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PROSPECTS FOR DEFENCE COOPERATION IN A MULTILATERAL FRAMEWORK

Iro Särkkä, Minna Ålander, Joel Linnainmäki & Antti Pihlajamaa

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AFD	Alternative für Deutschland (a German political party)
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
AUKUS	Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States
BRICS	Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa; later joined by Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran and the United Arab Emirates
CAVS	Common Armoured Vehicle System
C–130J	Super Hercules transport aircraft
C2	Command and Control
CSDP	European Union's Common Security and Defence Policy
DCA	Defence Cooperation Agreement
DCP2023	Defence Command Paper 2023
EC	European Communities
EEC	European Economic Community
EEZ	Exclusive Economic Zone
EFP	enhanced Forward Presence
EI2	European Intervention Initiative
ESSI	European Sky Shield Initiative
E3	France, Germany and the UK
F/A–18	Hornet multirole combat aircraft
F–35	Multirole combat aircraft
FCAS	Future Combat Air System
FLF	Forward Land Forces
FNC	Framework Nations Concept
GCAP	Global Combat Air Programme
IAMD	Integrated Air and Missile Defence
IR2023	Integrated Review Refresh 2023
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
JEF	Joint Expeditionary Force
JFC	Joint Force Command
MAWS	Maritime Airborne Warfare System
MGCAS	Main Ground Combat System

MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NB8	Nordic-Baltic Eight, a regional cooperation format that includes Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway and Sweden
NDPP	NATO Defence Planning Process
NG	Northern Group
NORDEFCO	Nordic Defence Cooperation
P3	France, the UK and the US
P5	UN Security Council's five permanent members, i.e. China, France, Russia, the UK and the US
OCCAR	Organisation Conjointe de Coopération en matière d'Armement, Organisation for Joint Armament Co-operation
QUAD	France, the US, the UK and Germany (Euro Quad)
RNS	Revue nationale stratégique, National Strategic Review
SMEB	Strategic, military, economic-political and bilateral factors impacting defence cooperation
IOR	Indian Ocean Region
IORA	Indian Ocean Rim Association
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
IT	Information Technology
IUU	Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated fishing
JCPOA	Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action
MDA	Maritime Domain Awareness
MDB	Multilateral Development Banks
MFN	Most Favored Nation
MNC	Multinational Corporations
MSR	Maritime Silk Road
NDS	National Defence Strategy
NFL	National Football League
NSC	National Security Council
NSS	National Security Strategy
NATO	Northern Atlantic Treaty Organization
NPT	Non-Proliferation Treaty
NTS	Non-traditional security
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
OFAC	Office of Foreign Assets Control
PNTR	Permanent Normal Trade Relations
PPP	Purchasing Power Parity

RCEP	Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership
SDR	Special Drawing Right
SEC	Security and Exchange Commission
SLOC	Sea Lines of Communication
SOE	State-Owned Enterprises
S&ED	Strategic and Economic Dialogue
THAAD	Terminal High Altitude Area Defence
TPP	Trans-Pacific Partnership
TTIP	Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USDFC	US Development Finance Corporation
VFA	Visiting Forces Agreement
WHO	World Health Organization
WTO	World Trade Organization

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FOREWORD

Finland's accession to NATO in April 2023 was a turning point for the country, ending the era of military non-alignment. Before joining NATO, Finland formed several defence cooperation partnerships bi-, tri- and minilaterally with its neighbouring countries and major NATO member states. To address this topic, a research group called "Finland as a NATO member: The potential of deepening bi-, tri- and minilateral defence cooperation within a multilateral framework", also known as the BITRIMINI research group, was established at the Finnish Institute of International Affairs (FIIA). The objective was to bring together researchers with expertise in key NATO members, Finland's bi-, tri- and/or minilateral allies and NATO as an organization. The research group was initiated and led by Iro Särkkä (Principal Investigator), and joined by Joel Linnainmäki, Antti Pihlajamaa and Minna Ålander. Each researcher was allocated their own country of expertise to focus on, and the empirical fieldwork was conducted in pairs of two researchers. Within the research group, Joel Linnainmäki was responsible for the country chapters on Norway and Sweden, Antti Pihlajamaa for the UK and Estonia, Iro Särkkä for France and Estonia, and Minna Ålander for Germany and Sweden. Iro Särkkä was responsible for developing the analytical framework of the study and writing the introductory and concluding chapters, with the substantial help of Minna Ålander and the other team members.

This report studies various defence cooperation formats and their importance for Finland as a new NATO member state. It seeks to widen our understanding of the rationales behind the security and defence policies of the six selected key European allies: Finland's neighbours – Estonia, Norway and Sweden – and regional powers – France, Germany and the United Kingdom. The roles of the six countries in intra-alliance policy-making were also studied. The findings of this report are primarily based on policy experts' and researchers' interview data, and they were substantiated by secondary research literature. Hence, they do not necessarily represent the official views of any government. The project was funded

by FIIA as an in-house research project. The research group would like to express its gratitude to the institute for the funding and overall support. We are particularly grateful to Juha Jokela, Harri Mikkola, Matti Pesu and Eoin MacNamara at FIIA, whose comments and reviews improved the manuscript. A special thanks also goes to the Finland in Afghanistan research group (FIIA Report 72, 2022), whose report served as an inspiration for the empirical research setting of this study. In particular, the guidance provided by Katariina Mustasilta was invaluable for the methodological design. We would also like to thank Timo R. Stewart and Charly Salonius-Pasternak, who readily shared their expertise and knowledge with this project, as well as Juha Käpylä and Anu Ruokamo from the FIIA research services team, Anna Majuri and Emma Koponen from research communications, Maiju Kivinen for guiding us through the publication process, and the FIIA events team for organizing our publication event.

Most importantly, however, our heartfelt gratitude goes to all the people we interviewed in many European capitals: Berlin, Brussels, Helsinki, London, Oslo, Paris, Stockholm and Tallinn. Your commitment, time and expertise made this study possible. It also made us feel that we are truly welcome in NATO as the 31st ally!

INTRODUCTION

Before joining NATO in April 2023, Finland had actively and significantly expanded its network of defence cooperation formats and agreements with key European partners. Some of these cooperation formats were primarily bilateral, such as the Finnish–Swedish defence cooperation or the bilateral agreement with the US, and others took trilateral forms, including the agreement between Finland, Sweden and the US. Finland also engaged in minilateral formats such as the Nordic Defence Cooperation (NORDEFCO) and the UK-led Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF).

After the NATO accession, the context and objectives of Finland's smaller defence cooperation formats have changed. Whereas in the early 2000s, defence cooperation was understood in Finland as a somewhat separate strain of development or an additional tool to enhance national defence capacity, it now takes place within the framework of NATO's collective defence. In the new context, bi-, tri- and minilateral cooperation can function as an important tool to achieve different objectives. These include bridging gaps below the threshold of NATO's Article 5 collective defence and deterrence and enhancing individual member states' national defence capability in accordance with NATO's Article 3.

In this report, we focus on studying defence cooperation at the level of nation states, through key actors that steer policy development and define objectives in the countries in question. Second, when we refer to a multilateral framework in this study, we mean NATO as the main collective security arrangement in the Euro-Atlantic region.

The key research questions in this report are:

1. What different strategic, military, cultural, economic and political drivers shape the strategic decisions behind defence cooperation in different countries?
2. How is cooperation with Finland viewed in the capitals of Finland's priority European partners, namely Estonia, France, Germany, Norway, Sweden and the UK?
3. How are Finland's interests aligned with those of its key partners? How could Finland best utilize the bi-, tri- and minilateral formats, and in which concrete areas could cooperation be deepened?

We argue that (sub)regional defence cooperation can yield positive outcomes for those member states that lack the necessary resources and military capabilities unilaterally, and it may benefit the wider alliance by compensating for individual member states' shortcomings through shared arrangements. But more importantly, bi-, tri- and minilateral defence cooperation can also open new venues in intra-alliance policymaking.

RESEARCH BACKGROUND

During the post-Cold War period, Finland deepened and widened its defence cooperation bi- and minilaterally with various countries.[1] In doing so, Finland's membership in the European union (EU) (1995) and active partnership with NATO since joining the Partnership for Peace in 1994 served as a basis for defence cooperation. Pesu and Iso-Markku (2022) have studied Finland's relationship with NATO and identified three consecutive periods of partnership. The first, the non-alignment era (1992–2014), saw significant military procurements bilaterally with the US, active participation in NATO- and EU-led activities and the inception of NORDEFCO. It was followed by the alignment era (2014–2022), during which Finland deepened its cooperation with NATO and started building bi-, tri- and minilateral defence cooperation formats with key partners and allies, namely Sweden, Norway, the US and the UK-led JEF. Finally, Pesu and Iso-Markku contend that during the alliance era (2022-), Finland continues to deepen its relations with key partners and allies as a member of the alliance.[2]

1 Ministry of Defence of Finland n.d.b.

2 Pesu and Iso-Markku 2022, 9–13.

From the perspective of Finland's defence cooperation policy, we identity four periods of development. The first was the early phase between 1992 and 2008 when Finland primarily focused on multilateral formats. The second, formative period followed between 2009 and 2014 and witnessed the establishment of the minilateral defence format NORDEFCO. The third period marked the widening of formats, with various bi- and trilateral agreements signed between 2014 and 2022. During the fourth period from the 2022 NATO membership application onwards, defence cooperation is being integrated into the NATO framework. As a result, Finland is currently adapting its strategic culture, characterized by "persistence, continuity, cooperation, and trust"[3], while moving away from the era of military non-alignment into membership in NATO.

Figure 1 maps out the different defence cooperation formats in a temporal perspective.

Geographically, there has been a strong focus on formats that operate within Finland's immediate geographical region: the Nordic and the Baltic countries. The minilateral NORDEFCO and Nordic-Baltic Eight (NB8) cooperation formats are examples of these. NORDEFCO was formalized as a structure in 2009, with a focus on cost-effective capability development.[4] It found initial success especially in joint training and exercises but largely failed to meet expectations in joint procurement projects. The only major exception was the decision in 2017 to jointly acquire a Nordic combat uniform.[5] After the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014, NORDEFCO shifted its focus to security and defence cooperation, including regional military exercises. Especially Finland and Sweden wished to deepen the defence cooperation.[6] However, the depth of cooperation was limited by diverging defence policy alignments: Norway and Denmark based their security on NATO, while Finland and Sweden remained militarily non-aligned. This setting prevented the Nordic countries from conducting joint defence planning for the region and from fully sharing information.[7]

Finnish-Swedish defence cooperation (FISE) has developed in the context of resurgent Russia. In 2015, the countries agreed to also discuss military cooperation during conflicts, which significantly broadened the scope of the defence relationship. In 2018, the countries signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on defence cooperation, which explicitly

3 Interviewee 44.

4 Nordefco 2009.

5 Saxi 2019.

6 Friis and Tamnes 2024.

7 Saxi 2019.

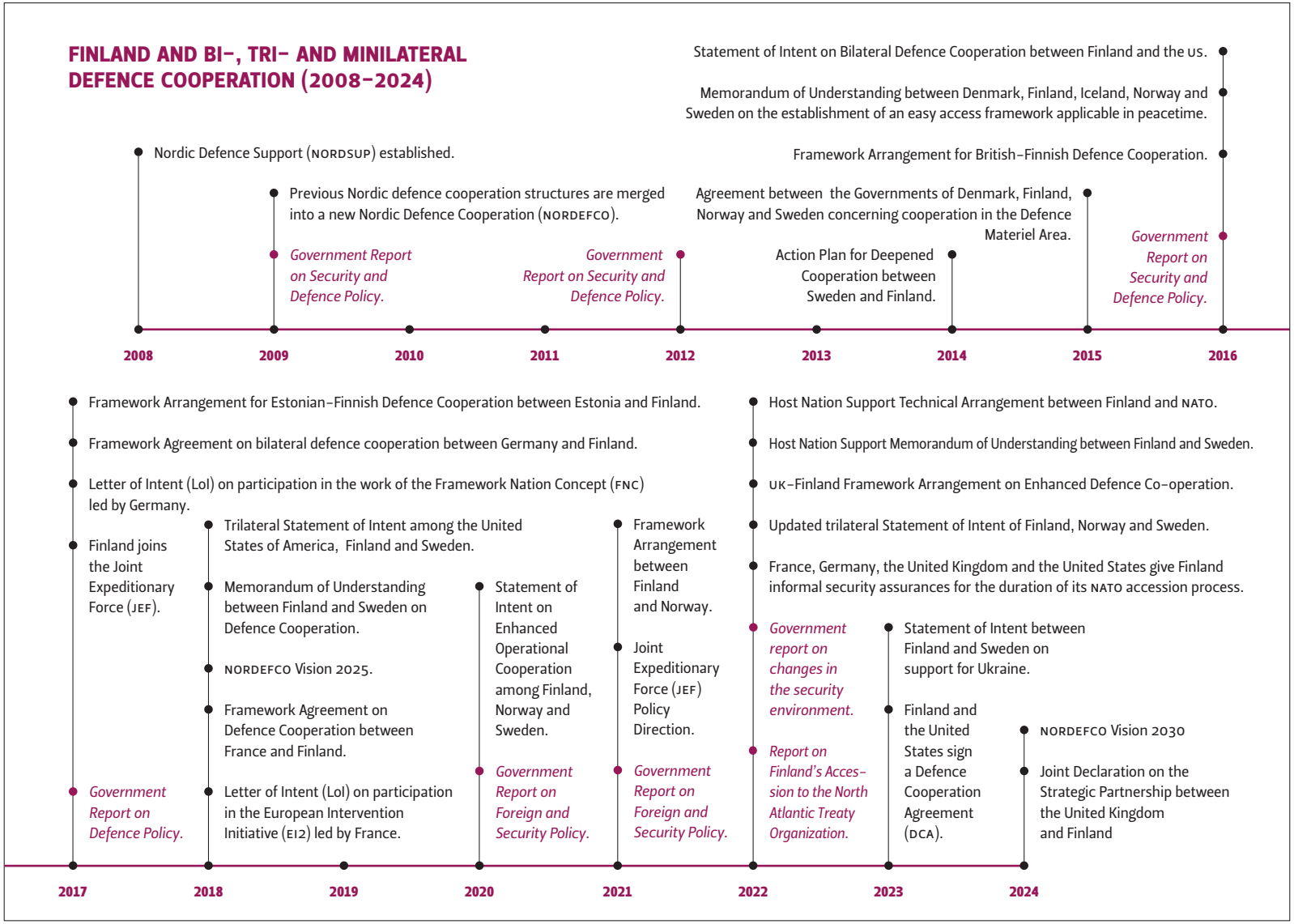

Figure 1. Timeline of Finland's most significant bi-, tri- and minilateral defence cooperation agreements (2008–2024).

Source: Finnish Ministry of Defence. International Conventions and Defence Policy Reports.

stated that it covers "peace, crisis and war", and that no "predetermined limits will be set on deepening the bilateral defence cooperation".[8] In practical terms, FISE has focused on three major domains: the maritime domain and sea surveillance in the form of the Swedish–Finnish Naval Task Group and the Amphibious Task Unit; the air domain in operations as well as command and control structures; and land operations with a focus on building interoperability.[9] Furthermore, Finland and Sweden have intensified cooperation in joint operational planning and exercises. FISE cooperation has been complemented with looser trilateral cooperation between Finland, Sweden and Norway, which signed a trilateral Statement of Intent in 2020.[10] However, the trilateral cooperation was never as close as that between Finland and Sweden due to Norway's membership in NATO.

When it comes to Finland's defence cooperation with major regional powers, France, Germany and the UK, the flexible multilateral defence cooperation formats have facilitated Finland's bilateral relations with the respective countries. Finland joined the UK-led JEF and the German-led Framework Nations Concept (FNC) in 2017. Similarly, the French-led European Intervention Initiative (EI2), which Finland joined a year later in 2018, has been considered important as part of a more EU-focused defence agenda. However, neither of the initiatives led by France and Germany has reached the same level of intensity as the UK-led JEF. The aim of the JEF cooperation has been to develop the capabilities and interoperability of the Finnish Defence Forces, but it has also been seen to serve the deepening of defence cooperation between the participating countries, especially with the UK. The JEF policy direction issued in 2021 specified its focus, with the principal geographical area of interest being the High North, the North Atlantic and the Baltic Sea region, and the operational focus the ability to respond to various contingencies in peacetime as well as to operate "as a force, across a broad spectrum of operational activity."[11]

Finland has also signed bilateral agreements with all three regional powers, France, Germany and the UK. With the UK, a bilateral agreement was signed in 2016,[12] and additional mutual security assurances for

8 Ministry of Defence of Finland 2018b.

9 Pesu and Iso-Markku 2024, 184.

10 Ministry of Defence of Finland 2020.

11 Joint Expeditionary Force 2021.

12 Ministry of Defence of Finland n.d.c.

the duration of the NATO accession process in May 2022.[13] Moreover, in June 2022, a UK–Finland Framework Arrangement on Enhanced Defence Co-operation was signed, outlining five cooperation areas that the parties are particularly committed to: high-level strategic dialogue, the JEF, the High North and the Baltic Sea region, hybrid threats and interoperability.[14] With Germany and France, Finland signed a framework agreement to strengthen cooperation on security and defence in connection with joining the FNC and EI2 in 2017 and 2018, respectively.[15]

Although this report focuses on European allies, it is worth emphasizing that Finland signed its most significant bilateral defence cooperation agreement (DCA) with the US in December 2023.[16] The history of Finland's partnership with the US dates back to the decision to procure F/A-18 Hornet fighter jets from the US-based defence company McDonnell Douglas (later Boeing) in the 1990s.[17] This development was a stepping stone for Finland to initiate defence cooperation with the US in procurement and the training of personnel after the Cold War. Later, in 2016, Finland signed a bilateral statement of intent with the US with the objective of deepening the bilateral defence cooperation between the countries. A trilateral agreement with Sweden and the US was signed in 2018.[18] The significance of Finland's geopolitical location is noted in Washington, and Finland is considered a "trusted partner" of the US.[19]

Despite the variety of cooperation formats Finland was engaged in before its NATO accession, the objectives of defence cooperation were somewhat unclear. On one hand, Finland wished to be part of all possible formats; on the other, it was clear to begin with that not all of them would likely reach the same degree of defence integration. Furthermore, some wishful thinkers might have even thought that defence cooperation could somehow substitute for Finland's membership in NATO. As Finland is now a militarily aligned country, there are no limits to how far defence integration can go. This will also have repercussions for how it can build closer bi, tri- and minilateral partnerships with key partners and allies.

Pesu and Iso-Markku (2022) recognise four types of benefits that arise for Finland as a NATO member from bi-, tri- and minilateral defence

13 "Should either country suffer a disaster or an attack, the United Kingdom and Finland will, upon request from the affected country, assist each other in a variety of ways, which may include military means." Prime Minister's Office 2022.

14 Ministry of Defence of Finland 2022a.

15 Ministry of Defence of Finland 2018a.

16 Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland 2023.

17 Vanhanen et al. 2023.

18 Ministry of Defence of Finland 2016; Ministry of Defence of Finland 2018c.

19 Interviewee 18.

cooperation formats. They benefit Finland by 1) "coordinating, organising, and executing NATO's deterrence and defence activities in the Nordic–Baltic", 2) "strengthening political and military arrangements for receiving and providing military assistance and ensuring security of supply in a conflict scenario", 3) "hedging against situations in which NATO for some reason is too slow or wholly incapable of taking decisions or action", and 4) "increasing cost-efficiency through coordination of defence planning, pooling and sharing of military assets, as well as joint development and acquisition of defence materiel."[20] This study takes a similar view and further seeks to discover how Finland in particular could develop and advance its bi-, tri- and minilateral defence cooperation with its key European allies.

OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH

In recent years, European defence cooperation research has mostly discussed cooperation within formalized institutional contexts.[21] Especially in Europe, research has prominently focused on EU- and NATO-related defence cooperation formats.[22] Recently, Nemeth (2022), for instance, has identified three major approaches: studies that focus on "multinational corps" in NATO-led initiatives; research on "multinational capability development" in EU and NATO initiatives, especially the pooling and sharing aspect; and literature on collaborative procurement and European armament cooperation.[23]

A second group of studies has investigated permanently and flexibly structured defence cooperation formats. Examples of the former category include multinational defence cooperation formats such as the Baltic Defence Cooperation, Benelux Defence Cooperation, Central European Defence Cooperation, British–Dutch Amphibious Force, British–French Defence Cooperation, Nordic Defence Cooperation, South-Eastern European Defence Cooperation and Visegrad Group. The flexible defence formats include several initiatives, known as the "European alphabet soup"[24], which have been the focus of study. As earlier discussed, the regional powers in Europe, France, Germany and the UK, have initiated their own flexible formats, facilitating European defence cooperation at

20 Pesu and Iso-Markku 2022, 41.

21 Nemeth 2022, 4–5; Zandee et al. 2016.

22 Haroche 2017; Tardy 2018.

23 Nemeth 2022, 5–7.

24 Flynn 2022.

different levels: the German-led FNC facilitates European capability development, the British-led JEF focuses on operational cooperation, and the French-led EI2 aims to create a shared European strategic culture.

A third strand of research concerns the role of bilateral defence cooperation. Such studies have addressed country-specific cases, including Franco-British,[25] German-British[26] and Franco-German defence cooperation[27], or bilateral formats in the Indo-Pacific region.[28] Another group of studies has focused on the role of bilateral DCAs,[29] with some studies exclusively dealing with the DCAs between the US and third countries.[30] With regard to minilateral defence cooperation, there has been a strong regional focus. European studies have focused on new emerging minilateral defence cooperation formats such as NORDEFCO,[31] whereas studies of minilateral cooperation in the Indo-Pacific have focused on formats such as ASEAN.[32] Other studies have used different categorisations, grouping cooperation formats under "official" defence cooperation (i.e. formal agreements such as bilateral defence cooperation agreements, DCAs), military cooperation and defence industrial cooperation.[33]

It is worthwhile to point out that a great majority of these studies were conducted before Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Hence, defence cooperation took place in a completely different strategic and threat environment, which explains the strong focus on the pooling and sharing aspects in research literature regarding both the EU and NATO. In current thinking, however, the economic rationale does not hold as much weight as it did before Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, and especially before the full-scale invasion in 2022. These changed circumstances call for further study of the significance of bi-, tri- and minilateral defence cooperation formats when the main objective is to create large-scale war-fighting capacity.

This report takes a somewhat different approach than many previous defence cooperation studies. It focuses on studying the factors behind the positions of Finland's key regional allies in NATO and their perception of bi-, tri- and minilateral defence cooperation with Finland. Hence, a

25 Faure 2018; Pannier 2016, 2017 and 2018.

26 Urbanovská et al. 2021.

27 See i.e. Maulny and Mölling 2020; Krotz and Wolf 2018; Kunz 2019.

28 Ishihara 2014; Samuel 2007; Mishra 2018.

29 Kinne 2018; Kinne 2020.

30 Cullen and Stormoen 2020.

31 Forsberg 2013; Saxi 2011; Jokela and Iso-Markku 2013; Dahl 2014.

32 Acharya 2002.

33 Urbanovská et al. 2021.

deeper understanding is required concerning the underlying national factors related to member states' military capability, strategic culture and the role they play in a multilateral collective security system. Understanding these key partners' internal drivers is particularly relevant for Finland in its NATO integration process, both regarding NATO's internal diplomacy and new individual partners. A somewhat similar approach was adopted by Meijer and Wyss, who turned "the research prism of European defence studies upside down by returning the analytical precedence to the national level" and yet conducted a "comparative analysis of national defence policies and armed forces."[34]

In this report, we assume that the ability of states to reach policy goals and shape the international order depends on their geographical size and location, population, economic power, political system, foreign policy orientation and relative military power within regional and global security arrangements. States can be classified as great powers, middle powers or small powers according to these attributes.[35] However, the status of European regional powers such as France, Germany and the UK is related not only to their resources but also to their willingness and capacity to impose their interests and claim a leading role in regional or even global affairs.[36] More importantly, they must be willing to cooperate with smaller states within regional security complexes.[37] On the other hand, small states and middle powers can also gain agenda-setting power through membership in cooperative security arrangements based on consensus, such as NATO, or increase their relative power through cooperation. An example of the former was the initial Turkish veto against Finland's and Sweden's NATO accession, which it used to ensure that terrorism, a major security threat in Turkey's view, was included prominently in NATO's new Strategic Concept agreed on at the Madrid summit in June 2022. The Nordic defence cooperation is, in turn, an example of enhancing the individual countries' defence capabilities, and thereby wider regional security, through cooperation.

By approaching defence cooperation from the perspective of individual NATO member states, this report aims to understand their motives and the key underlying rationales behind the bi, tri- and minilateral defence cooperation formats of the European "big three", France, Germany and the UK, as well as those of Finland's closest partners and neighbours, Estonia, Norway and Sweden. We have not included private sector actors such as

34 Meijer and Wyss 2019, 378.

35 Neack 2014, 146.

36 Østerud 1992, 6.

37 See Buzan and Wæver 2003; Lake and Morgan 1997.

defence industries as subjects of this study although we acknowledge their potential impact on policy processes. While this report recognizes the crucial role of the US in the transatlantic security arrangement, and the role of the rising regional power Poland, as well as that of Denmark and the other two Baltic countries, Latvia and Lithuania, these countries are outside the scope of this study due to limited resources.

RESEARCH DATA AND METHODS

This report takes an empirical and data-driven approach and addresses the underlying factors impacting the calculus of bi-, tri- and minilateral defence cooperation in a multilateral setting based on four key factors. This so-called SMEB framework focuses on the following factors in each partner country:

- *strategic factors* related to the country's threat perception, security environment, self-perceived role in it and strategic culture
- *military factors* defining the country's self-perceived role in NATO and its key partners and allies, as well as how the aims of defence cooperation are viewed in the country's wider security and defence policies
- *economic imperatives and political caveats* that limit or enable cooperation, both internally (domestically) and externally (imposed by the wider security environment)
- *bilateral defence cooperation factors* related to each partnercountry's relationship with the country in question, in this case Finland

The country chapters in this report are based on 76 semi-structured expert interviews (N=76) conducted mainly in the six partner countries and Finland between October 2023 and January 2024. Semi-structured interview is a systematic method to achieve comparable results and observations while allowing the interviewer to ask additional questions where necessary.[38] Likewise, the method allows the interviewees to focus on those topics that they feel most comfortable with.

38 Savin-Baden and Howell Major 2013, 359.

The research data collection and analysis proceeded as follows.

First, possible respondents were identified. Respondents were targeted in three categories:

1. strategic-level decision- and policymakers who have the capacity to impact the national policymaking process, such as leading government experts and politicians
2. operational-level officers and officials who steer and implement policy decisions within their field of responsibility
3. "out-of-the-box thinkers" such as researchers, think-tankers and scholars

Second, altogether 84 contacts were reached by the research team, of which a great majority replied affirmatively, indicating a high level of interest in the research topic.

The contacts were weighted with the objective that two thirds would fall into the category of strategic-level decision- and policymakers and operational-level officers and officials, and one third would consist of security policy scholars. The final data reflected this objective well, with over 70% (n=54/76) being decision- and policymakers and officers and officials, and the rest (n=22/76) being scholars. Each country-specific case was also given a target number of around ten subject matter expert interviews, which was well met. Furthermore, it should be noted that the interviews conducted in Finland discussed all the six partner countries and their respective bi, tri- and trilateral defence cooperation formats, raising the country-specific aspect to 15 to 25 interviews per each studied country.

Third, the interviews were conducted by a pair of researchers, one asking the questions, and the other focusing on taking written notes. Each interview lasted for approximately one hour. The research pairs conducted the interviews in Helsinki, Stockholm, Tallinn, Berlin, London and Paris. The Norway- and Brussels related interviews were conducted online due to time constraints on both the research team's and the contacted interviewees' side. The interviews were not recorded audio-visually but by taking written notes. The research team does not publish or reveal any information related to the identity of any of the individual respondents of the study. To protect the identity of each respondent and to allow them to express their ideas as freely as possible, the research data was pseudonymized. In this regard, it is useful to highlight that the research data

does not necessarily reflect the official views and predominant narratives of each country.

Although semi-structured interviews allow for the interviewer to focus on those areas that the interviewee feels most comfortable with, each interview covered the four key areas *strategic factors*, *military factors*, *economic imperatives and political caveats*, and *factors related to bilateral defence cooperation.* All the respondents were asked the same open-ended questions following an inductive, data-driven research method that allowed each respondent to highlight those areas of defence cooperation that they considered most important in their country. If the respondent was unable to answer the question, it was skipped. Furthermore, to avoid suggestive questions, the research question template did not identify specific defence cooperation formats, such as the minilateral defence cooperation initiatives EI2 (European Intervention Initiative, France), FNC (Framework Nations Concept, Germany), JEF (Joint Expeditionary Force, UK), NORDECFO (Nordic Defence Cooperation) and NB8 (Nordic-Baltic Eight), as well as bi-/trilateral cooperation formats. In most cases, however, the country-specific initiatives were automatically highlighted by the interviewees. The interview questions are attached in Appendix 1.

STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT

The following chapters discuss each of the country-specific case studies in alphabetical order. As a data-driven, empirical study, this report focuses on highlighting the key findings that stem from the research data. Where appropriate, the interview data has been supplemented by scholarly literature and official policy documents to give the necessary background for the reader. Hence, the country chapters do not attempt to cover all existing scholarly debates related to each specific country but aim to highlight those that provide a setting for the issues raised by the interviewees. The research team recognizes the limitations of this choice but concurrently feels that the ideas expressed by the respondents are more readily highlighted in this way.

Chapters 1–6 present the case studies through the four key themes of the SMEB framework described above. To begin with, the first part of each country-specific chapter studies the security environment and threat perception of the country in question. It then moves on to depict the strategic culture and the role that the country seeks to play in its security environment. In this report, we define strategic culture as the sum of ideas that

guide the foreign policy behaviour of any national strategic community, which resembles the definition used by Snyder (1977).[39] While this study recognizes that strategic cultures are an important attribute in forming a state's security policy, it does not attempt to predefine them externally. For instance, while there might be a transatlantic security culture or cultural environment,[40] each state's understanding of their own role in it differs depending on several factors such as their capabilities, relative power and the temporal circumstances in which they operate. Last, we acknowledge that there are also many other layers that impact the formation of national security cultures, including state identity, norms and values.[41]

Third, the chapters identify each country's major allies and partners and the types of bi-, tri- and minilateral cooperation formats it emphasizes in its security policy. In some chapters, military capability areas that are important for the case are also discussed, particularly in relation to the country's perceived role in NATO. Fourth, possible economic imperatives and political caveats that might constrain or limit defence cooperation are identified. The fourth and final section discusses the deepened cooperation potential with Finland as a NATO member. Where appropriate, some of the ideas expressed by individual respondents are highlighted by direct anonymous quotes that, in the author's view, describe well the key empirical findings in the chapter. Furthermore, each country-specific case study is introduced with an illustrated fact sheet, including a selected number of demographic, economic and military key facts and figures.

In the concluding chapter, we focus on comparing the strategic, military, political and economic factors between the six country cases and Finland. The objective is to draw together the similarities and differences between European regional powers, and medium-sized and small countries in NATO, and to see how they compare with Finland, and what conclusions can be drawn from that regarding defence cooperation. Furthermore, the report also deducts a typology of national contributions to NATO's collective defence vis-à-vis the military factors studied. In doing so, the analysis seeks to provide grounds for further studies in comparing countries within regional security complexes. The concluding chapter draws together key takeaways for Finland to consider when deepening its bi-, tri- and minilateral defence cooperation in the new era of military

39 Snyder 1977, 8: "Strategic culture can be defined as the sum total of ideas, conditioned emotional responses, and patterns of habitual behaviour that members of a national strategic community have acquired through instruction or imitation and share with each other with regard to nuclear strategy".

40 In literature, strategic culture is often interchangeably referred to as security culture. Haglund 2013, 11.

41 Jepperson et al. 1996, 33–35.

alignment with NATO. While the report does not make separate policy recommendations, it provides some profound insights into and new information on the potential of deepening defence cooperation between Finland and its key NATO allies.

In summary, this report argues that regional cooperation is beneficial for the whole alliance and its core task of collective defence in the Euro-Atlantic area. NATO's new regional defence plans require more regional cooperation in their implementation, as opposed to the pre-2022 era of out-of-area operations. Therefore, fostering smaller cooperation formats between allies does not necessarily imply that NATO would become regionally fractured, meaning that each region or flank would focus on deepening cooperation only with their immediate neighbours and thereby undermine NATO's 360-degree approach to collective security. Rather, they should be viewed as a strength in the intra-alliance policymaking.

/ 1

1. ESTONIA: COMBINING NATIONAL CAPABILITIES WITH TRANSATLANTIC COOPERATION

Estonia is a small front-line state with the historical experience of being under Soviet occupation for over 50 years. Against this background, Estonia recognized the need for joining the alliance immediately after regaining its independence in 1991. The country joined NATO in 2004 at the same time as the other Baltic states. From the beginning, Estonia has considered it crucial to both develop its national defence capabilities and contribute to NATO's collective defence efforts and out-of-area operations, believing that its solidarity will have a positive impact on its relations with the key allies and thus strengthen its national defence indirectly.

Russia has continuously remained the main security issue for Estonia, even though at some point after the NATO accession there were some hopes that the traditional military threat would have diminished. Starting from the 2010s, these positive prospects have disappeared from Estonian thinking. In the aftermath of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Estonia has significantly directed resources to defence and supported Ukraine in many ways.

Defence cooperation is vital for the small state with limited resources in a difficult geostrategic position. Cooperation plays a very existential role in Estonia, whose airspace has been monitored by allies, and which hosts NATO's Forward Land Forces (FLF) troops. For years, Estonia has been eager to return NATO to the basics and ensure that military aid is assured in case of a rainy day.

ESTONIA

Population in 2022 [1]	**1.35 m**
Defence expenditure in 2023 (estimate) [2]	
Current defence expenditure in US dollars (2023) [3]	USD 1.20 bn
Defence expenditure as a share of GDP based on 2015 prices (2023) [4]	2.89%
Defence expenditure per capita (US dollars) based on 2015 prices and exchange rates (2023) [5]	USD 587.00
Equipment expenditure as a share of total defence expenditure (%) [6]	29.31%
Military personnel [7]	
Active	7,100
Reserves	Defence League 21,200 Joint 20,000 Total 41,200
Other	–
Member in NATO (year)	**2004**
Member in the EU (year)	**2004**

Figure 2. Key facts and figures about Estonia.

1) Source: The World Bank.
2) Source: NATO. Defence Expenditure of NATO countries (2014–2023); 3) Table 2; 4) Table 3; 5) Table 6; 6) Table 8a.
7) Source: Military Balance 2024.

1.1. SECURITY ENVIRONMENT AND THREAT PERCEPTION

Estonia's view of the surrounding security environment is grim. The focus is also strongly regional, emphasizing the Baltic viewpoint on the wider European and transatlantic security. However, unlike in many other NATO countries, in Estonia there is a long-standing perception of Russia as the main existential threat to the country.[42] Therefore, Russia's war in Ukraine (2022) did not cause a sharp turn in Estonian security policy. For instance, the 2020 Estonian foreign policy strategy described it as follows: "The security of Europe is affected by the growing aggressiveness of Russia's foreign policy, the threats to use and the actual use of military force, acts of influence and interference in the internal affairs of other countries in order to achieve its goals."[43] The Estonian assessment is that the country is in great danger, and that it is unrealistic to think that this threat will diminish. After Russia invaded Crimea in 2014, Estonians spent many years convincing the other allied nations of their threat assessment.[44] Although the situation has now improved from the Estonian perspective, some interviewees saw that Estonians fail to see the risks with the current situation and still largely rely on the United States. Given the uncertainty of future US foreign policy, especially after the 2024 presidential election, the prevailing view was that Estonia needs to think of new ways to manage risks and lessen its dependence on the US.

Despite this imminent and existential threat to national security, there is also a sense of optimism in the air. If Russia remains heavily engaged in Ukraine, the pressure will decrease in the Baltic region. Second, Finland and Sweden's NATO membership is seen as the best outcome of a bad situation. This will make NATO's operational planning more effective by improving NATO's defence and deterrence posture in the region. Sweden is considered even more important due to its capabilities in the air and sea domains in support of the allied operations in the area. Similarly, Sweden's geostrategic position emphasizes its significance from the Estonian perspective: the territory of Sweden is now available for supplies and reinforcements that increases the options in this regard. Moreover, Sweden (Finland as well) provides an area for allies' long-range capabilities, strengthening defence in the area in all domains. All in all, Finland and Sweden's NATO membership will be a game changer in the Baltic Sea region. The Baltic states will be less vulnerable, being now more closely connected to the allies in the geographical sense. In Estonia's view, this

42 See e.g. Hedberg and Kasekamp 2018, 215–221.

43 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Estonia 2020, 8.

44 E.g. International Peace Institute 2014.

does not, however, solve all the operational concerns in the region: the Baltic states are on a narrow peninsula, and they lack strategic depth.[45]

Although Estonia shares NATO's threat perception in which Russia is the major threat together with terrorism, some interviewees assessed that "Estonia's security perception is very closed" and somewhat "dismissive of other security concerns".[46] Estonians acknowledge the growing competition between the great powers, China, the US and Russia, as well as Iran and North Korea, but they are not the major security concern. The question of China is, however, seen as a risk to be mitigated as Estonia is trying to avoid critical dependencies on China while maintaining functional economic ties. At the same time, Estonia cannot afford to have two major threats to deal with, which explains the milder interpretation of China as a threat. The growing importance of emerging security threats such as terrorism and climate change, hence, do not outweigh hard security questions. As one interviewee put it, "Estonia's security environment is complex" but at the same time "very easy"[47]. Furthermore, there is a lively ongoing debate in Estonia on how the Russian threat might further materialize. Although it is not a likely option, the possibility of war needs to be taken seriously. Therefore, Estonia needs to be ready.

1.2. ROLE AND STRATEGIC CULTURE

Estonia defines itself strongly as a NATO's eastern flank country. It is not afraid to voice its concerns loudly and in a more pronounced manner than many other NATO countries. At the same time, Estonia is a "profound Atlanticist but also pragmatic when it comes to European defence cooperation"[48]. "Never alone again" is the slogan that very well describes Estonia's deep-rooted Atlanticist and alliance-linked strategic culture. Above all, Estonia relies on cooperation with the nuclear powers, the US, the UK and France. This thinking is reflected in Estonia's strategic culture, which has been strongly focused on hard defence rather than on a whole-of-society approach. According to the National Defence Development Plan 2031, "military defence is a guarantor of the capability to ensure Estonia's sovereignty and deter, obstruct and counter possible military attacks"[49]. After 2022, Estonia has, however, also increased its funding

45 See also Lawrence et al. 2024, 18.

46 Interviewee 14.

47 Interviewee 47.

48 Interviewee 21.

49 Ministry of Defence of Estonia 2021.

on comprehensive defence to improve civil preparedness.[50] When asked about strategic culture, one of the interviewees immediately tied their reply to military procurement: "Estonia has been consciously building up ammunition stocks and other invisible things before the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, over the past 10 years."[51] However, Estonia has also acknowledged the significance of non-conventional threats such as cyber and psychological issues.[52]

As a profound Atlanticist, Estonia wants to show its commitment to the alliance. There is hence a growing awareness in Estonia that the country should be seen as a security contributor, not a consumer of collective security, which is reflected in Estonia's commitment to out-of-area operations in Africa and elsewhere to demonstrate solidarity with the allies. For Estonia, this has also been a question of state identity, of being and becoming "Western" and "European" after the Soviet occupation ended in 1991. For instance, by participating in the crisis management operations in the Balkans and Afghanistan, Estonia wanted to be integrated with the Western world – hence, NATO and the EU very quickly became part of the Estonian security agenda, with the goal to be seen as an equal.

To have credible deterrence and defence on its national territory as well as to operate in out-of-area-missions, Estonia needs to rely on the capabilities of the larger allied nations. The idea is to engage key NATO allies in defending NATO's eastern flank in Estonia by "bringing forces from the rear to the front"[53]. To this end, Estonia provides a structure of around 40,000 wartime troops consisting of well-equipped units based on reservists and supported by the Defence League troops. Estonia takes NATO's Article 3 on national defence and Article 4 on consultation very seriously. The main lesson from 1939 – the decision not to fight against the Russian invasion, which is now considered an unforgivable mistake – was to build a credible national defence based on conscription and the Defence League while engaging the rest of society, such as by offering voluntary defence classes in schools and organizing national defence courses. Furthermore, Estonia's defence spending currently exceeds three per cent of the GDP, which sends a powerful message to the rest of the allies about Estonia's continued support to the transatlantic community.

But to receive the necessary allied reinforcements, Estonia has paid a heavy price. For example, the motives behind Estonia's involvement in

50 Hurt et al. 2023, 3–4.

51 Interviewee 59.

52 Hedberg and Kasekamp 2018, 227–228.

53 Interviewee 47. Previously, other reasons for cooperation have also been identified. Stoicescu and Lebrun (2019) have argued that Estonia's motivation to cooperate with France comes partially from its will to demonstrate its commitment to the development of the EU's defence dimension. Stoicescu and Lebrun 2019, 9.

the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) operation were both political and military.[54] While from the military perspective, Estonia achieved military interoperability through its engagement in the ISAF operation, the political objective was to increase allied solidarity with Estonia and deepen security ties with major allies (with the UK and the US in particular) and lobby Estonia's image as a serious and committed ally.[55] Estonia hence became a front-line actor in Afghanistan without caveats – something that only few NATO allies did[56] – and was engaged in fire contact daily, having infantry companies and other combat units deployed to the most unstable, southern part of Afghanistan under UK and US command. Estonia also supported France in Africa throughout the French engagement in Mali and is currently still engaged in the NATO-led operation in Iraq. As one interviewee put it, this is part of Estonia's "avant-garde, positive inspiration; when we advocate others, we want to show that we are doing the same"[57]. In other words, Estonia demonstrates a strong commitment to NATO's collective defence, hoping that it will translate into better connections and an understanding of the Estonian cause within the alliance.

1.3. MAJOR ALLIES AND DEFENCE COOPERATION FRAMEWORKS

From the Estonian perspective, the most relevant defence cooperation happens within NATO. As one the argued: "I would frame everything within NATO. Everything that we do in bi- and multilateral formats should happen within NATO. NATO's military defence is the most important framework."[58] But when it comes to Estonia's major bi- and minilateral allies, a key ally is undoubtedly the US. Through these bilateral ties, one of the objectives is to have American troops and permanent presence on the ground. Furthermore, Estonia's relations with the US have intensified following considerable defence acquisitions such as the HIMARS deal (Lockheed Martin).

Another important ally is the UK, the framework nation for the Estonian-hosted FLF, previously enhanced Forward Presence (eFP), troops. Moreover, Estonia worked closely with the UK in Afghanistan, which

54 See e.g. McNamara 2021.

55 Kasekamp and McNamara 2021, 49.

56 See e.g. McNamara and Sulg 2021, 143–145.

57 Interviewee 1.

58 Interviewee 38.

served as a period of confidence building for the two countries. The UK is also relevant as the leading nation in the JEF concept, which is seen as "very practical", "a small coalition of the willing", with "Northern Europe as the focus"[59]. Agility is considered as the added value of the JEF, which is a result of its structure: only one framework nation and large naval country, excluding Poland and Germany. As one expert stated, Estonia is committed to the JEF and in principle open to the possibility of participating in a JEF coalition deployed out of area, such as in the Indo-Pacific, should the need arise, and national consensus be achieved. Likewise, Estonia considers the presence of all NATO nuclear states important for its deterrence. France is therefore another important ally of Estonia. Estonia was able to attract France's interest in the country by contributing significantly to the French-led crisis management operation in Mali and other French deployments in and around Africa during the 2010s.[60]

Besides the three large, allied nations, the respondents' views varied as to which allied groups hold most significance for Estonia. The Baltic states were brought up in terms of practical cooperation and a good understanding of one another; on the other hand, the differences between the Baltic states were also acknowledged.[61] The history of Baltic defence cooperation history dates to the early 1990s when the three countries formed a joint Baltic peacekeeping battalion (BALTBAT) in 1994. This cooperation laid the ground for the countries' attempts to seek the role of a security producer rather than a consumer in the region.[62] In the following years, this cooperation extended to the BALTRON joint naval task squadron, the BALTNET joint air surveillance cooperation and the establishment of the Baltic Defence College, a multinational defence college between the three Baltic states.[63]

At present Baltic cooperation takes place in various formats and at various levels both bi- and trilaterally – from foreign-policy consultation formats in which leaders coordinate common positions to collaborative frameworks and the training of officers at the Baltic Defence College. The Baltic States have until recently undertaken rather few joint procurements.[64] This tendency may be changing, however, as Estonia is conducting its IRIS-T air defence system acquisition with Latvia. All the three Baltic states are developing their indirect fires capability and jointly

59 Interviewee 47.

60 See also Stoicescu and Lebrun 2019, 3–7.

61 See also Jermalavičius et. al. 2020, 280–306.

62 Kasekamp and McNamara 2021, 44–45.

63 Kasekamp 2020, 883.

64 Hurt et al. 2023, 14–16.

purchasing the HIMARS system, which opens possibilities for capability development and maintenance. Much like the Nordic countries, the Baltic states share a similar operational area and military thinking, one of "taking the first punch"[65] and being a front-line state. They are also faced with the same political challenge, namely having to convey the message to their domestic audiences that "it is not about defending your own country but the alliance as a whole"[66].

When it comes to the Northern Group, the format did not figure in most of the discussions. Similarly, the Nordic-Baltic Eight (NB8) format was not highlighted in the data, although the future potential in developing the Baltic-Nordic defence cooperation format was acknowledged. One interviewee pointed to the possibility of a "joint strikers' network",[67] where Baltic countries would cooperate more closely with the Nordic countries in improving the air surveillance picture.[68] Likewise, the significance of cooperation with larger Baltic Sea allies, Germany and Poland was mentioned as a future challenge.

Finally, because of Estonia's limited resources, "having too many cooperation formats can be very counterproductive"[69], as one of the interviewees pointed out. Estonia therefore needs to pick and choose the areas on which it wishes to focus. This goes together with the Estonian view of "being part of the bigger clubs, which are more advanced in that technology"[70] in such domains as cyber or military robotics, in which Estonia is looking for collaboration with solid partners. NATO is then considered the most important and relatively loose multilateral framework, which can enable deepened bi- and minilateral cooperation, although Estonia is also becoming involved also in EU-led initiatives concerning areas such as military mobility.

1.4. ECONOMIC IMPERATIVES AND POLITICAL CAVEATS

National economic imperatives play a minor role in Estonia's defence thinking. Estonia defines itself as a small country when it comes to defence economics, which makes it difficult to become a major player in defence industry. When procuring new defence materiel, for instance, the

65 Interviewee 47.

66 Interviewee 47.

67 Interviewee 59.

68 Hurt et al. 2023.

69 Interviewee 21.

70 Interviewee 21.

guiding factor is to acquire the best equipment quickly. Estonia "neither has a strong defence industry nor an ambition to develop one"[71]. Estonia believes in the free-market economy and most cost-efficient choices. Major weapons systems and ammunition are purchased from the seller with the best prices and delivery potential. Estonia's defence procurement is hence not "overly politicized",[72] as one interviewee mentioned. In some cases, Estonia has, however, applied the pooling and sharing approach and made joint procurements with other Baltic countries.

Estonia heavily relies on a well-functioning NATO in its defence thinking. Any disruption in NATO's cohesion would be viewed as a negative element for Estonia's national security. One challenge concerns the speed at which NATO is changing. There is a concern that "we as the collective West, we are not acting as quickly as we should"[73] to keep up with the changes that NATO's new deterrence and defence concept requires. This is also related to the lack of resources amongst NATO allies as they are committing to NATO's collective defence as well as supporting Ukraine. When it comes to the inner dynamics of the alliance, and the risk of the United States' withering role in guaranteeing Europe's security, the outcome of the US presidential elections (2024) has so far probably raised somewhat less public discussion in Estonia than in Finland. However, this might have to do with the fact that Estonia does not want to increase risks with its own words. From the Estonian point of view, what is more important is to strengthen Europe's own defence capability, regardless of who will be the next president of the United States.[74] Rather, a crucial aspect will be Estonia's "ability to identify those areas of cooperation where there is most to gain"[75] with the key allies.

1.5. DEEPENED COOPERATION POTENTIAL WITH FINLAND AS A NATO MEMBER

When it comes to deepening defence cooperation between Estonia and Finland, they share a positive, common history to build on. Before the Second World War, during the first independence of Estonia, the countries developed extensive plans to block the transition of Soviet vessels through

71 Interviewee 15.

72 Interviewee 1.

73 Interviewee 15.

74 Van Campenhout 2024.

75 Interviewee 21.

the Gulf of Finland.[76] In the post-Cold War years and before Estonia joined NATO, Finland helped Estonia to redevelop Estonian national defence.[77] This included training Estonian officers in Finland. Currently, Estonians see two levels of cooperation: the first is NATO's collective defence and policies related to it, and the second is related to practical measures such as regional planning, joint capability development and common command and control structures. Estonians consider the security of Finland and Estonia to be intertwined as the countries operate in the same geographical area. Historically, there has been a "cultural affinity between the two countries"[78]. However, it should also be further realized that the security of Finland, Sweden and Estonia are intertwined.

A two-decade member of NATO, Estonia feels comfortable with the alliance politics and is ready to help Finland to grow into a strong and effective ally. Estonia would then like to see the Arctic-Nordic-Baltic region as "one seamless space"[79], which would relieve the dilemma of being a front-line state because it would facilitate reinforcements to the Baltic states in case of military aggression, for example. While Estonians understand that Finland is both an Arctic and a Baltic Sea state, their wish is that Finland would commit fully to contributing to NATO's collective defence on the eastern flank, and the Baltic Sea region in particular. This could include a Finnish contribution to NATO's FLF (eFP) troops, as well as participation in NATO's air policing, Standing Maritime Groups and Standing Mine Countermeasures Groups.[80] From the Estonian side, there is now more enthusiasm to develop cooperation in the air and maritime domains. Finland's presence in the ground-based FLF troops is not necessarily required. Too extensive Nordic presence in the Baltic region was even viewed by some as a potential risk, which could weaken the commitment of major NATO allies, the US, the UK and France, to Estonia. As another interviewee stated: "Baltic countries will prioritise their relationship with the big regional powers over the Nordic-Baltic dimension."[81]

As mentioned, maritime operations are regarded as a potential area of deepening relations, in which "Finland's accession to NATO is a game changer"[82]. Both Finland and Estonia have an obvious interest in denying the free movement of Russian military vessels in the Gulf of Finland

76 See Leskinen 1999.

77 See Kivimäki and Haario 2004.

78 Interviewee 14.

79 Interviewee 59.

80 Lawrence et. al. 2024, V and 35.

81 Interviewee 14.

82 Interviewee 21.

– recalling the plans of the 1930s. Both countries operate Gabriel-family missiles,[83] and Estonia has purchased Finnish naval mines[84]. Estonian Defence Minister Hanno Pevkur has even commented that Estonia and Finland need to integrate their coastal defences.[85] Cooperation could be further increased in such areas as information and intelligence sharing, interoperability and defence planning. Furthermore, Finland's long-range fires and deep precision strike capability are highly valued. NATO's regional defence plans will determine how the Estonian–Finnish bilateral relationship will develop. Both countries being Baltic littoral states, a further concrete area of future cooperation could be sea mines and the maritime domain in general both within NATO and in flexible formats such as the JEF.

The significance of Finland and Sweden's NATO accession for minilateral Nordic–Baltic cooperation or bilateral cooperation with Estonia is open for discussion and depends on how the new members are willing to contribute to aspects of collective and regional defence that are important to Estonia, such as airspace control, air defence and air policing in the Baltics and mine countermeasures in the Baltic Sea area.

Although there is a widespread understanding that Finnish ground forces are required to protect the Finnish territories, and particularly the long eastern land border with Russia, the Estonian experts highlighted a few issues in relation to Finland's role in NATO and the potential of deepening bilateral defence cooperation with Estonia. The first is the idea that Finns should expand their national defence thinking to include collective defence while understanding the necessity to maintain the necessary presence on its own territory. As one of the interviewees said, "the Finns need to be dragged out of their shell"[86]. This means understanding that collective defence does not end at Finland's territorial waters but at the southern border in Turkey. Finland's strong focus on Article 3 of NATO's founding treaty has also been noted in Estonian defence studies.[87] As Finland adapts, Estonians are willing to support Finland, to make them understand how "to show a flag"[88] and make their presence visible in other parts of the alliance by exercising more on the southern flank, for example.

83 Häggblom 2024.

84 Häggblom 2021.

85 ERR News 2022.

86 Interviewee 21.

87 Lawrence et al. 2024, 27.

88 Interviewee 21.

Second, Estonia's ambition in NATO has been to gain maximum allied contributions to the country in terms of the number of allied troops and capabilities. Thus, Estonia is thus willing to act as a helping hand although fully benefiting from the membership will take time and patience. But this is where the Estonian and Finnish thinking differ – while Estonia, a small eastern flank country, needs to maximize the collective defence on its territory in both war and peacetime, Finland does not see a similar urgent necessity especially in peacetime. Third, the question of NATO's Command Structure is a practical issue for the Estonians, who would prefer that Finland be attached to NATO's Joint Force Command Brunssum. The reasoning is that moving Finland from JFC Brunssum to JFC Norfolk would divide the Baltic Sea into two separate operational areas, and regional cooperation in the Baltic Sea area would therefore require more effort. Estonia does not see this scenario as a desirable course of action.

Nevertheless, the prospects for bilateral cooperation between Estonia and Finland are considered good. The long-standing bilateral relationship, based on open discussions, forms a sound basis for a partnership in NATO. One of the key issues could be how the two countries can explain and introduce their reserve-based conscription system to NATO. Another prospect could be to have some Finnish presence in Estonia's land-based divisional structure, which forms the multinational core of Estonia's troops in NATO. In the Estonian view, Finland's NATO membership does not change a great deal in the bilateral relationship between Estonia and Finland – rather the cooperation is likely to deepen within the multilateral framework of NATO. Estonia wishes, however, to see a strengthening of both the political and military dimensions between Estonia and Finland and to keep the Baltic Sea as one, undivided operational space. In the years to come, Estonia will follow with curiosity and enthusiasm how Finland's policy in NATO continues to formulate.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Russia is seen as an existential threat in Estonia. This view dominates the Estonian perception of the security environment.
- Estonia strongly relies on transatlantic relations while also seeking to build its national capabilities. As a profound Atlanticist, Estonia wants to show its commitment to the alliance and has been ready to contribute to NATO operations to get its security concerns across.
- Estonia's major defence cooperation frameworks include NATO as an alliance and bilateral relations with its large members such as the US, the UK and France. In the Baltic Sea region, particularly Sweden's NATO membership is seen to open new venues for cooperation.
- Economic motives do not significantly guide Estonian defence cooperation. The cohesion of NATO and the effectiveness of its deterrence and defence are more pervasive drivers.
- While Estonians understand that Finland is both an Arctic and a Baltic Sea state, they wish that Finland would commit fully to contributing to NATO's collective defence on the eastern flank, and in the Baltic Sea region in particular. A foundation exists for deepening cooperation between Finland and Estonia, but there are also open questions, such as Finland's future role in NATO, which will have implications for the relation.

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2. FRANCE: A EUROPEAN POWER WITH A GLOBAL OUTLOOK

As an old imperial power, France has always had a certain idea of itself, quoting President Charles de Gaulle's depiction of France's great power status. French foreign and security policy is built around the concept of strategic autonomy,[89] supported by its sovereign nuclear capability and maintaining a global presence, as well as the idea of European strategic autonomy, which is President Macron's flagship project of building greater European independence and decreasing dependencies globally.[90]

Russia's war in Ukraine, however, is pushing France to transform its security and defence policy.[91] First, the war in Ukraine has emphasized a new approach, which is to maintain "an effective, independent and sovereign deterrent" and to "constrain the risk of escalation" while also "building national resilience to all threats".[92] Second, it has underlined the need to re-examine France's relationship with Russia, as a result of which it has abandoned its diplomatic outreach to build the European security architecture according to Russia's demands.[93] Third, the war has led to the redistribution of French military capabilities and assets from Africa-based counter-insurgency operations to European soil, terminating several of them in Africa. Because of that, France has had to witness an increasing Russian and Chinese economic and military presence in *Françafrique* to much of its disappointment.

89 Major 2021, 11.

90 Macron 2024, 2–4.

91 Gunnarson 2024, 157.

92 National Strategic Review 2022, 31.

93 Cadier and Quancez 2023.

FRANCE

Population in 2022 [1]	**67.97 m**
Defence expenditure in 2023 (estimate) [2]	
Current defence expenditure in US dollars (2023) [3]	USD 57.82 bn
Defence expenditure as a share of GDP based on 2015 prices (2023) [4]	1.90%
Defence expenditure per capita (US dollars) based on 2015 prices and exchange rates (2023) [5]	USD 734.00
Equipment expenditure as a share of total defence expenditure (%) [6]	28.19%
Military personnel [7]	
Active	203,850 (+ Gendarmerie & Paramilitary 95,100)
Reserves	37,300 (+ Gendarmerie & Paramilitary 31,500)
Other	–
Member in NATO (year)	**1949**
Member in the EU (EEC) (year)	**1957**

Figure 3. Key facts and figures about France.

