

## 4. A time for alternative options? Prospects for the Nordic–Baltic security community during the Trump era

Eoin Micheál McNamara

### INTRODUCTION

Donald Trump's election as US president and his assumption of office in January 2017 have been conveyed by many commentators as ushering in an era of ideological division within the West that stands to inhibit multilateral cooperation across a multitude of policy sectors. With security policy as a specific focus, the generally negative strictures prompted by Trump's political rise have provoked considerable concerns in the Nordic–Baltic region. The rhetoric he expressed on various platforms during the 2016 presidential election campaign, and afterwards when in office has appeared to cast serious doubt upon the continuation of tangible US support for the transatlantic security link of which the Nordic and Baltic states have been long-term beneficiaries. Against the backdrop of renewed geopolitical tensions in Northern Europe following the Ukraine crisis in 2014, this chapter addresses two main research questions focused on Nordic–Baltic security during the Trump era. First, in the context of whether the Trump administration's actual policy actions match its president's often radical rhetoric, what implications will Trump's foreign policy have for Nordic–Baltic security? Second, given the increased unpredictability and less strategic focus from Washington identified in this chapter as pertinent implications in this regard, will the Trump era represent a time when the Nordic and Baltic states should pursue less-US-centric options?

It is argued that Trump's past rhetoric chastising NATO has not matched his administration's policy actions to leave the alliance's US-backed deterrence presence in Europe in place. However, the Trump era does signal a need on the part of America's European allies and partners – the Nordic and Baltic states prominently among them

– to pursue less-US-dependent security options, not specifically as a means of replacing the American contribution to European security, but as a means of ensuring the continued durability of the transatlantic security partnership through fairer burden-sharing. In this context, it is argued that the Nordic and Baltic states do not share precisely the same geostrategic environment. Different priorities focused on Arctic security for the Nordic states and the “Suwałki Gap” for the Baltic states direct some emphasis away from mutual cooperation. Nevertheless, this chapter identifies opportunities for enhanced Nordic-Baltic security cooperation in areas such as the joint procurement of military equipment and the improvement of “total defence” systems, as well as through the heightened defence initiatives currently in process on the EU level.

#### THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION AND EUROPEAN SECURITY

Aspects of Donald Trump’s rhetoric during the 2016 presidential campaign and since his ascent to the presidency have created negative strictures surrounding NATO. As detailed elsewhere in this report, after assuming office in January 2017, Trump expressed harsh criticism both of NATO as an organization and of Germany’s position within the Alliance.<sup>1</sup> Adding to his populist election campaign narrative, Trump’s claims that NATO’s European allies are essentially “free-riding” and “ripping-off” American tax-payers will no doubt appeal to his domestic electoral base. However, this rhetoric is far removed from the fundamental principles that have constantly shaped NATO’s albeit evolving *raison d’être*. First, NATO is an alliance that emphasizes solidarity to achieve allied objectives. Since its foundation in 1949 there has been a recurring tendency for many US presidential administrations to fervently call on European governments to redress the significant disparity between themselves and the US in shouldering NATO’s financial and military costs. However, Trump has delivered this message in an unprecedentedly abrasive manner, using rhetoric that casts doubt

1 For Trump’s comments on NATO, see “Trump worries NATO with ‘obsolete’ comment”, *BBC News*, 16 January 2017, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-38635181>, accessed 28 January 2017. For Trump’s comments on Germany’s NATO policy, see A. Erickson, “No, Germany doesn’t owe America ‘vast sums’ of money for NATO”, *The Washington Post*, 18 March 2017, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2017/03/18/no-germany-doesnt-owe-america-vast-sums-of-money-for-nato/?utm\\_term=.f65880533913](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2017/03/18/no-germany-doesnt-owe-america-vast-sums-of-money-for-nato/?utm_term=.f65880533913), accessed 28 March 2017.

on the credibility of NATO's collective security guarantee. The Alliance has never functioned through simple debit / credit transactions.

Second, although the US presence within the Alliance undoubtedly constitutes the strongest support for NATO's collective deterrence, Trump's populism appears to over-exaggerate the extent of the defence the US assigns directly to its allies during peacetime. The defence-spending ratios of individual NATO allies reflects the percentage of these states' GDP spent on defence. From an American perspective, Michael McFaul notes that NATO does not function on the basis of "protection-racket contracts" but on the "strategic value of allies to the United States".<sup>2</sup> The benefits for Washington have been listed as: allies committed to defending the US; a stable and peaceful Europe that can subsequently yield \$699 billion in trade turnover for the American economy; bases that allow US military power to be projected towards threats centred on Russia, Africa and the Middle East; and cooperation in counterterrorism and intelligence sharing. As far as America's allies in Europe are concerned, they provide 34 per cent of US basing costs, accounting for \$2.5 billion per year.<sup>3</sup> It has been claimed that the US defence budget has risen from 50 to 75 percent of NATO's aggregate defence spending since the attacks carried out on 11 September 2001.<sup>4</sup> However, inferred in isolation this statistic could be misleading. The Pentagon spends significant proportions of this budget on defence assets required, for example, to uphold US strategic interests around the Pacific and America's security-management efforts in the Middle East. These are specific costs largely unconnected with US NATO contributions.

As elaborated upon elsewhere in this report, Trump, as a presidential candidate in July 2016, appeared to jeopardize the credibility of America's commitment to NATO's Article 5 security guarantee, hinting that he might only sanction security assistance for the Baltic states

2 M. McFaul, "Mr. Trump, NATO is an alliance, not a protection racket", *The New York Times*, 25 July 2017, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/global-opinions/mr-trump-nato-is-an-alliance-not-a-protection-racket/2016/07/25/03ca2712-527d-11e6-88eb-7dda4e2f2aec\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.8b8590fe0d6e](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/global-opinions/mr-trump-nato-is-an-alliance-not-a-protection-racket/2016/07/25/03ca2712-527d-11e6-88eb-7dda4e2f2aec_story.html?utm_term=.8b8590fe0d6e), accessed 5 February 2017.

3 M. Fisher and S. Peçanha, "What the U.S. gets for defending its allies and interests abroad", *The New York Times*, 16 January 2017, [https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2017/01/16/world/trump-military-role-treaties-allies-nato-asia-persian-gulf.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2017/01/16/world/trump-military-role-treaties-allies-nato-asia-persian-gulf.html?_r=0), accessed 4 February 2017.

4 M. Foucault and F. Mérand, "The challenge of burden-sharing", *International Journal*, vol. 67, no. 2, 2012, p. 424.

had they, in his judgment, “paid their bills” or “met their obligations”.<sup>5</sup> By “obligations”, it can be assumed that Trump was alluding to NATO’s two-per-cent-of-GDP defence-spending pledge. These comments perplexed many in the Baltic capitals. Estonia is one of the few NATO allies conforming to this defence-spending obligation, which it has done since 2012. Latvian and Lithuanian defence spending has not reached the same level, hovering around the one-per-cent mark for the past decade. Defence spending is not the only metric highlighting solidarity within NATO, however. Some Baltic politicians interpreted Trump’s comments as extremely unfair, given that their military personnel had recently finished almost a decade of service closely connected to US objectives and NATO-led stabilization efforts in Afghanistan.

