

# Integrated security in the Northern Baltic

A comparative  
study of Finland,  
Estonia, and  
Sweden

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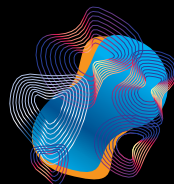
**How does the realisation  
of the security situation in  
the Northern Baltic affect  
the integrated security and  
cooperation between Finland,  
Estonia and Sweden?**

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**NORDIC  
SECURITY  
DIALOGUE**



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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The security constellation of the Northern Baltic is undergoing the most significant change since the Cold War. Russia's war against Ukraine and the NATO membership applications of Finland and Sweden will fundamentally change the region's strategic orientation and security culture. With the Finnish NATO bid succeeding in April 2023, and the Swedish application in the process of being ratified, the Nordic and the Baltic countries will belong to the same defence alliance for the first time in history. In practice, this will include civil preparedness cooperation, which will enable more streamlined and interconnected security cooperation and operative planning than ever before – replacing the former hodgepodge of various partnerships. The fact that there will be no barriers to sharing information and situational awareness is a significant advantage in building regional cohesion and hence in increasing deterrence in Northern Europe at the same time.<sup>1</sup>

Even before these dramatic events (which are still ongoing at the time of writing), Europe had been experiencing a spate of serious developments: the deepening climate and biodiversity crisis, intensified geostrategic competition, polarisation and the undermining of democratic values, and the Covid-19 pandemic, among others. Now, it is crystal clear that the collective West in general and the Nordic countries in particular have an urgent need to rethink and reform their safety and security infrastructures. Our work contributes to this need.

The new security landscape reflects the integrated security thinking and national security concepts of Finland, Sweden, and Estonia. In this report, we have chosen to use the term *integrated security* to cover the different terminologies of the reference countries regarding the whole-of-society approach to security. By integrated security, we mean multisectoral security and preparedness cooperation both nationally and internationally. Therein, vital functions of society are secured through all levels and actors in society, between central government, the authorities, business operators, regions and municipalities, universities and research institutions, organisations, and citizens. The term encapsulates the dimensions of security that need to be properly fulfilled at all times for the country in question to enjoy maximum security – in normal conditions as well as during times of crisis.<sup>2</sup>

In particular, we focus on the following seven dimensions of security: national leadership; international relations; “hard” military security; internal security; economy, infrastructure and security of supply; essential public services; as well as the psychological resilience of a nation. As our study commenced in Finland, where the authors

1 See e.g., Wigell et al. 2022, 135–139.

2 Security Strategy for Society (Finland) 2017.

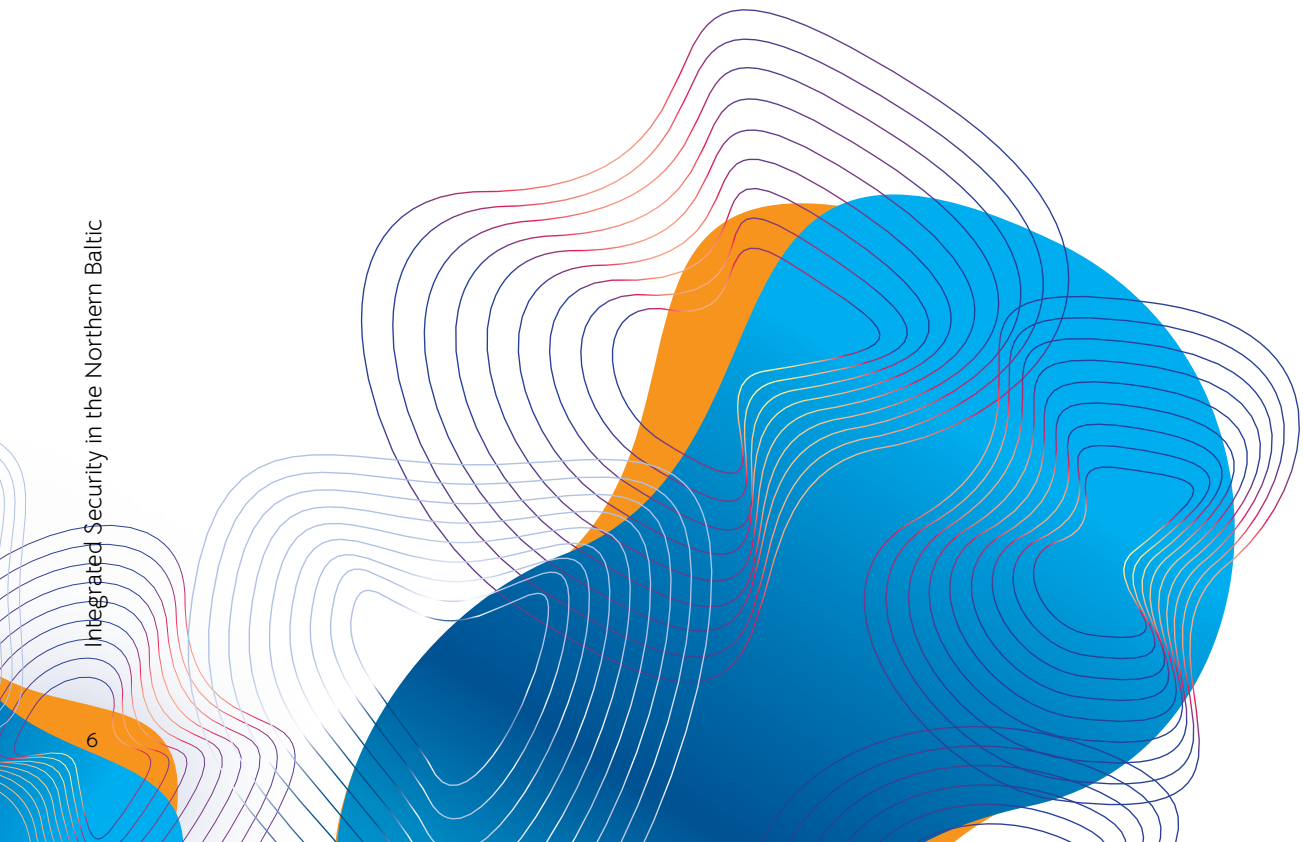
also gained their primary experience, its national security context and the model of comprehensive security serve as a stepping stone for understanding the whole-of-society approach to security and the systems of the reference countries.

The report is based on an exploratory qualitative study conducted in three empirical contexts: Finland, Sweden, and Estonia. Our main question is: *How does the realisation of the security situation in the Northern Baltic affect the integrated security and cooperation between Finland, Estonia and Sweden?*

The report is written primarily for political decision-makers, public officials, the third sector, foreign and security policy research organisations, as well as ordinary citizens. In compiling it, we wish to spark interest among young people, as well as draw attention more generally to questions relating to important societal security dimensions.

Over the years, there has been a lot of thought and talk but less concerted action regarding integrated security in the Northern Baltic nations.

At last, it is time for action.



## 2. KEY INSIGHTS

During and after the exploratory process for this study, we were able to draw together a set of “umbrella” themes and questions that helped to sharpen our focus and understanding. Thus, we have identified a series of key questions that tend to emerge within and across different empirical contexts touching on the different aspects of integrated security.

These are:

- 1 Who, or which national institution, is ultimately responsible for leading the national response to threats to integrated security? (*Who leads?*)
- 2 What is the state of awareness and response capability of a) the current political leadership, and b) key public officials? (*State of preparedness and ability*)
- 3 How suited is the national security system to respond to the systemic change in security policy and cross-sectoral threats? (*Up-to-dateness*)

We realise that the very nature of organisations and institutions is to secure their own existence, longevity and funding.<sup>3</sup> They emerge in a context and a contingency that calls for their creation, and gives them the mandates for existence and action, as well as abundant resources. They need to exist, and the environment in which they exist has a concomitant need for their qualities and functions. As time passes, however, they more often than not become redundant, inefficient and antiquated. Hence, radical reforms – and those focusing on downscaling and rethinking existing structures in particular – do not emerge from within the institutions themselves.<sup>4</sup> We have witnessed this in our study on national security institutions, and conclude that it leaves much to do on the part of the political leadership.

Our findings suggest, in fact, that politicians have relatively weak levels of agency when it comes to restructuring national security apparatuses. In established democracies, electoral cycles are predetermined by constitutions, and thus may not be entirely suited to evolving crisis landscapes – namely, contingencies that call for immediate change and reform. This is the reason why it is more important than ever to create and maintain a developmental attitude towards reforming existing security structures in the collective West. Even then, a whole-of-society approach should be maintained, as well as a critical yet constructive stance towards the incumbent institutions.

3 Scott 2000.

4 Meyer & Rowan 1977.

We use the concept of “integrated security” throughout this report. It is an umbrella term that covers the somewhat diverging security vocabularies in the countries analysed in our study: “comprehensive” in Finland, “broad-based” in Estonia, and “total” in Sweden. The term derives from the experiences of the authors, as well as the knowledge gained through conducting this exploratory study.

The purpose of this report is to provide a useful basis for understanding and developing the integrated security systems of Finland, Sweden, and Estonia, as well as possibilities for their cooperation. We interviewed leading security experts of the focus countries, as the strategic and geopolitical importance of the Northern Baltic region is even more central as a result of Russia’s war of aggression in Ukraine, and NATO’s wider expansion into Scandinavia. The need is confirmed by the observation that even our interviewees’ knowledge of the security systems of the reference countries turned out to be surprisingly limited. Despite this, the informants’ desire to better understand the security concepts and thinking of peer countries, and to build closer cooperation between the counterparts and more widely between the countries, was unanimously strong.

