

Zdzisław Śliwa

ORCID: 0000-0002-5653-2941

Baltic Defence College¹

Joakim Paasikivi

Baltic Defence College

Defence cooperation between Sweden and Finland. Brothers in arms in the Nordic and beyond

Abstract

The security of Europe has been evolving in the last decade, causing the verification of national defence policies. Being members of the European Union but not NATO, Sweden and Finland are revising their defence policies to face complex threats. Their geographical proximity is one factor causing their close military cooperation, supported by building–up their national military and civilian capabilities to deter potential threat from Russia and face hybrid challenges. The progress is visible, especially over the last decade. They are not disregarding closing ranks with other Nordic countries, NATO and specifically the US recognising that a joint effort with those nations and organisations, sharing the same values and facing similar threats, is foundation of their security. The paper utilises the qualitative research approach using a case study, desk research, analysis, and synthesis as methods.

Keywords: Sweden Finland, military cooperation, Baltic Sea region, security

Introduction

In 2003, the Finnish TV producer/director Petteri Väänänen made a TV program about a Swedish officer with Finnish heritage². The program was to illustrate that “*Sweden and Finland had never been closer in 200 years*”. Since that program was shown, almost 20 years have passed, and the defence cooperation has continued to evolve to the degree that there is now joint operational planning between

¹ The opinions expressed in the paper are the Authors’ personal stance and do not reflect the official position of the Baltic Defence College and its Framework Nations.

² P. Väänänen, “*Tosi tarina: J. Paasikivi*”, PVC Oy for YLE 1, 27 May 2003, <https://www.hs.fi/kotimaa/art-2000004143195.html>, [accessed on 4.02.2021]. The interview with author Joakim Paasikivi.

the countries, and laws have been enacted to facilitate joint operations on each other's territory. The Nordic nations have strong historical relations connected with their geostrategic location between mainland Europe, the Arctic and between Russia and the Canadian coastline, as of Greenland. Their cooperation has been continued for many years, and the 2009 *'Memorandum of Understanding on Nordic Defence Cooperation'* created a foundation of the joint effort to make closer the relations in the security domain. It was not only about cooperation within the organization, but it preserved an opportunity to merge military efforts with non-Nordic countries. In Memorandum's section 1 'Purpose and Objectives' the focus was on defence-related strategies and political issues, defence cost-efficiency, interoperability, and cooperation at the military level, either from the political or ministerial level or as a bottom-up initiative through the military level with other nations and organisations³. It opened prospects for closer relations based on bilateral and multilateral agreements and undertakings.

The paper focuses on selected Nordics, namely on cooperation between Finland and Sweden, which recognised the high demand to increase security-related joint efforts. After years of consultations, it has raised significantly over the last two decades; however, already the war in Georgia was for those nations a "strategic shock" causing Finland to conduct a "balance of power strategy, the Swedish ditto tend to favour a *hedging* strategy"⁴. Which then are the strategic reasons for the almost-alliance? Is it a renewed willingness for Sweden to "fight to the last Finn", a trope that goes back to the 30 Years' War, where the percentage of troops in the Swedish army was greater per capita from the Finnish half of the country and their bravery was renowned. Or is it simply that Finland would gladly have its air force tripled by help from Sweden and triple its operational depth? For two nations in the same region, but with a dissimilar geographical situation, to cooperate so deeply in one of a state's core tasks, national defence - especially two countries with a history of non-alignment - begs the question "why?" Is it the absence of membership in another alliance, i.e. NATO, which all other western nations in the region are members of, which forces Sweden and Finland together, or are there other factors that make their strategic interests align? The paper aims to identify what have been the main drives for the decision to close ranks in the security domain between those two nations. Although geographically close to each other, they are different in many aspects starting from history, the direct neighbourhood, armed forces models and others, but both are Nordic

³ *Memorandum of Understanding on Nordic Defence Cooperation*, Helsinki 4 November 2009, Section 1.

⁴ H. Edström, D. Gyllensporre, J. Westberg, *Military Strategy of Small States: Responding to External Shocks of the 21st Century*, Routledge 2018.

nations with strong democratic values and the West mentality. The paper covers bilateral projects and activities conducted regularly, including all the military services and beyond. Among them, the ability to conduct joint military operations is of great importance, especially regarding the Baltic Sea region. It is not done alone but in joint effort with partners within the European Union and NATO, although those two nations are not members of the latter.

The paper is based on qualitative research using the case study method for comparative studies of the two nations. The desk research of academic sources developed by academic organisations think tanks and available online sources is supported by analysing official documents, including national defence policies, strategies and reports. Those are available on the official Websites of respective nations and organisations. The article is composed of four parts. The first two briefly cover the defence policy of Sweden and Finland, focusing on the period after 2014. The next part discusses major initiatives leading to closer cooperation between the nations, founded by a common perception of multilateral security threats. As the “proof of the pudding is in the eating”, the possibilities of Combined Joint Finnish-Swedish defence cooperation are exemplified and commented in the respective section. One chapter is devoted to the respective nations’ perception of NATO membership, as this topic is a matter of many debates and academic papers. It allows concluding the paper in connection with the aim.

Sweden - from neutrality and non-alignment to joint defence

Sweden has not suffered directly from war for almost two centuries causing the nation to preserve the stability and peaceful development of the democratic nation. Such a mindset of the Swedish neutrality policy and a reliable national defence kept Stockholm out of two world wars and safe during the Cold War. The fall of the Soviet Union caused the armed forces’ underfunding as the threat was no longer seen as existing. According to Oscar Jonsson, a Swedish defence commentator, the Swedish mentality was based on “the idea that a) a regional armed conflict will not happen, b) it will not involve Sweden and c) it can be solved through peaceable means. As a result, defence essentially has been a non-issue for some time”⁵. Although neutrality and non-alignment were essential, the country participated actively in supporting peace in the world’s hotspots by deploying troops to UN,

⁵ G. Sanders, *Is Sweden’s military too small even for its peacenik ways?* “The Christian Science Monitor” 02 July 2015, <https://www.csmonitor.com/World/Europe/2015/0702/Is-Sweden-s-military-too-small-even-for-its-peacenik-ways>, [accessed on 4.02.2021].