Estonia and Lithuania took on particularly strenuous tasks as part of NATO’s collective mission, the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). From 2006 until 2014, alongside American, British and Danish contingents, units from the Estonian Defense Force (EDF) were deployed in the hostile combat conditions of southern Afghanistan’s volatile Helmand Province. Although essential to ensure a secure Afghanistan, Helmand was an environment in which few NATO governments wished to deploy their armed forces. Doing so came with a high risk of casualties and subsequent knock-on political risks. Lithuania was the only ally from NATO’s second post-Cold-War enlargement round in 2004 to take on the onerous task of leading a Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT). The Lithuanian PRT was based in Ghor in central Afghanistan.<sup>6</sup> It is against this context that Baltic leaders viewed with disparagement Trump’s comments indicating a potential denial of US solidarity. Pre-Trump, Baltic leaders believed that they had progressed diplomatically from NATO newcomers in 2004 to allies integral to the core of the alliance. Trump’s election appeared to shatter a decade of diplomatic progress,

5 D. E. Sanger and M. Haberman, “Transcript: Donald Trump on NATO, Turkey’s coup attempt and the world”, *The New York Times*, 21 July 2016, [https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/22/us/politics/donald-trump-foreign-policy-interview.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/22/us/politics/donald-trump-foreign-policy-interview.html?_r=0), accessed 6 February 2017.

6 D. Lamothe, “Donald Trump cast doubt on the Baltics’ involvement in NATO. Here’s what they actually do”, *The New York Times*, 21 July 2016, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/checkpoint/wp/2016/07/21/donald-trump-cast-doubt-on-the-baltics-involvement-in-nato-heres-what-they-actually-do/?utm\\_term=.c75ed58c9fb1](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/checkpoint/wp/2016/07/21/donald-trump-cast-doubt-on-the-baltics-involvement-in-nato-heres-what-they-actually-do/?utm_term=.c75ed58c9fb1), accessed 5 February 2017.

as the current Estonian Minister for Defense, Jüri Luik, explained: “We [Estonia] have to explain who we are all over again”.<sup>7</sup>

#### TRUMP’S UNPREDICTABLE SECURITY POLICY

A troubling dimension of Trump’s discourse on European security affairs has been his appraisal of US relations with Russia. His view has at times deviated radically from the views of the preceding Obama administration and many of America’s European allies. Trump occasionally spoke effusively about Vladimir Putin during his presidential election campaign. Once elected, he firmly and publically emphasized his “respect” for the Russian president.<sup>8</sup> ISIS and “radical Islamic terrorism”, as the Trump administration describes the more general threat, are security problems of prominent concern among his core conservative electoral support-base. If the rhetoric expressed during the 2016 election campaign is any indication, countering terrorism is likely to be the foremost priority in Trump’s security policy.

US-Russian cooperation in combating the insurgency and terrorism that originate from the Middle East has been heralded as an appealing prospect for some within the Trump White House. Although probably a spontaneous event that is difficult to place within a wider rationale, Trump’s alleged sharing of classified intelligence on ISIS with Russian Foreign Minister, Sergei Lavrov, in May 2017 would indicate a degree of amity on Trump’s part towards Russia, at least in counter-terrorism policy.<sup>9</sup> Often accompanied with some hard-line rhetoric, Trump has, at times, also promised a more offensive US military stance against

7 J. Luik cited in “Estonia counts on NATO, but worries about Donald Trump”, *The Economist*, 26 November 2016, <http://www.economist.com/news/europe/21710862-militia-moms-are-practising-their-marksmanship-just-case-estonia-counts-nato-worries>, accessed 30 March 2017.

8 “Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin pledge cooperation to ‘tackle terrorism’”, *Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) News*, 31 January 2017, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-01-29/donald-trump-and-vladimir-putin-talk-terrorism-relations/8220866>, accessed 28 January 2017.

9 A. Goldman, E. Schmitt and P. Baker, “Israel said to be source of secret intelligence Trump gave to Russians”, *The New York Times*, 16 May 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/16/world/middleeast/israel-trump-classified-intelligence-russia.html>, accessed 23 May 2017.

China's rising power projection around the Pacific.<sup>10</sup> These tendencies indicate, at first glance, that the security of NATO's "Eastern flank" is in danger of drifting down America's priority list. The Ukraine crisis and the rise of ISIS create contradictory interests for the US and NATO in general. It is difficult to foresee that these interests can be reconciled to the satisfaction of all allies. Seeking Russia as a meaningful partner with intelligence-sharing and military coordination in the fight against ISIS is likely to be politically infeasible unless the West reduces its punishments, such as the economic sanctions imposed in response to Russia's actions in Ukraine. This view is held by NATO allies on the frontline against the Russian threat, such as the Baltic states and Poland. On the other hand, not taking advantage of counter-terrorism cooperation with Russia might appear to some as an opportunity missed in the effort to reduce the exposure of Western societies to terrorist attacks.<sup>11</sup> This sentiment might resonate with NATO allies facing a greater risk from transnational terrorism, such as France and Belgium.

Trump's rhetoric during the 2016 presidential election campaign frequently signalled the prospect of a radical transformation in US foreign policy. However, some have since argued that the direction of his foreign policy will be managed by those within his executive holding the key foreign, security and defence portfolios. Trump's former national security adviser, Michael Flynn, favoured increased cooperation between Washington and Vladimir Putin's Russia in the fight against terrorism. The sentiments expressed by Flynn as one of Trump's closest security-policy aides led some to suspect that a rapprochement between Washington and Moscow might be in prospect. In a similar vein, reports have indicated that Henry Kissinger has been positioning himself as an informal mediator between the Trump administration and the Kremlin. The "Kissinger plan" for conflict resolution was said to include US recognition of "Crimea as part of Russia", and the termination of economic sanctions in exchange for the withdrawal of Russian troops from eastern Ukraine.<sup>12</sup> These

10 T. Phillips "Donald Trump and China on dangerous collision course, say experts", *The Guardian*, 7 February 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/feb/07/donald-trump-and-china-military-confrontation-dangerous-collision-course-experts>, accessed 29 April 2017.

11 I. Kfir, "NATO and Putin's Russia: seeking to balance divergence and convergence", *Comparative Strategy*, vol. 35, no. 5, 2016, pp. 447-464.