One of the key observations of this study is the siloed nature of national governmental and administrative systems, as well as ambiguity in regard to leading integrated security, which are reflected in the lack of common situational awareness. Situational analysis is conducted in different administrative branches and at different levels of society, but there is little cross-sectoral cooperation and exchange of information. Multisectoral meetings are held, but civil servants often participate in the meetings more as presenters and guardians of their own administration, rather than holding a dialogue and making a joint analysis. The mandates to develop and change the prevailing situation are also often missing. As a result, there is a risk of there being many different situational pictures in times of crisis.

Moreover, the National Security Council structure and National Security Advisor role should be clarified and taken into further consideration. This is the case in Finland in particular, as similar structures and roles are already in existence in Estonia and Sweden, and most of our Estonian and Swedish informants considered the role of the National Security Council to be successful in coordinating integrated security. It could also be beneficial for Finland to carefully examine the risks posed by its constitution. In its current form, the President is mandated to lead foreign and security policy, in cooperation with the government. On the other hand, the totality of leading the government rests politically on the shoulders of the Prime Minister. Thus, the distribution of power in integrated security policy is ambiguous, which should be remedied in the near future. An ambiguous integrated security mandate, combined with a centralised foreign political



power, may constitute a risk for national security and go against the principle of democratic transparency.

Finland could also carefully reconsider its siloed governance and administrative processes, as in their current state and form they constitute a significant lag in the functioning of the Finnish security system. In particular, Finland should learn from its far more agile neighbour, Estonia. In addition, we found that in all of our focus countries, especially in Sweden, strategic-level planning seems to be markedly decoupled from regional and local-level plans and calls for action. This might constitute a risk to national security, as one cannot rely on wishful thinking when it comes to national resilience. What Sweden also lacks is speed and decisiveness in terms of security decision-making – a need which has already been acknowledged by the Swedes themselves. One focus area of our study – which did not receive due attention – concerns mutual learning initiatives: training on risk, security, preparedness, and Russian ambitions in the area, among other issues. They are all highly recommended for all countries. We find it rather regrettable that no public administration we interviewed seemed to have a clear picture of how they could learn from one another.

Nor should the role of a healthy, well-functioning private sector be overlooked. Sweden excelled in this respect, with its export-drivenness being among the best in the world<sup>5</sup>. On the other hand, Sweden's security of supply model, which was downgraded after the Cold War, is not as developed as in Finland. Being able to cover the costs of national security, and a well-functioning society in general, is of utmost importance. Having conducted our study, we wish to highlight this even more. Security and economic policy personnel do not always speak the same language, which might be the result of one aspect bringing the money in, while the other is spending it, but this need not be the case. Awareness and development of both aspects should lie at the very core of the security political thinking of any nation.

Last but not least, every nation in the region should take a critical look at the laws regulating their security policy. While significant reforms are underway as we speak, several laws are still in urgent need of reform. Times of crisis call for action and speed. Avoiding needless legalism (yet maintaining respect for the principle of legality) makes a nation robust in the face of malevolent state and non-state actors.

5 This holds true especially in the light of small nations being valuable to 'bigger' nations and trading blocs.

### 3. APPROACH

This report is the first part of a two-part study. As mentioned in the introduction, the main question in the first part is: *How does the realisation of the security situation in the Northern Baltic affect the integrated security and cooperation between Finland, Estonia and Sweden?* The detailed set of questions is outlined in Appendix 1.

The results of this part will be published at the inaugural *Nordic Security Dialogue* event in Helsinki in August 2023. The report will serve as background material and support for the purposes of the conference. The empirical material for the second, follow-up part of the research project will be collected during the event.

The larger empirical context of this research (studies one and two) rests on the methodological approach of co-development<sup>6</sup>. In other words, we interview the relevant experts in their fields to begin with, and then have them discuss together in focus groups during the event. In this preliminary data collection phase, we rely on semi-structured, qualitative expert interviews<sup>7</sup>, and then turn to qualitative content analysis when analysing the data<sup>8</sup>.

The interviewees are a priori thematically selected, current and former government officials, representatives of non-governmental organisations, academics and researchers, and journalists. The job titles of the interviewees vary from researchers to professors, and from analysts and department heads to directors. We chose to follow the guidelines in *The Security Strategy for Society* (2017)<sup>9</sup>, a Finnish government resolution which harmonises national preparedness principles, and guides preparedness in the various administrative branches. According to the strategy, we chose our experts to cover the following areas: national leadership; international relations; military security; internal security; economy, infrastructure and security of supply; essential public services; and the psychological resilience of a nation. These national functions are deemed vital in every situation – in peace as well as in war – and they function as the ideational basis of all preparedness work.

The chapter on Finland is more insightful and thus more critical than the chapters on Estonia and Sweden. This stems from the fact that the authors are Finnish and are more familiar with Finland's administration and integrated security system than those of other countries, which resulted in greater rapport between interviewers and interviewees and enabled a

6 Ramaswamy & Ozcan 2014; Rask et al. 2012.

7 Buchanan & Bryman 2007.

8 Mayring 2021; Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2018.

9 Security Strategy for Society (Finland) 2017.

more in-depth approach. However, it should be noted that not all Finnish informants were critical of the state of affairs in the Finnish administration. Some of them seemed to be rather content with the current system. They also considered the rigidity and administrative structures to function as stability-creating and stability-supporting factors (i.e., as “checks and balances” of the Finnish political system), making it less susceptible to swings in political moods.

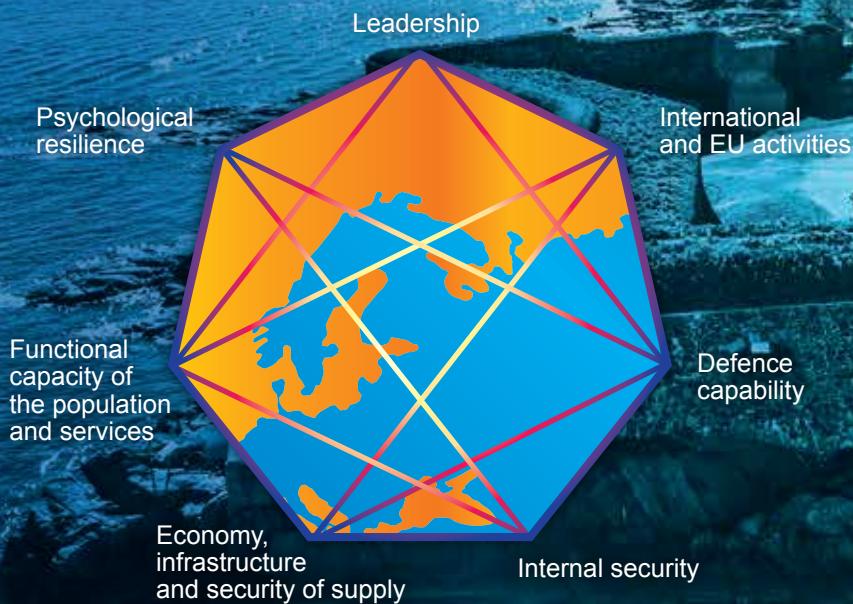
In order to remain open and dynamic to changes needed in our focus, we also used snowball sampling, in which informants point to other relevant interviewees in their circles of referral. In this way, we built actively on the insights of our early interviewees in directing our efforts in the later phases of our study. In total, we conducted 20 interviews between November 2022 and February 2023 in Finnish and English (8 in Finland and 6 in both Sweden and Estonia), and interviewed 24 governance and foreign and security policy experts from ministries, government agencies, universities, research institutes and NGOs (9 in Finland, 9 in Sweden, and 6 in Estonia). Apart from individual interviews, four interviews were attended by 2–3 people. The duration of the interviews varied between 60 and 120 minutes, and they were recorded and analysed in detail.

In accordance with the rather obvious sensitivities around the topic at hand, we chose to follow the principle of anonymity throughout the research and reporting processes. Thus, the informants’ identities and representative organisations are withheld. This choice also resonated well with the informants, as well as the general aims of the study: the reader benefits from the expertise of our informants, while a respectful distance from possible sensitivities pertaining to the topic of our study is maintained. In practice, this allowed an open and constructively non-structured empirical process, even though we had a “blueprint” structure for the interview questions to begin with. This openness would not have been achievable if our informants had been identified in the report.