1) Source: The World Bank.
2) Source: NATO. Defence Expenditure of NATO countries (2014–2023); 3) Table 2; 4) Table 3; 5) Table 6; 6) Table 8a.
7) Source: Military Balance 2024.

Although it might seem that France might currently be "a bit torn in its priorities"[94], there is a good understanding of the necessity to act with allies and partners.[95] Through various multilateral security frameworks and bi- and minilateral defence cooperation formats, as well as by building new connections globally, France is demonstrating "strategic solidarity". Despite its strong European focus, France is well aligned with NATO's threat perception and understands well the situation on the eastern flank. France emphasizes the European dimension in NATO maybe more than any other country, safeguarding the "shared destiny on the continent"[96].

2.1. SECURITY ENVIRONMENT AND THREAT PERCEPTION

The French reading of the present security environment is that it is "extremely troubling",[97] and that there seems no end to this cycle. The most recent National Strategic Review (Revue national stratégique (RNS) 2022) depicts the complexity of this situation, outlining the major causes of antagonism being "Russia's assumed revisionist ambitions" and the terrorist threat.[98] While France has struggled with the threat of terrorism for decades – most recently during the 2015 Islamist attacks in Paris that gravely shocked French people – understanding Russia as a major existential threat to Europe is a new development for France. Since the 1990s, the relations between France and Russia were largely based on economic ties. In 2014, with the Russian annexation of the Crimean Peninsula, France responded by joining the EU sanctions and NATO's deterrence measures in the Baltics.[99]

It was only after Russia's large-scale invasion in Ukraine on 24 February 2022 that France's threat perception of Russia shifted: before that, "France clearly failed to understand Russia."[100] In the early phases of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the idea still persisted that France could talk to Russia at different levels compared to others, keeping communication channels open. This thinking does not exist anymore, and France is utterly worried that Russia's is able to turn its power into victory in Ukraine and pose an existential threat to European security. In French

94 Interviewee 30.

95 Interviewee 48.

96 Interviewee 50.

97 Interviewee 33.

98 National Strategic Review 2022, 9, 13 and 15.

99 Sjökvist 2022, 1.

100 Interviewee 11.

and Macronian thinking, this scenario would have a devastating impact on Europe and the Euro-Atlantic security environment. Therefore, Russia must not win this war.

While France's major short- and mid-term concern is now Russia and the repercussions of its war in Ukraine,[101] France retains a global outreach in its security and defence and an "unaltered self-perception as a world power"[102]. Three major theatres are important in understanding French global presence: Africa, the Middle East and the Indo-Pacific. As a former colonial power, France holds a strong African and Middle Eastern position[103] although it is scaling down its military presence on the African continent after its involuntary withdrawal from Mali (Operation Serval 2013–2022) and Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger (Operation Barhkhane 2014–2023).[104] Whereas in the Middle Eastern region, the rationale for the French presence was to protect its citizens and access to energy and to fight against terrorism[105], in *Françafrique* historical legacies of France's colonial past have prevailed. The question for the future, then, is the extent to which France can steer and influence political change in its former colonies.[106] The interview data confirms thatFrance is aware of its changed position on both the Middle East and *Françafrique*. France considers that its interests are undermined in new and old territories as new competitors Russia and China are spreading disinformation and using all possible means to attack and compete with France. In the Middle East, it faces challenges in retaining its position as result of increasing power competition in the region.[107] France must therefore defend itself from "the combination of revisionist powers"[108] such as Russia, China and Iran.

As stated, the Indo-Pacific region is also significant in understanding French global presence. Protecting the rights of its citizens and the sovereignty of its territory are the mains missions of the French security and defence policy in the region. France believes that it has its own right in the Indo-Pacific, safeguarding the rights of its some 1.65 million people and the world's second largest exclusive economic zone (EEZ), comprising around 10.2 million square kilometres. To do so, it has built a dense diplomatic and consular presence in the region in altogether 39 states, as well as

101 Cadier 2018; Cadier and Quencez 2023.

102 Interviewee 11.

103 Van der Made 2021.

104 Pannier and Schmitt 2021, 124.

105 Fayet 2022; Vincent 2022.

106 Tull 2023.

107 Fayet 2022, 78–81.

108 Interviewee 30.

a permanent military presence in support of potential humanitarian and civilian disaster relief operations. Furthermore, the Indo-Pacific region is a major source of international trade for France, representing one third of French trade in goods outside the EU.[109] Essentially, France sees itself as a balancing power in the Indo-Pacific region, aiming to create a multipolar order. It means avoiding a situation in which it would become a party in a potential conflict between China and the United States.[110] To this end, France has built several bilateral partnerships in the Indo-Pacific area, such as with India, Australia and Japan, as well as minilateral ones with the ASEAN countries. As for NATO's role in the region, France has been a vocal critic, claiming that NATO should focus on the Euro-Atlantic area, not the Indo-Pacific.[111]

2.2. ROLE AND STRATEGIC CULTURE

As discussed above, France has a truly global outlook as a foreign policy actor, unlike many other European allies. For France, the current challenge is being globally present while showing more commitment on NATO's eastern flank, as well as maintaining active engagement in both traditional and new military domains such as cyber and space. The current deteriorated security situation in Europe, however, guides France to rethink its presence in the more traditional domains and focus presence on land warfare and the maritime domain. This widening of the scope has profound implications for France. Some argue, though, that it is impossible to remain equally present in all geographical environments and military domains, and that France should prioritize between them in its global presence. As one respondent put it, "sociologically, France suffers from PTSD"[112] (post-traumatic stress disorder) as France's military interventions in Africa[113] are coming to a bitter end, but its new role is still not fully defined.

French security and defence policy can be best explained by the French concept of strategic culture, which is shaped by two key factors. The first is the idea of safeguarding national sovereignty and strategic autonomy (*autonomie stratégique*)[114], which includes significant national

109 Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs of France 2021, 3.

110 Brenner 2003, 199

111 Droin 2023.

112 Interviewee 11.

113 French counter-insurgency culture was particularly active in sub-Saharan Africa, accounting for over 40% of French interventions in the late 2010s. DeVore 2019, 173.

114 Government of France 1994.

capabilities and decision-making powers in protection of vital strategic interests, strong armed forces and the national defence industry.[115] The French policy of nuclear deterrence is considered to be the "backbone of French strategic culture",[116] in which the French president possesses sovereign powers.[117] As one of the two European nuclear powers, the other being the United Kingdom, France contributes to NATO's nuclear deterrence in escalation management against "uninhibited revisionist adversaries".[118] Although France does not extend its nuclear deterrence, it still advocates a "European dimension",[119] and President Macron has invited NATO nuclear states to participate in NATO nuclear exercises.[120] Maintaining nuclear deterrence, however, has its disadvantages too as it cuts a huge chunk of the French defence budget. This has led France to develop arrangements on the conventional deterrence side, such as maintaining a flexible model of command and control with the capacity to act under national command or within NATO and European structures when required, the purpose of which is to maintain a sufficient level of capacity and avoid creating too many interdependencies.

The second key aspect of French strategic culture is related to France's missionary self-understanding of promoting and defending human rights globally.[121] As a global power, French strategic culture is also very agile and built around the idea of "winning the war before the war", which means taking the advantage in the field of perception before the confrontation, during the competition and contestation phases.[122] The vast global presence in the French past and present overseas territories, Africa, the Middle East and the Indo-Pacific region is an indication of the French willingness to project power worldwide, requiring a comprehensive set of readily deployable capabilities. France has what one respondent called "armed forces hardened through experience",[123] referring to the French track record of conducting more high-intensity operations in non-permissive conditions and contested areas. This is much reflected in the powers of the president, who has the power to decide on military operations and deployments.

115 Gunnarson 2024, 157; Rynning and Schmitt 2018, 42.

116 Interviewee 50.

117 Légifrance 2024, see also Lozier 2023.

118 Interviewee 30; Macron 2024, 6.

119 Interviewee 30.

120 Juntunen et al. 2024, 56.

121 Rynning and Schmitt 2018, 42.

122 Interviewee 48.

123 Interviewee 30.

France is, however, realistic about the limits of what it can achieve on its own in upholding the multilateral international order. France wants to ensure smooth cooperation with its key partners, underpinned by the concept of strategic solidarity. It stems from the realization that France is not capable of dealing with all the possible threats in the very intense strategic and geopolitical environment but needs reliable partners. In the past, this has been reflected in "its enduring willingness to be a major partner in multinational operations."[124] At present, strategic solidarity has twofold objectives. First, the aim is to ensure the need for strategic alliances and the principle of strategic solidarity within those structures. Second, strategic solidarity can be exercised through these multilateral frameworks or ad hoc coalitions by "sharing the risk"[125]. It means that allies who fight alongside the French armed forces converge more with France at the acceptable level of risk, including in battles against various insurgent groups globally.

Third, France considers itself a "fully European power"[126]. The European Union has traditionally been regarded as the most important framework for France's foreign and security policy[127], and it still is. This is much emphasized in President Macron's policy, which stresses his vision of European strategic autonomy,[128] meaning Europe's greater strategic independence and lesser dependence on other global actors.[129] However, France considers both the EU and NATO to be the most important multilateral frameworks within which France operates, using force responsibly in adherence with international law. The country's rapprochement with NATO has been a trend since France rejoined NATO's military command structure in 2009. France is committed to NATO's collective defence but hopes to influence the shaping of NATO's agenda as well.[130] France has significantly contributed to NATO-led missions and crisis management operations since the 1990s.[131] However, French presence on NATO's eastern flank has not been as remarkable in numbers, although France has participated in the Baltic Air Policing mission since 2011 and the enhanced Forward Presence (efP) troops in Estonia and Lithuania since 2017.[132]

124 Rynning and Schmitt 2018, 42.

125 Interviewees 13 and 30.

126 Interviewee 11.

127 I.e. Brenner 2003, 198.

128 Fiott 2022, 8; Gheciu 2020, 25; Kauffman 2023; Vohra 2023; Macron 2017.

129 Macron 2024, 5.

130 Pannier 2022, 68, 74.

131 Talmor and Selden 2017.

132 Pannier 2022, 81.

More recently, France has deployed a battalion-size rapid response force of some 800 soldiers to Romania as part of NATO's deterrence measures following Russia's invasion of Ukraine.[133]

In the French view, building a credible national, French, European and collective defence against Russia, including a European war economy, is what Europe needs to do now. As one interviewee maintained, "the sheer size of the challenge currently makes achieving long-term French goals, notably consolidating a stronger European pillar in NATO as part of burden sharing, all the more logical and relevant" [134] as the US will be looking towards Asia. Hence, Europeans will need to take a more proactive approach in collective European defence with the French leading the way. This is why France is now more interested in cooperating in building conventional forces – not only to mitigate the rising costs of military equipment but also to make France and Europe self-reliant in defence.

2.3. MAJOR ALLIES AND DEFENCE COOPERATION FRAMEWORKS

In France, building defence cooperation is largely centred around multilateral defence cooperation through EU and NATO institutional frameworks. However, France "does not believe in the inherent utility of institutions, but rather in using them flexibly in situations for which they are best suited."[135] Second, France also has significant bilateral relations with privileged partners[136] such as Germany, the UK and the US. As a self-perceived global power, France likes to converse directly with other regional powers. In this regard, the E3 format between France, Germany and the UK has been an important instrument for flexible minilateralism in security policy in the past.

This section will now focus on analysing key bilateral partnerships as highlighted by interviewees across the research data, starting from Germany, which undoubtedly is France's most traditional partner. Franco-German relations date back to the 1963 signing of the Elysée Treaty of Friendship and Reconciliation. The significance of the treaty, however, has always been more political than military due to the major strategic differences between the two countries.[137] Second, the Franco-German

133 NATO SHAPE 2022.

134 Interviewee 75.

135 Major 2021, 12.

136 Pannier and Schmitt 2021, 142–148.

137 Pannier and Schmitt 2021, 142.

relationship has to a great extent relied on the good personal relations between the leaders of the two countries.[138] This study supports the finding that the Franco-German relationship[139] lingers especially due to the war in Ukraine.[140] While there are apparent political difficulties and differences in the strategic cultures between the two countries, their symbiotic relationship as the core of EU integration still pertains its value.[141] This view was confirmed by the interview data as several interviewees named Germany as one of France's key bilateral allies. While the Franco-German relationship has not delivered what it could, cooperation remains strong in relation to joint procurement projects such as the Future Combat Air System (FCAS) programme and binational units such as the Franco-German Brigade[142] and the C-130J transport aircraft, the so-called "Rhine" Squadron.[143]

In addition to Germany, several respondents highlighted the importance of France's bilateral relationship with the UK. Despite the difficult rifts after Brexit and AUKUS, French-UK cooperation has been resumed and has even warmed up after the appointment of Rishi Sunak as the British prime minister.[144] The assumption that Brexit would then permanently weaken Franco-British cooperation after the promising start of the Lancaster Treaty cooperation[145] proved to be wrong for two reasons. First, both countries recognize the need to perform high-intensity military warfare and operations and could further deepen their cooperation at a bilateral[146] rather than an EU level.[147] Second, both countries are nuclear powers and hold permanent seats in the United Nations Security

138 Chancellor Helmut Kohl and President Francois Mitterrand saw Europe through the end of the Cold War and built a personal friendship over the years, which to a significant extent increased trust between the two nations. Mitterrand and Kohl's good personal relations enabled them to work towards Germany's reunification and deeper European integration, followed by Chancellor Gerhard Schröder and Jacques Chirac, who had a difficult start but later became closer personally and professionally. Similarly, Angela Merkel and Nicolas Sarkozy, or "Merkozy", as they emerged in the Euro crisis, found a common tune. More recently, with President François Hollande's entry into the Elysée in 2012, the relations cooled off, but they jolted back with Russia's first invasion of Ukraine in 2014. As President Emmanuel Macron entered power in 2017 with his pro-European agenda, he was soon disappointed by the lukewarm response on the German side to his vision for the future of Europe.

139 Kempin 2021, 6–7.

140 Särkkä and Ålander 2023.

141 Interviewee 30.

142 Deutsche Welle 2020.

143 European Security and Defence (ESD) 2023.

144 Interviewee 39.

145 The Lancaster Treaty defence cooperation has focused on improving interoperability and joint capability development bilaterally between France and the UK since the signing of the treaties in 2010. Mills and Brooke-Holland 2023.

146 Billon-Galland and Tenenbaum 2023.

147 Faure 2018, 104–105.

Council.[148] The nuclear aspect of Franco-British relations is highlighted, but this was done in the context of the P3 (France, the US and the UK) and the Quad format (France, the US, the UK and Germany) as these countries have a natural interest in conversing more closely with one another. Interestingly, the potential of deepening cooperation in new geographical areas such as the Indo-Pacific was not highlighted in the results of this study although it could be regarded as the next "logical step in Franco-British defence cooperation"[149] after the AUKUS fallout.

Third, this report supports the previous findings that another key ally of France is the United States.[150] This can be partly explained by the recent years' more Atlanticist developments in French security policy[151] but also by the strategic intimacy with the US, in which France has invested a lot. This strategic intimacy is based on the principle of having enough cooperation and exchanges on a permanent basis to build trust and ensure that the necessary structures and relations function. However, there are caveats to the bilateral relationship too. While the countries do share a good level of military-to-military understanding, mutual respect and shared experience, the political and strategic interests of the two nations do not always meet. France recognizes that the US shares neither the same level of interests nor the same geopolitical environments in which the countries operate. Furthermore, since the US decided to form the AUKUS alliance with Australia and the UK without first consulting France, the relations have not recovered to the level at which they were. This has been interpreted as a missed opportunity to advance security and cooperation in areas such as climate resilience and adaptation, security and defence, maritime law enforcement, and infrastructure and connectivity.[152]

Other important European partnerships include the Mediterranean allies, Greece and Italy in particular. The research data, however, did not highlight the importance of cooperation between France and Greece, for instance, despite the bilateral security agreement and mutual security guarantees established in 2021.[153] The significance of bilateral defence relations with Italy was not emphasized either in the data. What this study hence shows is that France is looking for new partners and reaching out to countries inside the alliance too, such as Sweden, Estonia, Finland, Poland or Romania. This is partly because of Russia's war on Ukraine, but

148 Faure 2018, 105.

149 Billon-Galland and Tenenbaum 2023.

150 Schmitt 2017.

151 Talmor and Zelden 2017.

152 Droin et al. 2022.

153 Perot 2021.

it is also due to a growing interest in new geographical regions such as the Arctic as a major maritime domain, where in the French perspective, freedom of navigation must be maintained.

When it comes to France's own flexible capability initiative, the European Intervention Initiative (EI2), which was first proposed by President Emmanuel Macron in 2017 as an initiative for European strategic culture and further developed as a mechanism of rapid evacuation and crisis response, it received very little attention in this study. Based on this data, we therefore draw the conclusion that the future of EI2 seems to be under consideration as France wants to make it more suitable for the present and future threat environment while engaging the key partners in the process. In the past, the endeavours to deepen cooperation have been limited by the fundamental differences between the participating countries, with the exception of France and the UK, whose willingness to participate in crisis management operations and in the spectrum of use of force has been high.[154] It is hence logical that EI2, which was hardly discussed in the French research data, was mentioned with reference to the UK, with the purpose deepening defence cooperation with this strategically more like-minded ally.

Finally, France has signed various types of defence and security cooperation agreements with Middle Eastern countries over the past twenty years, including Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon and Qatar.[155] While the scope of the study probably led the respondents to focus to a lesser extent on French global partnerships, the data still reveals the growing significance of these new global partnerships, such as Egypt[156], Saudi Arabia[157] and the United Arab Emirates.[158] This trend can be explained by the promotion of the "business of sovereignty"[159], referring to French self-sufficiency related to modernized weapon systems and the role of the arms industry, which will be discussed next.

154 Zandee and Kruijver 2019, 22.

155 See i.e. Fayet 2022, 79; Irish 2021; Rayess 2022.

156 Mandour 2021.

157 See i.e. European Parliament 2016, 9; Irish and Louet 2018.

158 See i.e. Ministry for Foreign Affairs of the United Arab Emirates 2022; Vitrand 2023.

159 Interviewee 11.

2.4. ECONOMIC IMPERATIVES AND POLITICAL CAVEATS

When talking about French economic interests, the defence industry plays a crucial role.[160] One can even argue whether it is rather the defence industry that precedes national interests, as one respondent maintained: "where there is defence industry, that's where strategic partnerships are created."[161] Yet, while we did not conduct interviews with representatives of the national defence industry, in the French case, defence industry needs to be understood as one of the influencing factors behind French security and defence policy. Historically speaking, the French defence industry has invested in high-end, high-tech, advanced technologies (such as submarine, stealth and missile technologies), which in French thinking must be retained under sovereign, national control. This is connected to the French view of nuclear deterrence as an underlying factor of national sovereignty, which requires a competitive edge in developing the core enabling deterrence capabilities.

Maintaining a comprehensive portfolio of capabilities and operational presence requires substantial financial assets, which is why France is faced with the reality of building stronger partnerships. In this regard, both the EU and NATO are important, but France is also active in other bodies. One of them is OCCAR (Organisation conjointe de coopération en matière d'armement/Organisation for joint armament co-operation), an international organization which focuses on cooperative defence equipment programmes. However, France recognizes that large defence procurement projects such as the follow-up of Rafale fighters[162] would benefit from multilateral cooperation. Nevertheless, there is an underlying belief that other countries should follow France given its strong background in military experience and interventions. The French approach is therefore twofold: while France wants to be self-reliant, it is to a certain extent ready to rely on the European industrial base, which is a high priority for France.

France thus has a genuine interest in building a European defence industry and bring the relevant stakeholders together – in being not only self-reliant but also reliant on Europe. This thinking stems from an understanding that France's national capacity to respond is limited, especially when it comes to its capacity to make additional investments, such as in support of Ukraine's war efforts. Traditionally, the Franco-German partnership has been an engine for defence industrial cooperation, but

160 For major French defence companies, see Pannier and Schmitt 2021, 86.

161 Interviewee 41.

162 Mackenzie 2024.

it seems to be struggling as there are question marks over many projects despite some positive recent developments in a joint tank project, for instance.[163] France feels much disappointed about the deterioration of Franco-German defence industrial cooperation, brought on by long German decision-making processes and export control procedures. For this reason, France is increasingly gazing across the channel towards the UK in defence industry-related matters as well, in addition to the already existing close military-to-military relations.

When it comes to extending new partnerships inside the alliance, France underlines the importance of building long-term, trustworthy relationships. This takes time, and regular exchanges of information can provide a fruitful ground for deepened cooperation at the political as well as military strategic and operational level. In the French view, nothing will replace the apparent need to conduct high-intensity operations, "to share the risk"[164], with key partners. Some respondents, however, saw a potential danger in developing minilateral formats because of how they could impact the inner dynamics of the alliance, potentially weakening the multilateral framework of NATO due to a preference for bilateral relationships between certain allied member states, such as courting the US. If building bilateral relationships between the US and third countries becomes a universal trend within the alliance, this could seriously undermine NATO's collective defence.

At the domestic political level, the situation might change if Marine Le Pen was elected the next president of the French Republic in the next presidential election foreseen in 2027, and she decided to distance France from the EU and/or NATO. Le Pen's party could profit from the migration issues and increasing inflation in France, which might also have repercussions for military-level cooperation if it argued that multilateral frameworks could limit national sovereignty. The respondents also believed that Trump's election for president could have catastrophic consequences, especially if it led to reduced support for Ukraine. From a military perspective, the Nordic countries' wish to join NATO's new command structure in JFC Norfolk raises some concern that the Nordics are choosing a strongly transatlantic track over a more European orientation. Another concern is related to France's own capacity to pivot the French armed forces from high-intensity operations to division-level subordinate brigades, which requires a fundamental cultural shift in French thinking and a possibility to learn from the Finns too. At the operational level, the main challenge for the French army would be to operate in extremely cold

163 Alipour 2024.

164 Interviewees 13 and 30.

environments, and for the blue-water navy, the challenge would be to navigate in the shallow waters of the Baltic and the North Sea.

2.5. DEEPENED COOPERATION POTENTIAL WITH FINLAND AS A NATO MEMBER

Traditionally, France has tended to overlook smaller nations in defence cooperation, and the focus has been on key regional power players such as Poland, Germany, the UK and Italy. However, because of Russia's war in Ukraine, Finland's geostrategic position in the current European security environment has changed the situation. Now with Finland and Sweden as full members of NATO, there is a window of opportunity to deepen this bilateral partnership, the French position towards Finland's membership being in a "honeymoon phase".[165] In the French view, the aim is not to duplicate other bi- and minilateral partnerships that Finland has with the US or the UK-led Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF) but to strengthen those pillars that are natural for both countries and relevant to their shared interests.

The starting point for bilateral relations is a promising one. France and Finland have a good track record of bilateral partnership, which at the political level has been demonstrated by their similar understanding of the significance of European solidarity and common defence as well Finland's strong support of solidarity for France during the 2015 terrorist attacks.[166] At the military level, frequent exchanges of information, including the defence industry,[167] and exercises and training are examples of deepened defence dialogue.[168] The interview data supports this view, univocally expressing that on the French part, there are no foreseen political challenges to further cooperation if the current line of moderate government continues in France. While France has focused outside Europe on African, Middle Eastern and Indo-Pacific territories and on high-combat out-of-area operations, an increase in French military presence especially in the Baltic region is observable since the mid-2010s. Furthermore, the growing significance of the Arctic and preserving freedom of navigation in the Arctic seas is an indication of an increased French interest in the Nordic region.[169]

165 Interviewee 41.

166 French-Finnish Statement on European Defence 2018.

167 Embassy of France in Finland 2024.

168 Finnish Defence Forces 2020; NATO 2023b; The Finnish Army 2023.

169 Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs of France 2016, 57.

Second, France considers Finland as a security provider on NATO's eastern flank and is of the opinion that "Finland has a unique place and position in the alliance"[170]. Particularly Finland's over 1,300-kilometre-long land border with Russia, which is also an EU border, is of great interest to France. In the French perspective, Finland brings know-how on how to deal with Russia in both conventional and hybrid domains – this is considered a great contribution to the alliance. Second, France has taken note of Finland's total defence approach, an area in which France could learn from the Finns. One objective in France is now to rebuild national resilience across society, including by increasing the size of the armed forces' reserve. Best practices from the Finnish conscription-based reserve system are therefore of interest to France.

Third, from a French point of view, the Finnish ability to operate in the Arctic and the potential to train troops together in the Finnish border area and extreme cold conditions are an increased priority. This was demonstrated by the French participation in the 2024 NATO-led Nordic Response exercise. In return, France is willing to share knowledge about its combat and operational experience in Africa. The French armed forces, which are used to training in forward-leaning, high-intensity combat brigades, could learn from the Finns how to conduct joint exercises and train in division-level installations and war fighting plans. Likewise, in the future, Finland would have the possibility to participate with the new squadron of Pohjanmaa-class corvettes that are compatible with small frigates, and this could enable the Finns to learn through exercises with the French.

Still, above all, France appreciates Finland's and the Nordics' "strategically cohesive"[171], "more balanced position against Russia than that of the other nations on the eastern flank",[172] as well as its serious contribution to European defence. France therefore sees more opportunities than challenges in bilateral defence cooperation with Finland. For the French, Finland is "a like-minded country: it is hard-nosed, takes defence seriously and is fully European"[173]. The two countries' common history as European nations and position of having autonomous national defence capacity make it easier for France to find common denominators for deepened cooperation with Finland. Finland has also actively supported the French idea of European strategic autonomy and participated in the French-led EI2 initiative, which is much appreciated by the French.

170 Interviewee 30.

171 Interviewee 11.

172 Interviewee 69.

173 Interviewee 33.

France considers that even as a NATO member, Finland should continue to develop an independent European identity together with Sweden to counterbalance the US influence.

It is also in the "French interest to ensure that newer NATO members adhere to a view of the alliance that is compatible with the French view"[174], which means developing what President Macron calls "strategic intimacy"[175] to build trust and get to know better each other's interests and ways of cooperating. This entails the idea of building stronger bilateral defence ties with key partners and allies inside the European core. Although Finland's decision to acquire the F-35 fighter jets instead of the French Rafale lessened the interest in Finland as a closer ally to France to some degree, but the fact that Finland is now a "member of the club"[176] opens possibilities for information exchange and deepened cooperation formats. This study demonstrates that French experts are well informed about Finland's strengths. France views Finland as a very capable strategic partner, which has proved itself on joint missions in Africa, a European ally and, above all, an interesting case due to its diverging strategic culture and threat environment, from which France would be willing to learn more.

However, there are challenges too. Currently, it is not sufficiently clear to the French how to continue to deepen their bilateral relationship with the Finns. Not to make it too easy, a cultural gap exists in communication between the Finns and the French. In the French view, the Finns sometimes seem so introverted that they have not been able to communicate clearly to the rest of allies what they are good at, and how they profile themselves as a member of the alliance. The French advice is therefore to clearly vocalize one's views and participate in building the collective security culture of trust. According to the French, however, building interoperability is not only a question of technical and operational layers but also one of "human interoperability, knowing each other's strategic cultures, and understanding how the partner thinks", which requires "a significant human investment".[177] The challenge for Finland is to make itself better known amongst the French. This can be done by raising awareness of its strategic environment, defence concepts and societal resilience models, in other words, by "playing to the clichés"[178] as the Nordic brand is positively viewed in France. Therefore, to gain France's attention, Finland should work closer with the French in fostering a closer dialogue.

174 Interviewee 30.

175 Interviewee 30.

176 Interviewee 7.

177 Interviewee 48.

178 Interviewee 11.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- France estimates the security environment to be extremely troubling with two major threats to national and European security: Russia and terrorism. France's understanding of Russia has fundamentally changed since Russia's unprovoked war in Ukraine.
- While maintaining its global presence in Saheel, sub-Saharan Africa and in the Indo-Pacific region, France's focus in security and defence policy is on Europe, and it projects power through key multilateral frameworks, the EU and NATO, and through President Emmanuel Macron's vision of European strategic autonomy.
- French strategic culture is founded on the idea of safeguarding national sovereignty and strategic autonomy (including nuclear deterrence) while balancing them with strategic solidarity.
- While developing a strong sense of strategic intimacy and strong partnerships with key privileged partners such as Germany, the UK, the US, Italy and Greece, as well its global partners, France has a deeply instrumentalist understanding of defence cooperation, carefully assessing the costs and benefits.
- Safeguarding the interests of a capable national defence industry is a question of national sovereignty for France. To safeguard Europe and European strategic autonomy, France has a genuine interest in building a European defence industry by bringing the relevant stakeholders together.
- When it comes to extending new partnerships inside the alliance, France underlines the importance of building long-term, trustworthy relationships. France is now looking for new serious partners, and Nordic countries such as Finland are examined with curiosity. The challenge for Finland is to make itself better known amongst the French. France is particularly interested in the Finnish comprehensive defence concept and ability to conduct operations in the High North and the Arctic area.