12 A. Buncombe, "Henry Kissinger has 'advised Donald Trump to accept' Crimea as part of Russia", *The Independent*, 27 December 2016, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/henry-kissinger-russia-trump-crimea-advises-latest-ukraine-a7497646.html>, accessed 17 May 2017.

developments have been viewed with concern by some NATO allies. At the outset of Trump's presidency in January 2017, British journalist Edward Lucas feared that the Trump administration might be tempted by the idea of a "grand bargain" with Russia, which could be heralded as a significant foreign-policy success deflecting attention away from the domestic troubles that the administration will inevitably face. In Lucas' view, "Putin can offer Trump cooperation on terrorism; he can offer cooperation on Syria". He can propose to take "missiles out of Kaliningrad" while reducing the military presence in Russia's western military district. Moscow could offer this package in exchange for the withdrawal of US and NATO forces from the alliance's "Eastern flank".<sup>13</sup> On the surface this would appear to be progress towards de-escalation, but it would not be welcomed by the Baltic states and Poland. From their perspective, it would be considered a betrayal of solidarity, and would weaken trust and unity within NATO. Following Russia's actions in Ukraine, such a deal would alleviate some pressure on Putin's government, allowing the Kremlin to consolidate its power domestically and regionally.

Nevertheless, events during the early months of Trump's presidency have reduced the prospect of this type of "grand bargain". The sharp controversy created by Flynn's contacts with Russian diplomatic representatives before the inauguration, ultimately leading to his resignation as national security adviser in February 2017, have taught the administration a pertinent lesson on the domestic political risks that the active pursuit of cooperation with Russia might entail.<sup>14</sup> In the aftermath of the debacle surrounding Flynn, some commentators have argued that the unpredictable trend in Trump's foreign policy actually fosters wariness in Moscow. This apprehension would probably not have been present had the more hostile, yet consistent, strategies pursued by Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton been followed. Mixed signals have, thus far, been a defining feature of Trump's foreign policy. Despite rhetoric criticizing NATO, the White House has stayed quietly consistent with NATO's Readiness Action Plan (RAP) in support of America's European allies, while nevertheless continuing to discuss

13 "The Baltic states in a post-NATO environment: an interview with Edward Lucas", *Deep Baltic*, 16 January 2017, <https://deepbaltic.com/2017/01/16/the-baltic-states-in-a-post-nato-environment-an-interview-with-edward-lucas/>, accessed 3 February 2017.

14 J. Borger, "Trump security adviser Flynn resigns after leaks suggest he tried to cover up Russia talks", *The Guardian*, 14 February 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/feb/13/michael-flynn-resigns-quits-trump-national-security-adviser-russia>, accessed 6 February 2017.

the idea of rapprochement with Russia.<sup>15</sup> In January 2017, during the very early days of Trump's presidency, Washington announced that it would reinforce its assurances to the Baltic states with the deployment of M1A2 battle tanks.<sup>16</sup> This context also lends support to the view that the defence-cooperation agreements negotiated between the US and Sweden and Finland, respectively, to include "military training, information sharing and research" are likely to retain their value under the Trump administration.<sup>17</sup>

The profiles of and the viewpoints expressed by some further members of Trump's executive will continue to reflect the unpredictable character of contemporary US foreign policy. This is evident in the outlook of Stephen Bannon, Trump's current chief political strategist. Speaking in 2014, Bannon expressed the view that Putin's government was a "kleptocracy", and that Russia was "really an imperialist power that want[s] to expand". Conversely, Bannon also acknowledged that "there was something to admire in Putin's call for more traditional values" while stating that Washington should prioritize "radical Islamic terrorism" because it constituted a bigger threat than Putin's Russia.<sup>18</sup> Bannon appears to be under no illusions in his view of Russia's intentions vis-à-vis US security interests. Nevertheless, coming from the "alt-right" political tradition, he does hint at some admiration of Putin's Russia as an international flag-bearer for paleo-conservative ideology.<sup>19</sup> Bannon's initial appointment to the Principals Committee of the National Security Council (NSC) was highly controversial. However, April 2017 saw him demoted from the NSC on the grounds that it was

15 S. Lain, "US-Russia relations: is the prospect of a Trump-Putin reset over?", *Royal United Services Institute Commentary*, 22 February 2017, <https://rusi.org/commentary/us%E2%80%93russia-relations-prospect-trump%E2%80%93putin-reset-over>, accessed 24 February 2017.

16 S. Hankewitz, "The US is to deploy tanks to Estonia", *Estonian World*, 31 January 2017, <http://estonianworld.com/security/the-united-states-is-to-deploy-tanks-to-estonia/>, accessed 4 April 2017.

17 J. Borger, "Finland says it is nearing security deal with US amid concerns over Russia", *The Guardian*, 22 August 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/aug/22/finland-us-russia-military-security>, accessed 4 April 2017.

18 F. Stead Sellers and D. A. Fahrenthold "Why even let 'em in?' Understanding Bannon's worldview and the policies that follow", *The Washington Post*, 31 January 2017, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/bannon-explained-his-worldview-well-before-it-became-official-us-policy/2017/01/31/2f4102ac-e7ca-11e6-80c2-30e57e57e05d\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.adbc6d34a79b](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/bannon-explained-his-worldview-well-before-it-became-official-us-policy/2017/01/31/2f4102ac-e7ca-11e6-80c2-30e57e57e05d_story.html?utm_term=.adbc6d34a79b), accessed 21 February 2017.

19 For a discussion of paleo-conservative ideology during Vladimir Putin's third term as Russian president, see V. Morozov, *Russia's Postcolonial Identity: A Subaltern Empire in a Eurocentric World*, Palgrave MacMillan, Basingstoke, 2015.



inappropriate for a political adviser to be so prominently involved in decisions that were highly consequential to global “war and peace”.<sup>20</sup> This might be an indication that the Trump administration is gradually “normalizing” its approach to security policy.

Trump selected Rex Tillerson, a former CEO at ExxonMobil, as his administration’s Secretary of State. With its lucrative business interests in Russia’s energy economy, it was rumoured that ExxonMobil had been lobbying against US economic sanctions applied to Russia following the Crimean crisis in 2014, and some feared that Tillerson would take a sceptical approach towards the continuation of these sanctions in his position at the State Department.<sup>21</sup> However, throughout the first five months of his term he has maintained that US economic sanctions on Russia will continue as long as Moscow continues to illegally annex Crimea from Ukraine.<sup>22</sup> Following Flynn’s resignation, the appointment of HR McMaster as National Security Adviser to the President was approved by many who wished to see a return to a more circumspect perception of Russia in US foreign policy, and the stable maintenance of America’s core alliances. As Keir Giles argues, McMaster’s appointment came without “a suspect relationship with Moscow and a toxic relationship with the US’s own intelligence services”.<sup>23</sup> Both these features had plagued his predecessor’s short stint in the role. Trump’s Secretary of Defence, James Mattis, with his experience as a retired General in the US Marine Corps, possesses a comprehensive knowledge of European security affairs, which informs his view that the US must remain vigilant to the Russian threat posed to NATO’s “Eastern flank”. Mattis has described Putin’s Russia as a “strategic competitor” of the West.<sup>24</sup> At the same time, he has warned

20 P. Baker, M. Haberman and G. Thrush, “Trump removes Stephen Bannon from National Security Council post”, *The New York Times*, 5 April 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/05/us/politics/national-security-council-stephen-bannon.html>, accessed 6 April 2017.