EU or NATO-led military missions, just to mention Kosovo, Afghanistan, Congo, Mali or Libya⁶. It was covered from military budget, which declined steadily from almost 4% in the 1960's to some 1% of GDP⁷. After the Cold War, the number of troops decreased, reaching some 16 000 in 2013. However, the war in Georgia was taken seriously; therefore, the enhanced interest in regional and global security was presented in the document '*A functional defence*' from 2009. It stated, "Sweden's security has been built up in solidarity with other countries with shared democratic values. Sweden's security is strengthened through confidence-building measures, joint crisis management operations and activities, credible contributions to Nordic, European and global security"⁸. The document highlighted the need to restructure and modernise armed forces and make them deployable within the country and in its immediate region and beyond. In 2010, Sweden ended conscription and started to rely on professional armed forces. NATO was important from the Swedish perspective, and it was in the Partnership for Peace program from 1994 and participated in NATO-led peace support operations. Such activities proved to be "the beginning of a new era in Sweden's military engagement in international coalitions operations"⁹.

The Swedish Commander-in-Chief's statement in 2012 that the country can defend itself for only one week in the case of external aggression, underpinned by the Swedish Royal Academy of War Sciences research, was a warning and reflected reality¹⁰. The words were not forgotten when in May 2013, the Defence Commission published the report '*Choices in a globalised world*', analysing the evolution of regional and global international relations and assessing their impacts on Swedish defence and security policy. It recognised NATO's role as "vital to the development of relevant, modern, flexible, and usable Swedish armed forces, both for national defence and for Sweden's capability to carry out operations in and beyond its neighbourhood"¹¹. Parallel, the period offered some warning signals as of Russian aircraft closing to Swedish airspace, presumably Russian submarine presence (however not clear) in national waters and warning about preparation to

⁶ M. Drent, M. Meijnders, *Multi-year Defence Agreements: A Model for Modern Defence?* The Hague 2015, p. 17.

⁷ J. Alozius, *Sveriges försvarsutgifter 1900-2022*, FOI MEMO 7249, Stockholm 2020, p. 2.

⁸ *A Functional Defence*, Swedish Government DS 2008/09:140, Stockholm, 19 March 2009, Chapter 3 'A usable and accessible defence force – the policy's orientation'.

⁹ F. Kermic, *Expeditionary Capabilities and the Use of Force in a Post-Interventionist Era: The Case of Sweden*, [in:] eds. G. Kümmel and B. Giegerich, *The Armed Forces: Towards a Post-Interventionist Era?* Potsdam 2013, p. 168.

¹⁰ C. Nünlist, *The Struggle for Sweden's defence policy*, Zurich 2013.

¹¹ *Choices in a Globalised World*, (Vägval i en Globaliserad Värld), Defence Commission, Swedish Ministry of Defence, Stockholm 2013, Ds 2013:33, 2013, pp. 218-219.

seize Gotland Island during large-scale exercises. Those were noted by politicians and military asking for decisions. Peter Hultqvist confirmed such perception stating, “it is a general fact that Russia is carrying out bigger, more complex, and in some cases provocative exercises”¹².

Following the war in Ukraine, increased tensions in Europe and the Arctic, the 2015 defence bill focused on a significant increase of armed forces’ warfighting capabilities as part of the total Swedish defence concept. The ‘*Sweden’s Defence Policy 2016–2020*’, based on broad political consensus, reflected the need to preserve national sovereignty, rights, interests and protection of fundamental values. It highlighted the requirement for “international defence and security cooperation, in particular, Nordic and Baltic cooperation” to strengthen regional security; the transatlantic link was not forgotten as key for Europe¹³. The document recognised hybrid warfare, psychological operations and cyber domain among emerging threats, emphasising the role of the Swedish Defence Intelligence Authorities and the Home Guard. It strongly emphasised the need to further implement the total defence concept merging “military defence and civil defence” based on “common planning guidelines, from the government to appropriate authorities”¹⁴. It was not only focusing on military effort as it included preparatory actions for societal resistance starting from Riksdag (the Swedish Parliament) down to every administrative level. The coordination effort relied on the Swedish Armed Forces and the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency to develop their capabilities and enhance mutual coordination. To support it, the government allocated SEK 25bln up to 2020 with SEK 1.3bln for civil defence¹⁵. A symbol of the military build-up was Gotland Island’s remilitarisation as the strategic location in the Baltic Sea. It was an outcome of presenting the reinforcements of Gotland’s defences as a special priority along with anti-submarine capabilities. The ‘*National Security Strategy*’ of 2017 followed defence development, therefore as stated by Stefan Löfven, Prime Minister “A separate section of the strategy defines those national interests that should guide our approach to security and our broader security efforts”¹⁶. The analytical summary of internal challenges and external threats asked for continuous and active involvement to enhance security in the broader sense. Although “a separate armed military attack directly targeting Sweden remains unlikely”, the strategy declared that “the deteriorating

¹² G. Sanders, *Is Sweden’s military too small...*, op. cit.

¹³ *Sweden’s Defence Policy 2016 to 2020*, Government of Sweden, Stockholm, 01 June 2015, p. 2.

¹⁴ *Idem*, p. 3.

¹⁵ *Development of modern total defence*, Government Offices of Sweden, 11 June 2018, <https://www.government.se/articles/2018/05/development-of-modern-total-defence/> [accessed on 2.02.2021].

¹⁶ *National Security Strategy*, Gullers Grupp, Prime’s Minister Office, Stockholm, January 2017, p. 3.

security situation places increased demands on Sweden's defence capability"¹⁷. The decisions proved to be very important to develop the new concept of total defence based on a comprehensive approach involving all vital national resources in a balanced and synchronised effort.

