrastructure, namely Baltic Sentry (since January 2025), and on its efforts on the eastern flank focused on airspace protection, namely Eastern Sentry (since September 2025).

**Commentary**

- **The Alliance has not previously engaged in the Arctic on a significant scale, but President Donald Trump's claims about taking control of Greenland led to the launch of Arctic Sentry.** From the perspective of NATO Headquarters and European allies, the initiative is intended, in political terms, to demonstrate to the White House the Alliance's added value in a region vital to US homeland defence. The Arctic represents the shortest route for a potential Russian missile and air strike against major US population centres. In this context, Arctic Sentry is also designed to reduce US pressure on the Kingdom of Denmark over Greenland.

- **Arctic Sentry is not a European 'coalition of the willing' and does not signal a US withdrawal from the European High North.** The United States and Canada will support this enhanced NATO vigilance activity through the binational North American Aerospace Defence Command (NORAD), as well as through two US commands – European (EUCOM) and North American (NORTHCOM). At the initial stage, Arctic Sentry will rely primarily on previously planned training activities. These include Denmark's 2026 Arctic Endurance, a series of exercises in and around Greenland (involving Allies), and the large-scale Cold Response exercise in northern Norway and Finland, led by Norway and the United States. Planned for March, Cold Response is set to involve 25,000 troops, including around 4,000 US personnel.
- **Arctic Sentry is not intended to establish a substantial additional permanent Allied presence above the Arctic Circle, but rather to coordinate and seek synergies in existing military activity in the region.** European Allies and Canada are reluctant to overstretch resources, given their reinforced presence in the Baltic Sea area and, more broadly, on the eastern flank, ongoing military transformation and force expansion processes, and the commitment to deploy stabilisation forces to Ukraine in the event of a ceasefire. In the Arctic, aside from the junction of the northern regions of Sweden, Norway, and Finland, the Alliance does not face the threat of conventional land aggression (NATO is establishing Forward Land Forces in Finnish Lapland). As a result, the primary military capabilities required in the Arctic are intelligence, surveillance, target acquisition, and reconnaissance (ISTAR), particularly for monitoring the activities of Russia's Northern Fleet.
- **The establishment of Arctic Sentry does not resolve the Greenland issue in relations with the United States.** Parallel trilateral negotiations on the island's status are under way between Washington, Copenhagen, and Nuuk. In line with its policy of consolidating the US sphere of influence in the Western Hemisphere, the Trump administration is seeking to strengthen control over Greenland. Washington's interests focus on the island's mining sector, the screening of third-country foreign investments, and national security. US military installations on Greenland could become part of the planned next-generation missile defence system, known as the Golden Dome. There is speculation about a possible revision of the 1951 US–Denmark defence agreement towards a 'Cyprus model', which would entail the establishment of sovereign US military areas. The Danish–Greenlandic side, for its part, is defending the principles of the state's territorial integrity and the right of the Greenlandic people to self-determination.