21 “At NATO, Tillerson pledges U.S. support For Ukraine and continued Russia sanctions”, *Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty*, 31 March 2017, <https://www.rferl.org/a/nato-tillerson-spending-plans/28402111.html>, accessed 23 April 2017.

22 D. Smith and L. Gambino, “Rex Tillerson denies knowledge of Exxon lobbying against Russia sanctions”, *The Guardian*, 11 January 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/jan/11/rex-tillerson-confirmation-hearing-trump-russia>, accessed 4 February 2017.

23 K. Giles, “McMaster appointment could bolster US line on Russia”, *Chatham House Expert Commentary*, 22 February 2017, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/expert/comment/mcmaster-appointment-could-bolster-us-line-russia>, accessed 24 February 2017.

24 E. MacAskill, “Russia is a ‘strategic competitor’ to the West, says James Mattis”, *The Guardian*, 31 March 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/mar/31/russia-strategic-competitor-to-west-james-mattis>, accessed 2 April 2017.

that tangible change is required in the attitudes of many European allies concerning the higher defence spending that is required for NATO to remain viable.<sup>25</sup>

Vice-President Mike Pence has expressed similar sentiments. As he stated in February 2017, “The promise to share the burden of our defense has gone unfulfilled for too many for too long, and it erodes the very foundation of our alliance”.<sup>26</sup> While emphasizing this pressing US concern, both Mattis and Pence have attempted to restore some confidence in transatlantic relations. Nevertheless, true to the unpredictable pattern of the Trump administration’s foreign policy, Tillerson undermined these initiatives a month later in March 2017. The Secretary of State initially indicated that he would skip the April 2017 meeting of NATO foreign ministers in favour of holding talks with Chinese leaders. These events momentarily “unsettled European allies” concerned that the move “reopened questions about US President Donald Trump’s commitment to the alliance”.<sup>27</sup> Although Tillerson eventually backtracked and the meeting was rescheduled, episodes such as this serve to warn European allies that unwavering US support for NATO should not be taken for granted during the Trump era.

The varying influences that shape Trump’s foreign policy direct the attention of many towards the long-standing tradition set by Andrew Jackson, US President between 1829 and 1837, as the conceptual mould from which contemporary US foreign policy will be formed.<sup>28</sup> The “Jacksonian tradition” outlines a desire for an international order in which America is “left alone”, but with the caveat that the severe use of military force will be advocated should others purposely conflict with American interests. Coupled with his scepticism towards multilateral international institutions and his support of economic protectionism, Trump’s statements indicating that he will retaliate against his political

25 “Remarks by Secretary Mattis at the Munich Security Conference in Munich, Germany”, US Department of Defense, 17 February 2017, <https://www.defense.gov/News/Speeches/Speech-View/Article/1087838/remarks-by-secretary-mattis-at-the-munich-security-conference-in-munich-germany>, accessed 20 February 2017.

26 “Remarks by the Vice President at the Munich Security Conference”, The White House Office of the Vice President, 18 February 2017, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2017/02/18/remarks-vice-president-munich-security-conference>, accessed 20 February 2017.

27 A. Mohammed and R. Emmott, “U.S. reverses course and offers new dates for NATO talks”, *Reuters*, 21 March 2017, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-trump-tillerson-nato-idUSKBN16S18S>, accessed 31 March 2017.

28 W. Russell Mead, “The Jacksonian tradition: and American foreign policy”, *The National Interest*, no. 58, 1999, pp. 5–29.

enemies “times 10” as well as his decision to target ISIS militants in Afghanistan with the “mother of all bombs” in April 2017 reveal some Jacksonian foreign-policy tendencies.<sup>29</sup> However, classifying Trump’s foreign policy solely from this perspective would not tell the full story. On the evidence of his first months in office, one might argue that his administration’s foreign policy could also be modelled as an albeit unpredictable version of the “hawkish” policy designs adopted by some previous Republican Party presidents such as Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush. Stripped of the angle of neoconservative ideology that seeks to promote liberal democratic values, this tradition’s military dimension specifies an offensive posture against America’s terrorist adversaries as well as aspiring powers seeking to strategically compete with the US in different regions of the world.<sup>30</sup> Although the process was initiated by the preceding Democratic administration of Barack Obama, the Trump administration’s continuation of US support for NATO’s deterrence presence along the alliance’s “Eastern flank” could nevertheless be perceived as an indicator of the latter outlook. This continuity has been acknowledged and welcomed by some leaders among NATO’s Eastern allies. For example, Estonian President Kersti Kaljulaid stated in this context: “In the new [Trump] administration’s steps [on NATO deterrence], I see not a single U-turn.”<sup>31</sup> It is nevertheless debatable whether this represents justifiable confidence or naïve thinking.

#### ARCTIC TENSIONS AND HYBRID CONFLICT

While much unpredictability emanates from the White House, Nordic-Baltic security continues to be challenged by Russia’s varied approaches to “multi-spectrum” conflict. There has been an increase in Russian military activity in the Arctic over the past decade. Particularly in relation to Russia’s nuclear arsenal, the Arctic is a site where its military capabilities can be based, while focused on other regions. Thus, additions to its military equipment based in the Arctic

29 P. Beinart, “Trump’s self-pitying aggression”, *The Atlantic*, 19 May 2016, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/05/the-jacksonian-candidate/483563/>, accessed 17 April 2017.

30 See C. Dueck, *Hard Line: The Republican Party and US Foreign Policy Since World War II*, Princeton University Press: Princeton NJ, 2010.

31 K. Dozier, “Russia’s NATO neighbors: we’re ok with Trump, actually”, *The Daily Beast*, 15 May 2017, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2017/05/15/russia-s-nato-neighbors-we-re-ok-with-trump-actually>, accessed 17 May 2017.

might not always have direct implications for that specific region. However, tensions spreading from the Ukraine crisis in 2014 have brought a halt to much of the Arctic security cooperation undertaken since the end of the Cold War, which involved Russia, the US, Canada and the Nordic nations. Although the cooperation focused mostly on “softer” security initiatives such as multilateral training exercises involving the coastguards and the emergency services, the militaries of the participating states retained a coordinating role.<sup>32</sup> Hence, these initiatives created a functional basis for military-to-military confidence-building. Lower levels of multilateral cooperation make room for further suspicion and insecurity. For instance, a report written by defence experts for Norway’s Ministry of Defence in 2015 advised that Oslo should increase its defence budget and extend military provisions as a contingency against possible Russian plans to militarily expand from the Kola Peninsula into Norway’s northern territory and its maritime zones in the Barents and Norwegian Seas.<sup>33</sup>

The Arctic is also a potential site for Russian “hybrid warfare” or “full spectrum conflict”, which could manifest in a variety of ways.<sup>34</sup> The notable increase in airspace violations has been described as a near-permanent form of low-intensity conflict taking place between rival states across the international system.<sup>35</sup> With a similar pattern noted in the Baltic states since 2014, airspace violations by the Russian Air Force are also a trend with which Nordic governments have to contend.<sup>36</sup> Given the ongoing Finnish and Swedish debates on NATO membership, as well as Baltic complaints about Russia’s actions communicated on the EU and NATO levels, these airspace violations could perhaps be perceived as a low-tariff tactic aimed at intimidating a target state that considers political action incompatible with Russia’s

32 E. Klimenko, “Russia’s Arctic security policy: still quiet in the High North?”, *SIPRI Policy Paper*, February 2016, pp. 26–32.

