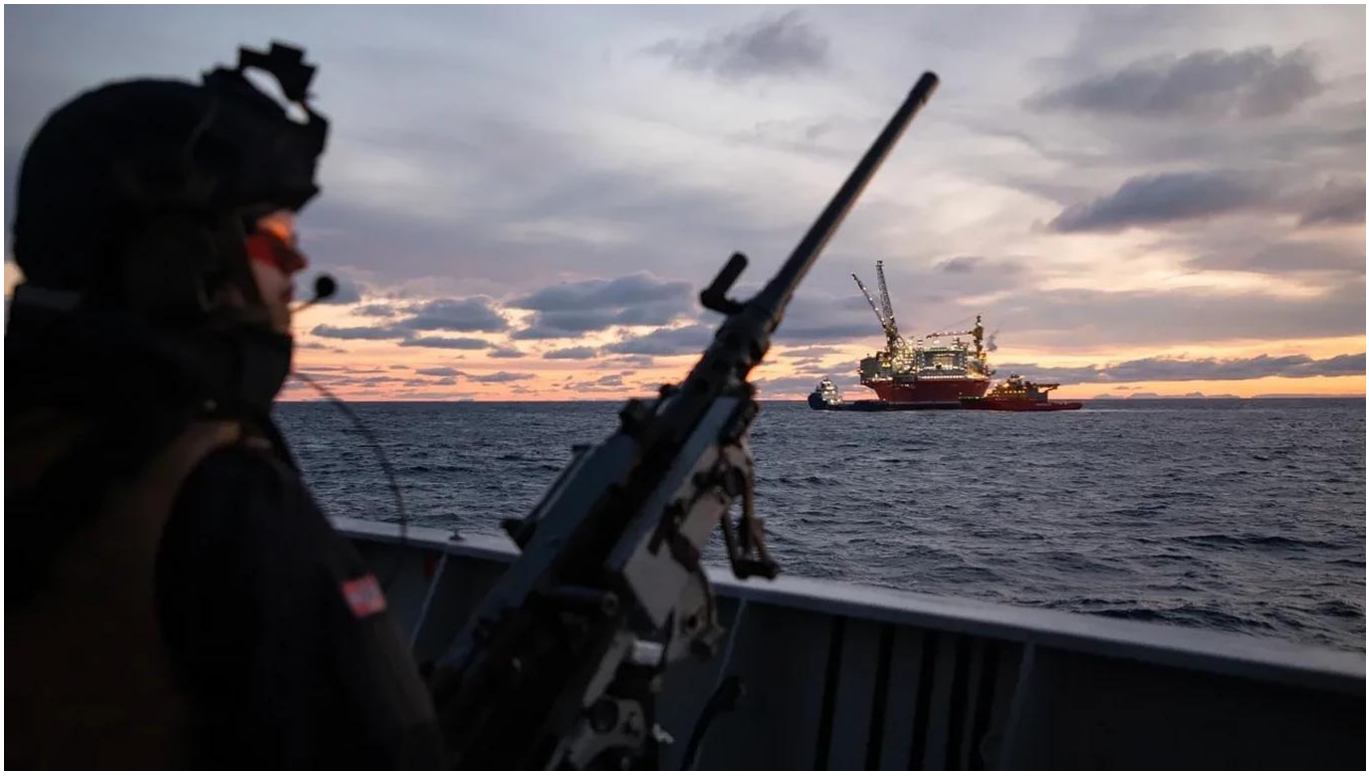
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Nordic-Baltic Security Coalition Meets Amid Heightened European Security Concerns

By Moscow Times Reporter

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The Royal Norwegian Navy Frigate HNoMS Fridtjof Nansen conducts a critical undersea infrastructure security patrol at the Goliat oil field in the Barents Sea. **jefnations.org**

Leaders of the Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF), a Nordic-Baltic military coalition that can act independently in its own right, are meeting in Tallinn as European security concerns remain heightened due to Russia's war on Ukraine.

The JEF meeting comes after NATO head Mark Rutte issued a stark warning to alliance members to "turbo-charge" defense spending, saying European nations were not prepared for the threat of future war with Russia.

Estonian Prime Minister Kristen Michal is expected to recommend to JEF members to raise the minimum threshold of defense spending to at least 2.5% of GDP during this week's

meeting.

Russia's nearly three-year war against Ukraine will be one of the main topics discussed at Monday and Tuesday's JEF meeting.

"In addition to the development of our own national defense, we must continue to stand by Ukraine. A victory for Ukraine is a victory for all of us — both Europe and the United States. All NATO states should focus not only on developing their own defense capabilities, but also on winning the war in Europe," Michal said ahead of the meeting.

Among the ideas being discussed is expanding the JEF to include Poland and Ukraine, which could provide a "deterrent presence in Ukraine through frequent exercises and the provision of air support," according to a recent article by Ian Bond, deputy director of the Centre for European Reform.

The JEF could also act as a response mechanism for incidents such as suspected sabotage of critical underwater infrastructure.

Several instances in recent years have raised suspicions of sabotage by enemy actors. Most recently was the cutting of two undersea data cables on the Baltic Sea floor in November, which occurred immediately after Ukraine used long-range missiles to attack Russia, according to Reuters.

A diminished U.S. commitment to NATO under President-elect Donald Trump could elevate the JEF's importance for ensuring Europe's security.

In his article, Bond called for members to "ensure that the JEF has realistic tasks, is resourced to perform them, and contributes to NATO's deterrent and defensive activities in the Nordic-Baltic and North Atlantic regions."

Established after Russia annexed Crimea from Ukraine in 2014, JEF is a rapid deployment force to respond to security threats in Europe. The British-led program includes Denmark, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands and Norway.

Finland and Sweden joined the JEF in 2017 as non-NATO members and Iceland joined in 2021.

Yet despite its potential, critics of JEF say it is slow, underfunded and lacks the participation of Germany and Poland.

"For now, the JEF is well-suited to filling the gap between peace and open conflict — the grey zone in which NATO may struggle to agree how to react to events — and should concentrate on learning to fill it effectively," Bond wrote.

"The JEF could conceivably become involved in full-scale conflict in its own right. Fighting such wars, however, would require far more resources than the JEF currently has," he said.

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