The "*Total Defence 2021–2025*" concept (Swedish: Totalförsvaret 2021–2025) is shaping the development of building capabilities to face unknown future as "the security situation in Sweden's neighbourhood and in Europe has deteriorated over time. An armed attack against Sweden cannot be ruled out"¹⁸. It refers, among others, to Russian aggression in Georgia and Ukraine using military means. Therefore, Sweden will promote solidarity toward EU members (and the UK) and Nordic nations expecting the same from partners. The foundation will be "joint operational planning with Finland and coordination of operational planning with Denmark, Norway, the United Kingdom, the United States and NATO"¹⁹. The total defence will be based on such principles as comprehensive use of all available national means, military and civil defence capabilities to conduct orchestrated operations, deterrence, and societal resilience. Dedication of EUR 8.9 billion by 2025 will present a 45% increase compared with 2020 and a 95% increase compared with 2015. Although the plan is financed, the new structure will achieve full readiness, in both personnel and equipment, only before 2030. It is a positive message as the planning is based on a pragmatic approach and not hasty, uncoordinated decisions allowing having required capabilities, which will realistically meet the total defence concept requirements. Finally, the '*Total Defence 2021–2025*' concept provides tasks for respective services and Home Guard in specific timeframes; a specific part of the document is related to enhancing civil defence involving the whole of society²⁰. The key factor is that the defence concept is to be substantially supported by the allocation of funds to underpin both military and civilian defence. It is a very complex approach as military capabilities are to be enhanced by stronger society's resilience based on a comprehensive approach to national defence and inclusion of all the ministries covering a range of societal functions.

The government secured the defence financing by increasing military spending up to 40% in the coming four years 2021–2025; it is about SEK 27bln

¹⁷ Idem, p. 17.

¹⁸ Summary of Government bill '*Totalförsvaret 2021–2025*' (Total Defence 2021–2025), Regeringskanliet (Government Offices) 17 December 2020, p. 1.

¹⁹ Idem, p. 3.

²⁰ See: Idem, pp. 4-8. *Objectives for Swedish Total defence 2021-2025 – Government bill '*Totalförsvaret 2021–2025*'*; Stockholm 18 December 2020, <https://www.government.se/government-policy/defence/objectives-for-swedish-total-defence-2021-2025---government-bill-totalforsvaret-20212025/> [accessed on 3.02.2021].

(some USD 3bln)²¹. Along with increasing military personnel from 60 000 to 90 000 members, new submarines, an extension of the corvette fleet and modern combat platforms procurement for the army and air force will significantly reinforce national defence capabilities. To underpin the number of combat-ready personnel, some 8 000 people will undergo basic military training per year until 2025²². Such decisions of the government, with broad political support, are based on threat assessment, and it significantly supports social trust in government acting alone and with partners; among them, Finland plays an important role. In 2020 additional security-related document was published by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs titled ‘*Sweden’s strategy for the Arctic region*’ presenting another important area of Swedish interest, which is seen as peaceful and stable as for now, and the country will support all initiatives and organisations to preserve such status²³.

Moreover, in March 2020, Riksdag approved a law authorising the government to “deploy Swedish armed forces to assist Finland in preventing violations of Finnish territory; and to receive military support in the form of military forces from Finland, in part to prevent violations of Swedish territory and in part to respond to an armed attack against Sweden”²⁴. The law is a pragmatic step toward closing ranks with Finland. If the government decides to deploy troops to Finland, it means that Sweden could soon be in a state of war with the third aggressive nation. The Swedish Government can decide to assist Finland militarily in situations short of war without the Riksdag authorisation, which has cut the decision time by about a week to ten days. Should Finland already be in a state of war, the government would have to receive parliamentary approval before sending military assistance.

Sweden’s decisions present a very pragmatic approach to security based on very purposeful preparations of the defence regionally and in a much broader sense, seeing it as a very connected and interdependent range of facts and actions. One important aspect is allowing predicting that the decisions taken will be implemented following the decisions. It is as Swedish democracy is characterised by consensus and “a strong tradition of getting all parties on board and, to that

²¹ D. Nikel, *Sweden to Increase Defense Spending by 40% Amid Russia Fears*, “Forbes” 16 October 2020, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/davidnikel/2020/10/16/sweden-to-increase-defense-spending-by-40-amid-russia-fears/?sh=697e66e667ba> [accessed on 3.02.2021].

²² *Substantial investment in total defence*, Ministry of Defence 16 October 2020, <https://www.government.se/press-releases/2020/10/substantial-investment-in-total-defence/> [accessed on 3.02.2021].

²³ *Sweden’s strategy for the Arctic region*, Elanders Sverige AB, Prime Minister’s Office, Stockholm 2020.

²⁴ *Riksdag adopts legislation that improves opportunities for operational military support between Sweden and Finland*, Government Offices of Sweden, 08 September 2020, <https://www.government.se/articles/2020/09/riksdag-adopts-legislation-that-improves-opportunities-for-operational-military-support-between-sweden-and-finland/> [accessed on 2.02.2021].

end, there are several procedures to come to a collective decision”²⁵. Such a factor is causing stability and continuity of implementing the Total Defence concept, not shaken by changing the nation’s leadership. It was based on recognising that the collective defence is a reliable and desired option to defend a small country against a superior enemy. Such peacetime status as non-alignment proved to be no longer applicable. Next, the nation is clearly distinguishing the complexity of the current security domain, recognising that it is not only a military domain causing it to invest in the comprehensive utilisation of national resources. The military reform progress will be reviewed and evaluated in 2023, leading to the development of the 2026–2030 Defence Resolution.