# FINLAND

Integrated Security in the Northern Baltic

## THE FUNCTIONS VITAL FOR SOCIETY



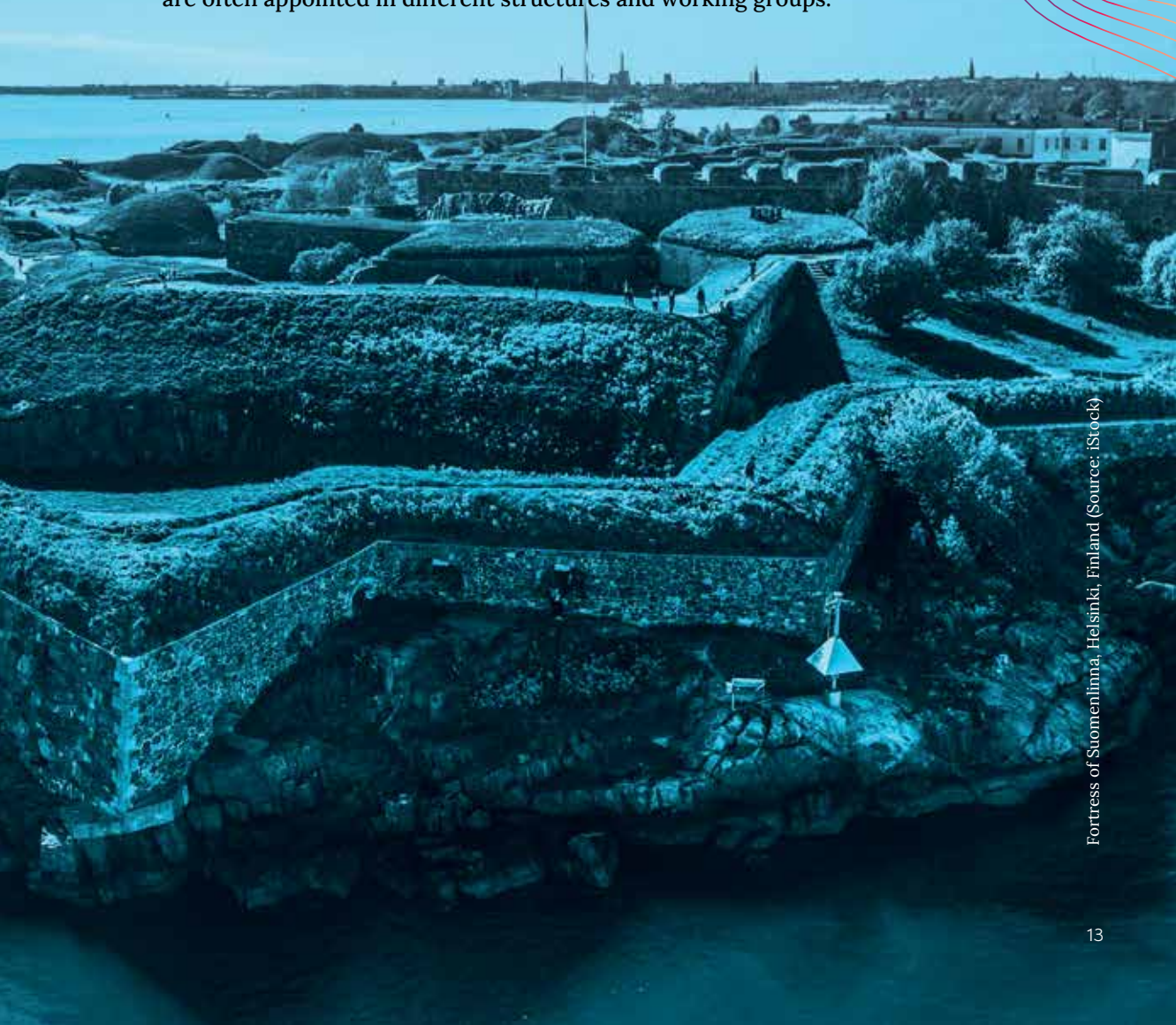
**Figure 1.** Model of comprehensive security in Finland (Security Strategy for Society 2017).



## Finland, comprehensive security

According to the interviewed experts from all three focus countries, Finland's strength in terms of integrated security lies in its comprehensive security model (see Figure 1) and wide-ranging preparedness planning. Estonian and Swedish informants also mentioned Finland's rather advanced security of supply system, which is currently being developed in both reference countries. Additionally, Estonian informants found that Finland's civil protection system served its purpose, particularly in relation to shelters and early warning systems.

However, in the light of the Finnish interviews, there are multiple structural overlaps in the system. Structural overlaps are common across administrations – they also have partial functions as checks and balances, holding those in power accountable. In this case, however, the same people are often appointed in different structures and working groups.



Fortress of Suomenlinna, Helsinki, Finland (Source: iStock)

## Key security structures in Finland

At the heart of Finland's security and foreign policy toolbox is the *Ministerial Committee on Foreign and Security Policy* (*Hallituksen ulko- ja turvallisuuspoliittinen ministerivaliokunta*, UTVA). The current political culture, however, dictates that it is almost always held jointly with the President of the Republic (*tasavallan presidentti*, TP). This being the case, its common name is TP-UTVA, reflecting the inclusion (as well as the leading position) of the President. This is, in practice, the most influential foreign and security political forum in the country, as the President is also the Commander-in-Chief (*ylipäällikkö*) of the Defence Forces. From the perspective of comprehensive security, the problem is that TP-UTVA focuses on foreign and security policy, and not so much on integrated national security.

The Government's Operational Centre (*Valtioneuvoston operaatiokeskus*) was established by the government of Prime Minister Sanna Marin after public pressure regarding the government's response to the Covid-19 pandemic. This process was preceded by President Sauli Niinistö's public initiative of establishing a "Corona Fist" (*"koronanyrkki"*), a special crisis group to address and formulate the national response to the then emergent health crisis posed by the pandemic <sup>10</sup>. Another key security structure operating in the Prime Minister's Office is its *Strategy Department* (*Valtioneuvoston strategiaosasto*), whose tasks involve integrating political analysis, international economic relations, as well as organising and documenting meetings. The Preparedness Unit with e.g., its Government Situation Centre (*Valtioneuvoston tilannekeskus*) also produces a cross-administrative security situational awareness.

Before the Covid-19 pandemic, the national apparatus for responding to comprehensive security challenges was seen to be the *Security Committee* (*Turvallisuuskomitea*). However, its remit is purely directed towards planning and coordination, and it does not have an operative role in managing crises. The Security Committee fine-tunes and dovetails the various interests of ministries and other public officials, and takes care of the overarching guidelines regarding the nation's comprehensive security strategy (*Yhteiskunnan turvallisuusstrategia* / *Security Strategy for Society*).

Significant parts of the Finnish security apparatus convene through two series of meetings – those of the *Meeting of the Permanent Secretaries* (*Kansliapäällikkökokous*), as well as the *Meeting of the Heads of Preparedness* (*Valmiuspäällikkökokous*). Secretaries of Preparedness, as their name suggests, make preparations in their respective ministries. However, neither of these parallel series of meetings are operative in nature, and nor can they be.

According to several Finnish interviewees, both Permanent Secretaries and Heads of Preparedness are trustees of the ministries they represent. Thus, they primarily have neither the will nor the ability to handle the integrated security perspective. Moreover, as is the case with administrations, they have little interest in reforming the structure or nature of the administration. Even if they were reformative privately, as a general rule, they would lack the power to initiate change in their 'own' ministries. The problems with this structure are personification, the ambiguous role(s) and incompetence of some often non-security officials in matters of security, as well as the aspect of ministries appointing non-central and even estranged individuals in these roles.

### **Maintenance through turf wars**

The administrative culture of security in Finland can be characterised as “maintenance through turf wars”. By this, we mean a state of affairs in which key players are completely satisfied with how things currently are, as well as unable to make structural changes. Based on the Finnish interviews, one gets a confusing impression that explicit leadership and operational responsibility is ambiguous at best. It could be interpreted from some Finnish interviews that in the event of the Prime Minister not showing leadership, the integrated approach to national security would ostensibly be missing. Ultimately, the cabinet is responsible, along with the Prime Minister as its leader. As mentioned above, during the early weeks of the emerging Covid-19 pandemic, the President called for an operative “fist” – a special group to coordinate the national response to the crisis – but the proposal was rebuffed by PM Sanna Marin. Instead, the PM subsequently established a new operational structure, the Government’s Operational Centre. What this shows is that the Finnish national security apparatus is, or at least was up until the Covid-19 crisis, untested in a cross-sectoral crisis. This could also be a case of the “attribution problem”, in which “no one knows who should take care of the problem at hand”. Thus no one will take care of it – until someone shows leadership.

The general impression gained from the Finnish interviews is that no official instance secures the “broader picture” – at least no one has any agency in the matter. Apart from leading crisis situations, managing change seems to be largely overlooked in the Finnish governmental system. Our informants often referred to the aforementioned Government Situation Centre (Valtioneuvoston tilannekeskus), but its task of tracking and gathering situational data from world events was often not fully understood. Instead, undue importance tended to be attached to it, despite its role being purely operational.

According to our interviewees, the Finnish model of governance is siloed

and outdated as we speak. At times, even politically mandated ministers merely “come to work”, as if the public officials working in the system would be their de facto superiors, as a few Finnish interviewees pointed out. Thus, the administrative system does not seem to have any incentive to change. Politicians come and go, according to their successes in the election cycles, and seldom have enough knowledge and understanding to change it. The administration of the country has a life of its own. If the culture were analysed according to the criteria of whether “things have changed or not” – Finland’s administrative culture would appear to be resistant to change. This can also be seen in the relative importance of the Government Programme, a jointly crafted statement of the political will of the incoming cabinet after a parliamentary election, the policy guidelines of which every participating political party is committed to, at least in theory.

Change should be mandated politically, but the contents of change should be designed by the respective public office holders. However, institutions in general, and the Finnish government in particular, aim at maintenance. The role of legal experts serving in the Finnish public administration appears to be to function as key “guardians” of the principle of legality, effectively preventing change in the very institutions they are supposed to serve.

### **Legalism in governance**

In the Finnish administrative culture, there are commonly allusions to “Finnish pragmatism” and “getting things done”. According to the Finnish informants and our own observations, however, this is not quite the case. In fact, Finland’s governance culture is characterised by legalism, in which change is impossible unless new laws are passed (and in the context of a parliamentary democracy, we know how difficult and time-consuming this can be). Legislation is never up to date vis-à-vis the current state of affairs in the ever-evolving contemporary security landscape. Therefore, when it comes to national security, more pragmatism would be in order.

In practice, this would mean a competent renewal of national preparedness legislation <sup>11</sup>. Preparedness would be increased, and the *rule of law* principle of the government would be preserved. As one of our Finnish informants so aptly put it regarding the Finnish administrative culture: “One can cooperate, even without legislative requirements.” On the other hand, the whole philosophy of crafting new legislation should be developed towards enabling new things, rather than preventing them from happening. The general tenet of Finnish public administration does not seem to be about embracing the culture of learning, but rather that of maintenance, regardless of whether it is meaningful or not.

11 This work is underway and is scheduled to be brought before Parliament in late 2025. Valtioneuvosto 2023; Helsingin Sanomat 2023.