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3. GERMANY: PAINFUL CHANGE OF COURSE

Perhaps more than in any other European country, in Germany the post-Cold War era was marked by a strong belief that, like in Francis Fukuyama's famous 1989 essay[179], history had ended with the Cold War.[180] In certain ways, it was true for Germany that at least a significant phase of history ended when the country, divided along the Iron Curtain, was reunified in 1991. Overcoming the division of Germany meant overcoming the division of Europe, which led to a deep internalization of the so-called piece dividend in German political thinking: the assessment that wars would from now on take place far away from Europe.[181] Germany therefore massively scaled down its armed forces and only maintained the minimal ability to participate in out-of-area missions and operations – which was the focus of NATO's doctrine in the post-Cold War decades.

In accordance with its foreign policy identity as a civilian power embedded in and dependent on multilateralism as a framework for action[182], Germany emphasized the win-win trade and energy relations with Russia as a basis for European security. In its *Wandel durch Handel*[183] (change through trade) policy, Germany believed that the logic of interdependence would make large-scale aggression in Europe impossible. The policy proved resistant to external shocks and despite Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, Germany went on to increase its dependence on Russian

179 Fukuyama 1980, 3–18.

180 Hoyer 2023, 3–4.

181 Franke 2021.

182 Maull 2007; Maull 2021, 55–57.

183 Lau 2021.

GERMANY

Population in 2022 [1]	**83.80 m**
Defence expenditure in 2023 (estimate) [2]	
Current defence expenditure in US dollars (2023) [3]	USD 74.08 bn
Defence expenditure as a share of GDP based on 2015 prices (2023) [4]	1.66%
Defence expenditure per capita (US dollars) based on 2015 prices and exchange rates (2023) [5]	USD 712.00
Equipment expenditure as a share of total defence expenditure (%) [6]	23.89%
Military personnel [7]	
Active	181,000
Reserves	36,000 (active), 930,000 (total reserve)
Other	–
Member in NATO (year)	**1955**
Member in the EU (EEC) (year)	**1957**

Figure 4. Key facts and figures about Germany.

1) Source: The World Bank.
2) Source: NATO. Defence Expenditure of NATO countries (2014–2023); 3) Table 2; 4) Table 3; 5) Table 6; 6) Table 8a.
7) Source: Germany's Armed Forces.

natural gas and started building the second Nord Stream gas pipeline, which was until the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine defended as a purely private enterprise project with no geopolitical risks.[184]

Germany is therefore currently in the process of catching up with the dramatically changed European security environment and coming to terms with the failure of many of the assumptions underlying its policy towards Russia and security in general. This has been reflected in the country's first-ever national security strategy, published in June 2023, in which Russia is now identified as the greatest threat to Euro-Atlantic security in the foreseeable future.[185] The new defence policy guidelines from November 2023 are also remarkably self-critical when it comes to the scaling down of armed forces in past decades, which is acknowledged as a mistake.[186] But correcting course is easier said than done as it goes against many long-held principles of Germany's foreign policy, and even its political system that was designed after the World Wars to withstand renewed militarization. As Helwig (2018) puts it, "Germany has always been a country that prides itself on its continuity in foreign policy, rather than announcing sudden reactions to international developments that turn out to be unsustainable."[187]

3.1. SECURITY ENVIRONMENT AND THREAT PERCEPTION

In Germany, the significance of Russia's large-scale attack on Ukraine on 24 February 2022 cannot be emphasized enough. All interviewees immediately mentioned the term *Zeitenwende* (literally: a turn of times, meaning a watershed moment). The term was introduced by Federal Chancellor Olaf Scholz in a speech on 27 February 2022[188] to describe the breach of European security order that Russia's invasion of Ukraine meant, and the measures to be taken in response. However, several interviewees pointed out that the transformation of the armed forces (*Bundeswehr*) – from the focus on crisis management and out-of-area operations to an increasing share of alliance and territorial defence – began already after Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014. This development was largely internal and did not get public, or even much political, attention. The shift away from crisis management in favour of territorial defence and Germany's role in

184 Chazan 2022.

185 Federal Government of Germany 2023.

186 Federal Ministry of Defence of Germany 2023.

187 Helwig 2018.

188 Scholz 2022.

NATO's collective defence of the Baltic states and Central Europe is now complete, although Germany will still show some presence in out-of-area operations, such as the current Franco-German Indo-Pacific navy deployment. Keeping up the ability to participate in crisis management even to a limited extent adds a significant logistical strain upon the armed forces' capacity, given the country's shift of focus towards NATO's collective defence.

The progress of Germany's change of course, the *Zeitenwende*, was described as an "uphill battle"[189] since 2022. Several interviewees confirmed that the sense of urgency has decreased notably since the initial shock of the invasion and the explosion of the Nord Stream gas pipelines in the Baltic Sea in September 2022. Especially the Nord Stream incident brought the war closer to home in Germany, as Germany was highly dependent on the gas supplies from Russia. Now the war is again starting to feel more remote. After the 7 October 2023 Hamas attack on Israel, the Gaza war additionally took attention away from Ukraine in the public discourse in the last months of the year 2023. One interviewee emphasized that in terms of sense of urgency and threat perception, there is a big psychological difference between Germany and the eastern flank nations, like Finland.

The severity of the shock caused by Russia's invasion in 2022 is partly explained by Germany's strategic environment in the post-Cold War era: it went from "*the* frontline state"[190], with German soldiers facing each other on both sides of the Iron Curtain, to being surrounded by friends and partners. The use of military force to achieve political aims was considered unthinkable in Germany, which used its economic power as a management tool of international relations. But since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, that lack of perceived threats changed dramatically and there is now a realization that the so-called post-Cold War peace dividend is over. The world where Germany was surrounded by friends and partners no longer exists in the same way. The most important ramification of the change in threat and security perception was the shift in public opinion on the armed forces: German citizens were shocked to find out about the armed forces' dire state. The *Bundeswehr* had been underfunded for decades and "lacked everything",[191] as the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces, Eva Högl, put it when presenting the 2022 report on the state of the armed forces. After 24 February 2022, the public appreciation of the Bundeswehr increased notably, as confirmed by

189 Interviewee 25.

190 Interviewee 32.

191 Högl 2023.

both several interviews and the 2022 annual report of the Parliamentary Commissioner.[192] The recent debate about *Kriegstüchtigkeit* (ability to wage/endure a war), with regard not only to the armed forces but also to the wider society, is indicative of the deep mental change required to adapt to the deteriorated security environment.

3.2. ROLE AND STRATEGIC CULTURE

In German defence thinking, NATO's collective defence has been considered synonymous with national or territorial defence, as expressed in the slogan "*Bündnisverteidigung ist Landesverteidigung*", (collective defence is national defence). This line of thought is indicative of the depth of integration of Germany's armed forces into NATO structures: more than 80 per cent of the German armed forces are assigned to NATO capability targets. Germany has not had its own national defence plan since the end of the Cold War but is now implementing one for the first time since the reunification, which is further evidence of the gravity of change in the threat perception. Nevertheless, NATO's Strategic Concept from 2022 sets the tone for Germany's national defence policy development, and the alliance's focus on deterrence and defence is directly reflected in the *Bundeswehr's* transformation and new strategy documents such as the defence policy guidelines and the national security strategy.

Germany's strategic culture is described as non-existing or cautious at best. Due to its role as aggressor in the World Wars[193], one interviewee assessed that Germany has not had a (military) strategic culture since the Second World War in the strict sense of the term. The respondents implied that the development of a strategic culture involving military means post-World Wars has been restricted by Germany's foreign policy identity as a civilian power, although the muted nature of Germany's military power is arguably also part of Germany's wider strategic culture. In the literature on Germany's strategic culture, Becker (2013), among others, identifies anti-militarism and multilateralism as the main elements of German strategic culture.[194]

"Leading from the middle"[195] and the concept of *Anlehnungsmacht* (a power to lean on) have been ways to address the contradiction between external leadership expectations and domestic suspicion towards military

192 Interviewees 40, 71, 3; Federal Parliament of Germany 2023.

193 On Germany's post-World War anti-militarism, see e.g. Baumann and Hellmann 2001, 61–82.

194 Becker 2013.

195 Interviewee 25.

power in the decades following the end of the Cold War. As a result of the contradicting domestic and external expectations, there is a lack of consistency in German strategic culture, with different visions in relevant ministries and the armed forces caught in the sidelines. Strategic thinking exists but not in terms of grand strategy like in France, the UK or the US, and discourse is limited to specific defence-related topics but hardly ever connects the dots to longer-term overarching security issues – "keeping the problems simple"[196]. Developing a more consistent strategic culture is a challenge in Germany due to the small size of the strategic community and its relative invisibility until 2022 outside thinktanks and research centres. Additionally, there are constitutional constraints on information exchange within the government to prevent similar events that led to German militarization in the 1930s. Another challenge to consistency is the culture of avoiding responsibility for any potential mistakes in state administration, known as *Verantwortungsdiffusion* (diffusion of responsibility). There is a clear demand both externally and domestically towards the German government to start formulating strategic goals more clearly than in the past 30 years, but it is a slow process. A strategic culture must be actively developed, and the recent strategy documents such as the national security strategy (*Nationale Sicherheitsstrategie*) and the defence policy guidelines are first steps in that direction.[197] Germany is in the process of redefining its role and relearning strategic thinking, but it is "like steering a super tanker – it takes a while to steady the course"[198].

While strategic culture is a more elusive question, there is a remarkable clarity about Germany's role in the new security environment and in NATO's planning. Due to its location in the middle of Europe and the large size of its population and economy, Germany has three main roles within NATO: 1) a troop contributing nation, 2) a receiving nation, and 3) a staging nation. The German term describing the centrality of Germany's geography is *Drehscheibe Deutschland*, a logistics node through which most allied troops would have to move in a crisis and conflict. Germany's location in the heart of Europe makes all its neighbours look to Germany for support, which creates a wide array of expectations to fulfil its role as a logistics hub. On the other hand, Germany's geography also enables it to relate to many different threat perceptions, the north-eastern focus on Russia as well as the southern emphasis on terrorism as the main threat.

Germany's evolving strategic culture is mostly related to its role in European security and NATO's defence planning. In that setting, Germany's

196 Interviewee 3.

197 See also Engström 2024.

198 Interviewee 3.

economic power and central location are defining factors for what Germany is expected to contribute. German post-Cold War foreign and security policy thinking has been based on three pillars: "never again war", "never alone", and "diplomacy first".[199] The first, never again war, began to change already in the mid-1990s in favour of German troop contributions to crisis management missions and operations. The third, diplomacy first, is now going through a change as Germany is strengthening its military and other means in addition to diplomacy following the failed diplomatic attempts to stop Russia from invading Ukraine in 2022. The second, never alone, is more deeply rooted in Germany's historical legacy and essentially means that Germany's actions will always be embedded in NATO and the Western structures. It is therefore considered an important element of continuity in the face of change. When it comes to the external expectations of leadership that skyrocketed in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the picture is ambivalent: on the one hand, the German leadership has made attempts at formulating a leadership ambition. On the other hand, leadership in defence-related matters does not come naturally to Germany for historical reasons. It is still hard for the German government to take the lead in a positive way; it is a selective leadership approach that tries to avoid the hard part of taking responsibility for uncertain outcomes.

3.3. MAJOR ALLIES AND DEFENCE COOPERATION FRAMEWORKS

In Germany, cooperation is viewed less through an instrumental lens and more as a value in itself, as the core principle of German foreign and security policy, "never alone", indicates. Hence, Germany is actively participating in a myriad of bi-, tri- and minilateral cooperation formats with both EU and NATO partners. As one interviewee described Germany's interest in defence cooperation, "Germany has always wanted to be part of everything but not take responsibility for anything"[200]. This is now changing, however, with Germany's pledge to deploy a permanent brigade to Lithuania as the lead nation of the multinational NATO Forward Land Force (FLF, previously: enhanced Forward Presence, eFP) battlegroup stationed there. The Lithuania brigade is considered a flagship project of the *Zeitenwende* and will remain a priority for the near future as Germany's contribution to the defence of the eastern flank and especially the Baltic states. The objective of the German "3+3" initiative is to

199 Interviewee 19; Hamilton 2023, 65–69.

200 Interviewee 63.

enhance the synergies, coordination and joint exercise activity between the framework nations and the host nations of the FLF battlegroups in the Baltics. However, the Lithuania brigade is criticized for being a peacetime measure as the number of troops would not suffice in a conflict.

The most important partners are France, the US and the UK, with whom Germany forms the so-called quad of powerful nations and, in the European context, the E3 (the three largest European nations, i.e. France, Germany and the UK). France is often mentioned as the most important, but also the most difficult partner, as differences in strategic and bureaucratic cultures make cooperation cumbersome. The overall Franco-German relationship is described as currently strained. France and Germany have several high-profile capability development processes in the pipeline, such as the Future Combat Air System (FCAS), Main Ground Combat System (MCGS) and Maritime Airborne Warfare System (MAWS). However, the number of joint projects has gone down in the recent years, and there are question marks about the feasibility of future Franco-German defence industrial cooperation because the current and past projects have turned out more expensive and less efficient than expected, thus reducing the benefits. While Germany's current focus is very much on the Baltic Sea and states, where Germany's ambition is to take on a leadership role in the maritime area, cooperation with France is more a high political priority than a military one. E.g. the Franco-German brigade is described as mostly fit for parading. However, Franco-German cooperation brings added value by offering initiatives that "95% of other Europeans can agree on"[201] – when Germany and France find common ground. Poland is considered another important but difficult partner, with some hopes that with the new Polish government, the trilateral Franco-Polish-German cooperation format "Weimar triangle" could be reinvigorated.

In the three domains, land, air, and sea, Germany cooperates bilaterally with different partners. With the Netherlands, Germany has a long-standing and uniquely deep bilateral relationship, with full integration of the land forces into joint units and structures. In the field of joint procurement, Germany and the Netherlands strive not only for interoperability but interchangeability as well. Norway is Germany's prime strategic partner in the High North and maritime area, where cooperation is blooming in the joint capability building sector: the flagship project is the development of a German-Norwegian common design submarine, including a whole joint crew. Furthermore, Norway has been a long-standing winter warfare training destination for the *Bundeswehr*. The German air force, in turn, is deeply integrated with its American

201 Interviewee 25.

counterpart – the US Air Force has its main base in Europe in Ramstein. Interestingly, the relations with the US were not otherwise highlighted in detail by the interview respondents, although it is arguably Germany's most central defence-related relationship that it has relied on ever since the Second World War.

The European Sky Shield Initiative (ESSI) is a multilateral German-led joint procurement initiative that was highlighted as an example of German leadership in filling a gap in European air defence capabilities. Initially, in October 2022, 14 nations joined the initiative, and the number has grown to 19 by now. The aim is to improve existing air defence capabilities, close gaps in Europe, and integrate the new systems into NATO's Integrated Air and Missile Defence (IAMD). The initiative has infuriated French counterparts due to a lack of coordination before the ESSI's announcement, and because it incentivizes the procurement of non-European systems apart from Germany's own IRIS-T (other systems included in the initiative are the American PATRIOTs and the Israeli-American Arrow 3).[202] Especially the inclusion of Arrow 3, even if on a national basis at first, has been assessed to have divisive potential within NATO, but on the other hand, both Finland and Germany have recently made decisions to procure Israeli systems.[203] Furthermore, in one interview the initiative was criticized for too narrowly focusing on creating economies of scale and lacking the operational and strategic levels that should be guiding procurement: who is doing what, by when, and to fulfil what operational objective? One respondent also pointed out that the field of air defence is a suitable and comfortable area for Germany to take the lead, as the framing as a "shield" is purely defensive and therefore easily digestible to the German public.

The Framework Nations Concept (FNC) was only mentioned in two interviews, which indicates that it is not currently in focus. Germany proposed the FNC in 2013 ahead of NATO's Wales summit as an initiative that would aim at developing multinational units that would, "in theory, increase sustainability and help preserve military key capabilities. Smaller armies could plug their remaining capabilities into an organizational backbone provided by a larger, 'framework' nation"[204]. The FNC construct adopted by NATO in 2014 sought to create both breadth, provided by the larger framework allies' wider warfare spectrum, and depth, by combining smaller allies' often specialized capabilities.[205] By doing so, the functional groupings could, in cooperation, provide the alliance with an array

202 See also the chapter on France.

203 Finland is procuring the David's Sling air defence system from Israel; Wachs 2023.

204 Major and Mölling 2014.

205 Ruiz Plamer 2016.

of complementary capabilities and thus help meet the capability targets identified and agreed on in the NATO Defence Planning Process (NDPP).

The FNC was essentially based on three premises. First, the US would provide only 50 per cent of NATO's capabilities, which would push the European countries to take a greater responsibility for NATO's capability development. Second, no European state can carry out military operations on its own, which would lead to greater interdependence between the European nations. Third, most European armed forces faced shrinking budgets and assets as a result of the global financial crisis, which made pooling of assets necessary.[206] The FNC thus presented a pragmatic answer: "States cooperate voluntarily in a highly agile format and while retaining their full sovereignty wherever they choose to do so – and in a best-case scenario, they do so with NATO coordination and while adding the greatest possible value for the alliance"[207]. The original framework nations were Germany, Italy and the UK.[208]

Finland joined the FNC in 2017 when it also signed a bilateral framework agreement on defence cooperation with Germany. The bilateral agreement included areas such as political dialogue, capabilities development, exchange of information, cooperation within international organizations, research, and materiel cooperation, while the FNC agreement was considered to complement the existing cooperation with regard to operations, training, and defence materiel, among other things.[209]

3.4. ECONOMIC IMPERATIVES AND POLITICAL CAVEATS

In Germany, the defence industry is a private one – similarly to Sweden and in contrast to France. The defence industry is an important interest in and often a subject of regional politics as producers can be significant employers in some regions. This is also often visible in Germany's domestic industrial policy and even procurement decisions, when politicians support the interests of local industry in their constituencies. At the national level, despite government support for German industrial exports as part of cooperation with partners, it is not necessarily a priority, especially in bilateral cooperation formats. However, Germany's own multilateral cooperation initiatives such as the FNC and the ESSI have had a heavy focus on joint procurement. Nevertheless, also in the ESSI the government

206 Major and Mölling 2014.

207 Glatz and Zapfe 2017.

208 Monaghan and Arnold 2022.

209 Ministry of Defence of Finland 2017b.

rationale is said to be quick and effective results to improve national and European defence, not to sell the German IRIS-T system.

Regarding deeper cooperation with Finland after its NATO accession, no caveats were identified. Finland was described as one of the closest and most aligned partners in terms of mindset and values. On the German side, the still prevailing peacetime bureaucratic mindset was considered a hurdle that can be hard to overcome: for example, due to the heavy bureaucratic regulation, it would speed up processes in the German chain of command to facilitate participation in exercises if Germany was invited by the partner country, instead of applying for exercise deployment at its own initiative. In general, the slowness of Germany's bureaucracy was regarded as a challenge, often leading to disappointed expectations. Doubts were expressed that the *Zeitenwende* process would ever really reach the bureaucracy as the current mentality is the result of 40 years of re-education after the World Wars.

The discrepancy between Finland and Germany with regard to human resources and decision-making efficiency is also considerable: while in Germany, there is not always sufficient understanding of the impact Finland's limited human resources have on its ability to participate in cooperation formats, the Finns should, for their part, not expect too much and too fast from Germany. In general, the image of Germany has been overpositive in Finland, which explains the deep disappointment with Germany's slow reaction to the Russian invasion in 2022. The Finnish-led Common Armoured Vehicle System (CAVS) was mentioned as an example of Germany lagging behind in bureaucratic speed, despite best efforts. Typically for Germany, it ended up making a deal with Patria on its own variation of the vehicle specifically fitted for the *Bundeswehr's* needs.[210]

3.5. DEEPENED COOPERATION POTENTIAL WITH FINLAND AS A NATO MEMBER

Finland's NATO accession was perceived as one of the few positive consequences of Russia's full-scale war of aggression against Ukraine. With Finland (and Sweden) in the alliance, the centre of gravity moves to the North. Finland was described as a high-priority partner for Germany, but with the NATO accession, it becomes an even more important strategic partner in the alliance due to its long border with Russia and experience in dealing with its eastern neighbour. The mutual appreciation was manifested in the bilateral agreement on security cooperation from 2018,

210 See Patria Group 2024a.

although its substance has remained somewhat limited. There was likely some context-related bias in the respondents' assessment of Finland's position among Germany's partners due to the topic of the interview. It is therefore a more accurate assessment that among Germany's priority partners, Finland is in a different category compared to countries such as France or the US, or even the Netherlands and Norway, with whom Germany has been cooperating at a deeper level and for a longer time within NATO.

Since the image of Finland is already very positive in Germany, the NATO accession is not expected to further improve it. In reverse, the fact that Finland and Sweden, "two of our favourite countries",[211] joined NATO can have a positive effect on public perception of the alliance – it confirms that Germany is in the right reference group and could possibly even reduce the NATO scepticism prevalent in some parts of the German public.

However, despite the historically good and close bilateral relationship, concrete operational cooperation has so far been limited in volume and has focused mainly on the navy, with some air force cooperation that could increase in the future when both Finland and Germany receive the new F-35 fighter jets. However, an increased German air force presence might not be needed or wanted as the Nordic countries already have a sufficient capacity together and comprehensive cooperation frameworks among themselves. Finland's distant location explains the lack of deeper cooperation between the armies, as land forces are not as easily deployable as the air force and navy. However, there is a long-standing jaeger exchange tradition between Finland and Germany, which is mostly restricted to individual jaeger troops participating in training in the other country. Shared NATO regulations can make army deployments to Finland easier in the future, and there is a great interest in more frequent exercise participation in Finland, especially for the Lithuania brigade as Lithuania lacks sufficient training space. These factors may explain why previous training and exercise activity did not feature in the interviews.

The picture was somewhat mixed with regard to an impact assessment of Finland's NATO accession. On the one hand, it was welcomed as a significant change for the whole alliance – for the better. The change is most notable in the Baltic Sea area, where Russia now (and especially after Sweden's membership is also fully ratified) has only a very limited area of control. Finland was seen as a well-prepared and capable new ally who knows how to deter Russia and deal with the multifaceted threats emanating from it. Geographically, Finland's location adds a layer of complexity, with a larger area of responsibility for NATO and

211 Interviewee 63.

the logistical challenges that come with it, but it also brings strategic advantages by creating new dilemmas for Russia. Russia can no longer focus on one single hot spot along the eastern flank but must consider the full "north-eastern dilemma"[212] that Finland presents. Finland's deepened bilateral cooperation with the US was seen in a positive light as it adds to the dilemma from a Russian perspective. From a German perspective, Finland's most important task in a war is to defend its own territory and the border, to be a stronghold in the North. Additional contributions elsewhere, such as in the Baltic states or in South-Eastern Europe, were seen as a nice extra if Finland still has capacity left. However, depending on how Russia's war in Ukraine and its threat potential elsewhere develop, expectations may arise for Finland to contribute more outside of its direct surroundings.

Concrete potential for increased future coordination and synchronization between Finland and Germany was identified in all domains, especially in strengthening the air defence pillar in NATO. Other capabilities in focus will be the navies, cooperation with the common German-made Leopard main battle tanks and the F-35 jets. Finland uses many systems that are also used in Germany, and Germany will have to learn from Finnish requirements as it will have to fight in a theatre similar to Finland. Finland can also offer strategic education for larger than battalion-size operations – an ability that has been lost in Germany due to decades of mission thinking. However, Germany is the only country in Europe capable of setting up more than one division. There is also interest at the political level in cooperating with and learning from countries like Finland that have kept up a conscription system and a reserve army as German decision-makers are looking for examples to orientate themselves in the domestic reform process in Germany's armed forces. In its distribution and backup role, Germany can learn from Finland about force generation ability, long-term planning and foresight, civil-military cooperation and total defence best practices. Disinformation and the cyber domain are considered to be Finnish strengths and part of Finland's overall resilience, an area where Germany still has lots of room for improvement.

While Germany's main area of interest in defence cooperation with Finland is restricted to the Baltic Sea and the country does not plan to get militarily involved in the Arctic, it has an interest in other aspects of the Arctic. These include climate change and the emerging trade routes, in which it is paramount to implement the rules-based world order that Russia is currently undermining. Russia's nuclear capabilities in the Arctic, Russia-NATO border intelligence sharing, winter warfare training, and

212 Interviewee 8.

radar cooperation in Northern Finland and Sweden are further areas of interest for Germany. Space is another emerging domain of interest for Germany, and there is a Finnish–Swedish–German project on space underway.

On the other hand, bilateral cooperation between Finland and Germany is not expected to increase significantly compared to the levels before Finland joined NATO. Personnel exchange is likely to increase, as well as joint exercise activity, but the establishment of new cooperation formats or a significant increase in frequency is unlikely. Partly this is explained by Germany's strong focus on the Baltic states that need more support – Finland is not on the "pulling side" and adds more capability to NATO. As an interviewee put it, "Finland is hard to defend but also hard to attack"[213]. New impulses were also not considered necessary as the Finnish–German connection was described to be like an old friendship.

But future prospects also depend on NATO's command and control (C2) arrangements after the accession of Finland and Sweden, as well as on Finland's own posture and role in NATO. Since Finland, according to the Nordic countries' wishes, is to be transferred from Joint Force Command (JFC) Brunssum to JFC Norfolk as soon as Norfolk has built up the necessary capacity, Finland and Germany will belong to different regions in NATO's new regional defence plans (north-west and centre, respectively). Therefore, closer cooperation is expected to be limited. While there is understanding for Finland's wish to join Norfolk rather than Brunssum – as Finland is close to Russia's Murmansk base and Northern Fleet in the Kola Peninsula – the German position initially was that Finland and Sweden should join JFC Brunssum to avoid division of the Baltic Sea between JFCs.

213 Interviewee 63.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- For Germany, the Russian full-scale attack on Ukraine in 2022 was a major shock that forced a long overdue course correction. In its first-ever national security strategy, Germany defines Russia as the main threat to Euro-Atlantic security and vows to take on a larger responsibility for European security. It is, however, easier said than done to conduct military reforms in Germany, due to many bureaucratic constraints and even the nature of the decentralized political system.
- Germany's evolving strategic culture is mostly related to its role in European security and NATO's defence planning. In that setting, Germany's economic power and central location are defining factors for what Germany is expected to contribute. German post-Cold War foreign and security policy thinking has been based on three pillars: "never again war", "never alone" and "diplomacy first".
- There is a remarkable clarity about Germany's role in the new security environment and in NATO's planning. Due to its location in the middle of Europe and the large size of its population and economy, Germany has three main roles within NATO: 1) a troop contributing nation, 2) a receiving nation, and 3) a staging nation. The German term describing the centrality of Germany's geography is *Drehscheibe Deutschland*, a logistics node through which most allied troops would have to move in a crisis and conflict.
- In Germany, cooperation is viewed less through an instrumental lens and more as a value in itself. Hence, Germany is actively participating in a myriad of bi-, tri- and minilateral cooperation formats with both EU and NATO partners. This differs significantly from the Finnish, more instrumentalist view of cooperation, as Germany's initiatives sometimes lack concrete objectives and/or follow-up.
- The Baltic Sea is the clearest shared area of interest between Finland and Germany. Further cooperation potential exists between the air forces once both start operating F-35s. Germany is also interested in increased training activity in Finland, especially for its future permanent brigade in Lithuania.

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4. NORWAY: HEDGING SECURITY THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS

Since the end of the Second World War, Norway has relied on NATO membership as the bedrock of its security and defence policy. As a small country responsible for a large maritime territory and a geography next door to Russia's strategic assets in the Kola Peninsula, Norway has never completely turned its attention away from territorial defence and the possibility of a Russian threat, especially in the High North. However, as NATO increasingly turned to out-of-area operations in the 1990s and early 2000s, Norway sought to present itself as a committed member of the alliance and slowly transformed its defence forces to suit mobile expeditionary operations. As Norway participated in US- and NATO-led international operations in places such as Kuwait, Kosovo and Afghanistan, its defence forces were cut down in size. However, Norway was never perfectly at ease with this turn and retained elements of its previous territorial defence model.[214]

Since the 2008 Russo-Georgian war and the 2014 annexation of Crimea, Norway and the other Nordic countries grew increasingly concerned about Russian aggression. Norway began to reinvest in its defence and advocated for NATO to prioritize collective defence over international operations. However, Nordic cooperation was always limited by diverging national defence solutions: with Norway and Denmark in NATO, while Sweden and Finland remained militarily non-aligned, NORDEFCO could not include mutual

214 Peterson 2018.

NORWAY

Population in 2022 [1]	**5.46 m**
Defence expenditure in 2023 (estimate) [2]	
Current defence expenditure in US dollars (2023) [3]	USD 8.80 bn
Defence expenditure as a share of GDP based on 2015 prices (2023) [4]	1.80%
Defence expenditure per capita (US dollars) based on 2015 prices and exchange rates (2023) [5]	USD 1,445.00
Equipment expenditure as a share of total defence expenditure (%) [6]	28.26%
Military personnel [7]	
Active	25,400
Reserves	Home Guard 40,000
Other	–
Member in NATO (year)	**1949**
Member in the EU (year)	**–**

Figure 5. Key facts and figures about Norway.