33 A. Staalesen, “New reality for Norwegian defence”, *The Barents Observer*, 30 April 2015, <http://barentsobserver.com/en/security/2015/04/new-reality-norwegian-defence-30-04>, accessed 28 January 2017.

34 O. Jonsson and R. Seely, “Russian full-spectrum conflict: an appraisal after Ukraine”, *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, vol. 28, no.1, 2015, pp. 1–22.

35 A. Nardelli and G. Arnett, “NATO reports surge in jet interceptions as Russia tensions increase”, *The Guardian*, 3 August 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/aug/03/military-aircraft-interventions-have-surged-top-gun-but-for-real>, accessed 28 January 2017.

36 D. Sharkov, “Russia violates Finnish airspace for the sixth time in a year”, *Newsweek*, 7 October 2015, <http://europe.newsweek.com/russia-violates-finnish-airspace-sixth-time-year-330105>, accessed 28 January 2017.

strategic interests. The Arctic, among other locations, is a site that is conducive to the effective use of this tactic.<sup>37</sup>

Russia's Arctic border also became an unlikely focus of the European immigration crisis during 2015 and early 2016. Substantial numbers of migrants reached Finland by crossing the border from Russia. Although the debate concerns whether this trend emanated from within Russia with the help of state officials or whether it was the work of illicit traffickers, the border is known to be managed meticulously on the Russian side by the FSB concerning both entry into and exit from Russian territory. Some believe that these events further demonstrate Moscow's aim to intimidate Finnish decision makers and escalate the European immigration crisis. In this context, the chairman of the Finnish Parliamentary Defence Committee, Ilkka Kanerva, is of the opinion that "They [the Russian authorities] are very skilful at sending signals. They want to show that Finland should be very careful when it makes its own decisions on things like military exercises, our partnership with NATO and European Union sanctions".<sup>38</sup> Nordic governments should upgrade their resources and strategic positioning related to the Arctic. With different instruments from within Russia's "full spectrum" repertoire being utilized in the region, the Arctic's position vis-à-vis wider European tensions requires increased vigilance.

#### THE "SUWALKI GAP" AND A2AD

The Arctic is not of direct concern as far as the territorial security of the Baltic states is concerned. However, the "Suwalki Gap" is a specific security problem of pressing importance for them and for Northern Europe. According to the Estonian President's National Security Adviser, Merle Maigre, the term "Suwalki Gap" was first introduced by the former Estonian President Toomas Hendrik Ilves to refer to the thin strip of land that links Poland with Lithuania. This portion of territory is bordered both by Russia's Kaliningrad Oblast and Belarus. Although only 65 km in width, this narrow land corridor

37 A. Russell, "Russia has a long history of violating NATO airspace", *Global News*, 24 November 2015, <http://globalnews.ca/news/2358786/russia-has-a-long-history-of-violating-nato-airspace/>, accessed 28 January 2017.

38 Cited in A. Higgins, "EU suspects Russian agenda in migrants' shifting Arctic route", *The New York Times*, 2 April 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/03/world/europe/for-migrants-into-europe-a-road-less-traveled.html>, accessed 28 January 2017.

is considered vital for Baltic security interests. NATO troops would have to pass through it unimpeded to effectively defend its three Baltic allies. As the convoluted diplomacy surrounding NATO assurances runs its course, the “Suwałki Gap” as a concept highlights to all allies the precise predicament the Baltic states face. A parallel is drawn with the well-known “Fulda Gap” at the height of the Cold War: it was viewed as a serious weakness, specifically for West Germany as a frontline state but also for NATO more generally.<sup>39</sup>

The ethnopolitical situation in the Suwałki Gap is not ideal from a collective-security perspective. Poland’s three main towns in this area, Suwałki, Sejny and Punszk, have Lithuanian minority populations. Local ethnopolitical issues have sometimes been the focus of attention in the frequently tense relations between Warsaw and Vilnius concerning the treatment of minorities. Agnia Grigas has argued that this circumstance could create an opportunity for Russia to stoke these tensions and thus aggravate disputes between Poland and Lithuania. Although the means by which Russia might pursue this strategy remains unclear, any worsening of Polish-Lithuanian ethnopolitical disputes could negatively affect both states’ cooperation in seeking to assist NATO in its efforts to allow free access along the Suwałki Gap.<sup>40</sup> The Suwałki Gap also comes into focus in connection with recent evaluations suggesting that Russian “full spectrum” approaches aiming to destabilize target states by agitating the Russian-speaking minorities within them would be far less effective in the Baltic context than they were in Crimea in March 2014. The Russian-speaking minorities in the Baltic states, which on average are comparatively well integrated locally, are considerably less likely to mobilize against the states within which they reside, which happened in Ukraine with Crimea and thereafter in Donbas starting in 2014. The purposely ambiguous military dimension of a Russian “hybrid” operation in the Baltic states using *spetsnaz* in tandem with local vigilantes would be significantly more difficult to conceal than in these parts of Ukraine.<sup>41</sup> Therefore, in the event of a serious escalation of Russian aggression against the Baltic states, a well-planned and quick

39 M. Maigre, “President Ilves and the Suwałki Gap”, *Diplomaatia*, no. 153, 2016, <https://www.diplomaatia.ee/en/article/president-ilves-and-the-suwalki-gap/>, accessed 28 January 2017.

40 A. Grigas, “Putin’s next land grab: the Suwalki Gap”, *Newsweek*, 14 February 2016, <http://www.newsweek.com/putin-russia-suwalki-gap-426155>, accessed 28 January 2017.