Finland – the evolution of the Winter War spirit

Compared to Sweden, the geographical connection with national history is stronger, affecting the Finnish defence policy and perception of threat. The memories of the Winter War, the loss of Karelia to Russia, and limited international support are important parts of national heritage. ‘Finlandization’ is seen as another negative historical aspect during the Cold War, and even later, Russia was one of the top economic partners. Such a past has caused Finland to rely strongly on its own capabilities to defend the country when bordering Russia and it “has shaped popular perceptions about the value of non-alignment”²⁶. The modernisation of Russian armed forces, aggressive action in direct neighbourhood, a militarisation of the Arctic and reoccupying old military base in Alakurtti caused real fears in Helsinki. The Baltic Sea and the Arctic were specific areas of concerns supporting international initiatives, e.g. Helsinki initiated the Arctic Council as a forum for peaceful cooperation²⁷. The national strategy was presented in the “*Finnish Security and Defence Policy 2012*”, which described Finland’s security environment of this period as stable²⁸. The EU and NORDEFECO were presented as important organisations to preserve stability in Europe and regionally, along with the vital role of NATO and OSCE in international crisis management. As a constituent of overall defence capabilities and resilience, other documents related to societal security

²⁵ M. Drent, M. Meijnders, *Multi-year Defence Agreements A Model for Modern Defence...*, op. cit., p. 16.

²⁶ C. S. Chivvis et al., *NATO’s Northeastern Flank. Emerging Opportunities for Engagement*, Santa Monica 2017, p. 191.

²⁷ Z. Śliwa, *The Arctic Council as a Forum for Peaceful Cooperation in the Arctic*, “Yearbook of International Security” 2020, Vol. 14, No 2.

²⁸ *Finnish Security and Defence Policy 2012. Government Report*, Prime Minister’s Office Publications 1/2013, Helsinki 2013, p. 14.

supported the strategic concept. What is significant during 2012–2015 Finland conducted a reorganisation of armed forces, including reducing wartime manning from 350 000 to 230 000 and active duty staff from 29 300 to 22 200 (2014). The main effort was dedicated to land forces supported by other services, border guard, and territorial defence forces²⁹. The military budget was reduced down to 1.3% GDP.

The threat perception was highlighted in the “*Long-term Challenges of Defence*” in the Parliament of Finland report in 2014, recognising strained relations between NATO and Russia. When discussing cooperation, the document mentioned some reservations as “while defence cooperation is essential for developing Finland’s capabilities, it does not imply any military security guarantees”³⁰. The Ukraine war caused an assessment that “Finland may, indirectly or directly, become involved in conflicts in its immediate vicinity, or in international operations”³¹. Specific attention was given to further development of national defence capabilities and modern weapon systems procurement supported by proper financing allowing achieving the desired effect in the 2020s to remain reliable until the 2040s. As non-NATO member, Helsinki focused on the European Union as a contributor to national security. It was expressed decisively by President Niinistö, who stated, “The EU is hardly a true union if it does not play its part in ensuring the security of its own citizens”³². Such a statement is linked with history and lack of international support during the Winter War and the realisation that alone the country cannot stand full-scale conventional Russian aggression. It also has value toward facing non-military threats. It was supported by the demand to include the principle of mutual assistance into the EU Global Strategy. A message to support joint efforts was the establishment of the European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats in Helsinki. The recognition of the evolution of the deteriorating international environment was underlined in “*Government Report on Finnish Foreign and Security Policy*” bringing uncertainty influencing the nation directly or indirectly. The narrative was decisive as Russia was recognised as the nation ready to use “a wide range of military and non-military instruments in advancing its interests”; therefore, the threat of using military forces against Finland cannot be excluded³³. The document emphasised rules-based international

²⁹ H. M. Tillotson, *Finland at Peace & War 1918 – 1993*, Norwich 1993, p. 276.

³⁰ *Long-Term Challenges of Defence. Final report of the parliamentary assessment group (summary)*, Parliamentary Office 5/2014, Parliament of Finland, Helsinki, 1 October 2014, p. 3.

³¹ *Idem*, p. 7.

³² M. Pesu, T. Iso-Markku, J. Jokela, *Finnish Foreign Policy During EU Membership Unlocking the EU’s Security Potential*, Finnish Foreign Policy Paper October 2020, Finnish Institute of International Affairs, p. 20.

³³ *Government Report on Finnish Foreign and Security Policy*, Prime Minister’s Office Publications 9/2016, Prime Minister’s Office, Helsinki 2016, pp. 11-12.

cooperation as an important factor to preserve independence. The role of Sweden and Nordics was mentioned along with the importance of the NATO Open Door Policy as an option not excluded toward the future.

The “*Government’s Defence Report*”, published in 2017, focused on defence systems’ capabilities to face changing security environment and evolving nature of war. It was recognised that existing military capabilities as of 2017 are adequate within all the services³⁴. Again, non-alliance was seen in the context of the growing importance of defence cooperation, which, however, “does not provide any security guarantees to Finland akin to those given to a member of a military alliance”³⁵. The nation sees the importance and value of continuity of the NATO’s Enhanced Opportunity Programme (EOP) and the ’28 (NATO) +2 (Finland & Sweden)’ initiative. Again, Sweden was recognised as a country with special status to strengthen its bilateral security and Baltic Sea region. Finally, the document covers major tasks for services, weapon procurement and mentioning major capability programs.

There is strong support for Finnish homeland defence based on commonly understood principles of the “whole-of-government”, and “whole-of-society” approaches. It involves all military and civilian authorities to participate actively during crisis and war, which is legally founded by the “Readiness Act and in the State of Defence Act, which would come into force through a presidential decision verified by parliament in case of a crisis”³⁶. The lack of progress in building EU military capabilities supports the Finnish-Swedish and Finnish-US cooperation and partnership with NATO within various exercises and initiatives and will continue in the future. Nevertheless, reliance on own capabilities is deeply rooted in the national identity and is playing a role, causing the nation to invest in defence and enhance the nation’s resilience potential. The Winter War spirit³⁷ (Finnish: Talvisodan henki) is part of national heritage influencing the perception of national security, which is always relying first on the whole population dedication and comprehensive national preparations during peacetime.

