

The Kingdom of Denmark – Speech to the Nordic Folk & Sikkerheds annual conference in Bergen, Norway on the 19th May 2026.

My name is Kaj Kleist, and as Chairman of Folk & Sikkerhed Greenland, it is both an honor and a privilege to lead the delegation from the Kingdom of Denmark at this year's Nordic Conference here in Bergen.

As many of you will have noticed, our delegation is smaller than usual. This reflects the current political situation in Denmark, where a new government has not yet been formed, and where ministers and senior representatives from Defence and Civil Protection therefore have not been able to participate.

Still, I believe our presence here matters greatly.

Because today, more than at any time in recent decades, the Nordic countries need each other.

For generations, our nations have been bound together by geography, by history, and by values. We are small countries in a large and often unforgiving part of the world. We have survived not because we were the biggest powers, but because we built strong societies, trusted institutions, and close cooperation across our borders.

From the North Atlantic to the Baltic Sea, from Greenland and Iceland to Finland, we share an understanding that freedom, stability, and peace cannot be taken for granted. They must be protected — politically, economically, socially, and militarily.

That understanding has returned with full force.

Like the other Nordic nations, the Kingdom of Denmark has made a historic shift in defense policy and defense spending. Denmark's defense budget has now reached 3.3% of GDP, with the clear ambition of reaching the NATO target of 5% by 2030 — 3.5% for defense and 1.5% for resilience.

This includes an increased military presence in Greenland and the Faroe Islands, more conscripts — now including both men and women — and significant investments in military capability, logistics, and preparedness.

But rebuilding defense is not only about budgets and equipment.

It is also about public understanding.

Compared with several of our Nordic neighbors, Denmark still lacks a clear and publicly accessible vision for the defense we are now rebuilding. And that matters. Because in democratic societies, defense policy cannot become something distant, technical, or hidden away from the public conversation.

At the end of the day, the defense we build exists for one reason only: to protect our people, our sovereignty, and our freedom.

And citizens deserve to understand the choices being made in their name.

From the outside, it appears that Danish defense planning is guided largely by NATO force goals. That is understandable and necessary. But NATO's Article 3 is also very clear: every member state must maintain the capacity to defend itself while contributing to the collective defense of the Alliance.

That principle is especially important for us in the Nordic region.

Denmark and Sweden stand at the entrance to the Baltic Sea. Finland guards NATO's longest border with Russia. Norway watches the High North and the Arctic. Iceland sits in the middle of the North Atlantic sea lanes. Greenland and the Faroe Islands form part of the strategic backbone between North America and Europe.

Together, our geography gives us responsibility.

And together, our cooperation gives us strength.

The war in Ukraine has reminded us of this in the harshest possible way.

Russia's brutal, unprovoked, and unjustified invasion shattered many of the assumptions that Europe had built upon since the end of the Cold War. Ukrainians are now paying the price — in blood, destruction, and sacrifice — for defending not only their own freedom, but the principles upon which European security rests.

And I am proud that the Nordic countries have stood united in supporting Ukraine.

Not because it is politically convenient.

But because we understand what is at stake.

History has taught the Nordic people what happens when aggressive powers believe that borders, treaties, and sovereignty can simply be ignored.

We know that peace without freedom is not peace at all.

And we know that neutrality without strength becomes vulnerability.

The consequences of the war are already visible in our own region. The sabotage of Nord Stream 1 and 2, repeated damage to undersea infrastructure, cyber threats, and the activities of the shadow fleet all demonstrate that we are facing a more dangerous and unpredictable security environment.

This requires vigilance.

It requires resilience.

And above all, it requires cooperation.

The accession of Sweden and Finland into NATO represents one of the most important strategic developments in Northern Europe in our lifetime. It creates opportunities for a truly integrated Nordic defense and security framework.

Not to save money.

But to create greater strength.

Greater coordination.

Greater situational awareness.

And greater ability to defend our part of the world together.

Because I think we all understand that an old era has ended.

For decades, many Europeans quietly assumed that, in the final instance, America would always carry the heaviest burden for Europe's defense.

That assumption no longer holds.

Europeans must now take far greater responsibility for Europe's security.

And in that effort, the Nordic countries have a special role to play.

Not only because of geography.

But because trust between our nations already exists.

In the High North, we face a particular challenge.

Today, the threat to the integrity of the Kingdom of Denmark no longer comes only from the traditional sources we once expected. Earlier this year, the current US administration once again expressed ambitions regarding the takeover of my homeland, Greenland.

I cannot overstate the impact those statements had on the people of Greenland.

For many Greenlanders, this was not experienced as abstract diplomacy or political rhetoric. It was deeply personal. People began discussing contingency plans for what to do in the event of pressure or even annexation by Denmark's closest ally.

That reality changed something in us.

In response, Folk & Sikkerhed Greenland published the preparedness folders "*What If?*" and "*How to Talk to Your Children in Times of Crisis*" in both Greenlandic and Danish, together with UNICEF Greenland. These were distributed to families across Greenland.

And yet, in that difficult moment, something else also became very clear.

The Nordic countries stood together.

The solidarity shown toward Greenland and Denmark from across the Nordic region has been deeply moving, and I want to express my sincere gratitude for that support here today.

Because solidarity matters.

Especially in uncertain times.

Today, it appears that all parties are seeking solutions within the framework of the existing Agreement on the Defense of Greenland. And we believe solutions can be found that address legitimate security concerns without surrendering a single square inch of Greenland.

But the broader lesson remains.

If we want to preserve a rules-based international order, then we must be willing to defend it.

Not only when it is easy.

Not only when it is convenient.

But especially when it becomes difficult.

The principles that protect Greenland today are the same principles that protect Svalbard, the Åland Islands, and every small nation that depends upon international law rather than raw power.

And for us in the Nordic countries, this is not a theoretical discussion.

Our entire modern history has been shaped by the understanding that law must be stronger than force.

That agreements must matter.

That sovereignty must be respected.

And that small nations survive by standing together.

That is why Nordic cooperation matters more today than it has for generations.

Not as symbolism.

Not as nostalgia.

But as strategic necessity.

Because when the world becomes more unstable, trust becomes one of the most valuable forms of security a nation can possess.

And trust is something the Nordic countries have built over centuries.

So let us continue to stand together.

Let us strengthen the bonds between our nations.

Let us show Europe — and the wider world — that cooperation, democracy, solidarity, and respect for international law are not signs of weakness.

They are sources of strength.

And let future generations be able to say that when the rules-based order came under pressure... the Nordic countries did not look away.

We stood together.

We defended it.

And we preserved it.

Thank you.