1) Source: The World Bank.
2) Source: NATO. Defence Expenditure of NATO countries (2014–2023); 3) Table 2; 4) Table 3; 5) Table 6; 6) Table 8a.
7) Source: Military Balance 2024.

security guarantees. This all changed with Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, which led Sweden and Finland to apply for NATO membership, and for Norway to double down on its shift back to territorial defence.

4.1. SECURITY ENVIRONMENT AND THREAT PERCEPTION

Norway's security environment has deteriorated in recent years and is seen as both challenging and dangerous, which increases the risk of a military conflict.[215] One interviewee saw the security environment as "the most serious since the Second World War".[216] The Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 served as a wake-up call for many in Norway. However, the security environment began to weaken already in 2007 when Russia resumed flying strategic bombers near Norway and Iceland. The change became more drastic in 2008 when Russia attacked Georgia, and especially after the 2014 Russian annexation of Crimea. Until the 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Russia's behaviour was new and concerning but not necessarily considered an acute crisis. In addition to Russian aggression, the security environment is also defined by protracted global great power competition between the United States and China and a hot war in Gaza.

Russia has always been a defence priority for Norway, but the country has never focused solely on Russia. In the 2000s, for example, NATO's expeditionary operations were a priority for the defence forces. Since NATO was established, Norway has been alone on the alliance's northern flank next to Russia's strategic areas in the Kola Peninsula. With Finland's and Sweden's NATO memberships, the outlook in Norway's immediate neighbourhood is better than before. Still, there is a need to prepare for worst-case scenarios regarding Russia. The most concerning scenario would be a threat that is "too big for Norway, too small for NATO"[217] and does not trigger an Article 5 response from the alliance. This could include a Russian operation against Svalbard. From the Norwegian perspective, Finland and Norway share Russia as a neighbour and as a result have a similar threat perception.

Norway is concerned about Russia's behaviour in the European Arctic and about the development of the Russia-China relationship in the region. As yet, no major changes have occurred in Russian operations or maritime activity in the north. However, Russia's relationship to NATO and its perception of allies, including Norway, has shifted with the war in Ukraine,

215 Government of Norway 2024a.

216 Interviewee 57.

217 Interviewee 76.

and Russia is likely to react to Finnish and Swedish NATO memberships over time. These changes are exacerbated by the rising geopolitical significance of the Arctic region. Norway's security is further threatened by Russia's Bastion concept, designed to protect its strategic assets in the Kola Peninsula. While Russia's conventional capabilities have been degraded by the war in Ukraine, its naval, nuclear and air forces in the European Arctic remain intact. Norway's intelligence services follow closely Russian air, sea and land activities up in the north. Russian air forces and long-range precision weapons based in the Kola Peninsula are also used to target Ukraine. One interviewee noted that Russia's capabilities are difficult to assess, but they and Russia's willingness to pay a price for aggression should not be underestimated. Therefore, it is important for Norway for NATO to signal presence and determination in the High North through exercises, for example.

Norway is used to thinking about its relationship with Russia in terms of a "thousand-year peace".[218] Norway has never fought a war with Russia, and the Soviet Union even helped to liberate the northern region of Finnmark from Nazi occupation in October 1944.[219] Due to this historical background, some in Norway still hope to build bridges towards Russia. Currently, communication with Russia is limited to safety-related areas such as the coastguard, search and rescue services, fishery management and border security. These areas have long historical backgrounds: border cooperation is based on a 1949 border agreement between Norway and the Soviet Union, fishery management cooperation started in the mid-1970s in the Barents Sea, and coastguard cooperation began in the late 1980s.

In summary, Norwegian security policy is changing, but the shift has been less dramatic than in neighbouring Finland and Sweden. There has been no general feeling of urgency comparable to the German *Zeitenwende*, for example. At the same time, Norwegian policymakers recognize that Russian aggression against Ukraine gravely affects the security environment, and that Russia is the main threat to Norwegian security and interests.

4.2. ROLE AND STRATEGIC CULTURE

Norway's strategic culture should be understood against its historical experiences. Before the 1940s, Norway was a neutral country that had close cooperation with the United Kingdom. Its strategy was to keep out of conflicts and align itself with the UK as a regional power. The German occupation, which began in April 1940 and lasted for five years, had

218 Interviewee 57.

219 Friis 2021.

devastating consequences for Norway and came as a deep shock to the country. Post-1945 attempts to negotiate Nordic defence cooperation with Sweden and Denmark collapsed due to Swedish demands for neutrality and Norwegian attempts to anchor the US and the UK to its security. Norway's main conclusion from its experiences in the Second World War was that a small state cannot survive without more powerful allies.[220] Since then, Norway's strategy has been to align itself with key Western powers, mainly the US and the UK, through NATO. Norway sees its membership in NATO as the "foundation for Norwegian and allied security".[221] In the 1990s and early 2000s, the Norwegian armed forces focused on international and expeditionary operations together with allies. The turn towards expeditionary operations was difficult for the Norwegian armed forces but seen as unavoidable since as a small country, Norway was reliant on allied solidarity and help during possible crises or conflicts.[222] After 2014, the focus shifted from crisis management back to national defence and the threat of Russia trying to seize part of mainland Norway as part of its Sea Bastion concept.

As a result of these experiences and Norway's geographic location next to Russia, its strategic culture has been defensive and has included balancing between deterrence and reassurance towards Russia. Norway operates near the Russian border and hosts exercises but has been careful to avoid being seen as provoking Russia or causing miscalculations. During the Cold War, for example, this included limitations on how far north exercises could be held. Norway's relationship with Russia has also included also other self-imposed restrictions on defence cooperation. In 1949, it adopted a policy not to host permanent allied bases in Norway during peacetime (base policy). In 1957, Norway announced that it would not allow the placement of nuclear weapons on its soil (nuclear policy).[223] Over time, these restrictions have become important elements of the country's strategic culture and politics. Norway is seeking a new balance between deterrence and reassurance. At the moment, this has not resulted in any major revisions in Norway's traditional base and nuclear policies, but these policies are flexible: "These restrictions can be strictly or loosely interpreted." As national policies, they can be adapted when the security environment changes. Currently, the balance between deterrence and reassurance is moving towards deterrence.

220 Friis 2021.

221 Government of Norway 2024a.

222 Friis 2021.

223 Lodgaard and Gleditsch 1977.

As a result, there is a shared political awareness in Norway that the country needs to invest more in its defence. In the new long-term defence plan for the years 2025–2036, Norway pledges to invest NOK 600 billion (USD 60 billion) in its defence over 12 years. The maritime domain will be prioritized as an investment area due to Norway's significant maritime security and economic interests. This will include the procurement of a new surface fleet with a minimum of five frigates and two standardized vessel classes. Norway will also purchase a minimum of one new submarine in addition to the four submarines already being procured jointly with Germany. In the air domain, Norway will boost its long-range air defences and double its existing NASAMS air defences to counter drones and missiles. In the land domain, the size of the army will be increased significantly with two new brigades (one in Finnmark and another in Southern Norway). The army will also invest in long-range precision firepower, which it currently lacks. Surveillance and situational awareness in the High North will be increased by purchasing long-range drones and satellites for the armed forces.[224] Overall, these investments form a major and serious effort to boost the Norwegian armed forces' endurance and capabilities and address current gaps in its defence. However, implementation will take time, and unforeseen issues can often arise in long-term defence investment projects.

Norway perceives itself as "NATO's eyes and ears in the North"[225] vis-à-vis Russia and as a maritime nation that protects the Atlantic sea routes and natural resources such as oil, gas and fish in its vicinity. Finland's and Sweden's memberships have been a revolutionary change for Norway's strategic outlook. Norway is used to being the end station for allied reinforcements and equipment. Now Norway will increasingly serve as a host nation responsible for receiving allied forces and materiel transferring eastward to Sweden, Finland and the Baltic states. Key routes will include Narvik towards Kiruna in Sweden, Trondheim towards Central Sweden and Finland, and Oslo and Gothenburg towards Gotland. From a Norwegian perspective, a key benefit of Finland and Sweden joining NATO is that the Nordic theatre of operations can now be approached in a holistic manner for the first time. Traditionally, Norway has looked towards the North Atlantic, Sweden and Finland to the Baltic Sea, and Denmark in both directions of the Danish Straits. Now the political geography of Northern Europe is changing: the Atlantic Ocean is moving closer to Finland and Sweden, and the Baltic Sea will become more important for Norway. This includes protecting the sealines of communication and sharing situational awareness of what is going on in the region. Still, Norway will

224 Government of Norway 2024a.

225 Interviewee 17.

continue to look primarily towards the open seas in the north and west and will keep investing in its naval capabilities. This maritime security role will be supported by Norway's existing competence and experience of blue-water naval operations in the Barents Sea and the North Sea and by its long-standing historical cooperation with the US and the UK. Norway sees it as vital to its security to be successful in this role.

4.3. MAJOR ALLIES AND DEFENCE COOPERATION FRAMEWORKS

Norway's defence concept is built on three pillars: national defence, NATO membership and bilateral partnerships.[226] NATO is seen as the cornerstone of Norway's security.[227] Norway seeks to strengthen NATO and its unity, actively participate in the organization's work and shape it into a modern alliance. Norway aims to build a network of bi-, tri- and multilateral cooperation with larger states. In a crisis, Norway can rely on its national capabilities for a limited period of time; in a longer conflict, it will rely on support from NATO allies and the United States. The closest bilateral partnerships are with the US as *primus inter pares* in NATO, the UK as a long-standing ally and a maritime power, as well as with Germany, Netherlands and France. Norway has a long-standing and deep relationship with the US.[228] The relationship grew close after the Second World War as Norway concluded that Europe's security could not be guaranteed without a strong US engagement. Norway sees itself as a loyal ally that has invested significant resources in the bilateral relationship over time. Norway and the US engage in deep cooperation on security, defence and intelligence, including prepositioning of military materiel by the US marine corps. Intelligence gathering and early warning in the High North through means such as signal intelligence (SIGINT) and digital intelligence play an important role in the cooperation.

Achieving deeper cooperation with the United States is a high priority. In 2021, the US and Norway signed a Supplementary Defense Cooperation Agreement (SDCA), which serves as a framework for cooperation and American presence in the country.[229] In February 2024, Norway and the US signed an agreement to open up eight new agreed facilities and areas for use by the American forces.[230] At the same time, Norway seeks to hedge its

226 Norwegian Armed Forces 2023.

227 Government of Norway 2023.

228 Cullen and Stormoen 2020.

229 Government of Norway 2021.

230 Government of Norway 2024b.

security through national capabilities and enhanced partnerships.[231] This is due to a concern that Norway has grown too dependent on the US as it decided to downsize its national defence forces after the end of the Cold War.[232] For Norway, it is important to understand how the United States' increasing focus on the Indo-Pacific region will impact its long-term commitment to Norwegian and European security: for example, will the marine corps assigned to Norway be relocated?

With the United Kingdom, Norway has engaged in long-term cooperation especially on maritime security and between the air forces. It also includes cooperation through the Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF) framework, which is led by the UK and can be used to react quickly to emerging threats in the region before NATO's Article 5 is activated. Deepening cooperation with the UK is seen as important. Cooperation with Germany is becoming more important but is not as established as with the US or the UK. Norway and Germany are jointly procuring new submarines, and Germany is expected to take more responsibility for the security of the Baltic Sea in the future as its maritime capabilities increase. With the Netherlands, cooperation is close in the marine corps and the navy, while with France, cooperation is more aspirational than practical. The French-led European Intervention Initiative (EI2) is viewed mostly as a think tank type of framework rather than an operational vehicle like the UK-led JEF. Norway's interest in cooperating with Poland is rising as Poland continues to invest in modernizing its defence forces, but not much is happening bilaterally at the moment.

For Norway, the significance of Nordic defence cooperation has increased now that Finland and Sweden have joined NATO. Especially trilateral cooperation between Norway, Finland and Sweden is on the rise.[233] This potential is supported by their shared geography and cultural and societal values. The new situation removes previous obstacles to cooperation and makes it possible, for example, to develop joint plans for air operations and land forces. In the land domain, Norway has an interest in the defence of the Cap of the North region (*Nordkalotten*), which covers the areas of Norway, Sweden and Finland located north of the Arctic Circle.

Cooperation within NORDEFCO will also have to be recalibrated to support NATO's capability and defence planning in Northern Europe. Nordic defence cooperation was formalized with the establishment of NORDEFCO in 2009. Cooperation was at first incentivized by a focus on cutting costs through joint procurement and capability development, but after 2014

231 Government of Norway 2023.

232 Friis 2021.

233 Saxi 2019.

joint defence and crisis-time planning came to the fore.[234] Deeper defence cooperation was also motivated by the increased geopolitical importance of the Arctic region.[235] Currently, cooperation is closest in the air domain, with a new joint air operations centre located in Norway.

Nordic ministers of defence approved a new NORDEFCO vision for the year 2030 at their meeting in the Faroe Islands in April 2024. For the first time, Nordic defence cooperation will focus on developing combined joint operations. This will be done in line with NATO's planning. Other priorities include Host Nation Support, military mobility, total defence, enhanced joint capabilities and better interchangeability of defence materiel.[236] The ministers also mandated the Nordic Chiefs of Defence to advance a Nordic Defence Concept for operational military cooperation.[237] Norway's goal is to strengthen Nordic cooperation and to ensure that national defence plans will be integrated into a holistic NATO regional plan. At the same time, Norway and the other Nordic countries will be careful to avoid creating an image of a Nordic bloc within NATO, although they have major joint interests to advance in the alliance. This concern is reflected in the new NORDEFCO vision, which argues that Nordic defence cooperation will strengthen both NATO's deterrence and defence in the north as well as support the security of the whole alliance.[238] Enhanced cooperation in NORDEFCO is also in line with the North Atlantic Treaty's Article 3, which requires member states to maintain national and collective means of resisting an attack.

So far, capability cooperation within NORDEFCO has been very limited due to previous failed attempts. The low point for Nordic capability cooperation was 2013 when Norway withdrew from a joint Swedish-Norwegian FH77BW L52 Archer artillery system development programme due to delivery delays. From Norway's perspective, Sweden had invested hundreds of millions in a project that did not benefit Norway. From Sweden's perspective, Norway was backing away from a written contract. In the future, there will be a need for a realistic assessment of potential cooperation areas: "In Nordic cooperation, we tend to hype up future success, but failure fissures out, and it is never talked about."[239] Increased operational cooperation can thus result in cooperation on capability development, but challenges are also likely to remain.

234 Friis and Tamnes 2024.

235 Forsberg 2013.

236 NORDEFCO 2024a.

237 NORDEFCO 2024b.

238 NORDEFCO 2024a.

239 Interviewee 76.

4.4. ECONOMIC IMPERATIVES AND POLITICAL CAVEATS

Norway sees potential for deepened economic cooperation in procurement and logistics while recognizing that past attempts at joint procurements have largely failed to meet the stated ambitions. The Norwegian and Finnish states are the largest shareowners in each other's defence industries. Norwegian company Nammo is partly owned by the Norwegian state and Finnish state-owned company Patria. At the same time, Patria is 49.9% owned by Norwegian state company Kongsberg Gruppen ASA. Joint procurement could be used to drive down the costs of spare parts for F-35s, for example. However, strict national criteria for procurements could hinder identifying specific areas of cooperation.

On the logistical side, it could prove cost-effective to identify areas of cooperation in stockpiling, maintenance, joint training and logistics support, including for the F-35 fleet, although the potential for economic savings is likely to be limited, and cooperation needs to be planned carefully. Norway has made effective use of NATO's Support and Procurement Agency (NSPA) and the NATO Security Investment Programme (NSIP), which can support funding infrastructure projects. Finland and Sweden can learn from Norway in using these instruments. Military mobility will be a joint challenge for all the Nordic countries. Just like in Finland, most roads and railways in Norway run on a north-south axis, which will make it more difficult to move forces and materiel from Norwegian harbours and airports eastward to Sweden and Finland.

There are no political caveats to cooperation between Norway and Finland. Cooperation is close at all levels, including the heads of state. In fact, cooperation is only likely to grow deeper in the next years. Public interests in Finland has grown markedly in recent years. However, diverging political interests could pose constraints. Norway and Finland have differences in their geographic outlook as Norway prioritizes the Atlantic Ocean and the High North, while Finland focuses more on the Baltic Sea and its south-eastern border with Russia. Nevertheless, both countries share Russia as a neighbour. There are also differences in their defence concepts, especially when it comes to land and naval forces. Finland's conscription army limits the number of forces available for international formations and exercises. Naval cooperation will be limited by different geographical focuses. The countries' defence cultures also differ as Norway is fully aligned with NATO's standards and procedures, whereas Finland is still integrating itself into NATO and its collective defence.

Other challenges could be related to debates within NATO over the future command structure as the Baltic states would wish to have Sweden

and Finland under JFC Brunssum, while the Nordic states hope to be relocated jointly under JFC Norfolk.[240] Some interviewees emphasized that these differences increase the risk of fracturing the political unity in the Baltic Sea region if not handled appropriately. Further, Norway is not part of the European Union, but this has not hindered cooperation between the Nordic countries before. Norway's self-imposed restrictions on defence cooperation could cause friction between the Nordic countries, especially if Swedish and Finnish approaches will differ on the placement of allied troops in peacetime or with regard to NATO's nuclear deterrence. However, interviewees noted that most likely these will prove to be minor sources of tension rather than major political challenges for cooperation.

4.5. DEEPENED COOPERATION POTENTIAL WITH FINLAND AS A NATO MEMBER

Bilateral cooperation with Finland and trilateral cooperation between Norway, Sweden and Finland have grown in importance as the security environment in Europe has deteriorated. Increased cooperation will now take place within a NATO framework rather than in an independent Nordic format, with the goal of supporting NATO's defence and capability planning. For example, the Nordic countries have agreed to support each other in Defense Planning Process (NDPP) meetings. Nordic cooperation can build a formidable deterrence against Russia in Northern Europe and help Norway to formulate a realistic concept for defending its northernmost territory of Finnmark. This is especially important as the war in Ukraine has shown how difficult it is to take back territory from a determined enemy. Finland's and Sweden's NATO memberships create certainty that the Nordic countries will help each other in a future crisis or conflict. This is important due to Norway's and Finland's historical experiences during the Second World War.

Norway sees Finland as its closest partner in analysing developments in Russia, their shared neighbour. Finland's NATO membership opens up new potential for cooperation in infrastructure, security policy dialogue, intelligence and resilience themes. In the northern areas of Finland, Sweden and Norway, there is a need to invest in railroads, roads and digital infrastructure to meet defence and security needs. On the practical side, cooperation has most to gain in the land and air domains. For example, the joint Nordic air operations centre located in Northern Norway could also function as NATO's regional air command. Finland

240 Lawrence et al. 2024.

has already begun to disperse military equipment to store in Norway and soon in Sweden as well.[241]

As a founding member of NATO, Norway has close traditional links with the United States. Norway and Finland can now share experiences on cooperating with the US and coordinate how to approach American presence in the region at a time when the US is increasingly focused on the Indo-Pacific region. On the Norwegian side, there is an interest in learning from Finland about hybrid warfare and the Finnish comprehensive security model. Norway and Finland share pragmatic attitudes towards defence cooperation as well as a similar territory, geography and climate. Both countries are located next to the Kola Peninsula, which is a strategic area for Russia. Together Finland, Sweden and Norway can coordinate air assets and set up air defences in the north.

Norway's goal is to help Finland integrate into NATO and its regional planning as efficiently as possible. To be an efficient operator in the alliance, Finland needs to build consensus in a manner that aligns with national priorities, including in the NDPP. Finland needs to have clear priorities that it will seek to input into the process. Prioritization is key: "You can't fight all the fights, you have to try to find the few issues that are important and go with them."[242] Interviewees also noted that Finland needs to take advantage of NATO's role as the primary transatlantic forum for defence and security issues.

Norway hopes Finland can quickly learn the ins and outs of navigating alliance politics. Moving discussion in a large multilateral organization with 32 member states can be difficult and slow. It is crucial to remember that NATO looks at security with a 360-degree approach. Geography affects how countries further away from Russia, such as France, Germany and Italy, think about their interests and security. Solidarity is key in a consensus organization: "NATO will take care of Finnish security, but Finland also needs to take care of NATO's security, and that also means stepping up if there are problems in not only the Baltics but in continental Europe as well."[243] Finland will need to find the most suitable bilateral, trilateral and minilateral formats within NATO for advancing its interests and priorities. Most importantly, all the Nordic countries need to carry their weight in the alliance: "We all need to contribute to the three C's: Cash, Capabilities and Contributions."[244]

241 Milne 2024.

242 Interviewee 49.

243 Interviewee 57.

244 Interviewee 49.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Norway perceives Russia as a long-term threat to Norwegian interests and security, especially in the European Arctic and the Kola Peninsula.
- Norway's outlook has changed with Finland's and Sweden's NATO memberships. The country is no longer alone on NATO's northern flank. In the future, Norway will serve as an important hub for receiving and transferring allied forces and materiel from the Atlantic towards Sweden, Finland and the Baltic states.
- The security and defence of Norway are based on its national capabilities, NATO membership and bilateral partnerships. The United States is Norway's most important partner, and the country has invested significant resources in the relationship. Cooperation with the Nordic countries, including through NORDEFCO, is growing in importance now that all Nordic countries are part of the same alliance. Norway, Finland and Sweden can cooperate trilaterally especially in the air domain and on the defence of their northernmost areas.
- Norway sees potential for deepened Nordic economic cooperation in procurement and logistics while recognizing that past attempts at joint procurements have largely failed to meet the stated ambitions.
- Norway does not have any political caveats about deepening cooperation with Finland. However, Norway and Finland have, to an extent, different geographic priorities as Norway looks towards the Atlantic Ocean and the European Arctic, while Finland is focused on its eastern border with Russia and the Baltic Sea. There are also differences in their defence concepts, especially when it comes to land and naval forces, as Norway is a maritime nation and Finland is a land power.
- Norway sees Finland as its closest partner in analysing developments in Russia, their shared neighbour. Finland's NATO membership opens up new potential for cooperation in military mobility, security policy dialogue, intelligence and resilience themes. On the practical side, cooperation has most to gain in the land and air domains. For example, Nordic air forces can use each other's geography for dispersal during crises.

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5. SWEDEN: ADAPTING TO SERIOUS TIMES

Sweden has enjoyed a long period of prosperity and peace since it fought its last war in 1814. Since then, the country followed a policy of neutrality and military non-alignment. During the Cold War, Sweden invested heavily in territorial defence through a conscription system, for example. It also had one of the largest air forces in the world.[245] While Sweden remained outside NATO, its informal and covert cooperation with Western powers was significant and included informal security assurances from the United States.[246] However, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Sweden turned its focus from national defence to broader security questions and made major reductions in its defence spending, including a 90-per cent cut in the size of its armed forces.[247] The Swedish armed forces were largely geared to international crisis management operations.

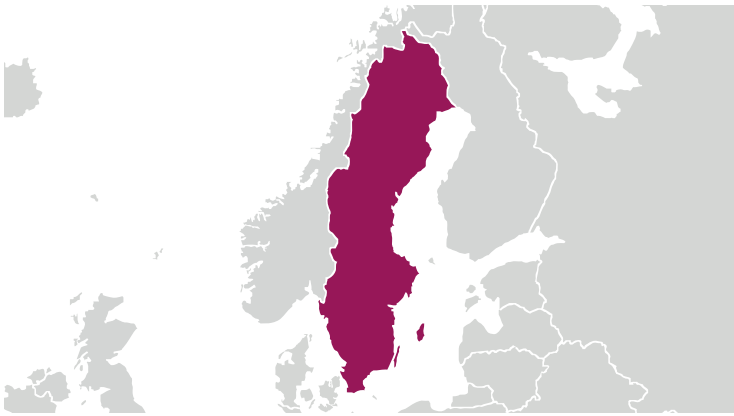
After the annexation of Crimea in 2014, Sweden began a slow turn back towards territorial defence. To compensate for the gaps in its security resulting from the lack of Western security guarantees, Sweden turned to developing a broad network of defence cooperation partnerships. The closest of these was with Finland, which faced a similar dilemma. Finnish-Swedish defence cooperation came to include both peace- and wartime planning – an unprecedented step for both countries.

The weaknesses of Sweden's security and defence solution became clear in 2022 with the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Swedish public support for Ukraine was high from the beginning of the conflict.

245 Andersson 2018.

246 Holmström 2011.

247 Andersson 2018.



SWEDEN

Population in 2022 [1]	**10.49 m**
Defence expenditure in 2023 (estimate)	
Current defence expenditure in US dollars (2023) [2]	USD 7.70 bn
Defence expenditure as a share of GDP based on 2015 prices (2023) [3]	1.30%
Defence expenditure per capita (US dollars) based on 2015 prices and exchange rates (2023) [4]	USD 732.06
Equipment expenditure as a share of total defence expenditure (%)	n/a
Military personnel [5]	
Active	14,850
Reserves	11,450
Other	Voluntary Force (Hemvärnet) 21,500
Member in NATO (year)	**2024**
Member in the EU (year)	**1995**

Figure 6. Key facts and figures about Sweden.

2) Source: FOI (2024) Western Military Capability in Northern Europe 2023.
3) Source: FOI 2024.
4) Source: SIPRI (2022) SIPRI Military Expenditure Database.
5) Source: Military Balance 2024.

Fears over the possible collapse of the Ukrainian state, the potential escalation of the conflict and expansionist Russian foreign policy, combined with Finnish political will to apply for NATO membership, led Sweden to follow suit and apply for membership. As Sweden entered the alliance as a full member in 2024, a new alliance era began in Swedish defence and security policy.

5.1. SECURITY ENVIRONMENT AND THREAT PERCEPTION

NATO membership was a dramatic policy change for Sweden, which has not fought a war for 200 years and stayed neutral during the Cold War. However, unlike Finland, Sweden always thought that it would not have to fight alone in a conflict. This mindset will help Sweden to adapt from national to collective defence, in which solidarity and close cooperation with allies is key.

According to the official assessment and repeated in several interviews, Sweden is facing the "most serious security situation since the Second World War".[248] This is also reflected in the title of the 2023 government security policy report *Allvarstid* (Serious times).[249] Although there is no immediate threat to Sweden, an attack on Sweden cannot be ruled out. There are multiple risks on the horizon: the lagging support for Ukraine in the US and Western Europe, the stalemate in Ukraine and the outcome of the US presidential elections in 2024.

Overall, Sweden now feels militarily safer than before, but Russia is a systemic long-term threat to Sweden and to European security. Sweden considers that there is "little hope for constructive or even pragmatic engagement" [250]. Russia is moving in a totalitarian and "neo-Stalinist"[251] direction. Strategic miscalculations are increasingly likely due to a very limited circle of decision-makers in the Kremlin. Instead of engaging with Russia, as the approach used to be, Sweden must find other ways to advance its security and interests. This situation led Sweden to apply for NATO membership.

In the past 100 years, Sweden has gone through several swings in the strength of its military power. Before the Second World War, Sweden was a weak military power. During the Cold War, it built up a considerable conventional force and a strong defence industry and had one of the

248 Kristersson 2023.

249 Ministry of Defence of Sweden 2023a.

250 Interviewee 77.

251 Interviewee 65.

largest air forces in Europe. Sweden even had its own nuclear weapons development programme until the early 1970s. After the Cold War, Sweden went all in on the peace dividend and scaled down its armed forces radically in the so-called "strategic timeout".[252]

There is a strong realization now that the period of "eternal peace"[253] of the post-Cold War era is over. Sweden is rebuilding its defence capability after post-Cold War scale down. Sweden's military adaptation to the changed security environment stands on four legs: improving readiness of the defence forces, establishing new training platforms and units, supporting Ukraine with military materiel and through training and becoming a NATO member. It will, however, take time for Sweden to reach a level that meets the requirements of the present security environment.