Finnish informants often referred to the concept of “competent authority” (*toimivaltainen viranomainen*), which, based on the interviews, is resolved by the Chancellor of Justice (*Oikeuskansleri*) in extreme cases of disagreement. These discussions have increased in frequency as the contemporary crisis landscape is evolving – and often in a direction that does not respect the administrative silos of the Finnish government. However, the question of the appropriateness of the competent authority is often raised <sup>12</sup>. As it uses its own decision-making ability and creative jurisprudence, is it too independent and using too much power, particularly in regard to the multifaceted and dynamic nature of contemporary crises? Some of the Finnish interviewees raised the issue of it not being purposeful. One or several authorities alone cannot respond to complex and cross-sectoral crises, although fleeting and insignificant issues are handled rather well, at least according to the informants. According to the Estonian and Swedish interviewees, the same issue applied to them as well.

### Challenges of cross-sectoral cooperation

If no one is leading, and no one is taking account of the big picture, responsibility is not assumed meaningfully. As a consequence, issues fall between administrative silos, both vertically and horizontally. Two telling examples of this raised by some Finnish experts were the case of the Russian-built and partly Russian-owned Hanhikivi nuclear power plant<sup>13</sup>, as well as the handling of protective FFP2 masks during the Covid-19 pandemic <sup>14</sup>. Despite red flags raised by some ministries, it was hard for cabinet members or leading civil servants to take the initiative in examining the cases. Moreover, ministries that were not the “issue owner”, and with other interests, were able to capitalise on lapses of political judgement. These cases show how even threatening problems may emerge when non-competent sectors have significant influence in matters of national security relevance. In other words, integrated security of society is not achieved.

According to many Finnish interviewees, cross-sectoral cooperation in the national security sector does not work well enough in practice because ministries and public authorities are possessive about events and topics that they feel belong to them. What sometimes happens at the practical level is the adjustment of various administrative interests. Moreover, when it comes to issues of national security, ministries do not seem to be equal. Thus, there can be no true respect, sense of togetherness or cross-administrative cooperation. Expertise, development proposals or support from non-competent defined authorities are easily overlooked and ignored (e.g., FFP2 masks in the national Covid-19 response). “You have to know what you don’t know and what to ask” – otherwise it is

<sup>12</sup> See e.g. Koistinen 2021.

<sup>13</sup> See e.g., Helsingin Sanomat 2022.

<sup>14</sup> See e.g., Yle 2020b.

practically impossible to request information for which there are strict legal procedures in place. As many of the Finnish interviewees implied that the principle of comprehensivity does not materialise in Finland, this gives rise to an even more significant question: What if Finland were to face many severe crises simultaneously – would our security system be sufficiently up-to-date to handle them all? Currently, answer seems to be discouraging.

One potentially positive exception to the general rule characterising the Finnish public sector is the management of the cyber domain: Working in silos is no longer the prevailing *modus operandi*. Yet several challenges remain regarding the management of cyber security as well: data exchange between officials is difficult, privacy vs. security is not consistently discussed and resolved socially or politically, and there are difficulties with the liability of “pretrial investigation”, to name just a few. Moreover, the management and direction of national digital security and resilience are, according to several Finnish informants, non-functional. The importance of the digital domain for the functioning of a developed, open society cannot be emphasised enough. Ensuring its resilience and functionality in all circumstances should be a top priority for any public official, not to mention the national leadership.

### **Diffraction of situational awareness**

Our empirical material indicates that communication across administrative levels is problematic in Finland. According to many Finnish informants, the high strategic level of national decision-making and crafting policy is detached from the regional and local levels. As our Finnish interviews took place largely at the strategic and high executive (ministry) level, we were constantly reminded that in times of crisis, local officials are the ones bearing the brunt of actual preparedness and crisis management work on the ground. A rather problematic finding in this regard was that local and regional situational reports (SITREPs) do not materialise at the higher (strategic) levels, or vice versa. Thus, there is a notable diffraction of the images of “what seems to be going on”. The risk is that this erodes trust between different institutional levels – at the strategic level, the local ability to function is questioned, and at the local level, the strategic level’s ability to allocate resources and make things possible is likewise called into question.

Some of our Finnish informants were of the opinion that there is currently insufficient “depth” of leadership. In other words, Finland’s political leaders do not necessarily have either the visibility or the tools to engage deeper levels of society. Further development in this respect should take into account (according to one interviewee) the well functioning system in the

education sector, where the Ministry of Education even has direct access to all individual primary school rectors.

Some Finnish interviewees indicated that the role of foresight, situational understanding and risk analysis, and resilience work should be better developed. This is also apparent in the extent to which foresight work does not seem to materialise into anything of practical significance (to the extent that the general public is exposed to these matters). On the one hand, this may be a good sign of resilience work actually “working” (as threats do not materialise). On the other hand, however, there is the undeniably depressing aspect of official government documents essentially saying very little. Some of our informants were also of the opinion that risk analysis is effectively unwelcome because it is too threat-oriented by nature. This particular culture may have its roots in the paradigm whereby military planning dominates the thinking with regard to security policy, but also in the cautious foreign and security political atmosphere in Finland that preceded the Russian war of aggression in Ukraine. As we know, the contemporary landscape of threats is much more diverse and complex than linear military-style scenarios are traditionally able to efficiently assess. In practice, “resilience” means that “we take care of anything”, whatever that may be.

It was also noted that one of the strong sectors of Finnish society is not adequately acknowledged for its work and significance. Our Swedish informants were happy to point out the relative strength of the Finnish “third”, non-profit sector. Its objectives or resources are not well aligned with the general aims of the comprehensive security objectives of Finland. Oddly enough, the mental resilience of society is not taken care of by the government, but by the third sector instead. As a general indication of this, only the Finnish Red Cross is represented in the Security Committee, on behalf of all NGOs. For instance, the Finnish National Rescue Association (*Suomen pelastusalan keskusjärjestö SPEK*) earned an honourable mention from the Swedish informants.



# ESTONIA

Integrated Security in the Northern Baltic



## Estonia, a broad and agile approach to security

In Estonia, the Prime Minister (and the Government Office) is the strongest power institution and is in charge of leading “a broad approach to security” – as integrated security is officially defined in Estonia<sup>15</sup>. This is also the case when it comes to the national security sphere, and is one of the biggest differences compared to Finland, where the President is still rather strong in terms of foreign and security policy. The role of the Estonian President is representative, and there are no power struggles between the PM and the President, as they were already largely settled in the 1990s.

<sup>15</sup> Government of Estonia 2023b.



## Key security structures in Estonia

The key security structures in Estonia comprise *the Security Council* and *the National Security and Defence Coordination Unit of the Government Office*. The Security Council is called in the event of an urgent security issue (e.g., Russia's 2022 aggression in Ukraine). It is led by the PM and consists of a number of key ministers. According to the Estonian Constitution, the President acts as the highest defence authority. The President also acts as an advisor to the Security Council, having the legal power to convene it, for example. However, the President's role in the Council is more that of a moral authority, rather than an executive one. *The Sub-Committee of the Security Council* also works alongside the Security Council, employed by the Permanent Secretaries of the ministries and led by the State Secretary.

The National Security and Defence Coordination Unit is a supporting and coordinating unit of integrated security, consisting of state officials from ministries and authorities. The unit supports the Security Council and prepares its meetings. It also conducts threat and risk assessments and coordinates security strategies, such as *the Security Concept*, the most important comprehensive security document. Furthermore, within the unit is *the Situation Centre*, a relatively new structure established several years ago, which produces a general situation report (SITREP) twice a day.

A broad approach to security, however, while officially acknowledged, remains “under development”, as practical steps have yet to be taken in that direction. The first Estonian national comprehensive security strategy, *the National Security Concept*, was published in 2010. The second concept was published in 2017<sup>16</sup>, and the third is currently being finalised<sup>17</sup>. The model of broad-based security consists of six pillars, with leadership as the core concept (see Figure 2). The pillars are military defence, civil defence, psychological defence, internal security, vital services, and international relations and diplomacy. According to many Estonian informants, the problem with the model is that the pillars are not equal. For example, military defence has been budgeted up to 2% of GDP in accordance with NATO requirements, but only a few persons are employed in the area of psychological defence in the government.

Some of our Estonian informants said that the Security Council would not be needed if the government worked well. During the Covid-19 crisis, the Security Council played a minor role because the cabinet worked as a council itself. Daily comprehensive security issues are still coordinated by the National Security and Defence Coordination Unit, which was expanded in terms of personnel and responsibilities during the pandemic. The Security Council nonetheless functions as a filtering platform for security policy before political decision-making.

16 National Security Concept of Estonia 2017.

17 Government of Estonia 2023b; Parliament of Estonia 2023.

In Estonia, ministries are independent of each other and not under the control of the Government Office. However, shifts in political coalitions influence their work significantly. The downside of the independence of the ministries is that security issues are spread across institutions. Despite security leadership ultimately residing in the Government Office, the leadership of integrated security is compartmentalised and not integrated strategically.

Some of our Estonian informants mentioned that before the Covid-19 pandemic and the Russian-driven situation on the Belarus-EU border in 2021, it was clear that in the event of a military crisis, the Defence Forces would lead the response (although the top-level leadership derived from the government). In the case of a civil crisis, the government agencies were in charge according to the law. For example, in the case of a health crisis, the Health Board was responsible. This was a neglected authority before, and totally unprepared to lead the response in the Covid-19 crisis. In actual fact, the Government Office, and particularly its National Security and Defence Coordination Unit, took charge during the crisis, as mentioned above. If a similar border crisis had happened in Estonia, the responsible authorities would have been the Ministry of the Interior and the Police and Border Guard Board, but the 2021 case showed that it would have been impossible to handle the crisis with only one or two authorities. After these crises, it was realised that in statewide and cross-sectoral crises the response should be led by the government. As a result, a law reform is underway, the principle of which is to have one general crisis management mechanism under one law<sup>18</sup>.