³⁴ *Government’s Defence Report*, Prime Minister’s Office Publications 7/2017, Prime Minister’s Office, Helsinki 2017, pp. 11-13.

³⁵ *Idem*, p. 16.

³⁶ C. S. Chivvis et al., *NATO’s Northeastern Flank...*, op. cit., p. 201.

³⁷ P. Himberg, *This was the spirit of the Winter War and a miracle through the eyes of a contemporary*, Yle 29 November 2019, <https://yle.fi/aihe/artikkeli/2019/11/29/talvisota> [accessed on 20.02.2021].

Swedish-Finnish Military Cooperation

The Finnish-Swedish Post-Cold War cooperation was primarily initiated at a technical level of defence forces. As the outcome of joint exercises, primarily air and naval forces, the need for information exchange outside of intelligence and streamlining of governmental permissions regarding entry to the partner nation territories became apparent. In the naval arena, exchange of information within the framework of ‘*Sea Surveillance Cooperation Finland and Sweden (SUCFIS)*’ came about in 2006³⁸ after some years of negotiation, technical studies and implementation of secure communications, at the same time when the Finnish and Swedish navies and amphibious units increased their cooperation. At the beginning of the Millennium, bilateral air force exercises were carried out within the framework of NORDEFECO but they were formalised in bilateral agreements³⁹. The increased cooperation was administratively cumbersome as all international exercises had to be approved by the government in several steps, with decisions at each step.

What, then, about an ever-deepening military cooperation between Sweden and Finland, perhaps culminating in a formalised defence union? The two governments expressed the will for continued bilateral planning and exercises for further combat systems integration and interoperability, identification of capability gaps and overlaps, which are still an impediment toward a formalised defence union. More likely, the cooperation will continue but will not include any binding agreements on mutual support, and that it will be complemented by bi- and multilateral statements of intent, or agreements, such as those entered into trilaterally between Sweden, Finland and the United States, and Sweden, Finland and Norway⁴⁰. An example of a successful outcome from the Swedish and Finnish points of view is the statement from General Jeff Harrigian, US Air Forces in Europe and Africa commander. Commenting the deployment of B-1 bombers to Norway in February 2021 he stated “operational readiness and our ability to support Allies and partners and respond with speed are critical to combined success”⁴¹. The popular support for further Swedish-Finnish defence

³⁸ J. Cohn, *Svensk och finsk försvars- och säkerhetspolitik – likheter och skillnader*, Swedish Defence University 2013, p. 20.

³⁹ S. Nielsen, *CBT – Cross Border Training*, “Scandinavian Aviation Magazine” 2021, <https://flymag.dk/cbt-cross-border-training/> [accessed on 14.02.2021].

⁴⁰ C. Salenius-Pasternak, H. Vanhanen, *Finnish-Swedish defence cooperation: What history suggests about future scenarios*, Finnish Institute of International Affairs 03 June 2020, <https://www.fia.fi/julkaisu/finnish-swedish-defence-cooperation?read> [accessed on 9.02.2021].

⁴¹ G. Jennings, *US to deploy B-1B bombers to Norway for first time*, “Janes” 03 February 2021, <https://www.janes.com/defence-news/news-detail/us-to-deploy-b-1b-bombers-to-norway-for-first-time> [accessed on 9.02.2021].

cooperation is also great in both countries⁴². The limit for defence cooperation is likely to be found in the threat perceptions of the two countries. Currently, they are well aligned, but would the Swedish enthusiasm be great for going to war with Russia over any Russian expansion into Finnish Lapland to extend its protection of the Kola Peninsula bases? Or the Finnish support in order to protect the Swedish Island of Gotland?⁴³ One should hope that there never will be any need to find out.

What is significant, Sweden and Finland decided to close ranks in the defence area in 2013, which was ahead of Crimea and the Ukraine war. It was based on assessing the international situation, regional security and the necessity to support each other during crisis and war. Such a decision would allow better use of national capabilities in concert with the partner. As the outcome, such cooperation “would increase interoperability and the capability to act jointly, both nationally and internationally”⁴⁴. The meaningful document was the ‘*Action Plan for Deepened Defence Cooperation*’⁴⁵ (06 May 2014), delivering guidance for further development; therefore, governments tasked respective Ministries of Defence to develop priority areas to contribute to nations’ joint effort. The report delivered by the Swedish Armed Forces and the Finnish Defence Forces recognised Navy, Air Force, Army, secure communication, logistics and materiel procurement and combined units as key areas. It included specific proposals: a bilateral standing Swedish-Finnish Naval Task Group (SFNTG) with full operational capability by 2023, interoperability of the Swedish and Finnish Air Forces, joint base operations and joint command and control capability, and finally, a combined Finnish - Swedish Brigade Framework⁴⁶.

The consultations continued to sign ‘*Final reports on deepened defence cooperation between Finland and Sweden*’ in May 2015 by the Defence Ministers of Finland and Sweden. It identified three specific capabilities: common air operations, joint base operations and interoperable command and control (C2) with a secure communications network and associated information exchange equipment as key enablers⁴⁷. This initial period was characterised by the close cooperation of

⁴² *Rapport Inställningen till Nato. Frivärld*, Demoskop 28 November 2017, <https://frivarld.se/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/NATO.pdf>, [date of access: 09.02.2021].

⁴³ G. Herolf, *Paasikivi 150 år-seminariet*, “Nupsamfundet” 19 October 2020, <https://www.nupsamfundet.org/inlegg-opinioner/2020/10/29/paasikivi-150-r-seminariet>, (date of access: 09.02.2021).

⁴⁴ *Defence cooperation between Finland and Sweden*, Government Offices of Sweden, the content published between 03 October 2014 - 20 January 2019, <https://www.government.se/government-policy/defence/defence-cooperation-between-finland-and-sweden/>, [date of access: 02.02.2021].