41 A. Kasekamp, “Why Narva is not next?”, *Estonian Foreign Policy Institute Opinion Paper Series*, No. 21, May 2015, [http://www.evi.ee/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/EVI-mottepaber21\\_mai15.pdf](http://www.evi.ee/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/EVI-mottepaber21_mai15.pdf), accessed 28 January 2017.

conventional military invasion aiming rapidly to seal off air, sea and land access might represent a preferable option for Moscow.<sup>42</sup>

Rhetoric emphasizing the nuclear threat further strengthens the Anti-Access / Area Denial (A2AD) that Russia could implement under this scenario. The international fallout from the Ukraine crisis has brought a marked increase in Russian discourse seeking to highlight the force of the country's nuclear arsenal. Nuclear threats have emerged as a formidable element within Russia's repertoire for "multi-spectrum" conflict. It is argued that creating a deterrent hindering a US or NATO military response to Russian aggression is one of the main functions of the Russian nuclear threat in a severe-crisis scenario.<sup>43</sup> Baltic security analysts have pointed to scenarios such as this in their appraisals of weaknesses in RAP as NATO's current deterrence stance. In response to an incursion into allied territory in the Baltic states, for example, the decision to deploy the RAP's Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF) against the threat of possible nuclear retaliation would be a severe test of NATO decision-makers' political mettle. Thus, it has been argued that a "forward-pressed" deterrence posture involving considerably more NATO troops stationed on a permanent basis represents a better option in terms of providing a stronger bulwark against the onset of this scenario in the Baltic states than the persistent presence of NATO's rotating multinational battalions.<sup>44</sup>

Isolated on the Baltic coast, Russia's Kaliningrad Oblast is often considered a prime strategic asset to facilitate a Russian A2AD strategy in Northern Europe. The military situation in Kaliningrad is frequently referred to as a litmus test for the condition of NATO-Russia tensions. Following Russian disillusionment with the US decision to locate a missile defence infrastructure in Poland and the Czech Republic during the years of the George W. Bush administration, for example, Moscow's rumoured retaliation was to use Kaliningrad to position *Iskander* mobile short-range ballistic missiles within the immediate

42 A. Radin, *Hybrid Warfare in the Baltics: Threat and Potential Responses*, Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2017, pp. 28–31.

43 D. Johnson, "Nuclear weapons in Russia's approach to conflict", *Fondation Pour la Recherche Stratégique, Recherches & Documents*, no. 06, p. 15, November 2016, <http://www.frstrategie.org/publications/recherches-documents/web/documents/2016/201606.pdf>, accessed 28 January 2017.

44 H. Praks, "Rethinking deterrence and assurance for the Baltic region – forward conventional deterrence and defence is the key", *International Center for Defense and Security Blog*, 18 June 2015, <https://www.icds.ee/blog/article/rethinking-deterrence-and-assurance-for-the-baltic-region-forward-conventional-deterrence-and-defe/>, accessed 28 January 2017.

hinterland of Polish territory.<sup>45</sup> Military analyst Dmitry Gorenburg describes Kaliningrad as a “forward-operating base” bringing the Russian military critically close to the territory of its Nordic and Baltic neighbours. According to one anonymous NATO official, Kaliningrad allows Russia to host “thousands of troops, including mechanized and naval infantry brigades, military aircraft, modern long-range air defense units and hundreds of armored vehicles”.<sup>46</sup>

Kaliningrad also provides Russia with the opportunity to project its power and pursue its A2AD strategy in the maritime domain. The US is the principal guarantor of maritime security in the Baltic Sea region. However, there are questions concerning where the region stands in the pecking order of US maritime security priorities. China’s growing ability to develop an effective A2AD strategy against the US naval presence in the Pacific is of critical concern to Washington. Securing the sometimes piracy-threatened sea lanes close to Africa and the Middle East is of paramount importance to maintain the stable international commerce that supports America’s global primacy. An inference that can be drawn from the March 2015 US maritime strategy issued jointly by the US Navy, the Marine Corps and the Coast Guard is that these priorities have left Europe’s seas in third place. Although having some doubts about the US strategic focus in the Baltic Sea, Moscow prioritizes this maritime zone on its preference list. Through its 2020 Armaments Programme, Russia plans to modernize its Baltic Naval Fleet based outside St. Petersburg and in Kaliningrad.<sup>47</sup> Finally, although many factors appear to favour a Russian A2AD strategy in the Baltic Sea region, it should also be emphasized that utilizing Kaliningrad would be a strategic gamble for Moscow. Should its adversaries find a way to enforce a blockade on the Oblast, Russia’s military advantage would be seriously compromised.<sup>48</sup> Knowledge that this outcome is feasible could serve as a formidable deterrent against any aggressive Russian intentions involving Kaliningrad. Therefore, to strengthen collective deterrence, it is the responsibility of all NATO allies and partners

45 W. A. Sanchez Nieto, “Assessing Kaliningrad’s geostrategic role: the Russian periphery and a Baltic concern”, *Journal of Baltic Studies*, vol. 42, no. 4, 2011, p. 469–470.

46 Both D. Gorenburg and an “anonymous NATO official” cited in T. Wesolowsky, “Kaliningrad, Moscow’s military trump card”, *RFE/RL*, 18 June 2015, <http://www.rferl.org/a/kaliningrad-russia-nato-west-strategic/27079655.html>, accessed 28 January 2017.

47 S. Lundqvist and J. J. Widen, “The new US maritime strategy: implications for the Baltic sea region”, *The RUSI Journal*, vol. 160, no. 6, p. 34.

48 S. Frühling and G. Lasconjarias, “NATO, A2/AD and the Kaliningrad challenge”, *Survival*, vol. 58, no. 2, p. 97.



surrounding the Baltic Sea to improve their cooperation and capabilities on land and sea and in the air so as to alleviate the A2AD threat.

ASSESSMENT:  
A TIME FOR ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS?

In sum, US influence – a crucial source of stability in Northern Europe since the end of the Cold War – might be on the wane. It is also clear that the Arctic requires increased vigilance in the light of the potential use of different instruments included in Russia’s “full spectrum” repertoire. More importantly for the security of the Baltic states and Northern Europe, the “Suwałki Gap” is a security problem of pressing importance. Given this background, has an era now emerged when the Nordic and Baltic states must consider alternative options to enhance mutual security cooperation? If this is the case, what scope is there for them to do so effectively? Let us start with the first question. The Trump administration has so far chosen to maintain America’s support for NATO’s post-2014 deterrence posture along the Alliance’s Eastern flank. However, Washington’s relations have veered unpredictably both in and out of tension with Russia, a tendency that began when the Trump administration distanced itself from the notion that it was Russia-friendly after Michael Flynn’s resignation as National Security Adviser. Tensions with Moscow have also shown a propensity to escalate since then, especially following the US missile strike against Bashar al-Assad in Syria in April 2017. Soon afterwards and true to his unpredictable form, having denounced NATO less than a year previously, Trump announced that NATO was “no longer obsolete”.<sup>49</sup> Despite the absence of vigorous enthusiasm, there are tangible indications that his administration will remain committed to Europe’s security. This bodes well for those in the Nordic-Baltic region. Nevertheless, Washington is unlikely to lavish resources on the transatlantic partnership. Trump himself as well as some of his administration’s members such as Vice-President Pence and Defense Secretary Mattis have implied that enhanced performance in military burden-sharing is required from NATO’s European allies. If this is not forthcoming, a frosty reception will continue to greet these allies in their diplomacy with Washington.

49 “Trump says NATO ‘no longer obsolete’”, *BBC News*, 12 April 2017, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-39585029>, accessed 17 April 2017.