The law reform is also related to a significant change compared to the past culture. Previously, the PM was responsible for peacetime and the Commander-in-Chief of the Defence Forces in a time of war. Now the structures are the same across situations and “times”. In the law reform, the outdated distinction between war and peace is being replaced with a combination of three different Acts (the Defence Act, the Emergency Situation Management Act, and the Emergency Situation Act).

### **Agile and low-hierarchical governance culture**

Estonian politicians and state officials were comparatively young after the restoration of Estonian independence in the 1990s, right after the fall of the Iron Curtain. This is not necessarily the case anymore, however – institutional forces have taken their toll on Estonian administrative culture in the past 30 years. What used to be the situation in 1993 is not the case in 2023. This was even evident in the way in which Estonia was praised by the Finnish and Swedish interviewees as a small and agile country, while many of the Estonian informants were of the opinion that it only holds true today



Conceptual drawing of the comprehensive approach to state defence.

The inner circle includes national defence. The middle circle includes the institutions responsible for running the subject field. The outer circle includes the institutions executing the subject field.

**Figure 2:** Model of broad-based security in Estonia (Juurvee 2020, 25).  
English translation by the authors.

in terms of size, and not so much in terms of agility. Moreover, the “dark side” of agility is that in the absence of institutional stabilisers – checks and balances – government policy may become volatile or even hijacked by influential political figures. In addition, the rhetorical and political culture in Estonia has deteriorated towards slandering and polarising (more ‘American’ than in Finland, for example, according to some Estonian experts), duly deterring the younger generations from participating in politics or holding public office.

As mentioned above, much of the perceived agility derives from the small size and smaller number of people in key positions (as well as funding). In other words, things simply have to be “done” with fewer people and resources. This ostensibly consumes less time and involves fewer bureaucratic steps than in “older” Western parliamentary democracies. There is, however, a significant qualitative difference in the mindset regarding issues of national security. This largely stems from an urgent need to withstand Russian aggression and provocations. These factors have duly contributed to a culture in which change is not necessarily a bad thing, but a potentially beneficial one, or even acutely needed and therefore worth exploring properly.

Estonia was able to jump over whole infrastructural and technological developmental phases, ‘thanks to’ its relative underdevelopment under the



Soviet regime, as well as the nation's insistence on not embracing some of the political choices of their neighbours, such as Finland and Sweden (e.g., with regard to taxation and social welfare). Digitalisation of society is thus one positive example where Estonia has performed well in modernising society in an agile manner. The government has a strong will to invest in digital security, and according to some Estonian informants, it is also one of Estonia's most important and successful themes in international forums and organisations. National cyber security is led by the *Information System Authority* (RIA), located within the Ministry of Economics and Communication. Thus, Estonians are used to, and competent in, using digital services and well aware of cyber and information security issues.

Moreover, hierarchies are not that important for Estonians – a largely pragmatic cultural feature in the light of a no-frills culture and an ambition to “get things done”. This is, however, only one side of the story, as the Soviet era still casts a long shadow over some aspects of the working culture. As mentioned above, another possible contributory factor to the perceived agility and use of digital services is the apparent lack of resources when compared to their Nordic peers. Estonians are hard-pressed to achieve results with very limited resources. In a sense, small and non-hierarchical official organisations need to keep the country running, so Estonia cannot afford futile bureaucracy and friction (unlike their wealthier Nordic peers).

The other side of agility is that below the surface, and in security policy in particular, Estonia continues, to an extent, to function in line with Soviet-era structures and operational cultures. At the same time, Estonia's NATO membership has become a panacea for all security ills – even the meaning of the word “security” is largely understood as hard military security. As one of our informants said, the Estonian approach is largely pragmatic in its embrace of Washington, come what may. The Estonian security strategy is demonstrated rather clearly in the country's non-questioning stance towards American military campaigns.

### **NATO as the measure of everything**

Although the Estonian national security system is being developed extensively as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine, it is still military defence-oriented (see Figure 2). The bulk of Estonia's capability is tied to NATO membership and the NATO Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence (CCDCOE) hosted by Estonia in Tallinn. In Estonian security culture, the military is not only the last, but also the first resort. Being the alpha and the omega of security issues is understandable, yet problematic. Looking at all issues through the hard military security lens does not take the woes of the population into consideration, at least to the extent needed. However, it is reassuring to note that NATO has recently started paying more attention to civil aspects of integrated security as well <sup>19</sup>.

19 See e.g., NATO 2022.

Understandably, NATO is the basis of national security and military capabilities in general. The Estonian voluntary defence league, *Kaitseliit*, is another layer of local “hard” security for the most part. NATO also increases trust in, and mutual understanding of, various issues. Civil defence has largely been neglected, but it has started to be actively built after recent crises. NATO military planning processes only started to take the defence of the Baltic states more robustly into account after the Russo-Georgian War in 2008. The occupation of the Crimean Peninsula in 2014 prompted these plans to be taken even further. In general, our Estonian informants’ stance was that Estonian security work is not sufficiently well financed, yet on paper, the thinking is based on a wide understanding of state security. Despite some decisive developmental steps taken during the years of NATO membership (since 2004), the Estonian military and crisis planning paradigm still suffers from a combination of the formal military planning practices inherited from the Soviet Union, and the ‘new’ formal military planning practices inherited from NATO.

### The weight of history

As alluded to above, Estonia lacks ‘history’ in terms of infrastructure. This has been helpful when it comes to creating systems and models that function well in contemporary circumstances, as well as innovating for the future. On the other hand, several Estonian experts pointed out that “historical experience” under Soviet occupation, and the forced adoption of Russian culture, have created a situation in which it has been impossible (with respect to Finnish political history) for politicians to Finlandise Estonian society and political culture. For instance, according to one Estonian interviewee, some “genuine” communists still remain in Finland, presumably even in public offices, but similar people remain at the very fringes of Estonian society. In a sense, lack of first-hand experience has led to a situation in which Finns “can afford” toxic ideologies. One of these is the Finnish myth of independence, and the notion that Finns survived the World Wars “alone”. In contrast, Estonians *know* that they cannot survive alone – they are acutely aware of their current security situation, unlike much of Europe. Sadly, a full-scale war was needed before even a basic understanding of Russia’s threat was acknowledged. Some of our Estonian interviewees pointed to the Finnish-Estonian future cooperation report as an illustrative example of Finland’s previous naive risk analysis<sup>20</sup>. Finland’s foreign policymakers wanted to completely exclude the security policy perspective from the study. Ironically, the report was published just after the outbreak of the Russian war of aggression in Ukraine.

Opinions varied among our Estonian informants on the question of the Russian minority in Estonia in relation to the integrated security of the country. Constituting roughly one-fourth (more than 300,000) of the population, individuals with a Russian background are divided when it comes to supporting the interests of the Russian Federation. Some informants are of the opinion that the Russian language or the Russian ethnic group do not constitute a significant security problem. Others point out that a considerable proportion of

uncovered espionage cases involve Estonian Russians<sup>21</sup>. The State of Estonia cooperates closely with the private and state media sectors in countering Russian propaganda: the state media even has Russian-language services and broadcasts. These practices are not in conflict with local language legislation.<sup>22</sup>

On a different note, according to our Estonian interviewees, Estonia lacks an efficient threat communications system. For example, during the early days of Russia's aggression in Ukraine in 2022, Estonian high officials and political leaders were initially reluctant to state the facts, to state the facts on the impact of the war on the Estonian economy. What they failed to realise was that the international capital market will make its own assessments if the national leadership seems to be out of touch. In the end, international capital initially flowed out of all small 'fringe' countries in any case, following its own logic.

Preparations for integrated security are still very much a work in progress in Estonia, particularly in terms of civil defence but also security of supply. Crisis stocks and shelters still appear to be rather low in number and in terms of functionality. The Estonian Stockpiling Agency, or ESPA (*AS Eesti Varude Keskus*), an agency for security of supply and preparedness cooperation between the private and public sectors, was only established in 2021<sup>23</sup>. In the integrated security sector, Estonia might benefit from learning from its Nordic peers. On the other hand, our Finnish and Swedish informants cited Estonian cyber and digital capabilities as something they wished to learn from.

Another Estonian strength that earned a mention was the high willingness among the population to defend the country, which is measured regularly (as in Finland and Sweden too)<sup>24</sup>. A good indicator of this is the prominent role played by voluntary defence. As a small country with limited human and financial resources, the Estonian defence and security system relies heavily on voluntariness, such as *Kaitseliit*. The police and rescue services also have voluntary sectors. Interestingly, many people volunteer for several of these institutions at the same time. Furthermore, one of Estonia's strengths (like Finland's) are the National Defence Courses, organised by the ICDS (International Centre for Defence and Security), which bring together leading experts from various sectors to learn from and simulate hybrid scenarios. Despite these positive developments, much remains to be done in order for the population to be fully conversant with the developments and necessities regarding security.

21 Since 2009, 21 people have been convicted of spying for Russia. Only 3–4 of them have been Estonians, and most of them have been Russian speakers.

22 Also in Finland, which has a Russian-speaking minority of about 1.5% of the population (80,000), Russian-language reporting was increased in the state media after the Russian war of aggression in Ukraine. See e.g., Yle 2022.

23 ESPA 2022.

24 In 2022, a total of 81% of the Estonian population considered it necessary to provide armed resistance in the event of an attack (ERR News 2022). However, willingness to defend the country is historically high in all focus countries: In 2022, 83% of Finnish residents wanted the country to be defended militarily in the event of an attack (MTS 2022), and 77% of Swedish residents said that it is a given to help others in case of an accident or a crisis (MSB 2022).