⁴⁵ *Action Plan for Deepened Defence Cooperation*, Ministry of Defence of Finland, May 2014, https://www.defmin.fi/files/2833/ACTION_PLAN_FOR_DEEPENED_DEFENCE_COOPERATION_BETWEEN_SWEDEN_AND_FINLAND.pdf [accessed on 8.02.2021].

⁴⁶ *Idem*.

⁴⁷ *Final reports on deepened defence cooperation between Finland and Sweden*, Ministry of Defence of Sweden, May 2015, p. 4, <https://www.government.se/49baf3/globalassets/government/dokument/forsvarsdepartementet/final-reports-on-deepened-defence-cooperation-between-finland-och-sweden.pdf> [accessed on 8.02.2021].

air and naval forces, including the Swedish-Finnish Naval Task Group (SFNTG)⁴⁸. The air force was operating from the partner nation air bases, specifically using Ruska in Finland and Flygvapenövning in Sweden, practising joint air missions for the national defence of the respective arranging countries.

After a period of consultations, the ‘*Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of the Republic of Finland and the Government of the Kingdom of Sweden on Defence Cooperation*’ signed on 09 July 2018 created the bilateral cooperation framework⁴⁹. The document named nineteen areas of cooperation to be funded nationally and legally, referring to Status of their Forces, done in Brussels on 19 June 1995 (NATO/PfP SOFA)⁵⁰. It was an important step for further formalisation of cooperation and asking nations to make the required steps toward implementing the Memorandum. As the outcome, closer cooperation of land forces was observed and the crisis response exercises shifted to high-intensity conflict scenarios and combined joint operations, including urban areas. Initial exercises between the Swedish Norrbotten regiment and the Finnish Jääkäriprikaati and Kainuun prikaati took impetus. Both nations took part in the exercise ‘*Trident Juncture 2018*’ in Norway; a Finnish unit was integrated into a Swedish brigade⁵¹. Swedish exercise ‘*Northern Wind 2019*’ in March 2019 included subordination of a Finnish battalion battlegroup to Swedish brigade showing the extension of interoperability and verification of command and control systems in the field.

The close relations between the five Nordic nations were highlighted by signing on 13 November 2018 the ‘*Nordic Defence Cooperation Vision 2025*’⁵². The Vision states that the Nordic countries have different security policy affiliations but face the same challenges and must strive for close, effective and cost-efficient cooperation to strengthen our national defence and capability to take joint action. According to the Vision, the countries maintain close security and defence policy dialogue and strengthen cooperation in peace, crisis, and conflict. The same year Finland, Sweden, and the United States signed a ‘*Trilateral Statement of Intent*’ to deepen defence cooperation and complement bilateral cooperation and create

⁴⁸ P. Szymański, *The northern tandem. The Swedish-Finnish defence cooperation*, OSW Commentary, Warsaw, 20 March 2019, p. 4.

⁴⁹ *Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of the Republic of Finland and the Government of the Kingdom of Sweden on Defence Cooperation*, Ministry of Defence of Sweden, July 2018, www.government.se/49fcef/globalassets/government/dokument/forsvarsdepartementet/2018/mou-finnish-swedish-defence-cooperation-20180625-signerad.pdf [accessed on 8.02.2021].

⁵⁰ *Idem*, para 3, 4, 6.

⁵¹ P. Szymański, *The northern tandem...*, op. cit., p. 8; M. Nilsson, *Svenskt-finskt samarbete i Norge*, Swedish Armed Forces, 29 October 2018, <https://www.forsvarsmakten.se/sv/aktuellt/2018/10/svenskt-finskt-samarbete-i-norge> [accessed on 8.02.2021].

⁵² *Nordic Defence Cooperation Vision 2025*, The NORDEFECO Website, <https://www.nordefco.org/Files/nordefco-vision-2025-signed.pdf> [accessed on 8.02.2021].

synergies⁵³. The participants recognised the need to extend trilateral defence relationship and cooperation supplementing bilateral relations and those with NATO, EU and NORDEFECO. Next, in September 2020, the defence ministers of Finland, Sweden and Norway signed an agreement to improve “their defence capability and cooperation in peace, crisis and conflict”⁵⁴. The Ministers based the decision on similar concerns toward regional security in the Baltic Sea region and other critical national security areas, e.g. the High North. The agreement will be supported by consultations and coordination of the joint strategic planning group’s national operations plans. The *‘Nordic Agreement concerning Cooperation in the Defence Materiel Area’* is another step to close ranks in common activities’ efficiency, allowing the creation of interoperability as a critical factor for any military and non-military actions. The defence cooperation will be further coordinated with Denmark and Iceland as Nordic partners. In respect of Finland, Swedish Minister for Defence Peter Hultqvist, in his statement, highlighted “the enhanced defence cooperation with Finland is based on similar interests, values and priorities”⁵⁵.



Figure 1. The Chiefs of Defence, General Micael Bydén (Sweden) and General Timo Kivinen (Finland) signing the Military Strategic Concept (18 December 2019)

Source: Courtesy of the Swedish Armed Forces. Photo by: Juhani Kandell.

⁵³ *Trilateral Statement of Intent among the Department of Defense of the United States of America and the Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Finland and the Ministry of Defence of the Kingdom of Sweden*, Ministry of Defence of Finland, 8 May 2018, https://www.defmin.fi/files/4247/Trilateral_Statement_of_Intent.pdf, [accessed on 8.02.2021].

⁵⁴ *Finland, Norway and Sweden enhance their trilateral military operations cooperation*, Government Offices of Sweden 23 September 2020, <https://www.government.se/opinion-pieces/2020/09/finland-norway-and-sweden-enhance-their-trilateral-military-operations-cooperation/> [accessed on 2.02.2021].

⁵⁵ *Riksdag adopts legislation...*, op. cit.

The joint “*Military Strategic Concept*” signed by Swedish and Finnish Chiefs of Defence in December 2019 was another step toward closer cooperation and translation of “the political will into aims, directions and guidelines for the military level”⁵⁶. It demonstrated that the nations’ efforts to the date were promising and conducted in support of bilateral and regional security (the signing ceremony see Fig. 1). Both military leaders recognise that there is a future for joint defence when working hand-in-hand.