European allies do not need to pursue alternative security options that are less US-dependent specifically as a means of replacing the American contribution to European security. They do need to do so, however, as a means of ensuring the durability of the transatlantic security partnership. This leads to the second question, concerning the available scope for European states to develop options that will enhance their collective defence and security capacities. To focus specifically on the Nordic-Baltic region, effective options for enhanced security cooperation could be visualized as three concentric circles: an inner circle containing the Nordic and Baltic states exclusively; a middle circle connecting these states to wider European security and defence-cooperation efforts; and an outer circle including the US through the transatlantic link. Security in Northern Europe could be enhanced significantly if cooperation were strengthened within both the inner and middle circles.

As the analysis in this chapter indicates, the specific strategic attention the Nordic and Baltic states need to give to the Arctic and the “Suwałki Gap”, respectively, could understandably take resources away from shared projects promoting Nordic-Baltic security cooperation. However, stronger leadership is required in the areas in which it is feasible to strengthen cooperation so as to ensure tangible results. As one of the most politically high-profile states in the region, Sweden might be expected to take a more prominent role in regional security and defence matters. Carl Hvenmark Nilsson points out the increased Swedish activity since 2015 in coordinating improved Nordic maritime-security cooperation in the Arctic as well as in “shared air space, and exchanging information about incidents/provocations orchestrated by Russia”. Nilsson also mentions Sweden’s prominence within the Northern Group: “a military forum where the Baltic and the Nordic countries coordinate their defense policies together with the United Kingdom, Germany, Poland, and the Netherlands”.<sup>50</sup> Although significant, however, these activities do not contribute to the heavier deterrence requirements of military cooperation.

Before Trump took office in 2017, one view expressed in Sweden was that transitioning from a technical defence cooperation agreement with the US to a bilateral defence guarantee with Washington might

50 C. Hvenmark Nilsson, “The Baltic region’s security gap: understanding why us-Swedish military cooperation is key”, *Centre for Strategic and International Studies Commentary*, 7 June 2016, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/baltic-region%E2%80%99s-security-gap-understanding-why-us-swedish-military-cooperation-key>, accessed 17 April 2017.

serve to enhance Sweden's security without triggering the political complications associated with possible NATO membership. However, as Leo Michel pointed out, such an arrangement would not be satisfactory from Washington's perspective because it would undermine the commitment to collective action that the US continues to encourage through the transatlantic partnership.<sup>51</sup> The US position emphasizing increased military burden-sharing has been spectacularly underscored by the Trump administration. With Trump's election initially fostering doubt over the future viability of the 2016 US-Swedish defence-cooperation agreement, some people such as the leader of the Swedish Moderate Party, Hans Wallmark, have argued that membership even of a "post-American" NATO should be a preferred option. Sweden would gain "strength in cooperating with 28 countries rather just one nation".<sup>52</sup> Although Trump's position on NATO became more positive during the early months of 2017, those in favour of NATO membership for Sweden might still see some merit in the latter option should Trump's position again turn negative.

Nevertheless, the domestic political landscape in both Sweden and Finland remains divided on the merits of NATO membership.<sup>53</sup> In the medium term at least, both will seek to strengthen their defence capacity while contributing to collective security around the Baltic Sea in partnership with NATO. Some might see the strategy put forward by Swedish Defence Minister Peter Hultqvist as a potential guiding blueprint in this regard. What has been termed the "Hultqvist doctrine" involves Swedish support for the transatlantic security link, a rule-based international order and a tough line on Russia for any violations of international law. Swedish NATO membership is not recommended: instead a multi-vector approach is outlined advocating comparatively more flexible defence cooperation with Finland, NATO,

51 L. Michel, "Bilateral defence treaties with the United States: not an alternative to NATO", FIIA Comment 19/2016, 4 October 2016, [http://www.fia.fi/en/publication/618/bilateral\\_defence\\_treaties\\_with\\_the\\_united\\_states/](http://www.fia.fi/en/publication/618/bilateral_defence_treaties_with_the_united_states/), accessed 17 April 2017.

52 R. Milne, "Swedes ponder joining NATO as Trump presidency focuses minds", *The Financial Times*, 21 November 2016, <https://www.ft.com/content/8b83d6e2-aff9-11e6-a37c-f4a01f1b0fa1>, accessed 18 April 2017.

53 T. Cronberg "The NATO divide in Finnish politics", *The European Leadership Network*, 2 September 2014, [http://www.europeanleadershipnetwork.org/the-nato-divide-in-finnish-politics\\_1836.html](http://www.europeanleadershipnetwork.org/the-nato-divide-in-finnish-politics_1836.html), accessed, 17 May 2017.

the US, and other Nordic states.<sup>54</sup> Compared to the benefits of full NATO membership, this compromise could offer fewer opportunities to strengthen territorial defence. Nevertheless, it would facilitate intensified Swedish and Finnish involvement in NATO exercises that are relevant to wider Nordic–Baltic security and could be used to hone military tactics conducive to more effective deterrence.

Some authors have proposed a “deterrence by denial” strategy as a stronger approach to safeguarding the Baltic states against the dangers that Russia presents. It involves signalling to Moscow that any military encroachment on Baltic territory will incur financial and military costs that would exceed any possible strategic gains.<sup>55</sup> Occupying forces would experience a hostile environment intended eventually to bleed the adversary of military and financial resources. This approach is almost indistinguishable from the system of “total defence”, which has historically characterized smaller states, notably Finland, as they seek to compensate for the disparity in troop numbers against a larger adversary.<sup>56</sup> To create the desired effect, “total defence” requires the complete “mobilization of national resources” and the generation of a large military force drawing on conscript and reserve components. “The ultimate aim is to conduct prolonged guerrilla warfare against the encroaching adversary.”<sup>57</sup> Norway, Denmark, Finland and Estonia have, to varying degrees, retained a reserve component as part of their post–Cold–War defence systems since the 1990s. In accordance with the post–2014 Northern European security environment, Lithuania and Sweden reintroduced conscription in 2015 and 2017, respectively.

The renaissance of total defence across Northern Europe provides considerable opportunities to increase security cooperation, leading to enhanced deterrence through more frequent and comprehensive training exercises involving all Nordic and Baltic states. Further exercises could serve to hone and develop this system, which relies heavily for its effectiveness on tight battlefield integration between professional units, reserve components and conscripts. Furthermore,

54 The term “Hultqvist doctrine” was coined by Annika Nordgren Christensen, and is elaborated in R. Dalsjö, “Trapped in the twilight zone? Sweden between neutrality and NATO”, FIIA Working Paper 94, April 2017, p. 23, [http://www.fia.fi/en/publication/674/trapped\\_in\\_the\\_twilight\\_zone/](http://www.fia.fi/en/publication/674/trapped_in_the_twilight_zone/), accessed 17 May 2017.

55 A. Wess Mitchell, “A bold new Baltic strategy for NATO”, *The National Interest*, 6 January 2016, <http://nationalinterest.org/feature/bold-new-baltic-strategy-nato-14818?page=2>, accessed 17 April 2017.