# SWEDEN

Integrated Security in the Northern Baltic



## Sweden, total defence

Sweden's national security and defence system is undergoing the greatest change in the modern era since the 1950s. The government of Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson, which began its term in 2022, as well as the previous Andersson and Löfven governments, have made significant administrative reforms in order to build up and intensify Sweden's total defence (total försvar) system, the name given to the national approach to integrated security.<sup>25</sup>



Vaxholm Fortress, Stockholm, Sweden (Source: iStock)

The overarching goal is to rebuild the once systematic and well-developed total defence concept encompassing the whole of society, which Sweden had during the Cold War. From the early 1990s onwards, Sweden started to radically downsize defence planning, deactivate military conscription, civil duty (*civilplikt*), as well as reserve stocks, thereby concentrating almost completely on expeditionary “counterterrorism” capabilities and international crisis management.<sup>26</sup>

### Key security structures in Sweden

The most significant reform orchestrated by the present government has been the establishment of the *National Security Council*. Its function and purpose are to coordinate Sweden’s security policy activity led by the Prime Minister, and to appoint a *National Security Advisor* (the first since November 2022). He or she is also the person leading the council’s operational, everyday work. The National Security Council was not built from scratch, as its predecessor was the Security Policy Council (*Säkerhetspolitiska rådet*), consisting of the Prime Minister, ministers of defence, foreign affairs and justice, and state secretaries. Its role was central in recent crises, such as the Covid-19 pandemic. Hence, the newly formed Security Council is more for staff supporting and coordinating the council’s activities and consists of approximately 75 employees from different units of the PM’s office.

The national security strategy is also being redeveloped, to which end, a parliamentary committee on total defence was established in December 2022. The newly appointed National Security Advisor is a member of the committee. Furthermore, the responsibility for civil defence and crisis preparedness was transferred from the Ministry of Justice to the Ministry of Defence, where a special minister for civil defence was appointed (unlike Finland and Estonia, Sweden does not have a Ministry of the Interior).<sup>27</sup>

In other words, the Swedish effort to redesign and rework the structures and administrative culture of national security is very much a work in progress. PM Ulf Kristersson’s cabinet has also implemented initiatives introduced by the previous government for structural reform of crisis preparedness and civil defence, which entered into force in autumn of 2022. After the reform, there are now six geographic state-government areas for civil defence and 10 different sectors for important societal functions, led by one appointed government agency.<sup>28</sup> It is important to note that this new structure only applies to total defence planning, not crisis management. Moreover, there are 21 *County Administrative Boards* (*länsstyrelsen*, also referred to as ‘CABs’) divided into the above-mentioned six geographic areas. Each area is led by a governor (*landshövningen*).

26 NATO 2018; Iltalehti 2022.

27 Government of Sweden 2022b.

28 MSB 2023a; Government of Sweden 2022a.

After the reform has been finalised and is fully actionable, one county governor from each area acts as a civil defence commander. Some of the civil defence areas are the same as the military areas, which might make the implementation of these reforms slightly easier in these particular areas. Presumably, the new structure consisting of six civil defence areas will also facilitate cooperation between government agencies – it is easier to agree on and coordinate matters with six instead of 21 counties.

CABs are the authorities charged with preparedness work and risk assessment at county and municipal levels <sup>29</sup>. Their role in the de facto workings of Swedish total defence is a significant one. They are, effectively, the level of organisation at which higher-level strategic initiatives are given a more practical, local shape in terms of particular actions. The Swedish government cannot control the county administrative boards, but it can assign them tasks. CABs are, however, responsible for implementing the decisions of the Swedish government and the parliament at the regional level. Their mandate spans a wide range of issues from agriculture to urban planning, energy, climate, cultural and equality issues, and further to emergency preparedness and total defence planning. CABs are effectively the state ‘arm’ at the local level, although municipalities are the ones taking the lead when a crisis occurs (*Närhetsprincipen*).<sup>30</sup> CABs are in charge of the coordination of crisis management and preparedness activities, as well as their evaluation within their respective counties across the country.

The Swedish government has also been active in creating new organisations to strengthen the total defence of the nation in recent years: the *Swedish Agency for Defence Analysis* (*Myndigheten för totalförsvarsanalys*, MTFÄ), and the *Business Council* (*Näringslivsråd*) in 2023, liaising between the government, business, and labour market organisations to strengthen security of supply (the Minister of Civil Defence acts as the chair of the council)<sup>31</sup>; the *Psychological Defence Agency* (*Myndigheten för psykologiskt försvar*) in 2022; and the *National Cyber Security Centre* (*Nationellt Cybersäkerhetscenter*) in 2021. It remains an open question, however, as regards the extent to which (if at all) the formation of these new organisational structures de facto increases the collective security of Swedish society. The appearance of new agencies is at odds with the supposed goal of the Swedish government to utilise existing structures and organisations instead of establishing new ones. An intriguing instance of this is the coordination of security of supply, as there are already approximately 340 agencies in the country.<sup>32</sup>

### Re-establishing total defence planning

The 2015 European migrant crisis changed Sweden’s security environment significantly, as 163,000 asylum seekers, especially from Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq, arrived in the country – double the amount compared to the

29 See e.g., Wigell et al. 2022, 74–75.

30 MSB 2023c.

31 Government of Sweden 2023b.

32 Government of Sweden 2023c.

previous record year (1992) and more than five times more than in the other Nordic countries <sup>33</sup>. Re-establishing total defence planning was presented for the first time in recent history in the *Defence Bill for the period 2016–2020* (2015) <sup>34</sup>.

The Russian annexation of Crimea and assault on Eastern Ukraine in 2014 was a wake-up call for investing in national security. For the first time in more than two decades, the Swedish government decided to increase defence expenditure and reintroduce military conscription, dismantled in 2009, for 4,000 people in 2017.<sup>35</sup> The Kristersson cabinet has set a goal of increasing national military spending to 2% of GDP (to meet the NATO benchmark), as well as doubling the number of military conscripts to 10,000 by 2030 <sup>36,37</sup>.

In addition, one of the key reforms implemented by the present government is the reactivation of civil conscription, which was deactivated in 2008. It is a citizen's obligation to help with important functions of society during war or crisis. In the first phase, the civil obligation applies to 1,500–2,000 persons trained as firefighters who, during a state of heightened preparedness or war, will move to work in municipal rescue operations.<sup>38</sup> In 2017, the government appointed a Defence Commission with the aim of clarifying the strategic direction for the coming Defence Bill 2021–2025 <sup>39</sup>. The Defence Commission produced a report entitled *Resilience – the total defence concept and the development of civil defence 2021–2025* (2017). The report laid down principles for a reformed total defence concept, the Swedish Government bill on *Total Defence 2021–2025* (2021).<sup>40</sup>

Sweden has also employed a system of total defence duty since 1995, which means that everyone between 16 and 70 years of age who lives in Sweden can be called up to play their part in the event of war or a severe crisis. In autumn 2022, the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency MSB (Myndigheten för samhällsskydd och beredskap) sent a letter to everyone who had turned 16 about the total defence duty of young people in a national crisis. The MSB plays an important role even more broadly in promoting citizens' safety information and self-sufficiency. In 2018, and as instructed by the Government, the MSB produced an information brochure on crisis preparedness entitled *If Crisis or War Comes (Om krisen eller kriget kommer)* and sent it to all households in the country (almost 5 million brochures). In addition to this, the MSB conducts research on the national defence will.<sup>41</sup>

33 Helsingin Sanomat 2016.

34 Government of Sweden 2021b; NATO 2018.

35 BBC 2017.

36 Folk och Försvar 2023.

37 Finland and Estonia already meet NATO's 2% of GDP benchmark. Estonia has set its national defence spending goal at 3% of GDP (ERR News 2023).

38 Yle 2023.

39 Government of Sweden 2017.

40 Government of Sweden 2020.

41 MSB 2022; MSB 2023b.



## The security potential of an export-led industry

Swedish interviewees gave the impression that there is also an urgent need to redesign and rebuild the Swedish security of supply system. In its current state, the responsibility for its proper functioning is decentralised among several agencies, regions, county councils and private companies. In the light of this, an inquiry into how security of supply should be organised and coordinated is underway (*Nationell samordning av försörjningsberedskapen*) and its conclusions are due to be presented in August 2023<sup>42</sup>. Finland and Sweden have also joined forces in their investigation of the possibility of joint crisis stockpiling. This work is conducted by government agencies: the National Emergency Supply Agency of Finland (NESA, *Huoltovarmuuskeskus*) and the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency (MSB, *Myndigheten för samhällsskydd och beredskap*).<sup>43</sup>

Based on our interviews in all focus countries, it could be argued that a key relative strength of Sweden is its industrial base. Along with Switzerland, Sweden has one of the highest numbers of multinational companies per capita in the world<sup>44</sup>. Swedish industry is export-intensive, highly efficient and modern, and has strong and functioning commercial relations worldwide. It literally feeds Swedish society. It should be noted, however, that the relative strength of its industry is currently a factor in Sweden's national security potential. Reflecting the insights of our Swedish informants, it seems that much of the potential of the strong private sector remains to be utilised in full.

## Laws that need war

The key challenge for Sweden's total defence system, including its legislation, is that it is planned for war or a high risk of war. The model consists of military and civil defence components (covering protection of civilians and crisis preparedness of society), but they are not balanced. In conditions of war, the role of hard military security is emphasised. To this end, civil defence is largely seen as being in a supporting role with regard to the military. In Sweden, the total defence system is referred to as if it covers the security of the whole society, but this is true only in a state of war or times of heightened preparedness. The main issue is related to the legislation. According to the law (*Fullmaktslagen*)<sup>45</sup>, the total defence system can only be implemented in case of a high risk of war, not in times of normalcy, such as in the case of a natural disaster. Unlike its Northern Baltic peers, Finland and Estonia, Sweden does not have a total defence law that it can implement in times of normalcy. There are no exceptional circumstances in the law other than a high risk of war.