For both nations, 2020 was an important year following political decisions, improvement of strategic concepts and their implementation into defence and civil forces. It included national directions and guidance to shape future military development to underpin cooperation as an important factor. The nations currently discuss legal aspects of host nation support, similar to the ‘*NATO Schengen zone*’ concept or EU PESCO ‘*Military mobility*’. The agreement will be reached, allowing both nations armed forces to conduct operations on each other’s territory. It will be linked with making command and control arrangements as this aspect is rather important with respect to multinational forces. The analysis above indicates the favourable political climate for increased defence cooperation, but the politically driven cooperation aiming at an increased joint defensive capability came later.

The perception of integration with NATO

Swedish policy towards NATO

The Swedish political climate regarding membership in NATO has become more positive over the past decade. While the centre and centre-right parties have been in favour of NATO membership for quite some years, they have never had a majority in the Riksdag. To some extent, that picture is now changing, as the populist right party ‘*Sweden Democrats*’ in the late 2020s changed their stance from negative towards membership to proposing that Sweden should adopt a ‘*NATO Option*’, similar to that of Finland⁵⁷. The subsequent statement in the Riksdag’s Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence⁵⁸ was a message that there was a prevalent public opinion that was not against NATO membership for the first time. However, it is not entirely

⁵⁶ *Sweden and Finland signs Military Strategic Concept for the deepened defence cooperation*, Swedish Armed Forces 18 December 2019, <https://www.forsvarsmakten.se/en/news/2019/12/sweden-and-finland-signs-military-strategic-concept-for-the-deepened-defence-cooperation/> [accessed on 25.02.2021].

⁵⁷ *Sverige bör hålla en dörr öppen till Nato*, ”Aftonbladet” 09 December 2020, <https://www.aftonbladet.se/debatt/a/vAkxxj/sverige-bor-halla-en-dorr-oppen-till-nato> [accessed on 8.02.2021].

⁵⁸ *Utskott anser att Sverige bör uttala en Nato-option*, Sveriges Riksdag 09 December 2020, <https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/aktuellt/2020/dec/9/utskott-anser-att-sverige-bor-uttala-en-nato-option/> [accessed on 8.02.2021].

positive either, as the Sweden Democrats do not really want to join NATO, but rather for Sweden to enter into a Defence Union with Finland, and by expressing the ‘*NATO Option*’ align the Swedish line with the Finnish one. Of course, it can be argued that the concept of having a NATO Option is redundant, as all sovereign nations are free to make their own political decisions. Nevertheless, it is seen as a change big enough to warrant strong rebuttals from the Government, where Prime⁵⁹, Foreign⁶⁰ and Defence⁶¹ ministers have argued against it, all while still being positive to an even closer partnership with NATO. The Swedish public opinion has also become more favourable to NATO, according to polls. A poll commissioned by the largest tabloid paper in Sweden, ‘*Aftonbladet*’, made in December 2019 and published in January 2021, showed that 46% favoured NATO membership, 34% were against, and 20% undecided⁶². As all parties have stated that any membership application to NATO has to be preceded by a referendum, those numbers are seen as significant.

Finnish Policy towards NATO

While Sweden seems to have moved politically towards a more favourable view on a possible NATO membership, the Finnish line of military non-alignment seems largely unchanged. Only two centre-right parties in the Finnish Parliament favour membership, while a solid majority of seven are against it⁶³. However, the then Prime Minister Lipponen stated in 2001 that “they would like to see that Finland would not have this NATO option when the time comes. That would, of course, mean that Finland’s non-alignment policy is not credible. And to still maintain this NATO option, we need a certain amount of cooperation”⁶⁴. The Finnish Parliamentary Security Policy Monitoring Group in 2009 published a report stating that “Finland is not a member in any military alliance but it closely cooperates with NATO and maintains the option of seeking membership in the organisation”⁶⁵. The concept of a NATO option has for some time now been seen as part of the

⁵⁹ *Statsminister Stefan Löfven om en Nato-option*, Youtube 09 December 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QrvLqwtXcuA> [accessed on 8.02.2021].

⁶⁰ *Tal av utrikesminister Ann Linde vid Folk och Försvars rikskonferens*, Regeringskansliet 11 January 2021, <https://www.regeringen.se/tal/2021/01/tal-av-utrikesminister-ann-linde-vid-folk-och-forsvars-rikskonferens/>, [accessed on 8.02.2021].

⁶¹ *Idem*.

⁶² L. Mellin, *Nära varannan vill att Sverige går med i Nato*, ”*Aftonbladet*” 12 January 2021, <https://www.aftonbladet.se/nyheter/kolumner/a/yRg23E/nara-varannan-vill-att-sverige-gar-med-i-nato>, [accessed on 22.02.2021].

⁶³ *Yles enkät om försvars- och säkerhetspolitik: Flera oppositionspartier är redo att minska på antalet jaktplan*, Svenska.Yle 19 January 2019, <https://svenska.yle.fi/artikel/2019/01/19/yles-enkat-om-forsvars-och-sakerhetspolitik-flera-oppositionspartier-ar-redo-att>, [accessed on 8.02.2021].

⁶⁴ *Archive and Chronology of Finnish Foreign Policy*, Finnish Institute of International Affairs 31 March 2001, <https://www.eilen.fi/en/chronology/?q=nato+option>, [accessed on 8.02.2021].

⁶⁵ *Finnish Security and Defence Policy 2009. Government Report*, Prime Minister’s Office Publications, p. 81, https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/156933/Finland_English-2009.pdf, [accessed on 8.02.2021].