56 T. Ries, *Cold Will: The Defense of Finland*, Brassey’s: London, 1988.

57 K. H. Kaldas, “The evolution of Estonian security options during the 1990s”, *Athena Papers*, no. 4, 2005, p. 26.

given that Nordic and Baltic defence forces tend to require similar specifications for military equipment, there is renewed scope for cooperation in joint procurement. Pooling orders when appropriate brings economies of scale into effect, thereby reducing the financial costs.<sup>58</sup> As demonstrated by Estonia's decision to join the Finns in the procurement of K9 Thunder howitzers from a South Korean manufacturer in February 2017, cooperation in this area can seamlessly cross Northern Europe's NATO / non-NATO divide.<sup>59</sup>

In terms of wider European security cooperation, the Nordic and Baltic states hold a considerable stake in the ongoing efforts to strengthen the European side of the transatlantic security partnership, be it through the EU or NATO. Should its defence dimension develop from the current political impetus, the EU has the potential to emerge as an entity that can further bridge security and defence cooperation between the Nordic and Baltic states. As well as highlighting Finland's commitment to EU solidarity (Article 222, TEU) and mutual assistance (Article 42.7, TEU), the 2016 *Government Report on Finnish Foreign and Security Policy* also alludes to the EU's potential to effectively meet the challenge of hybrid conflict given the extensive mix of civilian and military instruments at its disposal; which are required in response to hybrid tactics.<sup>60</sup> The Trump administration has insisted that the European side of the transatlantic partnership must shoulder more of the collective security burden, and whether this is done through the EU, NATO or both combined is unlikely to matter significantly.

Much of the progress that the EU might make in military and defence affairs will hinge on German leadership. There has been a detailed debate on the question of whether, on the one hand, generational change has allowed Germany's predominantly Western security outlook, in place since 1945, to fade in favour of a pragmatic geo-economic focus that also develops strong engagement with Russia or, on the other hand, whether Berlin remains firmly anchored on the Western security course. Chancellor Angela Merkel's ultimately resolute approach in

58 P. Järvenpää, "On deterrence and defense: the case of Estonia", *International Center for Defense Studies Blog*, 20 March 2014, <https://www.icds.ee/blog/article/on-deterrence-and-defense-the-case-of-estonia/>, accessed 17 May 2017.

59 J. Adamowski, "Estonia joins Finland in howitzer procurement", *Defense News*, 6 February 2017, <http://www.defensenews.com/articles/estonia-joins-finland-in-howitzer-procurement>, accessed 17 April 2017.

60 Government of Finland, *Government Report on Finnish Foreign and Security Policy*, Prime Minister's Office Publications: Helsinki, 2016, pp. 19–20, <http://formin.finland.fi/public/download.aspx?ID=159273&GUID=%7bBE1F0734-B715-4C7F-94AA-CBFD3AF7EA5A%7d>, accessed 17 April 2017.

leading EU economic sanctions against Russia since 2014 lends support to the latter argument.<sup>61</sup> The continuation of this foreign-policy line together with improved German leadership in EU and NATO defence policy should represent a beneficial development for all Nordic and Baltic states. Nevertheless, given the “culture of restraint” that has long shaped Germany’s approach to military affairs, filling Europe’s leadership void in defence could still be an uncomfortable undertaking for any German government.<sup>62</sup> The estimation has been made that “Europe is \$100 billion short of strategic autonomy”. Considering the country’s economic prowess, a German increase in defence spending towards the NATO target of two percent of its GDP would make a sizable contribution to reducing this deficit.<sup>63</sup>

Trump’s criticism of Germany’s defence-spending rates has fostered a counter-productive political backlash from some in German politics. Should Merkel’s government further increase defence investment, it risks being perceived as timidly succumbing to Trump’s outbursts and thus less popular domestically. A large-scale increase in defence spending is unlikely to be popular for the German Social Democratic Party (SPD), the current coalition partner as well as the main rival of Merkel’s Christian Democratic Union (CDU). On this question, Germany’s SPD Foreign Minister, Sigmar Gabriel, has said that “Two per cent would mean military expenses of some €70bn [\$75bn]. I don’t know any German politician who would claim that is reachable nor desirable”.<sup>64</sup> Transcending disputes solely over financing, it has been argued that a lack of political attention in recent decades has allowed serious weaknesses to emerge within the *Bundeswehr*. Criticism has been focused on the shortage of key military equipment available to perform core defence tasks.<sup>65</sup>

61 See H. Kundnani, “Leaving the West behind. Germany looks East”, *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 94, no.1, 2015, pp. 108–116 and the contrary argument in E. Pond, “Germany’s real role in the Ukraine Crisis”, *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 94, no. 2, 2015, pp. 173–176.

62 For context, see R. Baumann and G. Hellmann, “Germany and the use of military force: “total war”, the “culture of restraint” and the quest for normality”, *German Politics*, vol.10, no. 1, 2001, pp. 61–82.

63 F. Pothier, “NATO survival will depend on Germany”, *Politico*, 15 February 2017, <http://www.politico.eu/article/nato-survival-will-depend-on-germany/>, accessed 17 April 2017.

64 “Germany rebukes Tillerson over call for NATO allies to boost defense spending”, *The Guardian*, 31 March 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/mar/31/rex-tillerson-nato-spending-germany>, accessed 17 April 2017.

65 K. von Hammerstein, “‘Rearmament spiral’: a German clash over Trump’s NATO demands”, *Der Spiegel*, 24 February 2017, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/trump-nato-demands-becomes-political-debate-in-germany-a-1136140.html>, accessed 17 April 2017

## CONCLUSION

During the 2016 US Presidential Election campaign and since taking office in 2017, Trump has appeared to advocate the radical re-thinking of the many established norms that have traditionally shaped US global engagement. Much of his rhetoric initially sparked strong apprehension among America's allies and partners, chief among them being the Nordic and Baltic states. There may be indications that the Trump administration is gradually "normalizing" its approach to security policy. Nevertheless, it seems clear that unwavering US support for NATO can no longer be taken for granted, and that unpredictability will remain a dominant feature of the White House during the Trump era.

My aim in this chapter was to address two key questions in the light of these developments. First, should the Nordic and Baltic states consider alternative options to include enhanced mutual security cooperation in this era of growing unpredictability? I have argued that the Trump administration will probably remain committed to Europe's security, but NATO's European allies might be required to invest more in military burden-sharing. This could force European allies to pursue less-US-dependent security options, which leads to the second key question. What scope do European states have for developing effective options that will enhance their collective defence and security capacities? The analysis focused on three concentric circles: an inner circle comprising the Nordic and Baltic states; a middle circle including the nexus between these states, and wider European security and defence-cooperation efforts; and an outer circle including the US through the transatlantic link. I suggest that security in Northern Europe can be enhanced significantly if cooperation is strengthened within both the inner and the middle circles.

Even so, from a Nordic-Baltic perspective, security-cooperation at the regional, European and transatlantic levels continue, for now, to be only moderately effective. The uncertainties concerning the prospects for a stronger European defence project, combined with Trump's unpredictable security policy, will ensure that the wider security environment will continue to challenge Nordic and Baltic decision-makers beyond 2017.