42 Wigell et al. 2022, 79; Government of Sweden 2021a; Regeringskansliet 2023.

43 Keskiuomalainen 2023.

44 See e.g., Sifted 2022.

45 Sveriges Riksdag 2023.

Due to these circumstances, the Swedish government needed to create new laws very quickly during the Covid-19 pandemic. Thus, the current Swedish wartime and preparedness legislation is designed for a different crisis landscape and dynamics. Ironically, the Swedish state is vulnerable to hybrid manoeuvres by a hostile state actor because of the content of its laws <sup>46</sup>. This requires wide-ranging political and societal debate on the foundational principles of Swedish society, and how these security issues are resolved in a manner that respects the foundational freedoms of its citizens. It is chilling to even consider a situation in which a hostile state actor could launch a campaign of aggression against a Nordic country that would have to start a legislative process prior to responding.

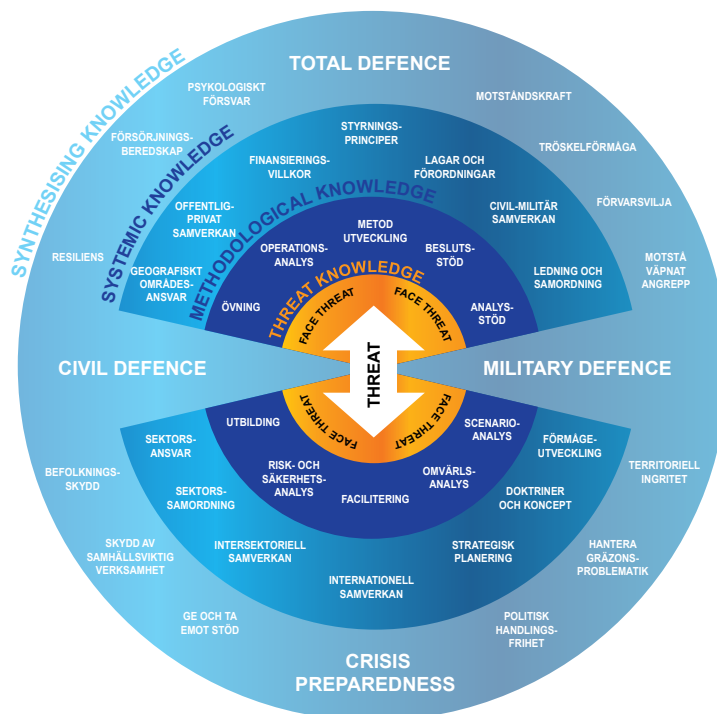
### **Decentralisation and fragmentation**

Sweden's societal security system and culture are highly decentralised and fragmented in nature, which is the major difference compared to the Finnish and Estonian systems. However, it has been noted that there is also a need for centralisation in Sweden, particularly in the field of security of supply, and furthermore in the need for the development of a command-and-control structure for the civil defence sector. Currently, Sweden does not control its private resources (cognitive or material), and nor does the government know what resources it needs. According to our Swedish informants, there would appear to be no discussions about far-reaching common strategies between the public and private sectors.

Our Swedish informants described Sweden's previous model of total national defence as hierarchical, multidimensional and organisation-oriented. The military defence component was led by the Commander of the Defence Forces and the civil defence component by the National Board of Civil Preparedness (*Överstyrelsen för civilberedskap*), which the MSB replaced in 2009 along with several other agencies. This is no longer the case, however. In contrast to the previous model, the role of the MSB (and also other responsible agencies) is coordinating and not commanding, so the hierarchical system has been replaced with one of coordination regarding civil defence.

Similarly to the old model, the current one (see Figure 3) is also based on government agencies. As mentioned previously, they are highly independent, and in times of normalcy or crisis, the government can only guide them with government directives. Paradoxically, according to our Swedish informants, the government agency mandates for action are also weak. In a state of war, the chain of command between the government and agencies is somewhat clear, but in the grey area, the government's coordinative role has caused slowness and ambiguity in decision-making and determination of a response. For these reasons, the government is trying to establish some form of chain of command for the civil defence component as well.

<sup>46</sup> To be fair, it should be noted that this problem is not entirely Swedish as Finnish emergency and preparedness legislation has similar inherent weaknesses. This makes these Nordic societies vulnerable to influencing operations that do not exceed the threshold for the activation of these laws.



**Figure 3.** The model of Total Defence of Sweden (Jonsson et al. 2019, 24). English translations by the authors.

Lastly, the Swedish system is characterised by a strong consensus-oriented culture. Decision-making is based on joint deliberation within the government, ministries, and agencies. Our Swedish informants emphasised that the extremely decentralised and engaged system forms a good basis for a legitimate and democratic whole-of-society approach and it works well when there is plenty of time and accurate information. However, such conditions have proved to be quite the opposite in today's rapidly changing security environment. The Swedish interviewees considered that the recently established National Security Council can contribute to improving Sweden's decentralised system's ability to respond to new threats. It is well qualified to quickly provide overarching expertise and strategic thinking, and to reduce the problems of a highly siloed and stovepiped system within ministries and agencies. The council could also contribute to the coordination of a better integrated security system in Sweden – instead of the current numerous ministerial coordination units and meetings, which, according to our Swedish informants, mainly consist of relatively junior staff without a mandate to coordinate mutual messages or to create mutual strategy.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter, we present the main conclusions of the study, which consist of the following key findings:

1. The current administrative structures do not sufficiently support cooperation and respond to the needs of new cross-sectoral crises occurring in the grey area between war and peace, as reflected in the current legislation.
2. The leadership and operational responsibilities of integrated security are unclear.
3. The structures of public administration are siloed, which poses a challenge to integrated security cooperation.
4. The nature of public administration is often one of maintaining, which is reflected in its reluctance and inability to reform.
5. There is an urgent need to update antiquated legal frameworks of national security to correspond to new threats.
6. Lessons learned from the strengths of different integrated security concepts.

The purpose of this report has been to assess and analyse the integrated security thinking, concepts, and response structures of Finland, Estonia, and Sweden. The viewpoint in this study is systemic as our focus is on learning from each national security and preparedness system, their present states, as well as their histories. One of our observations has been that during the Cold War, attitudes and modes of thinking were much more compatible with the realities we face today. Thus, there is much wisdom in the policies of those generations, whose lives were not yet permeated with the lull of easy living and 'eternal' peace. What we need in the present moment is a clear-headed stance towards risk in national and Nordic-Baltic regional crisis preparation practices. We see this to be the correct way to create stable national or regional crisis management and preparedness mechanisms. There is also a great need for increased understanding and knowledge about the security and preparedness of the countries in the Northern Baltic as, according to our observations, even the interviewed experts' knowledge of the integrated security concepts and key security structures of our focus countries proved to be surprisingly limited.

### **“There’s no one there to call the shots”**

The main finding of this report is that the current administrative structures do not support cooperation well enough, at least at the national level, and do not correspond sufficiently to the needs presented by contemporary crisis landscapes spanning sectoral and national borders. The national security and preparedness systems in the reference countries, which are siloed and largely planned for the purposes of warfighting, are currently



in a state of further development in order to respond better and faster to complex threats often taking place in the grey area between war and peace. As such, this has been a rude awakening to the ‘new’ realities of the post-Cold War era.

As a general note on the countries analysed, a lack of explicit leadership and operational responsibility for integrated security issues emerges as another significant finding from the empirical data. In the light of the interviews, it can be stated that, considering the nature of contemporary crises, it is no longer possible to respond to threats with just one or a few branches of government. Although this kind of approach, where consistent with the antiquated legal frameworks, might fulfil the letter of the law, it would hardly be meaningful as a proper response to the emerging and escalating crisis situation. Modern crises affect the entire society and all branches of government (which must have been the case in previous times as well). Across the context of our study, it is unclear who and which official instance is in charge of integrated security. We found it rather disturbing to realise that even the majority of our informants were not completely sure of the right answer to the question of “Who leads?”.

The main difference between the integrated security concepts of Finland, Sweden, and Estonia lies in the countries’ different legislative systems and historical geopolitical positions and cultures. What makes Finland different is the strong role of the President of the Republic in leading the foreign and security policy of the country in cooperation with the government. This has caused a power struggle between the President and the Prime Minister, who is responsible for the comprehensive security of the nation. In practice, Finland’s foreign and security policy has been strongly personified in the President, and domestic policy and EU affairs have been the Prime Minister’s area of responsibility. However, the Covid-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine have shown that such crises are reflected in both domestic and foreign policy, and can no longer be clearly separated from each other. Finland’s NATO membership and the issue of managing NATO cooperation will have a fundamental impact on the “plate dispute”<sup>47</sup>. Coordination of EU and NATO policies also requires closer cooperation between the President and Prime Minister than before. Related to this, it seems that the Finnish Constitution is antiquated and should be reformed to provide a clear and integrated view of the leadership responsibilities pertaining to national security.

There is no similar dispute in our other focus countries; in Estonia,

47 The plate controversy dates back to the early years of Finland’s EU membership in 1994–2009 when two plates were placed on European Council meeting tables, one for the President and the other for the Prime Minister. In 2012, it was enshrined in the Constitution that the Prime Minister represents Finland in the EU. A new plate controversy has been brewing in Finnish politics since Finland applied for NATO membership in 2022 as the law does not yet say anything about the coordination of NATO affairs (see e.g., Suomen Kuvalehti 2023).

the President's role is representative, and in Sweden, the monarch has no political power, but only representative and symbolic power. Thus, in Sweden and Estonia, the Prime Minister's – together with the government's – mandate to lead the nation's integrated security is clearer than in Finland. However, every country in our analysis suffers from a de facto leadership gap when it comes to doing things in practice. Who leads on paper can be completely different in practice. Thus, it would be fair to say that crisis response is only measured in times of crisis. What this means in practice, however, is that the leadership of integrated security is compartmentalised and strategically unintegrated. The interviews from each focus country show that there is an ongoing power struggle over the leadership of integrated security ministries and authorities.