Finnish security policy, but its efficacy has been questioned on the grounds that if the Finnish Government says that Finland will not join NATO, nor express a readiness to assist its neighbours militarily, the likelihood of NATO membership seems very low regardless of options⁶⁶. There was a perception that Finland is “likely to keep the door to NATO open but not walk through it in the foreseeable future”⁶⁷. Finnish public opinion also seems to be quite set against NATO membership, and numbers have not moved significantly over the years. A survey published in 2019 states that 22% of Finns believe that the country should join NATO while 47% oppose membership⁶⁸.

Conclusions

The cooperation between Sweden and Finland and other nations has progressed significantly as an example of a well-coordinated and systematic approach to national and regional defence. The background is not only linked with similar perception of multi-vector threats, as it is linked with their history and relatively close social and economic models. The Russian actions in Georgia and Ukraine were treated very seriously as a worrying factor for regional security and such an approach supported their cooperation. They recognised the importance of high readiness forces and deployability to support security and be a deterrent factor supported by societal resilience. Geographically, the direct threat was much more potent toward Finland, but it is obvious that failure or Helsinki could cause the aggressor’s intent to continue hostiles to the West or stop on the Swedish border, creating unpredictable future intentions. Of course, the geographical factor has an important role in causing them to consider the value of joint operational plans and close links between armed forces based on combined joint military exercises (e.g. ‘Arctic Challenge’, ‘Cold Response’, ‘Northern Wind’, ‘Northern Wind’ and ‘Trident Juncture’ or cross border training), weapon systems procurement and consultations. The enhancement during peacetime will benefit during any crisis or conflict situation affecting every single nation. So far, the Swedish side has been more verbal about the strategic benefits of the close cooperation. It was

⁶⁶ M. Gestrin-Hagner, *Svensk expert: Om Finland vill ha militär hjälp borde ni också hjälpa andra*, HBL 19 June 2016, <https://www.hbl.fi/artikel/svensk-expert-om-finland-vill-ha-militar-hjalp-borde-ni-ocksa-hjalpa-andra/> [accessed on 9.02.2021].

⁶⁷ C. S. Chivvis et al., *NATO’s Northeastern Flank...*, op. cit., p. 193.

⁶⁸ I. Haavisto, *Nato-kannat vakaita – Kannatuksessa suuria eroja miesten ja naisten välillä*, Elinkeinoelämän Valtuuskunta 14 December 2019, <https://www.eva.fi/blog/2019/12/14/nato-kannat-vakaita-kannatuksessa-suuria-eroja-miesten-ja-naisten-valilla/> [accessed on 9.02.2021].

expressed by the Swedish Defence Minister and the Swedish Deputy Air Force Chief, who highlighted the importance of the strategic depth and the possibility to have one air force with two commanders. They articulated it during a visit to Saab, the producers of the ‘*Gripen*’ multi-role aircraft⁶⁹. Those statements were part of a sales pitch aimed at the ongoing Finnish HX fighter procurement, but showed both industrial and strategic Swedish interests.

The differing affiliation to EU or NATO is not an obstacle as such bodies and NORDEF, or Arctic Council, allow the presentation of a common voice in important matters. The cooperation is of great importance for both nations and will strengthen as the shared security concerns are not changing and are ever-evolving, including a range of so-called hybrid threats. There is a common perception asking for building comprehensive defence capabilities based on using all national assets but hand-in-hand with partners and international organisations. There are still many differences connected with the model of armed forces, command and control systems, and periods of insufficient funding of defence, causing the desired end state to not be achieved soon. The horizon 2030 will mean significant progress and maybe other nations’ closer attention to those two countries joint decisions. It would be very encouraging factor regionally and for NATO strengthening its northern flank. Sweden is essential due to a strong desire to move closer to Finland, which was historically very independent but ready to receive Stockholm assistance. Historically it is not completely new considering that Sweden and Finland were one country from ca 1150 to 1809 when Finland was lost to Russia and that some 6% of the Finnish population has Swedish as their mother tongue; Finnish and Swedish are official languages in Finland, and some 7% of the Swedish population has Finnish roots⁷⁰.

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⁶⁹ S. Sprenger, *Swedish defense leaders push Saab’s Gripen offer for Finland*, “Defence News” 16 February 2021, <https://www.defensenews.com/global/europe/2021/02/17/swedish-defense-leaders-push-saabs-gripen-offer-for-finland/> [accessed on 23.02.2021].

⁷⁰ E. Vuonokari, *Statistik om sverigefinländare*, “Sverigefinländarnas arkiv” March 2017, <https://arkisto.org/sverigefinsk-kultur/vilka-ar-sverigefinlandare/statistik/> [accessed on 25.02.2021].

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Współpraca obronna między Szwecją i Finlandią. Towarzysze broni w krajach nordyckich i nie tylko

Streszczenie

Bezpieczeństwo Europy ewoluuje w ostatniej dekadzie, powodując weryfikację narodowych polityk obronnych. Będąc członkami Unii Europejskiej, a nie NATO, Szwecja i Finlandia zmieniają swoją politykę obronną, aby stawić czoła złożonym zagrożeniom. Ich bliskość geograficzna jest jednym z czynników powodujących zacieśnienie ich współpracy wojskowej, wspartej budowaniem ich narodowych zdolności wojskowych i cywilnych, aby odstraszać potencjalne zagrożenie ze strony Rosji i stawić czoła wyzwaniom hybrydowym. Postęp jest widoczny, zwłaszcza w ostatniej dekadzie. Nie lekceważą zamykania szeregów z innymi krajami nordyckimi, NATO, a konkretnie ze Stanami Zjednoczonymi, uznając, że wspólny wysiłek z tymi narodami i organizacjami, wyznającymi te same wartości i stojącymi w obliczu podobnych zagrożeń, jest podstawą ich bezpieczeństwa. W artykule wykorzystano jakościowe podejście badawcze, wykorzystując studium przypadku, badanie źródeł wtórnych, analizę i syntezę jako metody.

Słowa kluczowe: Szwecja Finlandia, współpraca wojskowa, region Morza Bałtyckiego, bezpieczeństwo