Building up armed forces and keeping up support for Ukraine are two challenges that Sweden, like many other European countries, must tackle simultaneously. Sweden does not have a wide existing material base and stockpiles that it can draw from to give to Ukraine. Between 2020 and 2024, Sweden doubled its defence spending and is on track to reach the two-per cent target in defence spending in 2024 in line with the NATO standard.[254] The government will approve a new defence bill in 2024. At the time of writing, the bill had not yet been released. The bill has been preceded by the military advice of the Supreme Commander of the Swedish Armed Forces and a report of the Swedish Defence Committee, which both argue for further investments in and defence expenditure for the armed forces.[255] The defence committee has proposed that defence spending should be increased to SEK 52.8 billion (USD 4.8 billion/EUR 4.5 billion) by 2030. The defence budget would then amount to 2.6 per cent of Sweden's GDP, according to current estimates.[256] While this level of funding would be a significant long-term investment in Sweden's security and defence, some Swedish commentators have noted that the pace of investments remains slow compared to the seriousness of Sweden's security environment.[257]

Globally, Sweden considers that the rules-based international order and rule of law are being challenged, which is a threat to small countries such as Sweden. In Sweden's view, the global security environment is being shaped by geopolitical competition, emerging technologies and

252 Interviewee 73.

253 Interviewee 73.

254 Government Offices of Sweden 2023.

255 Swedish Armed Forces 2023.

256 Government Offices of Sweden 2024c.

257 Lifvendahl 2024; Hökmark and Oksanen 2024.

questions of economic security. Sweden has an interest in maintaining an open international economy but is taking a more cautious approach to foreign direct investments (FDI) through new legislation and an enhanced screening process.[258] China is not considered a direct military threat, but it seeks to change international rules and norms in its favour, thereby contesting the Western understanding of the rule of law at the global level. In Sweden, China is viewed as a more complex threat than Russia as it challenges the West at the global geopolitical level with new technology and in the field of economic security. According to the Swedish Security Service (Säpo), there is evidence that China is also conducting intelligence operations in Sweden in the fields of business, research and development and politics.[259] Both Russia and China are seen to pose a threat to European security, and many other global actors are trying to balance between them and the West. As one respondent put it, Sweden has "a Baltic view of Russia and an American view of China"[260], making it very hawkish on both accounts – meaning that it has a clear threat perception of both.

5.2. ROLE AND STRATEGIC CULTURE

As the newest member in NATO, Sweden is transitioning from a militarily non-aligned country to an ally capable of contributing to collective defence and deterrence tasks. As a NATO ally, Sweden wants to play an active contributing role, take responsibility for its own defence in accordance with NATO's Article 3 and be "at the forefront in the region".[261] Sweden is aligned with NATO's 360-degree approach to security, but it also wants to take responsibility for the security of Northern Europe and the Baltic Sea as an enabler of collective defence. These aims will be supported by its strong national defence industry, increased military capabilities and geography.

Sweden is a natural logistic hub for the Baltic Sea region both from military and commercial perspectives.[262] As a result, the Baltic Sea will be one natural focus point for the country, including contributing to the defence of the Baltic states.[263] Sweden needs not only to invest in its defence capability but also to take responsibility for "this piece of real

258 On 1 December 2023, a new law came into force in Sweden, aimed at preventing foreign takeovers that could harm Sweden's security, public order or public safety. See Swedish Security Service 2023.

259 Pettersson et al. 2023; Swedish Defence Commission 2023.

260 Interviewee 65.

261 Interviewee 43.

262 Lawrence et al. 2024.

263 Pesu 2023.

estate" in the middle of the region: Sweden is the perfect staging area, close to Russia "but not too close".[264]

Traditionally, Sweden has seen itself as an active international player, with a role in advocating soft security questions, international norms, human rights and international development aid. This is partly changing, as one interviewee argued: "now we focus more on defence, on what we can contribute as a country."[265] However, regardless of its NATO membership, Sweden will remain a strong advocate of the international rules-based order and international law. The European Union is seen as the country's main foreign policy arena, while NATO is the new top forum for security policy and defence issues. As a long-standing EU member, Sweden seeks to strengthen EU-NATO cooperation and the EU's security dimension.

Following two hundred years of peace, Sweden's strategic culture has for a long time been values-driven, normative and focused on global questions and military non-alignment. Sweden's Cold War policy of neutrality was originally based on pragmatism but over time became connected to normative questions such as solidarity with the Global South. Many Swedes have felt that life in security is a permanent state as "if not God, then Providence has held a hand over Sweden".[266] Domestic consensus, diplomacy, negotiations and values such as human rights and equality have been at the forefront of Swedish foreign policy. Now Sweden's strategic culture is changing in a more pragmatic and interest-based and less ideological direction. In the new strategic situation, Sweden must better prioritize its interests: "it will take some time for Swedish strategic culture to adapt to the new post-post-Cold War era."[267] Russia's aggression and atrocities against Ukraine have mobilized Swedish public opinion for Ukraine and deepened the perception of Russia as a threat. Still, Russia's threat is not perceived as acutely in Sweden as it is in Finland due to the geographical distance to Russia.

5.3. MAJOR ALLIES AND DEFENCE COOPERATION FRAMEWORKS

After Russia annexed Crimea in 2014, Sweden's defence policy emphasized bilateral defence cooperation agreements to increase security. This approach was called the Hultqvist doctrine, named after the previous

264 Interviewee 16.

265 Interviewee 12.

266 Interviewee 55.

267 Interviewee 16.

defence minister under whose leadership Sweden concluded bilateral security agreements with 27 countries.[268] After the 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine, these bilateral agreements were no longer seen as sufficient as they did not include security guarantees. Like Finland, Sweden also had security assurances from large NATO member states such as the US and the UK during the NATO accession process. These were seen as sufficient for the period between application and accession, but if the process had drawn out for longer, they would have lost some of their relevance.

Membership in NATO means that all bilateral defence cooperation will now take place in a NATO framework and will have to be more focused than before on collective defence. Some bilateral agreements will no longer be as relevant, but others such as Finnish-Swedish cooperation will remain.

As a great power, the US is naturally Sweden's most important partner next to Finland. The Baltic states are also high up on the Swedish government's agenda as regional allies, and Sweden has pledged to contribute a limited brigade of up to 1,000 troops to Latvia. Cooperation with Germany is described as "surprisingly small-scale"[269], but it is anticipated to intensify as Germany is expected to take a leading role in sea control in the Baltic Sea region. The fact that Swedish foreign minister Tobias Billström made his first visit to Germany after NATO accession indicates that developing the relations with Germany is a priority.[270] With France, the trend is expected to be the opposite: Swedish-French cooperation used to be focused on crisis management and interventions in Africa and specifically in Mali, but cooperation in the area of interventions is now decreasing due to the shift of focus to the Nordic-Baltic region. However, during French President Emmanuel Macron's state visit to Sweden in January 2024, several new agreements were signed: Macron and Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson signed a renewed strategic partnership declaration, including security cooperation; the Swedish and French defence ministers signed a bilateral declaration of intent on air defence and air surveillance; and the Swedish defence group Saab also signed a letter of intent with the multinational, partly French-owned MBDA on deepened cooperation on anti-tank and ground-based air defence capabilities.[271]

Finland is Sweden's closest partner, and one interviewee even described Finland as Sweden's number one strategic partner. This is explained by the complementary logic of the long-standing bilateral

268 Wieslander 2022.

269 Interviewee 61.

270 Billström 2024.

271 Government Offices of Sweden 2024a; Government Offices of Sweden 2024b; MBDA 2024.

cooperation: "one plus one becomes three"[272], meaning that the combined force makes both stronger, and the threshold of aggression higher for adversaries despite the limitation of small size of both countries. Before joining NATO, Finland was the only nation with which Sweden had a political mandate to carry out military operations. After the completed NATO accession of both countries, the bilateral defence cooperation with Finland is viewed in Sweden as an important contribution to NATO's Article 3 provisions on national defence capability: cooperation is seen as a way to scale up national capability. The wider Nordic cooperation format, NORDEFCO, is also important but the bilateral, so-called FISE cooperation is even deeper than that with the other Nordic countries.

The FISE cooperation encompasses common operational planning, joint exercises, naval and air cooperation, and exchange between commands. Personal connections between the Finnish and Swedish armed forces are very close and have been deliberately facilitated over the years through exchanges and liaison officers. The pandemic experience showed how close the Finnish–Swedish connection is: after the pandemic-induced pause, cooperation was immediately resumed, and the countries were able to organize a challenging joint exercise, Vigilant Knife in August–September 2022, at a short notice.[273] Reinforcing Finnish forces in Finland serves Swedish interests as the aim is "not waiting for the problem to reach the Swedish border"[274]. Finland and Sweden also have a great number of mutual security interests, such as the defence of the Åland Islands, freedom of navigation in the southern Baltic Sea and their shared land mass in the north.

Sweden is strongly committed to Finland's security. Politically, it is not a polarizing question but rather an issue of consensus. This stems from their shared geography and history of non-alignment, common values in "almost everything"[275], as well as a broader sense of togetherness and a uniquely high level of trust. The biggest difference is the language. One interviewee described the Finnish–Swedish connection as somewhat counter-intuitive as language-wise, Sweden could be expected to have the closest relations with Norway. But with Finland, the long-shared history connects the countries: for example, in World War II, one third of the Swedish air force was handed over to Finland, and a large part of Finland's state budget was provided by Sweden despite its non-belligerent status when Finland was fighting the Soviet invasion in the Winter War.

272 Interviewee 28.

273 Yle News 2022.

274 Interviewee 28.

275 Interviewee 43.

As one interviewee put it, building close cooperation with Finland has been "like dating the girl next door"[276]: a safe option for both Finland and Sweden, which have been accustomed to keeping defence a very national issue due to their military non-alignment.

In terms of capability building, Finland and Sweden complement each other to an extent: the Swedish navy has submarines that Finland does not have, while Finland has long-range rocket artillery and more experience in artillery warfare. Finland has also maintained the total defence and societal resilience models that Sweden used to have during the Cold War but lost in the past 30 years – and is now in the process of building back. The two countries already have a joint naval task group and amphibious units that form a joint bilateral naval capability and present the longest-standing FISE cooperation format, increasing the capability of both navies. Air force cooperation should be developed with the goal of flexible deployment and creating a dispersed basing system. Finland and Sweden also complement each other with different types of fighter jets – Finland will replace its F/A-18 Hornets with F-35s from 2026 onwards, while Sweden has its home-made Gripens. Although maintenance may be more complicated, the advantage is that they present the enemy with a more varied capability to respond to. Finnish radars and Swedish airborne platforms, airfields and anti-missile capability make a good match. In air and missile defence, it is important to have a shared air picture so that either Finnish or Swedish air defences can react depending on the direction of the threat.

In the bilateral FISE format, defence plans are already in place, and now a similar development is underway in the wider NORDEFCO format. NORDEFCO has not reached the same level of maturity yet but will probably become the main cooperation framework for Sweden and Finland in the future.[277] This means that the significance of the strictly bilateral Finnish-Swedish cooperation may decrease in comparison. NORDEFCO will also have to be aligned with NATO's planning and capability development targets for the region. Trilateral cooperation with both Finland and Norway is intensifying especially in their northern regions, expanding from the long-standing air force cooperation to land forces as well. Cooperation with Denmark is still behind that with the other Nordic neighbours despite its relevance considering the countries' proximity in the Öresund region and the Danish Straits, and it is expected to increase after Sweden's NATO accession. In a potential crisis scenario or an early phase of a conflict that would remain below the threshold of NATO's

276 Interviewee 55.

277 Saxi 2019.

Article 5, regional cooperation would make the participating countries stronger, improve their preparedness and make a seamless escalation to Article 5 possible if needed.

Shared situational awareness is key to acting in a coordinated way in escalation management, avoiding both overreaction and the lack of any reaction by some allies. Contributing to regional security is the key objective of Nordic cooperation, and increasingly of Nordic–Baltic cooperation as well. From the Swedish point of view, NATO and smaller cooperation formats such as NORDEFCO and the Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF) constitute different layers of regional security. The objective is to develop seamless common operational capacity; to connect the ongoing exercise activities to NATO's operations planning, thereby developing joint operational capability for the region. In NORDEFCO, the main goal has been to develop common operational activities already since 2018, and the framework is being aligned with NATO's regional plans as a means of operational implementation in the region.

Sweden's list of priority partners – Finland, Norway, the UK and the US – is partly explained by the special conditions in the High North: only a limited number of partners and allies (i.e. the aforementioned) have the ability to operate in the challenging environment. Before Sweden's decision to join NATO, the UK-led JEF had become one of the major cooperation formats, and the British presence and joint exercises also played a role in the accession phase. However, from Sweden's perspective, it is somewhat unclear how important the JEF cooperation will be in NATO's regional plans. Cooperation with the UK has focused on sub-threshold and hybrid scenarios before Article 5 would be activated.

Through its NATO membership, Sweden will become more closely integrated into the High North dynamic, and the JEF provides a useful and complementary format to NATO's Article 5. Due to the increasingly volatile security environment, cooperation with others who share the same geography – the UK through its role as a gatekeeper to the High North along the so-called GIUK (Greenland, Iceland, the UK) gap – is always beneficial. The UK is also considered an important part of the transatlantic link. The equivalent cooperation formats with other large European countries, the German-led Framework Nations Concept (FNC) and the French-led European Intervention Initiative (EI2), have never reached the same level of relevance as the UK's JEF in Sweden.

5.4. ECONOMIC IMPERATIVES AND POLITICAL CAVEATS

Sweden is per capita one of the largest defence materiel producers in the world, with an entirely private industry. This increases Sweden's security of supply and eases its efforts to scale up its national defence. The size of Sweden's defence industry also gives it more influence in European defence and security debates. However, of the defence companies operating in Sweden, only Saab is Swedish-owned. Saab is also the biggest player in the Swedish defence industry. It is hoped that after NATO accession, Sweden's new allies will purchase more Swedish military equipment. The interchangeability of spare parts is identified as a potential niche for the Swedish industry. Of the Swedish-produced systems, the CV90 combat vehicle, the Carl Gustaf anti-tank system and the Archer artillery system are considered the most promising ones for wider allied use. Sweden, with its advanced sensor platforms, has an interest in NATO's integrated air and missile defence. However, there is awareness that in the end, "everyone buys from their national champions or what's best and most cost-efficient for them"[278] – especially in a time when many European countries are trying to build up their militaries as fast as possible. The Swedish industry is described to have "interests of its own"[279], although these are currently mitigated by the fact that all defence companies will now have their books full for the next decade, so it is more a question of prioritizing customers.

Currently, ammunition production is a high priority, and one of the few gunpowder production facilities in Europe is in Sweden. However, Sweden does not have stand-alone production of ammunition, and the largest producer with factories in Sweden, Nammo, is owned by Finland and Norway. As the three countries cooperate closely, this is not seen as a problem in terms of Sweden's domestic security of supply. Improving the interchangeability of ammunition is an important lesson learned from Ukraine's war experience.

While cost-effectiveness used to be a main driver of defence industrial cooperation, it is no longer considered to be a priority in Sweden as defence budgets are rising everywhere. If the main goal used to be to save money, it is now to get more operational effects for the same money. Coordination and common planning are now more important than saving money. In the NATO Defence Planning Process (NDPP), targets should be divided between member states in a coordinated manner. The logic

278 Interviewee 55.

279 Interviewee 61.

of complementarity should also apply to the division of labour between Finland and Sweden in the industrial sphere.

Politically, the only caveat to cooperation with Finland was Sweden's stalled NATO accession process. The longer the process would have dragged on, the more problems it would have caused for bilateral cooperation. However, that concern has been removed with Sweden's NATO accession on 7 March 2024. Otherwise, the domestic political conditions for defence cooperation with Finland were described as very favourable as it is an issue of consensus, and there are no political objections or limitations on either side of the political spectrum.

Sufficient bandwidth is, however, a question mark in both countries, given that human resources are limited, and the NATO integration process means a high workload for the responsible ministries. Finnish officials have kept their Swedish counterparts well informed about their challenges throughout the process. The FISE cooperation is so streamlined and mature that it will carry on under its own steam, and it is easier to allocate human resources if the bilateral cooperation fits well into the NATO context. It has been a positive surprise how well the FISE cooperation also matches the new security environment: its importance has been reiterated during the adaptation period. The NATO accession will require some legislative adaptation, however, to make the FISE format compatible with others as well. It might initially take some time before a new "battle rhythm"[280] and structure have been established and procedures refined. Sweden is also going through its own military adaptation process, and it remains to be seen whether Finnish and Swedish priorities stay aligned when both start developing their respective NATO policies. As one respondent put it, for the Swedish armed forces, the challenge is that a few years ago "we had little money and lots of time, now we have lots of money but little time".[281] As a result of 200 years of peace, Sweden's bureaucracy is considered too slow to respond to the magnitude of changes adequately fast.

Finally, there is an external political caveat that is considered to have high destructive potential: the US presidential elections in 2024. Depending on the result, political shifts in the US "can create turbulence down the line that can expose Sweden to dangers we cannot yet foresee"[282]. US domestic politics have seen a collapse of the post-War bipartisanship on NATO. If really put against the wall, Finland and Sweden would both look out for their own interests: Finland would prioritize national survival,

280 Interviewee 28.

281 Interviewee 65.

282 Interviewee 55.

while Sweden has a history of watching out for itself. In the wider Nordic group, despite their close cooperation, Finland, Sweden and Norway look in different directions because of their different threat prioritization and therefore need the US to provide an overview and coherence in the regional security arrangements.

5.5. DEEPENED COOPERATION POTENTIAL WITH FINLAND AS A NATO MEMBER

Sweden sees Finland as its closest ally in NATO. Sweden and Finland have developed a high degree of defence cooperation and political commitment, and "both can trust each other that neither partner will complicate matters with surprises".[283] There are clear military-strategic interests in deepening this cooperation. The countries share a similar understanding of their region and of Russia as a threat. They have a similar military geography, which includes the Baltic Sea and the High North, and mutual interests related to the security of the Åland Islands, freedom of navigation in the Baltic Sea and the Cap of the North (*Nordkalotten*) area north of the Arctic Circle. Culturally, bilateral cooperation with Finland is considered easy. So far, the basis for success has been the trust between the two countries, which has been built over time. Keeping up the high level of trust is also considered important in the future. Having a partner that shares one's values is a strength for small countries in multilateral organizations like NATO and the EU.

The level of trust between Sweden and Finland is not comparable to any other relation. However, cooperation will need to be adjusted to the security environment and NATO's operational planning. Bilateral cooperation can serve in responding to threats before NATO's Article 5 is activated, or to situations which do not meet the Article 5 threshold, such as hybrid threats. For example, if necessary, Sweden and Finland can quickly launch a joint naval operation in the Baltic Sea, and the air forces are able to respond to Russian airspace violations. Sweden's interest is in stopping a conflict from reaching its territory: "Sweden will not sit and wait for the Russians to come".[284]

Bilateral cooperation has potential to be deepened in multiple areas. In the future, Sweden will be a basing area for allied air forces and can be used as strategic depth for dispersing Finnish F-35 aircraft. Sweden, Norway and Finland share a common interest in integrating their defences

283 Interviewee 55.

284 Interviewee 65.

in the High North and exercising fighting together in the northern environment to create interoperable forces. Sweden and Finland are both acquiring new capabilities in the maritime (Pohjanmaa-class and Luleå-class corvettes) and air domains (the David's Sling weapon system and the Patriot PAC-3 missile defence system). Given the limited resources such as the number of officers, it would make sense to share experiences and learn from each other in these domains.

Sweden also plays an important role in Finnish security of supply and logistics: "Swedish supply lines are also Finnish supply lines."[285] To defend Western supply lines, Sweden's replacement for Visby-class ships will be built to be deployable in the high seas as well as the Baltic Sea. A need has arisen to comprehensively evaluate cross-border regulations for logistics in the region to avoid relying on multiple national logistical chains. New areas of cooperation could include undersea operations and the space domain. The expectation is that while bilateral FISE cooperation served a special purpose before Finland's and Sweden's NATO accession, in the future it will be integrated into NORDEFCO rather than remaining a stand-alone concept.

The Nordic countries have a joint interest in ensuring that NATO's regional plans are executable, and that their voices are heard in the planning process as other allies lack the experience needed to fight in northern conditions. The Nordic countries can now coordinate before NATO meetings at political and military levels. However, Sweden wants to avoid the perception of a Nordic bloc forming within NATO and will make sure to engage in the Baltic Sea in addition to Northern Europe, as well as to emphasize its commitment to NATO's 360-degree approach to security. Furthermore, all the Nordic countries have now signed a defence cooperation agreement (DCA) with the US, which sets the framework for military cooperation between them. In a similar fashion, they should clarify their mutual host nation support rules. For example, Swedish operational headquarters have liaison officers from Denmark, Finland and Norway, but this has required separate political decisions for each arrangement. Another example concerns the rules for landing aircraft: "F-35s are not allowed to land at foreign bases if their specific maintenance system is not available."[286] Finland's and Sweden's NATO membership will now help streamline processes among the Nordic countries.

285 Interviewee 52.

286 Interviewee 52.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Sweden perceives its security environment as serious and increasingly perilous. The country is adapting its defence spending and armed forces to face a long-term threat from Russia. Although there is no immediate threat to Sweden, an attack on Sweden cannot be ruled out.
- Sweden is investing in its security and defence through increasing the readiness of its armed forces, establishing new units and training platforms, continuing to support Ukraine's defence and joining NATO. However, it will take time for Sweden to fully adapt its armed forces to the challenges of the security environment and to fully integrate into NATO.
- As a NATO member, Sweden aims to have an active and leading role in contributing to and enabling security and defence in the Baltic Sea region and Northern Europe. Sweden will play a key role as a host nation and in receiving reinforcements and supplies and transporting them towards Finland and the Baltic states.
- Sweden sees Finland as its closest ally in NATO. Finnish-Swedish defence cooperation can be further deepened in multiple areas. Moreover, Nordic cooperation, such as within NORDEFCO, will grow in importance over the next years. Sweden, Norway and Finland can integrate their defences in their northernmost regions and provide a joint approach for allies in exercising in northern and Arctic conditions.
- The United States is the most important partner for Sweden next to Finland. The Baltic states are also a priority, and Sweden has pledged to contribute a limited brigade of up to 1,000 troops to Latvia.
- As defence budgets are rising, industrial cooperation is no longer motivated by cost-effectiveness but the idea of getting more "bang for the buck", i.e. gaining more for the same amount of money.

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6. UNITED KINGDOM: SECURITY THROUGH ACTIVE, EXPEDITIONARY AND FLEXIBLE COOPERATION

The United Kingdom has a long tradition of being a strong and assertive military actor. After the victorious Second World War, it maintained a significant military presence in West Germany throughout the Cold War, thus contributing to NATO's collective defence and European security architecture outside its own territory. The UK also had commitments elsewhere, such as in the Arabian Peninsula and South-East Asia. However, despite its withdrawal from the "East of Suez" at the end of 1960s, the UK gave up its basing strategy, not its presence.[287] The end of the Cold War meant a gradual shift towards a more expeditionary defence outlook at the expense of the UK's European commitments. At the end of the 1990s, Tony Blair's slogan "force for good" emphasized the idea that the rationale for the use of military force was changing but not ending because the confrontation of the Cold War was replaced by uncertainty and instability.

However, the reality of global politics was not always favourable to the idea of "managing" security threats with the use of military force in out-of-area operations. Terrorism reached UK soil in the 2000s. At the same time, the missions in Iraq and Afghanistan were not victorious but proved to be prolonged and resource-consuming experiences for the UK. Gradually, the country found itself overstretched and under-resourced. In the aftermath of these experiences, it began to emphasize cooperation: the Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015 stated that the UK's defence was to become "International by Design"[288], underlining the importance of both bi- and minilateral defence relationships in Europe and beyond.

287 James 2021.

288 Ministry of Defence of the United Kingdom 2015.

UNITED KINGDOM

Population in 2022 [1]	**66.97 m**
Defence expenditure in 2023 (estimate) [2]	
Current defence expenditure in US dollars (2023) [3]	USD 77.38 bn
Defence expenditure as a share of GDP based on 2015 prices (2023) [4]	2.28%
Defence expenditure per capita (US dollars) based on 2015 prices and exchange rates (2023) [5]	USD 1,077.00
Equipment expenditure as a share of total defence expenditure (%) [6]	33.37%
Military personnel [7]	
Active	144,400
Reserves	70,650
Other	–
Member in NATO (year)	**1949**
Member in the EU (EC) (year)	**1973–2020**

Figure 7. Key facts and figures about the United Kingdom.

1) Source: The World Bank.
2) Source: NATO. Defence Expenditure of NATO countries (2014–2023); 3) Table 2; 4) Table 3; 5) Table 6; 6) Table 8a.
7) Source: Military Balance 2024.

This outlook was reflected in the creation of the Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF), discussed in public for the first time in 2012 and further elaborated since 2014 after the annexation of Crimea. From the initial scope as a high-readiness force for rapid response anywhere in the world, the focus of the JEF has narrowed to Northern Europe and towards encountering "sub-threshold" threats.[289] Despite the UK's increasing attention towards the High North and the Baltic Sea region since the end of the 2010s, the country has continued to look beyond them as well. At the beginning of the 2020s, a vision of "Global Britain" was outlined, as well as a "tilt" towards the Indo-Pacific. After the full-scale Russian invasion in Ukraine, the focus of the UK's defence policy has shifted more to the Euro-Atlantic region.

6.1. SECURITY ENVIRONMENT AND THREAT PERCEPTION

The overall assessment in the United Kingdom is that the security environment is rapidly worsening. The UK updated its foreign and security political white papers in 2023, only two years after the previous ones because "what could not be fully foreseen in 2021 was the pace of the geopolitical change and the extent of its impact on the UK and our people"[290]. The Integrated Review Refresh 2023[291] (IR2023), addressing broader foreign policy issues, and Defence Command Paper 2023 (DCP2023) share the view that threats and volatility are increasing. This concern was well reflected in many of our interviews, as was the view that the UK's security environment is two-dimensional, including both regional and global security concerns.

The idea that the UK's security environment consists of two approaches is not a new one. As reflected at the beginning of this chapter, the UK has balanced between regional and global approaches during the past decades. In the 2020s, the regional dimension of the UK's security environment refers particularly to Northern Europe. Regionally, the UK's main concern is Russia's aggressive foreign policy, which is identified as "the most acute threat" in IR2023. From the UK's perspective, the nature of "the threat from Russia is long-standing and is not going away anytime soon"[292] – vice versa, Russia is seen to become even more dangerous because it is "an empire in decline"[293]. The Russian threat is now manifested particularly

289 See e.g. Pihlajamaa 2024.

290 Sunak 2023, 2.

291 HM Government 2023; Ministry of Defence of the United Kingdom 2023.

292 Interviewee 36.

293 Interviewee 70.

in its invasion of Ukraine. This acute issue is taking up most of the foreign political attention. The UK has taken an active role in the support of Ukraine, supplying weapons and training Ukrainian troops.

However, Russia-related concerns are not limited to Ukraine but also include the High North and the whole of Europe. Northern Europe is seen as a possible arena for both conventional and hybrid conflicts with Russia. As one interviewee put it, "Northern Europe might be in more danger when Germany and Poland get stronger as they spend more money"[294], meaning that Northern Europe may seem relatively more vulnerable from the Russian perspective if Germany and Poland strengthen their defence capabilities. Interestingly, in the interviews, the UK was portrayed as a natural player in Northern Europe despite its geographical distance from the area. This idea, as well as the view of Russia as a more hostile actor, partially explain why the defence of Northern Europe has become a priority for the UK.

In the 2020s, the UK's global perspective on its security environment covers a wide range of security threats and challenges. These are not necessarily limited to or solely defined in geographical terms, even though interviewees also explicitly referred to the regions where the UK has direct interests, such the Indo-Pacific. For example, the fragmentation of the rules-based world order, the systemic competition between liberal democratic and authoritarian states, and constant conflicts within the multipolar world are major concerns in today's volatile security environment, which also engage the great powers, namely the United States and China. Prime Minister Rishi Sunak has argued that "China poses an epoch-defining challenge to the type of international order we want to see"[295], expressing both the UK's stance on China and the significance of the desired world order. These global issues also have implications for the UK, which plays a global role in many respects. All in all, the threat perception in the UK is multifaceted and includes broad security issues such as authoritarianism, terrorism, transnational crime, climate change and the misuse of disruptive technologies.