### **Collaboration ... in silos**

Public administration structures are siloed in all three countries in our analysis. However, Finland, Estonia, and Sweden all have strong elements of governmental independence and authority over one's own subject matter<sup>48</sup>. This is particularly true in the case of Sweden, where the government does not have explicit authority over ministries and state agencies. This is a feature of the strong Nordic legal tradition, the value and significance of which should definitely not be undermined.

In other words, the self-authority of ministries and authorities is a strength, and an essential aspect among the checks and balances of democratic nations. As mentioned above, the independence of government sectors is emphasised in Sweden, where the national government may give instructions to state agencies, but not lead or task them from an operational perspective. From a practical point of view, this has also proved to be an obstacle at times, as integrated security cooperation suffers from the fact that information and expert views are not effectively shared between governmental and administrative branches, as administrative areas of responsibility are guarded too tightly and jealously. Many of our interviewees from each focus country pointed out that leading officials in the ministries and government agencies meet regularly in collaborative working groups, but instead of sharing information and searching for common solutions to security issues, the focus of discussions is – at times – limited to superficial jargon and meaningless displays of administrative trivialities.

Given all this, it begs the question of for whom, and for which stakeholders, the administrative system is working. Currently, they seem to be largely pursuing the interests of their own ministerial organisations. Our interviewees gave the impression that the public administration has neither sufficient desire nor capability to reform the system (in fact, reforms rarely emerge from the ruling systems). The reform is not only much needed, but must start at the level of political decision-making, ideally included

in the government programme and from the top down, as some of the interviewees suggested. The level at which regular politicians form their opinions regarding integrated security of the nations in the Northern Baltic, including knowledge of the administrative systems of their own nation-states, seems to be weak, particularly based on the Finnish interviews. Moreover, Finland has the particular problem that even though the ministers act as the heads of ministries, this may only be true in theory. In practice, they work for the ministries' apparatuses and planning cycles, and there is little if any room for expressing political will or enacting lasting change.

### **Double time or babble on?**

Since the issue concerns cross-national crises that occur in the grey area between war and peace, and the constitutional importance of maintaining the high legality standards of Nordic nations, the need to reform the antiquated legal frameworks of national security is urgent. Nordic countries cannot afford to be trampled by our adversaries merely due to the mismatch between our laws and our geostrategic environment. It is unclear who and what official instance is in charge of integrated security. Currently, our security structures are designed for times of normalcy, and our crisis management mechanisms are built for peacetime coordination, along with the vague mandate to lead.

All the countries analysed in this report are in the process of reforming their respective preparedness and security response legislation. The obvious objective of this work is to strengthen (and quicken) their national, but also collective responsiveness towards integrated security threats in the Northern Baltic. Reforming these legislative frameworks properly and efficiently would also enhance the resilience of all the respective countries, as hopefully, the antiquated states of 'war' and 'peace' would be taken out of the legal frameworks – while naturally safeguarding the foundational principles of our nations. This would greatly enhance our ability to respond to all threats, be it at a time of normalcy, crisis, or war.

There are also cultural differences worth mentioning. In consensus-seeking Sweden, decision-making processes are slower than in Finland, not to mention Estonia. In Estonia in particular, speed is an absolute value in decision-making, while in the Swedish decision-making culture, it seems that our informants regarded slowness as a virtue, even to the point that “the longer it takes, the better the result”. However, recent crises have also forced Sweden to change its decision-making culture to be more pragmatic and faster to react. The governmental and administrative systems of Finland and Sweden are also significantly more rigid and legalistic than their Estonian peer, which does not have the burden of a historical administrative ballast, as its administration was recreated in the 1990s after Estonia's regained independence from the Soviet Union.

## A lesson on learning

In the light of our interviews, Finland's key strength is the comprehensive security concept and the thorough and wide-ranging crisis preparedness and security of supply planning, which is still very much a work in progress in Sweden and Estonia. On the one hand, Finland received praise from Estonian and Swedish informants for having maintained its extensive national defence system, such as its 'general', albeit gendered, conscription model<sup>49</sup>, air raid shelters, and reserve stocks. Some of the Estonian informants also mentioned *sisu* as Finland's strength, which they described as citizens' persistence and resilience against external threats, which goes back not only to the Finnish Winter War in 1939–1940, but through the centuries in the Finns' struggle against invaders. The flip side of the culture of maintenance (and the external praise it receives) in the Finnish security paradigm is that Finland seems to have less desire to renew itself than Estonia and Sweden.

In turn, Estonia's key strength in integrated security is its low-hierarchy administrative culture, agility, and faster decision-making ability to tackle complex and comprehensive crises. Estonia's flexibility and ability to adapt to changes received much praise from the Finnish and Swedish informants. Estonia was also praised for its experience and knowledge of Russia and risk-awareness ability, as well as its ability to draw clear-headed conclusions on Russia's actions. Estonian and Baltic policy research has achieved good results with rather limited resources, at least compared to its Nordic peers with their much more generous budgets and structural myopia towards Russian aggression. In general, one of Estonia's advantages, according to the interviewees from all focus countries, is its advanced digital and cyber security ability. On the one hand, Finland and Sweden have a lot to learn from Estonia thanks to its two-decades of NATO membership and the international dimensions of defence and security planning (although as long-time "peace partners" of NATO, Finland and Sweden have extensive experience of these processes as well). Nevertheless, much work remains to be done when it comes to integrating their national systems with NATO structures. Estonia's small size is, however, a weakness of the country, as well as a strength. Both financial and human resources are very limited, and the administrative units and broad subject areas are managed by literally a handful of people. On the other hand, the country's small size is advantageous when it comes to keeping state processes agile.

Sweden's strength lies in its consensus-oriented culture of cooperation and a decentralised, deliberated and inclusive security system. Public agencies are strong, proactive, and capable. According to Estonian and Finnish interviewees, Sweden's advantage also lies in the ability to think boldly outside the box and implement wide-ranging reforms (such as the establishment of the position of Minister of Civil Defence in 2022). Additionally, Sweden's psychological defence capability, which the country is actively developing, was mentioned by the reference countries as one of the country's strengths. It should also be mentioned that Sweden's strong export-led industry and considerable governmental investments in the private sector received a lot of praise from informants from all focus countries. The Swedish decentralised and consensus-

49 See e.g., Tölli & Kuronen 2018.



seeking model works when there is considerable time and need to create wide support towards enacting change. It should also be mentioned that recent crises have shown rather clearly that the need to respond quickly and decisively is paramount, and the political mandates and chains of command need to be crystal clear. Therefore, Sweden's decentralised system and slow decision-making ability is also a weakness in terms of what we are currently facing.

## 6. FUTURE QUESTIONS

The aim of this comparative analysis has been to understand the integrated security structures and cultures of Finland, Sweden, and Estonia, but also to ponder how the cooperation between the countries could be strengthened. Although we received in-depth information about the countries' different national security systems, we gained relatively few insights into how integrated security cooperation could be developed between them.

Many of the interviewees said that they did not know the reference countries' security systems and mutual cooperation well enough to be able to give adequate answers to our questions addressing these themes. For this reason, we focused our interviews mainly on the national security systems and structures. This result is rather surprising given that the interviewees are leading experts of security policy in their respective countries. The interviewees' limited knowledge of the reference countries' security systems shows that there is a pressing need for this study and its continuation. Hence, the key question for further study is: *How can the integrated security cooperation between Finland, Estonia and Sweden be strengthened?*

Another future question emerging from the empirical data is the following: *How is integrated security strategically led in Finland, Estonia and Sweden, and what are the governments' preparedness and ability to respond to new crises spanning sectoral and national borders?* In connection with this, an interesting theme is the National Security Councils and National Security Advisors established in Estonia, and also more recently in Sweden. The topic has also sparked discussion in Finland as well lately.<sup>50</sup> It could be useful to find out how these structures manage to resolve the challenges and ambiguities related to comprehensive security management. Integrated security cooperation and information exchange – at both national and international levels – will become even more important in the near future when Finland and Sweden will have to coordinate their NATO and EU policies.

These future questions will be examined in the second part of this study. The empirical material will be collected during working group sessions of the inaugural *Nordic Security Dialogue* event in August 2023. The final report is due to be presented at the second event in 2024. In the future, it would be valuable to expand the perspective to other Nordic and Baltic countries as well, in order to strengthen comprehensive regional understanding and collaboration.

It is essential to bring ongoing studies regarding different Nordic-Baltic configurations together, in order to avoid overlap and to exert a greater impact on the results.

50 See e.g. Yle News 2023.

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## APPENDIX

### APPENDIX 1: RESEARCH QUESTIONS

#### Primary research question:

How does the new security situation in the Baltic Sea region affect the integrated security work of Finland, Estonia and Sweden?

#### Supporting questions:

How do Finland, Estonia and Sweden take care of integrated security and preparedness vis-à-vis a range of emergencies?

What kinds of integrated security cooperation strategies and models are employed?

What kind of strengths and weaknesses can be identified?

How do Finland, Estonia and Sweden cooperate in the field of integrated security 1) with each other, and 2) with other Nordic and Baltic countries?

What are the challenges and opportunities identified?  
How could this cooperation be developed further?



# NORDIC SECURITY DIALOGUE

Elisabeth Rehn – Bank of Ideas is an independent and non-profit Finnish think tank that continues the life's work of Minister Elisabeth Rehn and focuses on comprehensive security in the Baltic Sea region. The organization produces research, supports decision-making, and engages citizens and policymakers in societal matters.

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