It is noteworthy that direct military threats towards the UK's territory did not figure predominantly in the interviews. In turn, and interestingly from the Finnish perspective, there is an increasing consciousness of the need for societal resilience in the UK.[296] Given the UK's geostrategic position, this view seems quite understandable. One interviewee stated that "any direct military threat to the UK would have to make its way through

294 Interviewee 70.

295 Sunak 2023, 3.

296 See also HM Government 2023, 45.

most of Europe, though in the hybrid space we can all be impacted concurrently"[297]. The UK has also reportedly been interested in broadening the agenda in NATO to cover wider security threats.[298] This emphasis on so-called "sub-threshold" threats – referring to threats below the threshold of conventional war and activation of NATO's Article 5 – has also been criticized for questioning the core purpose of the UK armed forces.[299]

6.2. ROLE AND STRATEGIC CULTURE

In one word, activeness would sum up the interviewees' perceptions of the UK's strategic culture, even though such a condensed description obviously does not capture all the dimensions of the concept: the special relationship with the US, nuclear deterrence, the focus on sea power and various other aspects might be seen as parts of the UK's strategic culture in terms of substance.[300] At any rate, activeness applies both to the use of military force in general and to the UK's broader role in various international forums, particularly NATO. Interviewees' thoughts about the UK's strategic culture are in line with IR2023, in which Prime Minister Sunak refers to the previous foreign policy white paper, which "recommended a more active and activist posture for Britain on the world stage"[301]. The UK sees itself as a leader in Europe as well as on the global stage, which is manifested in several ways: "The UK is one of the biggest European defence spenders, it maintains full-spectrum armed forces, and it sits in the United Nation's Security Council as a permanent member."[302] Although activeness is a tool that serves the UK's interests, it can also be seen as a continuation of the UK's historical position: it highlights the fact the UK has often been on the winning side of wars, having a less traumatic legacy of the use of military force compared to some other countries. Historically, the UK has been ready to engage militarily: since the end of the Second World War to 2004, the UK is said to have been "involved in more military operations than any other country"[303].

Interrelatedly with activeness, the UK's strategic culture has been impacted by the fact that the UK is an island. First, being an island includes a

297 Interviewee 62.

298 Webber 2022, 121.

299 Jermalavičius and Billon-Galland 2023, 4–5.

300 See Finlan 2023.

301 Sunak 2023, 2.

302 Interviewee 24.

303 Webber 2022, 124.

strong focus on maritime issues and an emphasis on freedom of navigation. Second, the remote position provides protection: this was reflected in the fact that direct military threats to UK territory were hardly mentioned in the interviews. Ever since the World Wars, the UK has engaged in wars outside its own borders. Instead, it has been able to conduct more "wars by choice" than "wars of necessity", such as the wars in Iraq and Libya in the early 2000s. Third, the lack of strategic depth of UK territory *requires* an expeditionary approach and operations abroad. Preventing security threats from reaching UK territory is a way of securing the homeland. In other words, depth is sought outside the UK's own national territory.

The UK has a history as an overseas empire and currently takes a global approach to world affairs. According to IR2023, "the UK will continue to deepen relationships with a wide range of influential actors across the Indo-Pacific, Gulf, Africa, and beyond"[304]. It is easy to see that this focus is based on the UK's direct interests. However, the country's history may also entail unintended duties: according to one interviewee, "the UK is *expected* to be involved globally".[305] The UK's active role is therefore not always built only on the country's immediate and concrete interests but also on the premise that the UK's allies and partners have expectations for the former empire.

Owing to its tradition of and interest in being active globally, the UK cannot forget the other side of the coin: even for a major European military power, it is difficult to do everything alone. This is why international partnerships are indispensable to the UK, whether they are transatlantic, European or Indo-Pacific. However, involving oneself too broadly may cause the risk of becoming overstretched. The UK has been criticized for the lack of clear strategic prioritization in the 2010s.[306] One interview also argued that "the UK activity has not focused enough on strategic and political aspects but on operational level"[307], meaning that the UK has been eager to engage militarily without a sufficient consideration of the goals and implications. For these reasons, the UK must perhaps rethink the extent to which it can afford to maintain an extensive global role in the worsening security environment. Such a consideration is voiced to some degree in IR2023, which states that the Indo-Pacific tilt highlighted in the previous Integrated Review of 2021 has been delivered.[308] However,

304 HM Government 2023, 13.

305 Interviewee 2. Italics by the author.

306 Webber 2022, 127.

307 Interviewee 53.

308 HM Government 2023, 20.

this hardly means that the UK will stop looking beyond its immediate surroundings.

6.3. MAJOR ALLIES AND DEFENCE COOPERATION FRAMEWORKS

NATO is "always the most obvious"[309] element in the UK's security cooperation network. According to DCP2023, "the collective security provided by NATO is our strongest bulwark against state aggression".[310] The significance of the alliance is reflected in the UK's contributions in NATO.[311] The interviewees also emphasized the UK's role in NATO: it is one of the biggest spenders[312] and even "the most committed"[313] member of the alliance. NATO thus both serves to ensure the security of the home region and provides an arena for UK leadership. NATO has been seen as a cornerstone of the UK's security ever since the forming the alliance in 1949 and is as important to the UK in 2020s as it was at the beginning of the Cold War.[314]

NATO also helps to reinforce the UK's most important bilateral relationship, which is undeniably the one with the United States, which provides an institutional framework for cooperation.[315] Since the 20th century, the UK's security policy has been closely linked to the US. The term "special relationship" is often used to characterize the deep and extensive relationship between these two countries and has also included several joint military campaigns since World War I. For the UK, it is important that the US is engaged in European security and shares the burden that consumes the UK's resources.[316] In turn, according to the interviewees, London feels that Washington is closer than most of its European allies. For this reason, the developments in Washington resonate significantly in London, and the UK also wants to maintain its influence on the US.[317] The interviewees emphasized that the UK–US relationship will not be compromised in any circumstances. The UK has even been ready to prioritize the transatlantic relationship over its European allies, as was the case in the Iraq War in 2003.

309 Interviewee 53.

310 Ministry of Defence of the United Kingdom 2023, 8.

311 See e.g. Webber 2022, 125–129; Slapakova and Spatafora 2021, 53–57.

312 According to the NATO defence expenditure statistics, the UK was the third biggest spender in NATO in 2023 after the US and Germany. See Table 2, NATO Public Diplomacy Division 2024.

313 Interviewee 2.

314 Webber 2022, 116–118.

315 Webber 2022, 117.

316 Slapakova and Spatafora 2021, 47.

317 Slapakova and Spatafora 2021, 47.

However, the UK clearly recognizes that neither NATO nor the close bilateral relationship with the US is a solution to all security concerns in the volatile world. DCP2023 explicitly highlights the significance of "alliances and partnerships around the globe to protect UK territories and interests".[318] The ministerial foreword to DCP2023 mentions several important cooperation formats and projects such as the Five Eyes, the JEF, the Northern Group (NG), the Global Combat Air Programme (GCAP) and AUKUS.[319] In the context of Northern Europe, the most significant of these are the JEF and the NG. Besides them, the Defence Command Paper lists quite a number of bilateral relationships in Central and Northern Europe: France, all the JEF partners (Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden), Germany and Poland.[320]

Interviewees clearly recognized geostrategic factors as drivers for developing cooperation in Northern Europe. The reasoning behind the UK's involvement in the region is not necessarily self-evident. Still, the High North and the Arctic were mentioned as an area of strategic importance to the UK, as was the Baltic Sea region, where the UK sees itself "as a natural player"[321]. These ideas can presumably be traced to the worsened UK–Russian relations, the UK's expeditionary strategic culture and its willingness to show leadership in the post-Brexit situation. In the context of Russia's aggressive foreign policy and invasion of Ukraine, interviewees also mentioned more detailed and concrete issues as incentives for cooperation, including maritime security, undersea infrastructure, models of comprehensive security, intelligence cooperation and cold weather training.

Several Northern European countries were mentioned across the research data as important bilateral defence cooperation partners of the UK. Interestingly, only a few of them were discussed in more detail by the respondents. Estonia was one of them, supposedly mainly due to the UK's role as a framework nation for the Forward Land Forces (FLF, earlier enhanced Forward Presence) battlegroup. Moreover, Estonia and the UK have engaged in extensive defence cooperation for years.[322] The countries cooperated in the NATO-led ISAF mission in Afghanistan in the early 2010s, and they further formalized their relationship by signing a Defence Roadmap in November 2022 "to implement the commitments made at the NATO Madrid Summit for the forward defence of Estonia"[323].

318 Ministry of Defence of the United Kingdom 2023, 8.

319 Ministry of Defence of the United Kingdom 2023, 2.

320 Ministry of Defence of the United Kingdom 2023, 77–79.

321 Interviewee 36.

322 Jermalavičius and Billon-Galland 2023, 20–22.

323 Ministry of Defence of the United Kingdom 2022.

In addition to Estonia, Norway was mentioned as another important partner for the UK. This could possibly be explained by the active training cooperation between the UK and Norway since the Cold War. As a legacy of that era, the UK still trains actively in cold weather conditions in Norway, but according to one interviewee, this is perhaps "just because that is how things are happening"[324]. Interestingly, cooperation with France, for example, was not particularly emphasized. The interviewers' Northern European background might have played a role in this as it might have influenced the respondents' focus during the interview. Another reason might be the difficulties UK–France defence cooperation has encountered during the last few years. The meeting between Prime Minster Rishi Sunak and President Emmanuel Macron in March 2023 was the first summit related to Franco–British defence cooperation in five years, but according to one assessment, the major outcome of the summit was that it took place at all.[325]

From a minilateral perspective, the Northern Group did not figure in the research material, possibly implying its decreasing significance in the UK's security policy. In turn, the JEF, a flexible defence cooperation initiated by the UK, was covered quite extensively in the interviews. The JEF has arguably been the most successful Framework Nations Concept (FNC) initiative in terms of visible output. It has established "a coalition of the willing" and taken as its geographical focus the High North, North Atlantic and Baltic Sea region, even though it could also be deployed further to respond to a humanitarian crisis. In addition to the UK, the participating nations were initially Denmark, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands and Norway. Furthermore, Finland and Sweden joined the JEF in 2017, and Iceland in 2021. The UK provides JEF command and control structures from the Standing Joint Force Headquarters in Northwood, London.[326] JEF cooperation has intensified after Russia's war on Ukraine. For instance, following the damage to cables and pipelines in the Baltic Sea region in 2023, the JEF increased its presence to help protect the critical underwater infrastructure in the region.[327]

The JEF is a cooperation format that has some specific characteristics. It is quite an exclusive format, consisting of ten like-minded countries. The JEF does not require consensus in decision-making, and the countries participating in operations and other activities are defined case by case. This is why some countries may be more involved than others. Finally, the

324 Interviewee 70.

325 Whitman 2023.

326 See e.g. Monaghan 2023 and Pihlajamaa 2024.

327 Ministry of Defence of Sweden 2023b.

JEF does not have an end state *per se*, allowing changes in focus as time goes on.[328] The interviewees identified many features in the JEF that were useful either to all the participant countries or solely to the UK. From a broader perspective, the JEF can be seen as a tool of building a network of countries sharing a common view of the security environment. The limited number of participants allows the JEF to focus more strictly on the interests of the involved countries. The JEF can also play a supplementary role within the European security architecture, serving a gap-filling function: "when the Enhanced Vigilance Activity managed by NATO is not on, the JEF can conduct exercises to fill the gap."[329] The flexibility of the JEF was seen as particularly useful in the so-called sub-threshold environment, below NATO's Article 5. The activation of NATO's collective defence under Article 5 requires consensus among the member states, which would not necessarily be achieved easily particularly in hybrid threat scenarios. The adversary could intentionally stay below the supposed threshold of Article 5, leaving NATO vulnerable. That said, the JEF might have an even broader gap-filling function.

From a narrower British perspective, interviewees believed that the JEF also serves the interests of the UK. The JEF is a forum to demonstrate the UK's engagement in and dedication to European security. Whereas the benefit of a collaborative, flexible defence cooperation format such as the JEF might be difficult to measure, it might be useful in terms of the soft power and status it promotes for the UK in the post-Brexit context. One interviewee saw the JEF as "a political project in the time of Brexit"[330]: the platform was created even though its function was somewhat unclear. On the other hand, there is no reason to overemphasize the significance of Brexit for the JEF, which existed even before Brexit. As one interview concluded, "the political impetus which most energised the JEF was the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine, not Brexit"[331]. The drivers behind the JEF are therefore rather related to the broader interest of the UK in supporting and creating a new, post-war European security architecture.

To summarize interviewees' perceptions about the cooperation, Northern Europe is largely seen not so much from the perspective of bilateral relations between the UK and other countries but rather through the lenses of mini- and multilateral cooperation in which Northern Europe forms one entity that is of interest to the UK. Cooperation is interest-based rather than strictly formalized, which implies that flexibility is a natural part of

328 See also e.g. Jermalavičius and Billon-Galland 2023, 19–20; Lord Peach of Grantham et al. 2023; Arnold et al. 2023; Arnold et al. 2024.

329 Interviewee 62.

330 Interviewee 10.

331 Interviewee 62.

the British perception of the nature of cooperation. It was underlined in several interviews that the format is less important than cooperation in itself. For example, "most of bilateral relations might also be trilateral opportunities"[332]. The utility of various new subgroups within NATO was not excluded either, perhaps in contrast to the general approach to regionalization in the alliance. However, at this point, the JEF is the most visible forum for the UK's involvement in Northern Europe. The value of the JEF is largely connected to its unique features: the flexibility and relative cohesion among the participating countries provide several benefits that distinguish the JEF from other cooperation formats. However, flexibility does not necessarily fully resonate with all partners – for example, Estonia might prefer a more robust "boots on the ground" approach.[333]

6.4. ECONOMIC IMPERATIVES AND POLITICAL CAVEATS

Economically, the UK's biggest defence industrial projects are not in Europe but in the Indo-Pacific: the US, the UK and Australia are codeveloping a new, conventionally armed but nuclear-powered submarine under the auspices of the AUKUS partnership. In addition, the GCAP programme involves the UK, Italy and Japan to develop a sixth-generation stealth fighter. European partnerships still have significance for the UK, but the development of defence capabilities mostly takes place bilaterally or in small groups. The UK has also not been involved in the development of defence capabilities within the EU.[334]

For the UK, there are no specific caveats when considering economic factors as imperatives guiding defence cooperation with Northern European countries. On the other hand, economic factors were not seen to play a particularly significant role in the cooperation in Northern Europe. However, there are issues related to Northern Europe that are at least implicitly linked to economic aspects. For example, critical infrastructure has recently gained more significance. Undersea infrastructure such as data cables and energy facilities are vulnerable, as the incidents of Nord Stream and Baltic Connector have proved. On the other hand, the new JEF vision underlines the ability to respond to hybrid security challenges.[335] There is thus both supply and demand for such activity. At the same time, differences emerge when assessing the prospects of the UK's bilateral economic

332 Interviewee 53.

333 Jermalavičius and Billon-Galland 2023, 15.

334 Scazzieri 2023, 3–5.

335 Joint Expeditionary Force 2023.

or industrial defence cooperation with individual countries. For example, the respondents considered that the UK's defence industrial cooperation with Sweden was more prominent than with Finland – less surprisingly, given Sweden's sizeable defence industry.

From the British perspective, the global world order that is characterized by conflict underlines the need for cooperation in the economic domain as well. As one respondent stated, the war in Ukraine highlights the need to increase the production capacity of defence materiel and "innovate at pace with conflict".[336] In this context, the JEF could also play a role in the field of defence innovation, and it was suggested that "the JEF should leverage its collective world-leading civilian technology sector to accelerate defence innovation with a modernised partnership with industry"[337]. For the time being, however, these visions have not been materialized. Furthermore, several interviewees saw the softer side of defence industry, namely software and secure communications, as a possible area of cooperation in Northern Europe.

Besides these opportunities, there are issues that may hamper materiel defence cooperation. One interviewee underlined that the UK is not ready to build "a military industrial complex"[338]. Another noted that UK defence companies are "private and are driven by profit margin"[339]. Compared to Finland, the expectations concerning defence industry are considered differently in the UK. The view in the UK is that defence industry should actively engage with the armed forces and contribute to innovations that are taking place in the defence sector. One interviewee claimed that "Finland's approach does not fully utilize opportunities in that regard and does not fully understand the possibilities available in digital innovations, artificial intelligence and so on"[340].

Regardless of the different views concerning economic cooperation, the caveats related to the deepening and broadening of the relations with Northern Europe are probably more practical than political. The UK's flexible mindset would possibly allow extensive cooperation in various arenas. The interviewees raised nothing significant that could prevent cooperation between the UK and Northern European countries. However, cooperation partners do not always share interests, end states and capabilities. A different mindset might hence serve as an impediment to promising beginnings, even in the absence of any specific caveats. Caveats

336 Interviewee 70.

337 Arnold et al. 2024.

338 Interviewee 2.

339 Interviewee 70.

340 Interviewee 36.

may also depend on the time frame: the UK's long-term vision in relation to Northern Europe remains undefined. Thus, the incentive for cooperation may not be sufficient if many resources are needed, and the utility of the output is uncertain.

6.5. DEEPENED COOPERATION POTENTIAL WITH FINLAND AS A NATO MEMBER

The UK–Finnish defence cooperation has deepened significantly since the late 2010s. The two countries have signed bilateral agreements on cooperation in 2016 and 2022. An important milestone was Finland's joining the JEF in 2017. Finland is a significant defence cooperation partner for the UK but not the only one in Northern Europe. For example, in terms of capabilities, the UK is allocating much more attention to Estonia. However, it is possible to find some features that the interviewees underlined specifically in relation to Finland.

First, the UK has been willing to show its leadership in Europe during the Russian invasion, and this has also been evident in its relations with Finland. In May 2022, the UK and Finland signed mutual security assurances in the context of Finland's NATO application process. It is noteworthy that the written – and thus perhaps more binding – security assurances were not signed with the US but with the UK. This was highlighted as an important event and an indicator of the strength of the Finnish–UK relationship by interviewees.

Second, according to several interviewees, Finland's adaptation to NATO is the core interest of the UK. Finland was seen to play an important role in deterring Russian aggression against its eastern members – a territory in which the UK is clearly involved, most directly through the FLF battlegroup. As one interviewee stated, perhaps somewhat humorously: "Currently, Finland is a one-trick pony, it fights Russia."[341] Moreover, considering the worsening security situation, the overall modernization of NATO – a bedrock of the UK's security – was seen as an essential task to keep the North Atlantic free and secure, thus also having a direct link to the UK's security. Against this background, the UK wants to ensure that Finland's NATO integration will be conducted smoothly.

As a NATO member, Finland's geopolitical position in the vicinity of the Kola Peninsula, where Russia has its major strategic nuclear capabilities, makes Finland an interesting ally. The interviewees mentioned some concrete operational possibilities, such as getting Finland access to

341 Interviewee 36.

long-range weapon systems in order "to saturate the main highway from St. Petersburg to Kola"[342]. Finland was seen as an example of good, dispersed command and control structures in which NATO is not particularly advanced. Finnish air space was also mentioned, providing allies with the opportunity to conduct intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance gathering flights near the Russian border.

Exercise cooperation includes several interesting options from the UK perspective: Finnish training areas are attractive, and cooperation in the air domain was seen as particularly useful. Finland's warfighting capabilities in the Arctic, operating models in contested air space and in littoral areas, mine warfare and comprehensive security were mentioned as learning opportunities for the UK. From the UK perspective, training with Finland also serves as strategic signalling.

Comprehensive security was one specific area in which Finland was repeatedly mentioned as a model. As discussed above, the UK has clearly recognized the need to develop national resilience. In this regard, the interviewees considered cooperation to be useful. They agreed that the UK cannot directly adopt the Finnish model of comprehensive security. However, it was acknowledged that there is room for Finnish leadership in relation this, and best practices were desired.

The interviewees also recognized factors that may pose limitations to further cooperation between the UK and Finland.[343] It is noteworthy that the UK is committed to Estonia through the FLF battlegroup. At the same time, the strength of the British Army has been diminished, and this may limit the UK's capacity to engage in large-scale cooperation with Finland, even though various exercises could be conducted. Moreover, it was noted that tactical-level cooperation – mostly joint training – is basically easy and useful to both parties. In the respondents' view, it is much more difficult to approach cooperation from a strategic perspective, as a top-down entity, and find broader common interests. This would require a new level of creativity from both sides.

"The bandwidth" might also be a challenge on the other party's side, in a governmental sense. It was pondered whether Finland – being in the middle of the NATO integration process – can maintain cooperation with limited resources, or whether it will somehow prioritize its efforts. Interviewees also thought that Finland's NATO membership might result in the UK–Finnish cooperation being increasingly handled through the alliance. Cooperation will obviously be continued, but the unanswered question is which matters will be covered in the NATO framework, and

342 Interviewee 53.

343 See also Pihlajamaa 2023.

which will be managed bilaterally. At any rate, there might be a risk that the bilateral relationship will receive less attention if Brussels becomes a major venue of cooperation.

Finally, one major issue concerning the future of bilateral defence cooperation between Finland and the UK is related to Finland's perception of its own role in the European security architecture. What is the Finnish story that will be told in the future? What is the Finnish way that will be worth continued attention? The interviewees emphasized that Finland should now show its relevance and actively contribute to security affairs. This idea implies that Finland should not take the role of a junior partner in NATO but an appropriately assertive one.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The UK's security environment has deteriorated considerably. The significance of Northern Europe has increased for the UK due to Russian aggressive foreign policy, but the country still also maintains global interests.
- The UK plays an active role in European security architecture, which reflects its expeditionary legacy and geostrategic position. However, the balance between ambitions and resources is to be considered.
- Defence cooperation is of great importance to the UK. NATO is its most important framework, and the US is the key ally in that regard, but the war in Ukraine has also given impetus to the JEF.
- The UK's flexible mindset does not limit the extension of defence cooperation in Northern Europe per se, but the UK's and other countries' practical (e.g. defence industrial) interests do not always match.
- From Finland's perspective, the overall prospects for further cooperation are promising. However, there are also potential limitations to deepening cooperation, such as the UK's extensive defence cooperation network across Europe and Finland's ability to maintain its relevance from the UK's perspective in the future.

CONCLUSIONS

This report focused on studying six individual NATO member states and Finland through four key factors – strategic, military, economic and political, and bilateral – to understand the way Finland's key allies approach defence cooperation from their national perspectives. In this concluding chapter, we compare them with Finland through the so-called SMEB framework that was presented in the introduction. The objective is to draw together key trends, similarities and differences between the larger regional powers, France, Germany and the UK, and Finland's smaller neighbouring countries, Estonia, Norway and Sweden. To help this comparison, we have compiled a table in Appendix 2, which highlights the differences and similarities between the countries. The table is based on the primary research data from semi-structured interviews.

Focusing the analysis on the level of nation states, this report contributes to defence studies which analyse European defence policies and armed forces in a comparative perspective. This study attempted to grasp the differences in the thinking of major regional (i.e. European) powers and smaller and/or medium-sized states, which play a more significant role regionally than globally.

STRATEGIC FACTORS

Before Russia's unprovoked war of aggression in Ukraine (2022), European NATO members were divided in their analysis of the main threats in the Euro-Atlantic area. There was a particularly obvious gap between different

flanks of the alliance. Whereas the eastern flank countries such as the Baltic states and Poland spent years voicing their concerns over Russia's increasingly aggressive role in their region, Western European countries continued to balance their economic interests and the requirements of collective defence.

The fragmented threat perceptions changed as Russia launched its war against Ukraine in February 2022. The first key finding of this report is that due to the worsened security situation in Europe, all the six countries studied here now widely share the same threat perception, defining Russia as the main threat to European security. Finland benefits from the shift in that it no longer needs to explain to partners why its defence concept differs from many European counterparts in various ways – in contrast to most other European countries, Finland maintained national territorial defence capability even after the Cold War. The fact that Finland's key European allies as we all as NATO have shifted their focus from out-of-area operations back to territorial defence is good news for Finland.

While regional differences and country-specific nuances still prevail in all the six case studies in this report, the most widely shared threat perception is Russia. The results of the country-specific analysis indicated some variation especially between the larger regional powers on the one hand and smaller or medium-sized countries on NATO's eastern and north-eastern flank on the other. Regional powers, especially France and the UK, consider themselves to have global agency, potentially even the ability to shape the world order. In the French case, terrorism remains another high-priority potential threat, which is explained by the underlying realities of illegal immigration. Likewise, the UK considers both the Russian threat and more global issues such as its interests in the Indo-Pacific and the fragmentation of the international rules-based order to be main security challenges. Germany, on the other hand, takes a more limited regional perspective and sees potential threats emanating from its own domestic environment (i.e. a renewed rise of the far right and potential political and economic instability) as well as from external sources (mainly Russia). From Finland's point of view, the alignment of threat perceptions is thus stronger with its direct neighbours than with European regional powers, except for the UK, which has for a longer time shared the threat perception of Russia.

When considering the potential for deepening defence cooperation, the second important underlying factor is each country's strategic culture and the role they envisage for themselves regionally and globally. Large regional powers, especially France and the UK, consider the global approach to be their natural role. This thinking transfers to their self-perception of

their role in NATO too: they are nuclear powers next to the US, deterring threats for the whole transatlantic alliance. Germany deviates from this thinking not only due to its more limited capabilities but also because of its constrained mindset regarding military power. The legacies of the Second World War are visible in all the three countries' self-perception and strategic choices: Germany's timid identity as "leading from the middle" at best, France's emphasis on strategic autonomy and nuclear deterrence, and the UK's confidence as a power that has been on the winning side of the 20th-century European wars.

Regarding their role and approach in the transatlantic community, the studied countries display different strands of Atlanticism. This supports the findings of previous comparative studies of NATO member states. For instance, the UK has the most Atlanticist strategic culture. Likewise, Norway, which benefited from the transatlantic bargain throughout the Cold War, and Estonia, which relies on the presence of the nuclear powers on its soil as guarantors of its security, display strong Atlanticism.

Clearly more European than Atlanticist in its outlook is France, which has persistently pushed to develop the concept of European strategic autonomy. Germany is an interesting case, with its risk-averse mindset leading it to heavily lean on the US, partly as a Cold War legacy. This means emphasizing the significance of NATO and the importance of the bilateral US link as the guarantee of national security. On the other hand, due to the centrality of the post-World War II Franco-German reconciliation as the basis of European peace and integration, Germany feels obliged to support France's more European outlook at least rhetorically. [344]

Sweden, in turn, is just coming to terms with the end of its long neutrality and non-alignment, but the potential for an Atlanticist leaning is high. Sweden has recently deepened bilateral defence cooperation with the US by signing a DCA. Moreover, Finland's own profile is still work in progress: Finland used to advocate the EU's Article 42.7 mutual security provision and a more effective EU Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). In the recent years, however, Finland has deepened its security partnership with the US both bilaterally and, until NATO accession, trilaterally with Sweden and the US. Like in the Swedish case, the Atlanticist turn of Finnish defence policy recently culminated in the signing of a bilateral DCA with the US in late 2023.

Nevertheless, this report concludes that different strategic cultures in themselves are not a limiting factor for intensifying defence cooperation. Rather, the challenge is posed by deviating perceptions of the security environment where armed forces should operate. Primarily because of

344 Särkkä and Ålander 2023.

their imperialist and colonialist legacies, both France and the UK consider their operating environments to be global, although their role is now more constrained than in the past. Examples include France's dominant role in counter-insurgency operations in Africa and the Middle East throughout the 2010s. Furthermore, France must maintain its capability to act in its overseas territories to protect the sovereign rights of its citizens. Being the leader of the Commonwealth group of nations, the UK also still considers its global role and presence important.

Finland therefore shares a similar operating environment in the High North with Sweden and Norway when it comes to the extremely remote and cold Arctic conditions. With Estonia, Sweden and Germany to an extent, the Baltic Sea region is a shared security concern, and since the Finnish and Swedish NATO accession connects the wider Nordic-Baltic region into one operational area, a more explicit regional division of labour is possible.[345]

MILITARY FACTORS

Looking at each country's partnerships and the minilateral formats they engage in, there are clusters of partners who cooperate more closely with each other. First, the European regional powers coordinate at a different, global level with each other and with the US. They are steering and dominating players in the Euro-Atlantic security order. They also look for more global partners; the UK, for example, has joined the AUKUS coalition with Australia and the US in the Indo-Pacific. Moreover, the big three regional players have their own tools of flexible defence cooperation both among themselves (the P3 and P5 of nuclear-armed states or the Quad including France, Germany, the UK and the US) and with smaller countries (EI2, FNC and JEF). They have the capacity to act as convening powers, taking a leading role in multiple geographical and military domains. This is different from Finland's neighbours in the region, Estonia, Norway and Sweden, which have more limited capabilities and assets. When comparing France, Germany and the UK in their roles as leading European nations, the UK has taken the most active role in Finland's immediate region. The research data shows that the UK sees the JEF increasingly as a framework for countering threats below Article 5 scenarios as well as a tool to show the UK's commitment to the security of Northern Europe. However, the scope of the JEF also leaves room for new areas of cooperation in the future.

345 Pesu 2023.

Second, geographically close allies tend to rely more heavily on each other, as is the case both between the Nordic countries and between France and Germany and France and the UK. NORDEFCO, for example, has gained new momentum as the Nordic countries are preparing to implement NATO's regional defence plan, which requires cooperation and a division of labour. Estonia is an outlier in this regard since it relies more heavily on other larger European countries such as France and the UK, but this is explained by Estonia's status as a small-sized frontline state.

Third, the obvious challenge is that the seven countries have various concepts of warfare and priorities in developing national defence and contributing to NATO's collective defence as a whole. Those that still value high-intensity combat operations and out-of-area missions, such as France and the UK, might find it difficult to see added value in regionally focused operations. What unites all the studied cases, however, is their strong belief in multilateral institutions and the value of defence cooperation as such. This makes common defence arrangements within the alliance a starting point for all of them.

Fourth, this report also studied and compared the country cases through their various levels of participation and engagement in NATO's collective defence arrangements and potential to take on a leading role within various minilateral cooperation formats. Based on the research data, we deducted a typology of three roles the countries take on in the alliance: contributing, enabling and leading (see Table 1).

- Contributing: the country seeks to take care of its own national security and defence but heavily relies on allies; it actively develops capabilities and solutions that benefit national defence as a (limited) contribution to collective defence
- Enabling: the country enables collective defence with key capabilities and by taking responsibility for allies' security arrangements; it actively develops capabilities and solutions that benefit collective defence
- Leading: the country takes a leading role in the coordination of collective defence arrangements, has standalone national deterrence capability and possesses key enabling capabilities and solutions that provide collective defence for the wider alliance

These three categories are not mutually exclusive and can also overlap. States can take advantage of different roles and choose to emphasize certain ones both within different multilateral frameworks and in minilateral defence cooperation formats. Our conclusion is that all the studied

countries have a contributing role to NATO's collective defence in some form. This also applies to smaller states such as Estonia, which often misleadingly is framed as a consumer of collective defence. In relation to its size, Estonia has in fact contributed a significant share to NATO's collective defence. While relying on the presence of NATO's FLF forces as well as NATO air policing, Estonia therefore actively contributes to collective defence by acting as a host nation to a considerable size of the allied troops, developing its own national defence and teaming up with the other Baltic states, Latvia and Lithuania, to jointly procure key capabilities and improve regional readiness. Estonia is realistic in its thinking about what it can achieve alone and hence seeks the active involvement of more powerful allies on its territory.

Like Finland, Sweden and Norway see their roles as both contributing and enabling nations. Sweden considers its territory a significant contribution as it functions as the (hitherto missing) link between the Norwegian High North and the Baltic states and offers NATO's defence planners an optimal staging area as well as strategic depth for dispersing air assets, for example. Furthermore, Sweden brings to the table its strong native defence industry, a navy with submarine capability and a large air force with its own Swedish-made fighter jets. If Sweden can keep up a swift pace with its defence investments, it could take on a regional leadership role especially in the maritime domain.[346] Norway, in turn, sees itself as NATO's "eyes and ears" in the North, providing crucial intelligence and situational awareness on Russia's strategic assets in the Northern Fleet. Norway also provides critical energy supplies to Europe and enables allied reinforcements and supplies to move from the Atlantic towards Sweden, Finland and the Baltic states. Before reorienting towards territorial defence, Norway has for decades contributed to NATO's out-of-area missions.

In sum, smaller states' contributions can come in different forms, including territory (Sweden) and know-how or expertise (Estonia's long-term Russia policy and Norway's situational awareness in the High North). In Finland's case, the contribution is a mix of more "traditional" capabilities: one of Europe's largest artilleries and reserve-based land forces, geography in the form of the long border with Russia that creates new dilemmas for the adversary and, like Norway, situational awareness about Russia's movements along the border.

Countries that aim to lead, on the other hand, are less reliant on capabilities provided by allies but instead aim to facilitate collective defence. The UK, for instance, is the framework nation in NATO's FLF battlegroup

346 Lawrence et al. 2024, 35.

in Estonia, seeks to facilitate Finland's NATO integration and sees the JEF as complementary to NATO. Germany is building a similar role for itself in Lithuania by having pledged to deploy a permanent brigade as the framework nation of the Lithuania multinational FLF battlegroup. As an immediate response to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, France also sent reinforcements to Romania and has been building up its presence as the framework nation of the newly established multinational battlegroup in Romania.[347] Beyond NATO's borders, in accordance with its wider concern for European security amid Russia's war in Ukraine, France signed a defence cooperation agreement with Moldova in March 2024.[348]

ECONOMIC IMPERATIVES AND POLITICAL CAVEATS

The study shows that the economic rationales of defence cooperation, which used to focus on pooling and sharing (EU), smart defence (NATO) or achieving cost-efficiency (NORDEFCO), are no longer the main drivers of defence cooperation. Instead, the focus is on acquiring the necessary capabilities at the fastest possible speed and "bang for the buck", meaning maximizing the effectiveness of the acquired capabilities. This view was equally shared by Finnish respondents. The cost-saving rationale is rather considered a phenomenon of "peacetime thinking".[349] Cost-effectiveness, however, is still present in Finnish decision-making and long-term defence planning.

The risk of the West's incapacity to increase industrial production at a sufficient pace was relatively mildly highlighted in the data, despite Russia's continued war in Ukraine. A major limitation in the data is recognized in this regard owing the fact that the respondents did not include representatives from the defence industries. However, the study demonstrated that larger countries, as well as Sweden in this respect, highlighted the significance of the industry as part of their national defence policies, which could potentially amount to a caveat for cooperation if the pursuit of national interests was prioritized. Concurrently, the Finnish respondents maintained that NATO membership may open up new opportunities especially for the defence industry. However, different planning cycles in defence material acquisitions and long production processes, as well as national caveats, often make it difficult to harmonize materiel

347 NATO 2023a.

348 Irish 2024.

349 Interviewee 58.

procurement in practice. This also applies to Finland, where national industry is viewed as an integral part of the national resilience thinking.

For Finland, the challenge of the coming years is to build what one Finnish respondent framed as "international resilience", which "requires a fundamental change of mindset"[350]. The research data indicates that potential for such new defence industrial cooperation could be initiated with Germany, for instance, when it comes to both materiel cooperation and knowledge sharing. Finland therefore needs to scale up its defence economics. Concrete measures have already been taken in this respect, and Finland has said to double its ammunition production by 2027.[351] Finally, Finnish respondents did not see a danger of a so-called "Nordic club" developing in the field of industrial cooperation as cooperation is in any case conducted in smaller groups within larger multilateral frameworks, the EU and NATO. Finland has actively participated in an EU-led mobility initiative and signed a framework agreement on the Common Armoured Vehicle System (CAVS) with Patria, as well as Letter of Intent on the procurement of 160 armoured personnel carriers.[352] The close relations with Sweden and Norway also apply to materiel procurement and production. In Sweden's case, this has materialized in joint coordination of support for Ukraine, as well as in small-weapon acquisitions and the recent large-scale purchase of 300 Patria 6x6 vehicles by Sweden.[353] As for Norway, materiel and logistics cooperation has intensified, laying grounds for industrial cooperation. Norway and Finland (through Patria) already co-own the ammunition producer Nammo, and the Norwegian Kongsberg owns 49.9% of Patria.[354]

As for political caveats, noticeable differences exist between the regional powers and Finland's neighbouring states when it comes to the countries' self-perceptions. The larger regional powers, France, Germany and the UK, are more concerned with both domestic and external factors affecting their leadership ability. Externally, the shared main concern is how to steer the European and global security order, especially if the US chooses a more absent role in Europe in the future. In France's case, the domestic layer is marked by the political uncertainty regarding the upcoming change in political power in the 2027 presidential elections. Similarly, in Germany, there are growing concerns about the recent gains of the far-right party Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) in polls ahead

350 Interviewee 44.

351 Rasmussen 2023.

352 Government of Finland 2021.

353 Yle News 2023; Patria Group 2024b.

354 Patria Group n.d.

of the 2024 regional elections and the 2025 national elections. On the other hand, Germany is at the same time occupied with its *Zeitenwende* process and the transformation of its armed forces. Finally, the UK feels slightly torn between its stated ambitions and the resources it can pool to maintain both is regional and global presence as it has been struggling with economic decline and political instability since the Brexit came into effect in 2020.

In contrast, Finland and its neighbouring countries, Sweden, Norway and Estonia, are more concerned about risk factors affecting NATO's cohesion, which makes sense given their more limited agency and higher dependence on the outcomes of such potentially negative developments. One of them is the outcome of the 2024 presidential elections in the United States. However, the Finnish respondents did not think that even Donald Trump's re-election to the White House would affect bilateral defence cooperation between Finland and the US fundamentally. In fact, defence cooperation between Finland and the US deepened during Trump's previous presidential term. Instead, the respondents suggested that more likely, black swans could be the trajectory of the BRICS countries, in particular China, which already defines itself as a near Arctic state, and with early signs suggesting that Europe is becoming reliant on Chinese raw materials in defence production.[355]

Most importantly, however, none of the countries expressed any caveats concerning cooperation with Finland. All the countries consider Finland a capable, valued partner, which enjoys a high level of trust within the alliance. However, the further one moves from the Nordic-Baltic region, the less known Finland's military capability becomes. Likewise, the Finnish respondents did not foresee political caveats in relation to deepening defence cooperation with the allies as such. There is, however, one point of concern that is related to the commitment of European countries to invest in their national defence in the long run. If European countries lost their interest in defence, the repercussions would be severe from a Finnish point of view.

DEEPENED BI-, TRI- AND MINILATERAL DEFENCE COOPERATION

According to this study, bi-, tri- and minilateral cooperation formats will not lose their value for Finland after NATO accession. Rather, NATO membership will unlock potential in new geographical areas and

355 Kayali 2024; Neil Alim and Nilsson 2024.

domains. Finland's long-term thinking, "pragmatism, of not relying on one card"[356], will thus maintain its value in defence cooperation.

Starting from the regional powers France and Germany, both have expressed interest in the Finnish defence concept, whether planning large operations up to army corps, using the large training facilities of the Finnish Defence Forces, or the general conscription model, which most of the Western European nations have abolished since the end of Cold War. With *Germany*, the Baltic Sea is an increasingly important shared maritime environment. However, a caveat could be the countries' different approaches to defence cooperation. For Germany, cooperation has intrinsic value, and its initiatives sometimes lack concrete objectives and outcomes – which, in turn, are imperative for Finland. *France*, on the other hand, has expressed interest in learning from Finland in areas such as comprehensive defence and resilience. But with France, the lack of a shared operating area may limit cooperation as French commitments are directed further to the South-East of Europe and, to an extent, to the Indo-Pacific region.

The Finnish respondents were more critical in this respect and did not assess French and German presence in Northern Europe with similar optimism. France was considered "to play its own game, with a strong focus on the south"[357], which makes the credibility of French commitments in the North and Baltic Sea region questionable. However, France was perceived to have a stronger focus on the EU than NATO, which makes it an important partner for Finland particularly in the EU framework.[358] According to Finnish experts, this has been demonstrated by the EI2 initiative with a focus on strategic culture, the EU's strategic compass and France's active leadership and partnership in crisis management operations in Africa and the Middle East, where Finland has also been involved. Regardless of these developments, in the Finnish perspective, France does not seem to have a credibly strong strategic interest in Finland and the Nordic region.

Cooperation with Germany, on the other hand, was assessed to have more future potential when thinking about Finland's deepening partnerships inside the alliance. Although security policy relations between Germany and Finland are at a good level at present, German strategic culture is seen as an impediment, another being the lack of the necessary (human) resources on the Finnish side. A major common denominator is the Baltic Sea region, where Finland could deepen cooperation with

356 Interviewee 20.

357 Interviewee 31.

358 French-Finnish Statement on European Defence 2018.

Germany and the other Baltic Sea states beyond the obvious maritime domain – into cyber and space domains, for example. While it was considered important for Finland to be part of the German-led FNC initiative in capability development, its future development remains a question mark from the Finnish perspective. The fundamental difference between Germany and Finland is the overall approach to cooperation: "whereas Germany considers multilateral defence cooperation to have intrinsic value, for Finland, it is instrumental and should fulfil set goals".[359] The potential for future bilateral cooperation therefore depends on where synergies between the two countries meet as Germany is currently in the process of reforming and building up its armed forces to restore its national defence capability. However, although France, Germany and Finland might differ in their strategic thinking, France and Germany could demonstrate their value as partners through a clear commitment to the Nordic-Baltic region. One way to do so would be not only to actively participate in NATO-led exercises and peacetime activities such as the Nordic Response 2024 or Baltic Air Policing but also to engage in regular training and exercises with the Finnish Defence Forces. Such an activity or interest has already been demonstrated by both countries. France[360] and Germany[361] have both recently participated in training with and in Finland on multiple occasions, although both have engaged more in multinational exercises than on a bilateral basis.

Finland is already an important defence cooperation partner for *the UK* in Northern Europe, but future cooperation should not be taken for granted. The UK has also other valuable partners in the region and maintains global interests, so its long-term vision of engagement with Finland is not exactly defined. When it comes to the Finnish point of view, the role of the United Kingdom was highlighted above any other amongst the respondents. The Brits were considered the strongest European member of the alliance, which has a genuine interest in Northern Europe and the Arctic region. Training and exercising with the Brits, particularly within the JEF framework, was considered highly beneficial from the Finnish point of view. Furthermore, JEF was seen to bring added value operationally, complementing NATO's readiness and new defence plans and serving as a tool to advance bilateral cooperation with the UK. The Finns would therefore also welcome new venues for cooperation.

359 Interviewee 60.

360 The Finnish Defence Forces 2020; NATO 2023b; The Finnish Army 2024.

361 Germany's armed forces have mainly participated in multinational, often NATO-related exercises in Finland, such as the Arctic Challenge Exercise, in which Germany took part for the second time in 2023 (see German Armed Forces 2023a; German Armed Forces 2022).

Sweden sees Finland as its closest ally. However, the context of the previous bilateral defence cooperation with Finland is changing as it will now take place in a NATO framework. The FISE cooperation will also likely become integrated into a broader NORDEFCO cooperation instead of remaining a special partnership. Sweden sees potential for enhanced cooperation in all domains, but especially between the air forces, in air defence and in creating interoperable land forces in the North. There is also a need to review cross-border regulations for logistics in the Nordic countries to ensure security of supply and efficient host nation support. Finally, Sweden and Finland have a shared interest in ensuring that NATO's regional plans and capability targets for Northern Europe are realistic and meet the needs of the security environment.

As Sweden too is now a full member of NATO, defence planning between Finland and Sweden will be conducted in line with NATO's planning and capability goals. But what remains unchanged is Sweden's geographical significance for Finland, offering the necessary "strategic depth"[362] in a crisis or conflict, as one interviewee pointed out. Furthermore, Sweden's complementary defence capabilities to Finland's national defence, particularly in the maritime domain (i.e. submarines), are recognized to contribute to security in the wider region. This thinking suggests that it will be natural to continue to keep up strong bilateral ties with Sweden inside NATO's processes and structures. During the NATO accession process, Finland's political leadership stated frequently that Finland's membership would not be complete without Sweden.[363]

From the Norwegian perspective, Finnish and Swedish NATO membership opens new potential for Nordic defence cooperation, which will now be aligned with NATO's defence planning. Like Sweden, *Norway* sees potential especially in the air domain (air forces and air defence), land domain (defence planning in the Cap of the North) as well as military mobility, resilience and intelligence. In particular, defence cooperation with Finland and Sweden can aid Norway to defend its northernmost territory of Finnmark, which has previously been challenging.

From the Finnish point of view, Norway's role is becoming increasingly important. Although Norway and Finland deepened their cooperation already in 2021 by signing a framework arrangement[364], Finland's membership in NATO is now considered to remove previous caveats and to open new areas of cooperation, such as in the space domain. This is particularly highlighted in the context of cooperation with both Norway

362 Interviewee 31.

363 Niinistö 2023.

364 Ministry of Defence of Finland 2021.

and Sweden, which could lay stronger grounds for trilateral cooperation between the three countries[365], moving from more traditional domains to new areas. Geographically, in addition to the Arctic dimension, another natural focus for the Nordic countries will be the Baltic Sea area, in which cooperation and coordination with the Baltic countries is key. Some interviewees mentioned that the bilateral FISE cooperation could set a potential example for developing NORDEFCO cooperation in the long term.

While continuing to develop NORDEFCO actively in a more operational direction, the Nordic countries should reflect on how the regional defence cooperation format aligns with NATO rather than creating a bloc within the alliance, as several respondents pointed out. In this regard, it is relevant to assess what added value NORDEFCO as a separate minilateral defence cooperation format brings now that both Finland and Sweden are members of NATO. As one respondent suggested, "NORDEFCO is not necessarily a prime example of deepened defence cooperation on the European scale when it comes to pooling and sharing resources."[366] Some other European countries, such as Germany and the Benelux countries have taken cooperation much further towards integrated troops or shared capabilities: "over time, needs and the scarcity of resources might lead us to opt for similar solutions."[367] Furthermore, Swedish respondents emphasized that the NORDEFCO countries must stay mindful of how to contribute to NATO's collective defence in the 360-degree perspective since their contribution is to defend not only the Nordic region but the alliance as a whole. By doing so, the Nordic countries would contribute to increasing alliance cohesion rather than regional fragmentation, which is feared by some allies especially on the southern flank.

The future of Finland's defence cooperation with *Estonia* is open for discussion and will largely evolve with Finland's NATO integration. The prospects for cooperation are relatively good, but Finland's future position in terms of NATO's collective defence – most concretely in the command structure – can have significant implications for the defence relations between Estonia and Finland. However, their shared geography, including the Gulf of Finland, also creates significant opportunities. There is a long-standing focus on the Baltic region in Finnish defence thinking. Estonia is geopolitically important for Finland in the Baltic Sea area, with a view to restraining Russia's potential aggression in the Gulf of Finland. Furthermore, Estonia's national defence system was appreciated by the Finnish respondents, who mentioned regular exchanges between the

365 Ministry of Defence of Finland 2020; Ministry of Defence of Finland 2022c.

366 Interviewee 54.

367 Interviewee 54.

armed forces as a long-standing tradition. Now that Finland is a NATO member, the objectives of the Finnish-Estonian defence cooperation could be further aligned and clarified in line with the bilateral framework between the two countries.[368] However, it still seems that Finland has not fully realized the potential of bilateral defence cooperation with Estonia.

Finally, the role of the US, although not a subject of a country-specific case study, is crucial. As some of the Finnish respondents interviewed in this study expressed, the US is Finland's top ally now.[369] Interestingly, the significance of the trilateral partnership between the US, Sweden and Finland[370] was not particularly highlighted in the data, which was explained by the US interest in an arrangement with Finland and Sweden while the two countries remained outside of NATO. This demonstrates that now the need for such a separate trilateral arrangement no longer exists as both Finland and Sweden have bilateral DCAs with the US and are members of NATO.

Yet, when defining its profile within NATO, defence cooperation in smaller formats can also help Finland to find those key partners and allies that suit its national goals best. As a Finnish respondent said, "membership in NATO is not an answer to everything"[371]. Partnerships can function as an additional lock, especially as NATO continues to struggle with its coherence in unanimous decision-making. However, the difference to the past is that now "bi-, tri- and minilateral formats are fitted inside the NATO frame".[372] In other words, defence cooperation should now be approached as a means of defence *integration* within NATO's collective defence.[373] Given that NATO is militarily embracing a new degree of regionalization through its new regional defence plans, bi-, tri- and minilateral defence cooperation formats could function as a tool to build trust with key partners and allies and to develop practical arrangements. Smaller formats can also serve to increase the alliance's overall readiness and capability in the implementation process of NATO's regional plans. Hence, this report concludes that bi-, tri- and minilateral defence cooperation does not fragment alliance cohesion but rather strengthens it.

368 Ministry of Defence of Finland 2017a.

369 Interviewee 31.

370 Ministry of Defence of Finland 2018c.

371 Interviewee 5.

372 Interviewee 20.

373 Pesu and Iso-Markku 2024.

EPILOGUE: IMPLICATIONS FOR FINLAND AS A NATO MEMBER

In further developing bi-, tri- and minilateral defence cooperation, Finland's case lies in the nodal point of strategic interests and operational needs, "capability, capacity" first.[374] As a small country, limited resources make it imperative to prioritize those key partnerships that have most common denominators and are most likely to produce concrete outcomes. Sometimes this might not be explicitly related to national defence but also to other important issues, such as support for Ukraine. Although there is a growing interest in consulting and cooperating with those NATO member states with whom Finland has not had strong bilateral defence relations, such as Poland and many Southern European states, the need to prioritize is apparent. For this reason, Finland sees potential for deepened cooperation especially with geographically close partners, including Estonia, Sweden and Norway, as well as the United States, which plays a key role in managing the Northern European regional security order.

The starting point for deepened defence cooperation inside NATO is promising. As one Finnish respondent explained, "our location, our capabilities, our special characteristics, they make us attractive."[375] While Finland's systematic and holistic approach to security and defence is now paying off, the "honeymoon period" of being the newest ally is over after a year in the alliance. Therefore, Finland needs to start defining its main contribution, and how it wants to profile itself in the multilateral framework of NATO. Finland is in the process of expanding its thinking from national to collective defence while balancing the necessity to maintain presence within its own territory and at the same time learning to deploy beyond its borders.[376] Regional allies that have been NATO members for a longer time, such as founding member Norway and Estonia, which celebrated 20 years in the alliance in 2024, can help make the transition process as smooth as possible.

NATO membership then requires incorporating a new degree of Atlanticism with the more traditional Europeanism and Nordicism in Finland's state identity.[377] Finland will have to consider whether "it wants to frame itself as a small frontier state next to a belligerent regional power" [378], or whether it would rather see itself developing into a key partner in a multilateral defence alliance. The question is whether the key principles of

374 Interviewee 54.

375 Interviewee 54.

376 Pihlajamaa and Särkkä 2024.

377 Särkkä 2024.

378 Interviewee 20.

Finland's strategic culture, small state realism and multilateralism, will remain intact as Finland continues to further integrate with the transatlantic community. New opportunities will follow from new challenges: technological development and new domains such as cyber and space, situational awareness, integrated air and missile defence, joint capabilities development and centre of excellence activities were mentioned among the benefits of Finland's NATO membership. However, new requirements will be imposed as well, including strategic lift capability, to deploy Finnish land troops when necessary to operational areas outside Finland and the immediate region, or missile defence capabilities which Finland currently does not have. These potential targets could be achieved through bi-, tri- and minilateral formats as supporting mechanisms to NATO's defence planning process. Although some say that the Finnish Defence Forces' NATO integration has nearly been "plug and play"[379], the cultural and generational change will take much longer. The work has hence just begun, and it will take a considerable amount of time to recruit, staff, educate and train personnel to fill both military and civilian positions in NATO structures. These challenges lead to the conclusion that NATO accession is "the biggest transformation of the Finnish Defence Forces since the end of Second World War."[380]

While this report focused on studying Finland's neighbouring key allies and major Western European regional powers, there is an apparent need to widen the scope of the analysis. The case selection was based on current relevance from a Finnish point of view, in terms of existing defence cooperation relations. However, due to limited time and human resources, several countries were excluded from this report that would be relevant case studies in terms of future cooperation potential and the overall increased need for information about allied countries after NATO accession, such as Poland, the Netherlands, Denmark and Southern European countries. The United States is at a level of its own and thus less comparable with European partners.

As a NATO ally, Finland needs to further explore opportunities in all flanks, whether east, north, south or west, and be responsive to the alliance's 360-degree approach. Part of this process is to learn to better understand all our allies, some of which are currently less known to Finland. In the future, research should also be conducted on the United States' future role in Northern European security, and how its focus on China will affect its transatlantic commitments. This would require expanding the research agenda to also include NATO's Indo-Pacific partners.

379 Interviewee 18.

380 Interviewee 31.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

BI00. How do you deal with bi-, tri- and/or minilateral defence cooperation that Finland is involved in?

Q1. What is your country's perception of the security environment? How would you describe your country's role and strategic culture?

Q2. Which major bi-, tri- and minilateral defence cooperation initiative(s) does your country participate in/lead and which objectives does your country have in this/these format(s)?

Q3. Are there specific defence capabilities your country seeks to develop through this defence cooperation format?

Q4. How would you describe your country's strategic interests in this defence cooperation format with Finland?

Q5. Are there economic interests which could be achieved through this defence cooperation format?

Q6. Could third-party stakeholders (i.e. the defence industry) contribute to this collaboration format?

Q7. What concrete future opportunities does this defence cooperation format involve?

Q8. What are the major challenges, and how could they be overcome? How about political imperatives and caveats?

Q9. Finland is a new NATO member. Does Finland's membership impact the way defence cooperation is conducted in your country?

Q10. Is there anything else you would like to add?

APPENDIX 2 / TABLE 1. COMPARISON OF COUNTRY CASES.

	STRATEGIC			MILITARY				ECONOMY AND POLITICS		RELATIONS WITH FINLAND	
Country	Threat	Operating area	Strategic culture	Level of participation in NATO's collective defence*	Key partners	Military priorities	View of cooperation**	Economic imperatives	Political risks	Bilateral relations	Future cooperation potential
ESTONIA	Russia	Regional	Atlanticist	Contributing	Baltic countries, FR, UK, US	National defence, NATO collective defence, out-of-area operations	Multilateral, existential	Cost-effective	Factors risking NATO's cohesion	Old partner and friend	Regional defence in the Baltic Sea region
FINLAND	Russia	Regional	Nationally focused, pragmatic	Contributing, (enabling)	(DE), (FR), NO, SE, UK, US	Comprehensive national defence, territorial defence, NATO collective defence	Multilateral, instrumental value	National defence industry, national resilience, cost-effective	Factors risking NATO's cohesion, change in defence mindset	Finland wants to be seen as a pragmatic and trustworthy partner***	
FRANCE	Russia, terrorism	Global	Strategic autonomy	Leading	DE, UK, US	Nuclear deterrence, interventionist, out-of-area combat operations	Multilateral, instrumental value	National defence industry	Domestically volatile environment	Trusted but distant partner, good relations, future potential	Defence concept, conscription, resilience, Arctic
GERMANY	Russia, internal instability	Regional, European	Risk-averse, atlanticist	Enabling, (leading)	FR, LT, NL, NO, (PL), (UK)	NATO collective defence	Multilateral, intrinsic value	National defence industry	Zeitenwende, transformation process	Close political relations, future potential	Defence concept, resilience, conscription, exercises
NORWAY	Russia	Regional	Atlanticist, reassurance and deterrence	Contributing, (enabling)	DE, FI, SE, UK, US	NATO collective defence, Arctic maritime, out-of-area operations	Multilateral, instrumental value	Synergies-driven	Factors risking NATO's cohesion	Trusted partner and neighbour, future potential	Air domain, Arctic, surveillance, exercices, land domain in the north
SWEDEN	Russia	Regional	Normative	Contributing, (enabling)	(DE), FI, (FR), NO, UK, US	Out-of-area operations, NATO collective defence	Multilateral, intrinsic value	National defence industry	Peacetime mentality, pace of defence reforms	Closest partner, high level of trust	All domains, surveillance, Arctic
UK	Russia, competitive world order	Global, regional	Active, expeditionary, atlanticist	Leading	AUKUS, JEF, US	NATO collective defence, maritime, expeditionary, high tech	Multilateral, instrumental value	Market-driven	Balance of ambitions and resources	Interesting, like-minded partner	War-fighting capabilities, comprehensive security, exercises

* Contributing = capabilities that mainly serve national defence; Enabling = capabilities that bring added value to regional defence, e.g. long-range missiles or submarines; Leading = capabilities that contribute significantly to alliance-level deterrence, e.g. nuclear weapons.
** Multilateral = the country prioritizes multilateral cooperation over bilateral formats; Instrumental = cooperation as a means to an end; Intrinsic value = cooperation as a value in itself. *** Finland's self-assessment.

Table 1. Comparison of country cases.

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PROSPECTS FOR DEFENCE COOPERATION IN A MULTILATERAL FRAMEWORK

Before joining NATO, Finland formed several bi-, tri- and minilateral defence cooperation partnerships with its neighbouring countries and major NATO member states. After NATO accession, the role of smaller defence cooperation formats has changed in Finland's security and defence policy. As a NATO ally, why should Finland continue to promote these forms of defence cooperation, and what will their significance be in the future?

This report approaches defence cooperation from the perspective of individual NATO member states, aiming to enhance our understanding of the motives behind such cooperation in France, Germany, the United Kingdom, Estonia, Norway and Sweden. It studies defence cooperation through key strategic, military, economic and political factors, such as the perceived threat environment, military capabilities, strategic culture, and the role member states play in the multilateral security framework of NATO. The report compares these six countries with Finland and identifies factors impacting potential future cooperation.

The report finds that regional defence cooperation can yield positive outcomes for NATO. Bi-, tri- and minilateral defence cooperation can enhance intra-alliance policy-making and serve as a tool to build trust with key partners and allies, thus facilitating defence integration within NATO.

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